DISCRETION
An Art of the Possible

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DISCRETION - AN ART OF THE POSSIBLE

Education Committees in the Swedish System of Government

AKADEMISK AVHANDLING
Som med vederbörligt tillstånd av rektorsämbetet vid Umeå universitet
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ABSTRACT

Discretion is commonly analyzed as the scope for choice set by formal superiors. This study aims at developing an alternative theory of discretion which also takes into account the assumptions of the actors in implementing positions. The theory is constructed with the purpose of being an empirical tool for analyzing discretion on a nation-wide basis and in a central-local government context. It concerns two main questions: to what extent does discretion vary and how can this variation be explained? The theory section concludes with a number of empirically testable hypotheses.

The concept of discretion is defined as the scope for choice available to actors, in formally subordinate positions, vis-à-vis their superiors. It is seen as a special case of autonomy, as it is attributed to subordinates and primarily concerns one dimension of autonomy, namely freedom of action.

In the second half of the study, the theory is applied empirically to the discretion available to Swedish local government Education Committees. A questionnaire study of all Education Committee Chairpersons and Chief Education Officers and in-depth interviews of a selected sample of these have been undertaken.

The empirical study clearly indicates that there is variation in discretion. In spite of the uniformity of the system of governing local education, it is found that the limits for discretion are set differently by different Education Committee representatives.

The variation follows a pattern which has been, at least partly, reconstructed. Variables which appear as important in explaining variation include: the extent to which the control system is regarded as efficient; the size and population density of the local authority; and individual traits such as length of experience and gender. However, our analysis also shows that these explanations are more valid in certain contexts than in others, which points the way for further research.

Key words: Discretion, autonomy, central-local government relations, local government, education policies, Education Committees, actors’ perspective.
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Anders Lidström
INTRODUCTION

Discretion is commonly identified as an actor's or a units' scope for choice within limits set by others. The values and assumptions of actors are, however, only rarely taken into account when discretion is analyzed. This, we argue, is a serious limitation if the purpose is to understand the conditions for, and nature of, discretionary decision-making. Our major theoretical aim is to outline a theory of discretion which can serve as an alternative to the currently dominant theories.

In this study, discretion is not treated as a phenomenon existing outside the consciousness of the implementing actors involved or as merely a scope for choice delineated by formal superiors. It is, on the contrary, recognized that discretionary decisions are made by actors equipped with knowledge, beliefs and values and that actions are based on their understandings of the situation in which they act, alone or in cooperation with others. Hence, discretion itself ultimately depends on these actors' interpretations and, therefore, will be regarded as an art of the possible. It is claimed that difficulties in governing welfare states, such as the

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1 Here, the concept of actor may apply to organizations as well as individuals. However, when specific reference is made to the assumptions or perceptions of actors or to an actor's perspective, these are thought of as properties of individuals.

2 In the remainder of the text, it is not regarded as necessary to add adjectives, such as assumed or perceived, to underline the chosen approach. Our study of discretion implicitly concerns the phenomenon in terms of actors' assumptions. Further, it should be stressed that our concept must be distinguished from Galligans' (1986) concept of assumed discretion. His concept refers to discretion exercised as departure from legal rules, which in this study is seen as only one of several aspects of the concept.
Swedish, reinforce the position of the implementing agents and, thus, underline the significance of taking into account their perspectives when analyzing discretion.

In the literature on discretion, the meaning of the concept is not altogether clear. For example, in relation to autonomy, the two terms are sometimes regarded as synonymous whereas, in other contexts, discretion is treated as a specific form of autonomy. In Chapter 2, we analyze previous definitions of discretion. The analysis aims to contribute to the general clarification of the meaning of discretion and to serve as a basis for our use of the concept. According to our definition, discretion is the scope for choice available to actors, in formally subordinate positions, vis-à-vis their superiors. It is conceived of as a room containing potential alternatives for action or inaction.

Theory development is undertaken in Chapter 3. The theory is constructed with the purpose of being a tool for analyzing discretion, from an actor's perspective, on a nation-wide basis and in a central-local government context. It concerns two main questions; to what extent does discretion vary and how can this variation be explained? The theory section concludes with a number of empirically testable hypotheses.

In the second half of the study, the theory is applied empirically to the discretion available to Swedish local government Education Committees. Their position is highly interesting from the point of view of our theory, not least because of the process of major change to which the regulation of Swedish education has been subjected since the mid 1970s. Further, the increasing difficulties involved in governing the Swedish welfare state in general is also likely to reinforce uncertainty at the local level. Hence a focus on local discretion from an actors' perspective becomes particularly important.

From a legal perspective, the amount of discretion available to Education Committees should be the same for all committees, since they, on the whole, are regulated in the same way. However, in terms of how discretion is perceived by key actors on the Education Committee level, we would expect considerable variation to occur. In part, this is connected with the present restructuring of the way in which the welfare state is governed, but it also reflects differences in terms of the experiences and influences to
which these actors have been subjected. The empirical section revolves around two aims. One is to analyze the extent to which Education Committee discretion varies and the other is to explain the variation in such discretion.

The empirical application is introduced in Chapter 4. Both Education Committees and the decentralization which has taken place within the system of governing education are reviewed. The methodology and materials used in the study are also described and discussed. The analysis is undertaken in relation to formal rules, most of which are issued at the national level, although some stem from the municipality. Quantitative as well as qualitative measures are combined, including a questionnaire study of all Education Committee Chairpersons and Chief Education Officers and in-depth interviews of a selected sample of these.

In Chapters 5 and 6, variation in discretion is analyzed, both in relation to general rules and to regulations concerning the use of resources. In Chapter 7, this variation is explained in terms of the experiences gained by the actors in the social worlds to which they belong or have belonged. Thus, these experiences may not only derive from the education sector but also from other social contexts. Finally, Chapter 8 summarizes the major results from the study and analyzes the developments during the last few years.

This first chapter continues with a brief overview and analysis of legal positivism, which serves to illustrate the limitations of the conventional approaches. Finally, attention is focused on recent developments in the Swedish welfare state and related problems of how it can be governed. These provide a setting for the actors’ perspective in this study.

Legal Positivism

The conventional way of approaching problems of discretion has been from the "outside". Limits are identified, often in terms of formal rules, without taking into account how these are apprehended by the actors themselves. As concluded by Ham & Hill (1984), top-down assumptions characterize much of the research in this field. The perspective from the outside is very
clear in legal perspectives on discretion. We have chosen to use legal positivism as an illustration of an elaborate and consistent way of thinking about discretion along these lines. In the following, legal positivism will be introduced, discussed and criticised as an approach to the study of discretion.

Positivism is the common label given to a variety of scientific approaches developed during the last two centuries. Most of them derive their origins from the early works of Auguste Comte (1798-1857), who has been regarded as the founding father of both sociology and positivism. According to Comte, the highest form of knowledge, the positive, is characterized by a rational search for regularities undisturbed by theological or metaphysical considerations. Generally applicable statements, expressed in causal form, are the ideal. This view already dominated within the natural sciences of his time. However, Comte claimed that sociology should use the same methods as the natural sciences for constructing and testing statements. In other words, Comte aimed at extending positivism to the investigation of the social world. In contemporary social science, it is often claimed that the Comtian tradition is strongest in systems theory and structural functionalism. (Andersson 1982, Burrell & Morgan 1979, Cuff & Payne 1984, Liedman 1983).

A positivist tradition with particular relevance for the study of discretion in relation to rules, is legal positivism. Within legal theory, positivism usually has a related but more specific meaning. Originally developing as a reaction to natural law theories, legal positivism refers to the study of "law as it is", i.e. the law as it has been posited by human authority. Legal positivism is a dominant tradition within jurisprudence and contemporary legal thinking and it is concerned with finding the correct application of the given legal system to specific human activities. The approach was introduced at the beginning of the 19th Century by the English jurist John Austin. Hans Kelsen and H L A Hart have been important contributors to its further development during the 20th Century. Legal positivism has a common heritage, but is, today, a label representing different schools of

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thought. In contemporary legal theory, Hart has distinguished five different meanings of the concept of positivism (referred to in Friedmann 1967:256). Nevertheless, in the following, we will try to identify the core of the approach.

As has already been pointed out, legal positivism originally developed as a reaction to dominant metaphysical ideas in legal theory. One of Austin’s contributions was to clarify the distinction between analytical and normative jurisprudence, or law "as it is" and law "as it ought to be". Inspired by the progress in the natural sciences, it was argued that the study of law should concern observable phenomena. Legal positivism is not interested in whether present law is good or bad or the function of law in a society. The focus is distinctly on positive law, i.e. how the law operates in a given situation.

Consequently, its proponents tend to regard the legal system as given. The task for the analyst is to discover its correct application to specific human activities:

"The analytical lawyer takes the law as a given matter created by the state, whose authority he does not question. On this material he works, by means of a system of rule of legal logic, conceived as complete and self-contained. In order to be able to work on this assumption, he must attempt to prove to his own satisfaction that legal ideology can be excluded from the lawyer’s province. Therefore the legal system is made watertight against all ideological intrusion, and all legal problems are couched in terms of legal logic." (Friedmann 1967:289).

Another basic assumption of the approach is the existence, in each society, of a legal system which is binding on its citizens. With the development of the nation-state, legal systems became nation-wide. The basic rules of the legal system are produced by an authoritative political system within the nation. What makes a legal system binding on its citizens? Following Jeremy Bentham, John Austin argued that law in a society is based not on metaphysical principles such as the notion of a natural law, but emanates from a sovereign. Law becomes binding on the citizens as commands of the sovereign. The sovereign can be anything from a single autocrat to the popular representation in modern societies.
The idea of a legal system implies that different laws in a society are interrelated. They are "linked with each other in an integrated structure" (Friedmann 1967:16). The legal system is expected to form a coherent whole, with some laws being more fundamental, and others having a lower status. Further, the system has a certain amount of self-regulating ability, thus possessing organic properties. If no law is applicable in a particular case, an established practice gives guidelines on how a valid norm can be deduced. The practice is developed and defended by a legal profession and introduced to new generations of jurists at the law faculties of the universities. The practice includes norms on the correct way of referring to other sources of law, such as precedent and equity, and ideas about permitted interpretations of laws. The notion that there is, more or less, a correct application of the law to each problem implies, in reality, that the laws form a system. In its extreme form, this notion is represented by the "Conceptual Approach" of legal positivism, for which there is just one "correct way" of applying the laws of a nation to every single case (compare also Dworkin 1977).

Legal Positivism and the Study of Discretion

From a legal positivist point of view, discretion is identical with what an actor or a unit is entitled to do within the law. For units operating under the same rules, discretion is expected to be identical. Hence, different students in the legal positivist tradition should reach the same conclusions about the amount of discretion available to a unit. Deviations are seen as results of inadequate knowledge in the practice of the legal profession.

In the legal positivist tradition, studies of the discretion available to public organizations are mainly descriptions of their powers as defined by the law (Hart 1961). A traditional judicial method is used, by which the content of the relevant system of rules is analyzed through a study of documents such as laws, regulations, documentation of precedent, statements in Government Bills, etc. For example, in the field of Swedish

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local government, Kaijser (1975) and Lindquist (1987) summarize what local authorities are entitled to do according to law and precedent.

Legal positivism may be a convenient approach if the student of discretion is only interested in the formal conditions of decision-making. However, for an understanding beyond that, the approach has severe shortcomings. First, the approach’s formalistic bias makes it unable to grasp limitations to discretion of a non-formal kind. The focus is exclusively on the legal system. There is no scope for the researcher who may wish to operationalize the concept in a way which also takes into account other restrictions on discretion, such as informal recommendations or pressures.

Second, the view from above in the formal hierarchy makes the approach one-sided. Focus is on what discretion is expected to be according to the legal system. Thus, it has a normative undertone, emphasizing what discretion is assumed to be by those at the top, rather than what it turns out to be in practice. How the scope for choice is perceived or performed by those in discretionary positions is not taken into account. The student of discretion, aiming at understanding the phenomenon beyond its legal aspects, cannot ignore the perspective of the decision-making actors themselves.

Third, legal positivism has an underlying tendency to view society as basically characterized by order, stability and harmony. The notion of there being a legal system which is coherent and comprehensive, possessing an ability for self-regulation as well as the production of new legal norms, underlines this impression. Hence, the opportunity for identifying conflicts and tensions is limited from this perspective. Indeed, it cannot be taken for granted that discretionary decision-making takes place in harmony. The scope for choice is often a result of previous and on-going struggles for power and control, thus drawing attention to the role played by conflict. Under all circumstances, the possession of discretionary decision-making ability at the bottom of a formal hierarchy is likely to create tensions vis-à-vis the top level.

To conclude, legal positivism may be sufficient if the purpose is to come to grips with formal aspects of discretion and if the perspective is from the top. However, any other understanding of the phenomenon requires a different approach. The actors’ perspective provides several
advantages, such as the ability to take into account the assumptions of affected actors and is, therefore, adopted in this study.

A Swedish Welfare State in Transition

The focus on discretion from an actors' perspective is not only justified as being more fruitful than conventional approaches, such as legal positivism, but it has, also, become more apposite because of structural changes in society. The recent developments in the welfare state and difficulties related to the way it is governed, focus attention on local, implementing actors. Hence, an actors' perspective has become more relevant for an understanding of the conditions for discretionary decision-making. In this section, we turn first to a brief overview of the major characteristics of the on-going restructuring of the Swedish welfare state. Later, we will discuss problems of government under these conditions.

During the first decades after the Second World War, Sweden served as a model for many other countries. It was seen as representing a "middle way", successfully combining the best sides of capitalism and socialism. Its policy of neutrality in relation to the two international power blocks and the development of a modern, publicly financed welfare system were regarded as particularly attractive features. However, since the middle of the 1970s, the Swedish model has been under pressure as emerging drawbacks have been observed (Ruin 1982, Heckscher 1984). This coincides with the welfare state undergoing major changes (Gidlund et al 1988) which are characterized by at least three principal features:

First, the rapid growth of the public sector has come to an end. After a remarkable period during the 20th century, and especially in the post-war years, of practically continuous growth, the public sector shows signs of stagnation and even of decline. Initially the bourgeois parties, but later also the Social Democrats, have regarded it as necessary, not only to bring the growth of the public sector to a halt, but also to reduce its size. As a share
of the GNP, public spending\(^5\) was 31 per cent in 1950, reached a peak in 1982 of 67 per cent but has since decreased to 60 per cent in 1988 (Statistiska Centralbyråns 1985a, SOU 1990:14). However, despite the decline, the public sector is still larger in Sweden than in any other comparable Western nation. The implications for the welfare state have been severe: No longer can emerging problems be solved by the allocation of new resources. If new responsibilities are to be adopted, this requires that previous tasks are either abandoned or fulfilled more efficiently.

Second, the public sector has undergone major organizational transformations. A general trend is the decentralization of power and responsibilities, not only from national to local government, but also within governmental agencies (Gustafsson 1987). Further, differences between public and private service provision have become less clear, as market-like thinking and economic incentive structures from the private sector have been introduced for the handling of public affairs. Indeed, one of the major trends during the 1980s was the application of the ideal of the private firm operating in the market to public activities. It seems to be only a question of time before the private provision of what have traditionally been public tasks in Sweden, is also accepted by those who have earlier been the major proponents of the public model.

Alongside decentralization and devolution, a decline in policy-making rationality has been observed. Previously it was believed that, by using knowledge and long-term planning, an ideal solution could be found to each problem (Anton 1969, Gustafsson & Richardson 1979, 1980). However, over the last decade, symbolic and pseudo ingredients have become more common (Gustafsson, G 1983). Comprehensive policy programmes have also become less frequent (Wittrock & Lindström 1984).

Third, the present restructuring of the welfare state coincides with a difficult period for its main proponent and architect, the Social Democratic

\(^5\) This measure of the size of the public sector excludes transfers within the public sector but includes transfers intended for final consumption within the private sector, such as pensions and unemployment benefits. Thus, in theory, it could exceed 100 % of GNP. It should be kept in mind that the choice of measure may influence conclusions about public sector development (Lybeck 1984). For example, if the number of public employees is used instead, the conclusion would be that no decline in growth has taken place during the end of the 1980s. Also, compared with other measures, the one chosen here indicates the fastest growth rate.
Party. Since the beginning of the 1930s, this party has been the principal political force in Sweden. With the exception of a few months in 1936 and the period 1976-82, the party has alone, or in coalition, shaped Swedish politics. Social democratic ideas made a lasting imprint on Swedish society (Milner 1989). As a matter of fact, some foreign observers have described the situation as a Social Democratic hegemony (Enzensberger 1982, Kesselman et al 1987). The Social Democrats have not only been the ruling party, they have also set the agenda for the political discourse. As a result, the basic ideas behind the welfare state have not until recently been seriously challenged, as in other comparable countries.

However, since the 1970s, the Social Democrats have been facing a number of structural problems, which are likely to alter the basis of their position. The scope for traditional Social Democratic political solutions is limited by the standstill in public sector growth as well as by increasing international dependence. Further, changes in the class structure, mainly the relative decline of the industrial working class, threaten to erode support for the party, implying a weaker electoral position (Tiden 1990). The 1991 election results were a considerable setback for the party, being the worst since 1928. Thus, the major restructuring of the Swedish welfare system coincides with, and is perhaps facilitated by, severe problems for its main ideological proponent.

Zero-growth, the organizational transformations and the decline of Social Democracy are major trends implying a restructuring of the Swedish welfare state. Clearly, these features are interrelated, even if the reasons behind, and the particular relationships between the different components will not be discussed here.

Problems of Government

The on-going restructuring of the Swedish welfare state gives rise to questions about how it can be governed. In general terms, this problem has attracted considerable attention in recent studies of politics and government. It has been claimed that factors such as the mere size and thus, increasing complexity of the public sector, together with the growing influence of
interest organizations has made it more difficult to govern the modern welfare state (see for example Crozier et al 1975, Rose ed 1980, Rose 1984).

Even if the causes of these problems are open to discussion, it is obvious that new ways of governing the welfare state have been introduced. Detailed regulation is no longer considered entirely functional and is often replaced by goal formulations combined with efforts to evaluate and control. However goals are often criticised for being too abstract and difficult to transform into action by agencies, and comprehensive evaluations of policy effects are still rare. A shift has also taken place towards the use of market-inspired means of steering. Thus, economic incentives have replaced traditional ways of planning and allocating resources. Business-like conditions are being reproduced within the public sector.

In the particular case of Sweden, my conclusion is that the realization of goals, formulated nationally as well as by local governments, have become more problematic. Not only have the goals, in themselves, become vaguer and, thus, more difficult to transform into actions, but the policy outcomes also seem harder to control. One consequence is that the quality and content of service provision is likely to be more varying, which may pose a challenge to the established values of equality and fairness.

These problems of governing the welfare state can be interpreted in terms of a weakening of the ideal of a link between the popular will and policy implementation, which is an important notion in normative democratic thinking. Not least the Swedish Constitution expresses this ideal clearly. Parliament, the government and, finally, subordinate administrative units are expected to perform tasks, which although separate are nevertheless linked, aimed at realizing the popular will (Birgersson & Westerståhl 1980, SOU 1983:39).

The accuracy of this ideal model of democracy has also been challenged by phenomena such as declining electoral turnout which threatens the traditional ways of political representation. Not surprisingly, it has been suggested that it is time to redefine the basic preconditions of the model. For example, Hjern argues that policy solutions arrived at on the local level, perhaps contrary to directives from above, should not be regarded as
unacceptable divergencies from democratic theory: "They may, but do not have to be. They can be expressions of the idea of democratic self-government through organisation and collective action with forms of political responsibility and control not specified by the parliamentary model" (Hjern 1983:15, my translation). However, a more thorough reformulation still remains to be undertaken.

Meanwhile, and for our purposes, it is sufficient to make the observation that this discussion points at the crucial position of local, implementing agents. In the restructured welfare state, the conditions of local decision-making are increasingly characterized by uncertainty and vagueness. The limits to the scope for action are likely to have become less clear. Therefore, how the actors themselves define the situation is expected to be more important for policy implementation and hence, should be better taken into account by the student of politics and administration. As we will argue later in the thesis, actors are expected to deviate from each other with respect to how the available scope for action is perceived.

This chapter has indicated the need to develop alternatives for gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon of discretion. However, before turning to this task, it is necessary to more specifically clarify what we mean by the concept.
THE CONCEPT OF DISCRETION

Discretion - an Overview

As is already evident, the concept of discretion occupies a key position in our study. Therefore, before outlining a theory of discretion, it is necessary to explain more specifically what we mean by the concept. By doing so we hope to contribute to a general clarification of its meaning. A three stage analysis is undertaken: Firstly, the use of the concept and its different meanings in the literature are briefly reviewed. This provides a description of the role the concept has played in different theoretical contexts. Secondly, in order to show how we intend to use it, in the next step draw up a framework consisting of the distinction between actors and structures, and the concept of autonomy. Thirdly, and finally, our meaning of the concept is clarified and developed with reference to this.

Discretionary decision-making is a common feature in a wide range of organisational situations. Modern organisations are often regarded as unable to function smoothly unless a certain amount of discretion is available within them. Without room for those on lower levels to make decisions based on their own judgement and interpretations, it is claimed that the organisation very soon becomes static and less able to respond to internal as well as external changes.

Discretion is present in all organisations with a formal division of functions. Even in one of the most extreme cases, i.e. soldiers marching on the parade ground, the choice between obedience and disobedience is still open to them, although the price to pay for not conforming might be high.
Indeed, the purpose of military drilling can be seen as a way to minimize soldiers’ discretion by training their ability to unquestioningly obey orders and thus reduce the scope for them to make their own choices. In traditional military thinking, too much discretion is expected to reduce organizational performance. Similar ideas are pursued in some theories of workplace efficiency, such as Taylorism and scientific management, which suggest that workers should be given very routinized tasks and thus only limited discretion.

In other organizational settings, the scope for choice is greater. Some professionals, such as doctors and teachers, often have a considerable amount of discretion available to them, justified by their possession of particular knowledge and skills. The street-level bureaucrats, described and analyzed by Lipsky (1980), also have a wide area of decision-making freedom. They are often in a position to distribute benefits to, or impose sanctions on, individual citizens, as is the case with police officers and social workers. Apart from being provided with considerable scope for making their own interpretations, the close relationship with their clients and the large gap between identified needs and provided resources enhances their scope for choice.

Defining Discretion

The concept of discretion has been used in a number of different ways. Indeed, the Oxford English Dictionary lists eight definitions under the common headline of discretion. Most of them originate from the late Latin word discretion, meaning discerning, discrimination, capacity for distinguishing. The particular meaning of the concept used in the social sciences as well as in this study is closest to the fourth entry, which reads: "Liberty or power of deciding, or of acting according to one’s own judgement or as one thinks fit; uncontrolled power of disposal" (The Oxford English Dictionary 1989).

Discretion is often connected to the notion of law. Playing an important role in legal theory and practice, legal discretion (Davis 1969, Galligan 1986) represents the scope for judgement provided by the legal system.
Indeed, as claimed by Davis, "(w)here law ends, discretion begins" (Davis 1969:3). However, discretion is also a frequently highlighted concept in the social sciences, whereby legal aspects remain important, but are assumed to perform a less dominant role. In a context of decision-making in organisations, different forms of discretion, such as bureaucratic (Hill 1976, Dunsire 1978, Elmore 1978, Bryner 1987), street-level (Prottas 1978, Lipsky 1980) and professional (McGlew & Robertson 1981) have been identified. The notion of local government discretion (Rhodes 1981, Lane & Ersson 1987, Page & Goldsmith 1987) is also common.¹

In the same way as other key concepts in social science, discretion has been defined in a number of different ways. The variations in the definitions may depend on the particular context under consideration. The discretion exercised by local authorities represents something different from that used by the professional acting in a discretionary capacity. Another dimension along which definitions may be distinguished is the extent to which the legal system is emphasized as a constraint. However, as we will argue later, a common core can be identified among different definitions.

Definitions may also be distinguished according to their breadth. Davis’s definition, which is perhaps the most commonly used, is broad, including a large number of phenomena (Ham & Hill 1984:149) He suggests that "(a) public officer has discretion whenever the effective limits on his power leave him free to make a choice among possible courses of action or inaction" (Davis 1969:4). The actor in a discretionary position is seen as possessing a certain scope for choice, within "effective limits". These refer to constraints imposed by the legal system, but also take into account that some actions may be taken even if they are of questionable legality. However, the legal system remains his point of reference.

By contrast, a narrow definition is proposed by Bull (1980). The concept is reserved for the situation when officers, in exceptional cases, depart from rules they are expected to follow. The application of rules and the making of choices within the limits of these rules is referred to as judgement.

Several writers take Davis’s definition as their starting-point, but extend

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¹ For a further overview see Adler & Asquith 1981 and Ham & Hill 1984, chapter 9.
or modify it. For example, Thompson and Scicchitano, in a study of state discretion within American occupational safety and health, draw on Davis’s definition, but emphasizes its position in a formal hierarchy. It "focuses on administrative freedom *vis-à-vis* formally specified policy makers rather than all groups in the agency’s task environment" (Thompson & Scicchitano 1986:190). However, it could well be argued that Davis also implicitly presupposes a formal hierarchy, represented by the legal system.

A definition with similar breadth to Davis’s and often treated as synonymous to his, is the one suggested by Jowell. For Jowell, discretion is "the room for decisional manoeuvre possessed by a decision-maker" (Jowell 1973:179). The notion of a scope for choice is similar and is seen as a continuum from narrow to wide. However, Jowell differs from Davis in his specific reference to non-legal factors also as limitations on discretion. For example resources, time and political pressures may constrain the room for decision-making.

The idea of discretion providing a scope for choice, as suggested by Davis and Jowell, has been criticised by Galligan for being too simplistic. Within the area provided, Galligan claims, choice is not free. Rather, "discretion consists not in the authority to choose amongst different actions, but to choose amongst different courses of action for good reasons" (Galligan 1986:7, his emphasis). Good reasons represents some standard according to which choices should be made. This standard may consist of professional knowledge and norms or of directives from a higher level of the organization.

Perhaps the notion of "good reasons" can be seen as reflecting a distinction between different kinds of discretion. Professional discretion is often based on the idea of good reasons. The doctor and the teacher are given a certain amount of freedom of choice, but are expected to perform their task according to accepted professional norms (Adler & Asquith 1981). The bureaucrat, on the other hand, is normally assumed to act in line with standards issued from above. According to Galligan, the official has a duty "to realize and advance the objects and purposes for which his
powers have been granted" (Galligan 1986:30).2

Local government discretion, finally, may be regarded as more in tune with Davis's and Jowell's definitions. The freedom of local authorities to make their own decisions is emphasized. Clark defines local government discretion as "the ability of local governments to carry out in their own manner their own particular objectives in accordance with their own standards of implementation" (Clark 1984:199).

Clark is explicitly concerned with relations between different tiers of the state. Characteristic for the concept of local government discretion is its concern with decision-making freedom in relation to central government. The approach suggested by Page & Goldsmith includes this perspective. Indeed, it is highlighted in their definition of local government discretion. This concerns "the ability of actors within local government to make decisions about the type and level of services it delivers within the formal statutory and administrative framework for local service delivery, and about how that service is provided and financed" (Page & Goldsmith 1987:5).

Characteristic for Galligan's approach, as well as for many other approaches to the concept of discretion, is the view from above, i.e. he represents a top-down perspective. Discretionary agents are expected to act in accordance with statutes, specified on a higher level of the organization. However, problems of discretion have also been studied from a different angle. Lipsky's theory of street-level bureaucracy is probably the best known (see also Elmore 1982).

The street-level bureaucrat is in the frontline between a public organization and their clients. He or she may be, for example, a police officer, a social worker or a teacher and is typically in a position to have wide discretion in terms of distributing benefits or sanctions to individual clients: "Street-level bureaucrats have discretion because the nature of service provision calls for human judgement that cannot be programmed and for which machines cannot substitute" (Lipsky 1980:161).

However, their scope for discretion is not shaped primarily by the rules they are expected to follow. Of equal importance are factors such as the

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2 Compare also Burke's (1987) distinction between discretion due to external vs. internal sources of direction over policy implementation.
considerable gap between identified needs and provided resources and their close relationship with the clients. Indeed, in street-level bureaucracies, policies are seen as being shaped not by the persons occupying the positions at the top of the organization chart, but by the actual behaviour of the front-line workers.

A different way of conceiving of forms of discretion is suggested by Ronald Dworkin (1977). His commonly cited separation distinguishes between senses of weak and strong discretion. Basically, weak discretion means the mere interpretation of standards laid down by a superior authority. Strong discretion, on the other hand, refers to the situation when the actor creates his/her own standards, even though he/she is supposed to follow some directives from above (Bankowski & Nelken 1981). According to Dworkin, weak discretion is not really discretion since, in his view, there is always a right interpretation, and thus no scope for choice. Naturally, the notion of the existence of a right interpretation is highly controversial and has been a matter of debate (see further Galligan 1986:14ff). If this notion is rejected, the difference between the weak and strong senses becomes a matter of degree. Discretion in the strong sense simply means more scope for choice.

Another, but related way of identifying the components of discretion, is to distinguish between different "natures" of discretion. As Sink & Lyman (1986:203ff) argue, any policy or programme may provide scope for one or more of three categories of administrative discretion. The first is rule application, which is a very limited form of discretion. Second, agents may exercise choice, which allows them to make decisions about alternative courses. Third, and most advanced, discretion may provide scope for innovation, for example, to develop new forms for the implementation of policies. Obviously, innovation requires a favourable breeding ground which goes beyond what mere scope for choice can offer.

A Common Core

As is evident from this brief overview, the concept of discretion has been used in a number of different contexts and with different meanings. Despite
not being exhaustive, several dimensions have been identified along which definitions may vary. In this section, the focus is shifted from the diversifying to the unifying elements. Among definitions used in legal theory and social science, we will suggest that a common core can be identified, consisting of three components.

First, discretion is something in the hands of actors. These may be individuals, such as professionals, street-level bureaucrats or public officers. Discretion may also be exercised by organizations in collective forms, for example by local authorities (Page 1985a) or sub-units within a broader organization. In the hands of these, discretion appears as certain powers or a certain authority.

Second, discretion represents a scope for choice, judgement or assessment. As expressed in Dworkin’s metaphor, "(d)iscretion, like a hole in a doughnut, does not exist except as an area left open by a surrounding belt of restriction" (Dworkin 1977:31). Thus, the actor is assumed to have a certain amount of freedom to decide between different alternatives. This is clearly evident in Davis’s and Jowell’s definitions, and also in an empirically oriented measure, such as Dunsire’s "scale of discretion" which represents "the number of choice options left open, from an 'either/or' choice at one end (score 2) to some very high number at the other end" (Dunsire 1978:102). The notion of "good reasons", which some theories expect to be prevalent in discretionary decision-making, also implies the existence of a scope for choice.

Third, discretion is available to formal subordinates, who are expected to act according to certain statutes or directives issued by superiors. Statutes may be precise and specific or just represent a general frame for the agency’s actions. When summarizing the meaning of the concept, Galligan underlines this aspect of discretion as the performance of delegated powers:

"(D)iscretion, as a way of characterizing a type of power in respect of certain courses of action, is most at home in referring to powers delegated within a system of authority to an official or set of officials, where they have some significant scope for settling the reasons and standards according to which that power is to be exercised, and for
applying them in the making of specific decisions." (Galligan 1986:21).

However, discretionary powers are not always a result of conscious delegation by superiors. Subordinates are often in the position to create a scope for decision-making of their own accord, which may deviate from their superiors’ expectations. Indeed, a recurring theme in the literature on discretion concerns the problem of unauthorized discretion and whether and how it should be limited (Davis 1969, Jowell 1973, Kadish & Kadish 1973, Galligan 1986, Morgan 1987). However, we may still talk about discretion as long as a formal division of tasks along hierarchical lines prevails.

In line with these key features, we will define discretion as the scope for choice available to actors in formally subordinate positions, vis-à-vis their superiors. These actors may be individuals or organizational units.

**Actors, Structures and Autonomy**

After having summarized the core meaning of the concept of discretion, and specified our own definition of it, the next question to be addressed concerns its position in a more general context. The actor-structure relationship is the point of departure in our analysis. It provides a general frame of reference, to which our use of the concept of discretion will be related. Following this, the analysis continues with a discussion of the concept of autonomy, which has a certain resemblance to discretion. The purpose is to use it as a means to further clarify the way we conceive of discretion.

Starting with the relationship between actors and structures, this is regarded as a principal meta-theoretical problem within social science (Rothstein 1988:28). Most social theorizing acknowledges the existence of these two sets, which are often treated as antinomies (Giddens 1979:49).

Actors are commonly referred to as someone (an individual or a collective) who has scope for choice, i.e. "could have acted otherwise" (Giddens 1979:56, see also Lukes 1977:6). The property of consciousness is crucial. Actors have "the capacity to understand what they do while they do it" (Giddens 1984:xxii). The concept of structure is more problematic
and has been defined in a number of different ways (see for example Lukes 1977:7f and Giddens 1979:59f). It is more abstract, but may generally be conceived of as circumstances or factors constraining or enabling the actor. Rothstein defines structure as a "pattern with a certain duration", which is neither random nor directly created by the individual actor (Rothstein 1988:33). According to Lundquist,

"(s)ocietal structures comprise patterns of activities and ideas in the form of institutions, relations, procedures, role patterns, rules, myths etc together with their relevant resources. They are to a large extent the result of the agency of past generations, and each new generation changes old structures and creates new ones." (Lundquist 1987:40).

Depending on their position in relation to the actor-structure division, theories tend to provide either actor or structure oriented explanations. Those stressing the crucial position of the actor tend to emphasize voluntarism, i.e. the actors' ability to shape their environment. Structural theories, on the other hand, have a determinist tendency. In the extreme case, social actors are regarded as nothing but a mere product of their environment. (Lukes 1977, Archer 1982, Astley & Van de Ven 1983).

The key question, as formulated by Lukes, is therefore: "to what extent and in what ways are social actors, whether individuals or collectives, constrained to think and act in the ways they do?" (Lukes 1977:3). What is, more precisely, the balance between action and structure, voluntarism and determinism? To what extent is action structurally determined and how does action affect structures? The contemporary challenge lies in developing not only a theory linking the two levels together, but also a theory which is possible to operationalize (Lundquist 1987, Rothstein 1988).

Lukes (1977) suggests that four alternative positions may be distinguished in relation to the problem of the actor-structure relationship. The voluntarist and the structuralist positions correspond to the previously discussed extremes on the scale, which argue that either actors or structures are sufficient for an understanding of social phenomena. The relativist position claims that the two sets of theories are simply incommensurable and therefore impossible to relate to each other. Lukes rejects all these
alternatives, instead advocating a dialectic view, claiming that:

"... social life can only properly be understood as a dialectic of power and structure, a web of possibilities for agents, whose nature is both active and structured, to make choices and pursue strategies within given limits, which in consequence expand and contract over time." (Lukes 1977:29).

This or similar approaches also seem to dominate among other solutions suggested. One of the forefigures in recent debate is Anthony Giddens, whose "theory of structuration" deals with the duality between structure and action. The structure is constantly reproduced by agents' actions. Thus, the concepts are interrelated:

"The constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality. According to the notion of duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize." (Giddens 1984:25).

Interpreting the dialectic view broadly, it can be seen as encompassing Giddens's notions that there is a mutual dependency between actors and structures which is reproduced over time and space: "Structure thus is not to be conceptualised as a barrier to action, but as essentially involved in its reproduction" (Giddens 1979:70).

**Actor Autonomy as a Link**

Among other theories stressing the interdependence between the two concepts as a basis for bridging the gap, the model proposed by Lundquist (Lundquist 1984, 1987, see also Lundquist 1988) seems particularly interesting for our purposes. The explicit use of the concept of actor autonomy as the link between actors and structures characterizes Lundquist's model. Rejecting total determinism, as well as total voluntarism, Lundquist concludes:
"In practice we seem to face mixed forms in which different factors preponderate over different persons in different situations. The actor has some degree of autonomy founded on consciousness and capacity for self-reflection but is bounded by structures." (Lundquist 1987:51).

Lundquist suggests that actor autonomy is affected by structures, mainly through three flows; socialization, information and by being limiting/enabling. Through socialization processes, the actor’s perceptions of himself and his environment, as well as his preferences, are shaped. Information, "communicated messages about the structures" (Lundquist 1987:49) provide the actor with more immediate knowledge on structural conditions. The limiting/enabling flow "restricts or furthers the actor’s execution of certain acts and thoughts and his possibilities of achieving certain outcomes" (Lundquist 1987:49). Following Giddens, structures are seen as both enabling and constraining (Giddens 1979:69). This flow is independent of the consciousness of actors. However, actors may consciously develop strategies to avoid or utilize the particular limiting/enabling functions of the structure.

Lundquist underlines the dynamics of his model. The flows are continuous and actors can also affect the structures. Important, at least on a macro level, is the distinction between necessary and possible actions. Some actions are structurally necessary for the maintenance of the system. Remaining actions are structurally possible, i.e. they may or may not be performed by actors. They represent optional choices and are expressions of actor autonomy.

Hence, the autonomy of actors is a key concept in Lundquist’s linkage theory. The notion is also emphasized by others. Lundquist explicitly refers to Lukes (1977) and Hernes (1977). The latter argues that actors make choices within the context of the macrolevel, which provides incentives, constraints and alternatives (Hernes 1977:517f). Similar ideas are reflected in Elster’s two-filter theory. Individual choice, he argues, consists of two steps:

"Any given piece of human behaviour may be seen as the end product of two successive filtering devices. The first is defined by the set of structural constraints which cuts down the set of abstractly possible
courses of action and reduces it to the vastly smaller subset of feasible actions. The constraints are assumed to be given and not within the control of the agents; ... The second filtering process is the mechanism that singles out which member of the feasible set shall be realized." (Elster 1979:113).

It could be argued that the first filter provides the scope for actor autonomy. Hence, autonomy can be conceived of as a bridge linking actors and structures. However, before specifying the position of discretion in this context, the meaning of autonomy has to be elaborated one step further.

The Concept of Autonomy

Autonomy has a long tradition in political theory and statesmanship. The Greek city states had autonomia when they possessed the capacity to make their own laws, rather than being under the control of a conquering power. Etymologically, the word consists of the parts autos (self) and nomos (rule or law) (Lindley 1986, Dworkin 1988, Petersson 1989b). Literally, autonomy is equal to self-rule. However, in practice, the concept is used with very different meanings:

"It is used sometimes as an equivalent of liberty (positive or negative in Berlin’s terminology), sometimes as equivalent of self-rule or sovereignty, sometimes as identical with freedom of the will. It is equated with dignity, integrity, individuality, independence, responsibility, and self-knowledge... About the only features held constant from one author to another are that autonomy is a feature of persons and that it is a desirable quality to have." (Dworkin 1988:6).

However, being a feature of persons is no common denominator. The concept has also been used as a property of collective units. As a matter of fact, if its use in a biological context is excluded, the two remaining

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3 It is acknowledged that Elster’s own definition of the concept of autonomy is more specific. See for example Elster (1983).
principal meanings are the self-government of an institution and personal freedom (The Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). This distinction is also commonly made within the social sciences (Lane 1981, Lindley 1986, Lane & Ersson 1987).

Individual autonomy, "the self-rule of the individual in society" (Lindley 1986:6) is a key concept within Western political thought, not least in relation to central values connected to liberal democracy. Philosophers such as Kant, Hume and Mill have written extensively on the matter (Lindley 1986).

Organizational autonomy, on the other hand, can be regarded as the self-rule of organizations. Being autonomous is, according to Weber, a condition where "the order governing the organization has been established by its own members on their own authority, regardless of how this has taken place in other respects" (Weber 1968:49f). It deals with "the ability of organized collectives to control their own behaviour" (Lane 1977:247).

As a property of collectives, autonomy has been seen as a feature of territorial units, such as regions and local authorities (Saunders 1980, Gurr & King 1987, Appleton & Clark 1989). It has also been discussed in functional terms as the autonomy of an administrative unit or a professional group within a broader organization.

The concept is also central in the debate on, and the study of, the independence of the state. The relative autonomy of the state has been a matter of controversy, mainly within Marxist theory. The question concerns the extent to which the state is and can be independent of the ruling class and thereby be used as a tool for positive change. (See for example Miliband 1969 and Poulanzas 1973. For an overview, see Saunders 1980.) The autonomy of the state is also an important theme within the study of international politics, but here focus is on the nation-state in relation to the international community (Dunér 1977, 1979, Engberg & Lane 1980).

Further, the concept has also been used in a collective, but not necessarily organizational sense, for example when describing the existing or desired independence of a local community or of an ethnic minority within a nation.
Two Dimensions of Autonomy

In the literature on the concept of individual as well as organizational autonomy, the meaning of the concept is commonly specified as consisting of two separate, but related dimensions. To be autonomous, an actor has to enjoy a certain degree of freedom from external constraints. However, he/she must also be able to make use of this freedom and reach desired outcomes (see for example Lindley 1986 and Petersson 1989b).

In Lundquist’s analysis of the concept, this distinction plays an important role. The former is called the freedom of action possessed by the actor and the latter the capacity to act and achieve results (Lundquist 1987, 1988). The relationship between the notions is illustrated by the following figure.

![Diagram showing two dimensions of autonomy](image)

**Figure 2:1** Two Dimensions of the Concept of Autonomy.
A key point in Lundquist's model is that both factors have to be present simultaneously in order for a condition to be autonomous. In both the C and D cases, illustrated in the figure, autonomy becomes E, since the amount of one factor is not matched by the size of the other. The C case is exemplified by the Night Watchman State which, whilst possessing a large amount of freedom in relation to external constraints, lacks the necessary capacity for action, thereby having limited autonomy. An example of the D case is Napoleon on the island of Elba, possessing an outstanding personal ability, but having his freedom to act severely circumscribed. Hence, we may conceive of an ideal combination of the two factors, where autonomy is optimized. Lundquist does not explicitly discuss the relationship between the two dimensions, but the right angle in the model suggests that they are independent of each other. Hence, actors with considerable freedom of action available are not more likely than anyone else to have a large capacity for action.

It should be emphasized that autonomy is to be conceived of as a potential, permitting a wide range of actions to take place, and does not, in itself, provide answers about which the specific actions are that are undertaken in a particular situation.

**Freedom of Action**

The first dimension of the concept of autonomy, freedom of action, can be conceived of as a potential, providing the actor with a range of alternative courses of action. Closely connected to this concept is the notion of **constraint**. This is "placing limits upon the range of options open to an actor, or plurality of actors, in a given circumstance or type of circumstances" (Giddens 1984:177). Thereby, the concept of constraint represents a link between structures and the autonomy of an actor, even if, as has been previously emphasized, this relationship also includes an enabling component.

Constraints have been classified in a number of different ways. On a general level, Lukes's distinction between rational and structural constraints is important. Rational constraints provide the actor with reasons for not
acting in certain ways. Other options may be too expensive, in conflict with the actor’s basic values or otherwise not feasible. Nevertheless, Lukes claims "I retain the freedom or power to act otherwise, though, given that I have the wants and beliefs that I have, my actions have been determined" (Lukes 1977:13).

Structural constraints, on the other hand, have a more definite limiting function. They "limit the agent’s freedom or power to act otherwise by precluding (rather than putting a price tag on) such a possibility" (Lukes 1977:13). Certain courses of action are ruled out as impossible. For example, Marxist theory assumes that the actions of the ruling class must not intrinsically challenge its own position. Another example of a structural constraint is the thick concrete wall, which a human being cannot penetrate without the necessary implements. Determinist theories have drawn the conclusion that structural constraints provide an objective limit to the actor’s scope of action. However, these constraints must still be perceived and interpreted by actors. As Gidden claims, they "do not operate independently of the motives and reasons that agents have for what they do" (Giddens 1984:181). Hence, the conclusion must be that it is not possible to identify any absolute limits to an actor’s freedom of action. Rational constraints will always depend on the values of the actor. Structural constraints will, at least in non-determinist theory, leave some scope for the actor’s own interpretations.

The notion of autonomy within the limits of constraints raises several questions, which will only be touched on briefly. For example, the role played by other actors is not clarified sufficiently. The autonomy of an individual actor is seen as limited by structural factors. But to what extent do other actors perform a limiting function? The answer depends on the way in which structure is defined and where the boarder-line between structures and other actors is drawn. A wide definition, such as Rothstein’s (1988) "pattern with a certain duration", or just circumstances or factors constraining or enabling the actor, may well encompass patterns deriving from other actors. However, if structures are defined in a more narrow way, focusing only on impersonal forces, it is necessary to take into account

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4 Compare also Lundquist’s previously reviewed category of limiting/enabling
other actors when specifying the limits of an actor's autonomy.

Another problem concerns the role of self-imposed constraints. Actors may construct their own rules, make commitments or promises which have the effect of pre-emptying future choice and thereby limiting the scope for action\(^5\). According to the view presented here, such limitations are not seen as being set by the structure (see Rothstein 1988:33) and are thereby not regarded as limiting autonomy. Indeed, as Petersson (1989b) argues, the ability to make one's own rules is a central element of autonomy.

**Capacity to Act and Achieve Results**

The second dimension of the concept of autonomy concerns the ability to use available choice options and achieve desired outcomes. These may be conceived of as two, interrelated notions.

The first is the capacity to act, which concerns the capabilities of the actor. These include features such as skills, abilities, knowledge and resources. The "developed self" is also important (Lindley 1986:6), i.e. the actor's consciousness of himself and his abilities. It is assumed that the capacity to act can also be identified as a feature of a collective actor, but without falling into the trap of reification.

The second notion, the ability to achieve results or outcomes, is actually a commonly used definition of power (see for example Giddens 1979:88). To a certain extent, it is likely to be connected to the actor's capacity to act, but in practice, his/her ability to reach desired outcomes is likely to be a more complex matter. Goal-achieving capacity is sometimes referred to as positive autonomy, whereas negative autonomy concerns the capacity to resist the power of others (Dunér 1977, Lane 1981).

In conclusion, following Lundquist, autonomy is seen as a concept linking actors with structures and as consisting of two dimensions; the freedom of action possessed by the actor and the capacity to act and achieve results.

\(^5\) Compare for example Lewin (1988) and his concept of manoeuvring room in politics, and Elster's (1979) discussion on self-binding.
Specifying Discretion

This final section of the chapter brings the analysis one step further. Against the background of the concept of actor autonomy, which has previously been identified as a link between actors and structures, we here aim at specifying how we conceive of the concept of discretion. A conclusion to be drawn is that the concepts of discretion and autonomy have a lot in common (Clark 1984). A brief glance gives the impression that they deal with basically similar problems. They are both concerned with the scope for choice or action, Indeed, they sometimes seem even to be treated as synonyms. Professional discretion is not always distinguished from professional autonomy. Also within the field of local government, the boarder-line is not always clear.

Another different way of conceiving of the concepts as similar is to claim that they represent similar phenomena, but within different school of thought within contemporary political science. Berben et al (1985) argue that two separate traditions can be distinguished. It seems that autonomy would concern the first of these, focusing on the concept of politics. This deals with problems of power and influence and often adopts a macro perspective in which socio-political forces perform a crucial role. Discretion, on the other hand, would appear to be closer to the suggested second branch, represented by the concept of policy. This focuses more on the study of the process of political decision-making and implementation, often from a micro perspective and within administratively defined policy sectors.

A different approach to the autonomy-discretion relationship is found in the works of Lipsky. The second chapter of his Street-Level Bureaucracy (1980), deals with both of these concepts. Street-level bureaucrats, he argues, perform a role as policy makers based on high degrees of discretion and relative autonomy in relation to organizational authority.

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6 For example, in the following statement by Magnusson & Lane, the concepts are obviously treated as synonyms: "Local government autonomy or discretion may be considered as a function of the application of two distinctions: general local government competence versus competence derived from special law, and regulation versus no regulation" (Magnusson & Lane 1987:22).
The two concepts are not explicitly defined, but discretion seems to refer to the scope for judgement connected with certain, mainly professional, roles. This scope is accepted by the superiors and corresponds to objectives common for both superiors and subordinates. Autonomy, on the other hand, seems more related to the scope available to the front-line worker to avoid central directives. This happens in situations where superiors and subordinates have different interests and objectives and where the street-level bureaucrat will attempt to withhold cooperation.

The distinction made by Lipsky bears resemblance to Bull’s previously discussed separation of judgement from discretion. However, and somewhat confusingly, it is Bull’s narrow definition of discretion which corresponds to Lipsky’s autonomy, whereas judgement in Bull’s terms is similar to Lipsky’s discretion.

In this thesis, it will be argued that discretion and autonomy are separate but at the same time interrelated concepts. The differences are summarized in two statements:

First, discretion, not necessarily autonomy, is the scope for choice of individual or collective actors in a formally subordinate position and concerns the relationship with their formal superiors. Discretion is attributed to subordinates, even if these in practice may enjoy considerable freedom vis-à-vis their superiors (compare Page 1985b). Autonomy is a broader concept since it may also characterize actors in other settings. For example, the autonomy of a local community can be seen in relation to local economic and social forces (Clark 1974, Gurr & King 1987, Goldsmith 1990) and the autonomy of the nation state can be regarded as its self-rule in relation to other nations and the international community. Autonomy, therefore, is a broader concept in relation to which we will treat discretion as a special case in a specific setting.

In a sense, our specification in this respect can be seen as a more general application of a distinction suggested by Rhodes in relation to local government discretion:

"It would be preferable if the term 'local discretion' were reserved for the extent to which the room for decisional manoeuvre of local government decision-makers was constrained by other governmental
units. 'Local discretion' is a component of, rather than a synonym for, 'local autonomy'." (Rhodes 1981:30).

Hence, we claim that discretion generally takes place in a division of functions, where one level performs tasks which have formally been laid down by a superior level.

Second, we will treat discretion as primarily concerning the freedom of action aspect of autonomy, not the capacity for action. Discretion as a scope for choice, judgement or assessment is seen as corresponding to the first of Lundquist’s dimensions of autonomy. Thus, also in this case, autonomy can be seen as the broader concept.

In the literature on the matter, discretion is often related to specific limitations or constraints, which are seen as providing an area of manoeuvre for the decision-maker. However, the particular constraining factors, identified as relevant, vary between definitions. Some focus exclusively on legal aspects while others take into account the function of other factors. Generally, the capacity to act and achieve results has played a minor role in most of the literature on discretion, even if, in practice, the border-line is not altogether clear. Theories of street-level and professional discretion can be regarded as exceptions. Even if they emphasize the freedom of action dimension, they also underline the importance of the actors’ capabilities and skills for the performance of their roles.

Conclusions

This chapter has focused on clarifying how we define discretion, a key concept in our study. In doing so, we hope that we have made a contribution to the general understanding of discretion. The literature on the matter has been reviewed and the concept has been related to the actor-structure distinction and the concept of autonomy.

Discretion, we conclude, is a property of actors and concerns the scope available to them for choice, judgement or assessment. Further, these actors

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7 A distinction between autonomy as a kind of frame and discretion as a more limited concept is also suggested by writers such as Clark (1984) and Galligan (1986).
are formally subordinate, expected to act according to certain statutes or directives issued by superiors. In essence, the concept is defined as the scope for choice available to actors in formally subordinate positions, vis-à-vis their superiors. These actors may be individuals or organizational units.

Discretion has much in common with the concept of autonomy. They both concern the scope for choice or action of an actor. However, in our study, they are regarded as two theoretically interrelated but, nevertheless, separate concepts. Discretion is seen as a special case of autonomy, attributed to formal subordinates and primarily concerning the freedom of action dimension of autonomy. Thus, through the concept of autonomy, discretion is also connected to the actor-structure relationship. It represents the scope for choice of actors under the constraint of structural factors. It concerns the autonomy of the actor, but only in a specific sense and in an hierarchical structural setting.
One conclusion to be drawn from the previous chapter is that the concept of discretion has not only been defined but also approached in a number of different ways. Therefore, before outlining the theoretical basis of the study, the principal distinctions between different approaches will be identified. We have selected two dimensions which are seen as constituting important analytical lines of division between the various approaches. The first concerns the **outlook point in relation to the formal hierarchy**. Basically, the question is whether discretion is studied looking downwards from the top or upwards from the bottom of the organization. As is clear from the previous chapter, legal studies generally adopt a perspective from the top, focusing on how actors at lower levels are expected to behave. Whereas, in contrast, Lipsky’s theory of street-level bureaucracy takes the view from the bottom. The distinction also corresponds to the one frequently used to differentiate between various approaches to the study of policy implementation, although, as will be elaborated more extensively later, their subject matter is slightly different from the one in this study.

The second dimension concerns the **ontological/epistemological basis** of the approach. This is not specifically connected to the problem of how discretion can be conceptualized, but is instead a more general distinction among social science theories. This dimension deals with fundamental questions of in what sense phenomena are "real" and how knowledge about reality can be obtained. Varying ways of conceptualizing this dimension are presented in the literature. However, one of the more straightforward and accurate is the subjective-objective distinction, suggested by Burrell &
Morgan (1979). Historically, the subjective-objective scale represents a principal division in the on-going debate on the nature of social science. Originally, the issue concerned whether the models and the methods of natural science could be applied to the study of social phenomena or whether a fundamentally different approach was required.

Burrell & Morgan argue that social science theories are more or less either objectivist or subjectivist, depending on their position with regard to four different but related problems concerning the nature of social science. The first problem is ontology, i.e. the question of the nature of reality. The objectivist claims that reality is of an objective kind, out there to be discovered, existing independently of the individual’s perceptions. The subjectivist, on the other hand, regards reality as a mere product of the individual’s mind.

The second problem is that of epistemology, i.e. how one is to reach knowledge about reality. The objectivist argues that the search for regularities and causal relationships generates a knowledge which grows cumulatively. This is rejected by the subjectivist, who claims that social matters can only be understood by adopting the perspective of the directly involved individuals.

The third concerns human nature, or the freedom of choice possessed by human beings. The dividing question is whether individuals are just performing actions determined by their environment or whether they can, basically, be seen as creative and able to act of their own volition. The final problem relates to the choice of methodology. Should a method be used which looks for regularities and generalizations in large amounts of data or should each case or event be treated as unique?

Theories located at the extremes in relation to each of these four problems represent objectivist and subjectivist theories in their absolute forms. However, as Burrell & Morgan recognize, very few social theories are pure representatives of either kind. Instead, most of them are based on combinations of ideas, which belong to these extremes to a greater or lesser extent. Thus, theories are more or less subjectivist or objectivist, rather than either/or. Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that Burrell & Morgan

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1 On this point, compare the actor-structure distinction, discussed in the previous chapter.
construct a dichotomy on the basis of the scale. The sorting of theories into "paradigms" has not been altogether successful. In particular, along the dividing line between subjectivism and objectivism, theories seem to be forced into one or the other of the paradigms. For example, those of Weber and Silverman, which explicitly aim at creating a bridge between different traditions along the subjective-objective scale, are not easily sorted into any of the paradigms.

Nevertheless, the subjective-objective scale is of relevance when specifying the approach to a study of discretion. As a social phenomena in an organizational context, discretion can be investigated from either a subjective or objective starting-point, or some combination of these.

Our point here is that approaches to the study of discretion may be located along the two dimensions identified. In relation to the formal hierarchy, they may take the view from the top or from the bottom. With regard to the second dimension, approaches close to the subjectivist end of the ontological/epistemological scale would consider discretion to be a socially constructed phenomena, not existing independently of the minds of the actors involved. Instead, as its ontological position suggests, only what is perceived by the actors would be regarded as real. Those at the objectivist end, on the other hand, share the basic preconception that there is a social reality outside the consciousness of the actors. They claim that "the social world exists independently of an individual’s appreciation of it" (Burrell & Morgan 1979:4).

Returning to legal positivism, we may ask how this can be conceived of in terms of these two dimensions. Considering first the outlook point in relation to the formal hierarchy, its view is clearly from the top. It focuses on what the limits are for discretion at subordinate levels according to the legal system, which is essentially outlined by the centre.

In relation to the other dimension, i.e. the ontological/epistemological basis, we would argue that legal positivism occupies a position among theories at the objectivist end. Clearly, the assumptions or behaviour of actors at the lower level are not taken into account when discretion is specified. Further, despite developing as a reaction to natural law-ideas, legal positivism may nevertheless be regarded as representing a modified objectivist position on the subjective-objective scale. It rejects the idea of
an eternal law, and is, therefore, relativist in its outlook. Instead the
starting-point is the existing legal system. However, this system is treated
as an objective phenomena. The legal positivist is concerned with finding
the correct application of the given legal system to specific human
activities. The Conceptual Approach within legal positivism represents this
notion in its most extreme form. However, other forms of legal positivism
also regard the legal system as "something which actually exists" (Gray,

Obviously, as these two dimensions indicate, several alternative
approaches to discretion are possible. In our study, we develop an actors’
perspective which takes its outlook point from the bottom. The views of the
actors actually involved in discretionary decision-making play an important
role in this line of theorizing. We adopt an intermediate position vis-à-vis
the ontological/epistemological basis. Even if, ontologically, the conscious­
ness of the individual is crucial for what is regarded as real, epistemologi­
ally it is assumed that discretion can be analyzed and explained in causal
terms. Hence, our approach has an obvious tendency towards the subject­
ivist side, but borrows notions from objectivist theories. The remainder of
this chapter is concerned with further specifying the actors’ perspective
used in this study.

An Actors’ Perspective

The specific characteristic of approaches using the actors’ perspective is
their concern with the study of social phenomena from the point of view
of affected individual actors, rather than as identified by outside observers
(Löwstedt 1989, Cuff & Payne 1984). They focus on the actors’ percep­
tions, cognitions and ideas, which are generally seen as providing the basis
for what is regarded as real. In contrast to the conventional way of
approaching the concept, this perspective regards discretion as equal to
what these individuals, in discretionary positions, see as the scope for
choice.

These notions correspond to the view taken by several writers on public
policy making. Edwards, for example, argues in favour of an approach
dealing with "the actors involved in the policy making process ... and with their perceptions of the particular social problems and policies with which they are concerned" (Edwards 1981:303). Young suggests that studies should be undertaken from the point of view of actors' "assumptive worlds", which is "the policy makers' understandings of and ways of representing the worlds upon which they operate..." (Young & Mills 1979a:24, see also Young & Mills 1979b and Young 1981).

One obvious source of inspiration is Weberian sociology. Weber claimed that human activities could not be understood from the outside, but required that the researcher put himself into the role of the actor. Thus, the notion of explanatory understanding (erklärendes Verstehen) is crucial in his methodology. The researcher should try to reconstruct the subjective meanings of the acting individuals in order to understand why they act as they do. In particular, Weber regarded this as a fruitful method in historical studies, but his ambition was also to extend it to the study of social science generally (Parkin 1982).

However, at the same time, Weber's aim was to build a bridge between the two main theoretical schools within the social science of his time - idealism and positivism. Therefore, notions borrowed from positivism have influenced his thinking such as, for example, the aim to reach causal explanations of social phenomena.

An actors' perspective is also evident among theories within the paradigm of "interpretative sociology" (Burrell & Morgan 1979, Putnam 1983). Under this heading, theories such as phenomenology and hermeneutics are sorted. These are partly inspired by Weberian verstehens-sociology, but aim at developing more consistent subjectivist theories. In contrast to positivist and functionalist theory, interpretative sociology claims that no objective social laws exist independently of human consciousness. Instead, the mind of the actor is seen as the key to any understanding of social phenomena. According to Gorman, phenomenology is united by the notion that

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2 For a discussion on the relationship between Weber and the phenomenologist Schutz, see Eliaesen (1982).
"... what is perceived by a conscious individual adequately reveals what is. Being is confirmed as existing only through our subjective experiences. It is idle chatter to suggest that an objective world exists apart from our conscious experiences." (Gorman 1976:496).

However, despite this essentially subjectivist focus, most theories within this tradition, for example the phenomenology of Schutz (1972, 1974) and Berger & Luckmann (1967) emphasize the intersubjective character of the social world. Each individual internalizes assumptions from the social relationships in which he or she participates. A "social stock of knowledge" has developed over the years and is transmitted from one generation to another.

Thus, both Weberian and interpretative sociology are characterized by a perspective from the point of view of affected individual actors. Among different actors’ perspectives a distinction can be made according to the object in focus. Basically, the question is whether theories are concerned with explaining actions or whether they primarily deal with the assumptions of the actors on their own accord.

A focus on actions characterizes Weberian social action theory. Action, for Weber, is

"... all human behaviour when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it... Action is social in so far as... it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (Weber 1947:88).

Crucial for Weber’s Verstehen-approach is the emphasis on understanding action through a reconstruction of the motives and meanings of the acting individuals. Thus, in Weberian theory, subjectivist notions have a function in explaining social action. A connection is expected to exist between the subjective meanings of individuals and their actions (see also for example Silverman 1970).

Weber classifies the motives for individual action into four categories. Two of them concern different forms of rational action, i.e. conscious
choice of means in order to obtain an end. However, action may also be emotional if it is determined by feelings, or traditional if it is the result of mere habit or respect for existing authority. These categories serve the purpose of being ideal types, to which actual actions can be related in order to understand why they are undertaken (Campbell 1981).

Alternatively, an actors’ perspective may concern the assumptions of individual actors. The actors’ perceptions, cognitions and ideas are focused upon as primary objects, even if it is not ruled out that these may, at a later stage, be used to explain social action. A study may include descriptive as well as explanatory aspects. Not only is the mapping of assumptions undertaken, the question of how these have developed and why may also be raised. In an organizational context, a study of assumptions may aim at achieving a better understanding of the working of the organization. Assumptions to be mapped out may concern organizational features, divisions of functions and powers, the role of the actor in this context, and so forth.

**Discretion and Actions**

This brings us over to the specific features of this study. In terms of the two action perspectives presented, our concern is with actors’ assumptions. The purpose is not to explain actions, but to map and analyze discretion, as perceived by individual actors. Thus, it adopts an actors’ perspective with a focus on assumptions. However, this is not to say that there is no linkage between discretion and action. Generally, actors’ perspectives presuppose that social action can be understood by reference to actors’ assumptions. As has already been pointed out, this is a crucial element in Weber’s social action theory. However, there are different interpretations of Weber, also in this respect. Certain schools of thought, mainly some within the interpretative paradigm, take it for granted that understanding is sufficient for explanation. However, as argued by Eliaesen (1982:101f), it is more plausible that interpretative understanding, in Weber’s sense, should be seen as a necessary, but not sufficient requirement for causal explanations. In other words, in order to establish a relationship between
assumptions and actions, the researcher has to make an interpretation outside the mere consciousness of the actors involved.

Turning to the specific problem of the relationship between discretion and actions, it is suggested that in order to understand why actors in discretionary positions act as they do, knowledge about their assumptions of discretion will contribute to, but not provide, a sufficient explanation. The link is blurred by at least three circumstances.

First, as implied by the observation that interpretative understanding is an insufficient requirement, other factors, outside the mere consciousness of participating actors, will also be important. For example, some social structures are usually assumed to be hidden, and not brought up to the surface of actors’ consciousness (Lukes 1974). Nevertheless, their role for understanding social action may be crucial.

Second, the theory provides only limited guidance about why a specific option is chosen. Discretion can be seen as a field of possible choice options. It draws the boundaries of the hole in the doughnut, to borrow Dworkin’s already cited metaphor. The concept is useful in pointing at what sort or what range of alternatives are considered to be available. However, which of these the actor actually prefers, depends on additional factors. Barrett & Fudge suggest that, in particular, perceptions of the need for action and the actors’ motivation to act are relevant (1981:27f). Silverman, who regards action to be rationally orientated, claims that:

"Any instance of action (a unit act) thus stems from the ends that the actor is concerned to attain, his definition of the situation, including the range of alternative actions that he perceives to be available to him, and his choice of a means which is likely to be effective, bearing in mind the likely reaction of others to his act". (Silverman 1970:130, my emphasis).

Third, a further complication appears when the theory is applied to a study of the discretion available to organizations. In these cases, the relationship concerns the assumptions of individual actors about the discretion available to a collective unit. Thus, if the purpose is to explain choices or actions made collectively, it becomes necessary to reconstruct the links between individual assumptions and collective action. There are several ways of
trying to establish this link, each characterized by its own specific theoretical preconditions. However, of crucial importance is in what sense it can be assumed that there exists a collective assumption of discretion. It is likely that these assumptions are more developed at an individual level than expressed in collective terms and, even if there are collective assumptions, these are carried by individual actors. Therefore, one possibility could be to weight the assumptions of the participating individuals, on the basis that they all contribute equally to the overall picture. However, such an expectation is unrealistic, therefore, an alternative could be to assign different weights to different participants, taking into account their power positions. This requires an estimation of the influence of each individual, which, to complicate the matter even further, may vary between different decision-making situations. Thus, in short, it is highly problematic to establish a link between individual assumptions of discretion and actions formally performed by a collective unit.

In conclusion, discretion is not in itself a sufficient basis for a theory of action. Nevertheless, knowledge about the way discretion varies can be expected to contribute to an understanding of what actions are plausible. This in itself justifies a study of discretion. Further, particular forms of discretion may be connected to specific policy-making styles. For example, large amounts of discretion, under equal formal/legal conditions, may well be linked to a preparedness to consider policy options close to, or exceeding formal/legal limits. Thus, decision-makers possessing these latter assumptions can be expected to pursue less traditional and more innovative policy alternatives.

The theoretical problems involved in an examination of the link between discretion and actions are only too evident. However, a further elaboration of these lies outside the purpose of this study. We will confine ourselves to the problem in which discretion is seen as the dependent variable.

The Implementation Studies Tradition

Before proceeding to develop a theory of discretion, a few words should be said about how the focus of our study relates to problems of policy
implementation. Even if we are concerned with implementing agents, our problem is different from, but nevertheless related to, those posed in studies of policy implementation. Over the last decade, the previously neglected problem of policy implementation has attracted considerable attention in policy studies and political science. Today, the literature on implementation is characterized by a number of different approaches, not only dealing with how implementation can be grasped theoretically and empirically, but also suggesting different conceptions of what implementation actually is (for overviews see for example Barrett & Fudge 1981, Ham & Hill 1984 and Eckerberg 1990).

By tradition, a line is drawn between top-down and bottom up implementation perspectives. Even if attempts have been made to identify common denominators and develop a synthesis (Sabatier 1986, Hull & Hjern 1987), the two traditions are still sufficiently distinct to be regarded as separate.

Top-down approaches are primarily concerned with whether policy decisions are realized in accordance with the intentions behind them. The starting-point is a particular political decision or programme and the focus is on the extent to which this has been put into effect on lower levels of the hierarchy and the eventual outcome of the policy decisions. Conclusions often concern why policies fail to be implemented and what the conditions for successful implementation may be (see for example Pressman & Wildawsky 1973 and Sabatier 1986).

Bottom-up approaches are more varying in their focus. However, the perspective from the bottom of the formal hierarchy is a common feature. Instead of starting with the formal decision, analysts find their point of departure out in the field, where day-to-day problems are being solved. Elmore (1982) suggests backward mapping as a means for tracing the connections between implementation and formal policy decisions. Lipsky (1980) is concerned with a specific category of implementing agents, namely street-level bureaucrats. Hjern and associates (Hjern & Porter 1981, Hjern & Hull 1982, Hjern 1983) deal with how actors organize themselves in implementation structures in order to identify and solve problems.

However, this study focuses on a different, albeit related problem. Our concern is with how the scope for choice, within the frame set by national
as well as local government policies, is perceived by actors in an implementing position. Thus, the focus is neither the effects of policies or programmes nor agents’ ways of organizing themselves to solve policy problems. Another difference which has already been discussed is that our problem does not concern actions, but the assumptions of actors.

Nevertheless, this study may contribute to an understanding of problems also relevant for implementation theories. In the same way as in top-down analysis, we take the existence of a formal structure for granted. However, the top-down model should benefit from also taking into account the implementing agents’ perceptions of the scope for choice. This must be regarded as an important precondition for successful implementation. Too great a deviation between intentions from the top and assumptions at the bottom is likely to weaken the correspondence between policy decisions and the way they are carried out.

The resemblance to bottom-up theories lies in the focus on implementing agents from their own perspective. Thus, a study of their assumptions vis-à-vis the formal structure at national and municipal level may contribute to an understanding of the particular conditions to which they are subject.

In conclusion, the problems and design of the present study are related in several ways to studies of implementation. Whilst it is expected that it will shed light on problems focused upon by top-down as well as bottom-up approaches, this study, nevertheless, has another subject matter in focus. Thus, it should be regarded as different from the major implementation study traditions.

A Theory of Discretion

A major aim of this thesis is to outline a theory of discretion. So far, concern has mainly been with clarifying the preconditions for this theory in terms of the meaning of the key concept and the specification of the particular approach chosen, i.e. the actors’ perspective. We now turn to more explicitly addressing the question of how a theory of discretion may be constructed.
Initially, it should be made clear that, in principle, the area of applicability is limited to a central-local government context, particularly in areas where local authorities are seen as formally performing tasks on behalf of the central level. Further, the theory deals with variation in discretion on a nation-wide basis and the question of how this variation can be explained.

Given this particular focus, it can be concluded that the basis of knowledge, from which our theory can be developed, is weak. Very few previous studies along similar lines have been discovered. Analyses of discretion from an actors’ perspective on a nation-wide basis are very rare and have not been the focus of more systematic empirical investigations or theory development\(^4\). For example, the question of how variation in discretion might be explained has not attracted much attention in research undertaken by other scholars. This justifies an essentially inductive way of theory development. Basically, the theory to be presented and the hypotheses suggested have evolved as generalizations from our own and others’ empirical observations. They are not to be seen as logical deductions from an actors’ perspective, even if they are consistent with this approach.

Nevertheless, our theory development has taken place against the background of the more general justification of the relevance of the actors’ perspective, as outlined in Chapter 1. Hence, the need to develop an alternative to conventional approaches has led us to generate hypotheses which highlight the difference between legal positivism and the actors’ perspective. Theory construction has also been influenced by the on-going restructuring of the welfare state and the related problems of how it can be governed. Not only does this justify a study of discretion from the point of view of affected actors, it also affects how variation in discretion can be understood and explained.

As already has been established, discretion is our dependent variable and is seen as equal to the scope for choice, as perceived by actors at the bottom. The actors’ perspective as a basis for the study has been

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\(^4\) For a summary of recent research in Sweden concerning knowledge and attitudes about rules among actors at local government level, see Ds 1991:32.
underlined. Discretion ultimately depends on the assumptions and perceptions of the actors in discretionary positions. However, these actors are seen as located in a formal/legal structure consisting of rules, formally defined roles, formal organizations and divisions of functions, etc. This provides guidance for the actor about what he/she is supposed to do according to his/her formal superiors. The existence of this formal/legal structure is taken for granted in our study. It has the function of providing a framework to which the concept of discretion is related. However, the formal/legal structure does not live a life of its own, but requires the active involvement of social actors. It is constructed, reproduced and changed by actors. Of particular importance in this context, and in line with the actors' perspective, is that its more precise function will depend on how it is interpreted by actors. Thus, a formal/legal structure putting limits on discretion does not in itself constitute discretion, which would be the case according to legal positivism.

Our view on the position of the formal/legal structure represents an important line of division also in relation to interpretative sociology. A phenomenologist would share our emphasis on the perspective of the actors. However, he/she is not likely to regard the formal/legal structure as a given framework. Any structure of this kind, and for that matter, any other possible limitation on discretion, would only be taken into account in so far as they are recognized by the affected actor. In this way, the formal/legal structure may enter only as a limitation reported by the actors.

The crucial role of the actor as an interpreter of the formal/legal structure implies that discretion is likely to vary between different individuals, in different contexts, working under similar formal/legal structures. This is consistent with the actors’ perspective, which emphasizes the distinctiveness of each individual’s view of the social world. Even if theories of this kind also underline the modifying function of intersubjectivity and the transmission of a social stock of knowledge, individuals are still expected to vary in their outlook. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

(H1) Discretion varies despite similar formal/legal structures.
Variation is expected because of the uniqueness of each individual’s experience and ability to make individual interpretations. Further, we expect variation to be enhanced by the particular difficulties of governing the modern welfare state. The system of governance has become vaguer and more uncertain from the point of view of the implementing agents. It should be observed that a hypothesis along legal positivist lines would provide a different argument: in the context of a similar formal/legal structure, no variation would be expected.

Indeed, this distinction between the perspective from the top and different actors’ assumptions of the limits to discretion is highlighted by an observation made by a Royal Commission summarizing experience from the Swedish national deregulation programme. Within its frame, a number of municipalities were selected as "free communes" and were granted freedom from certain nationally set rules (Rose 1990). The local authorities themselves were to suggest the regulations from which they wanted to be exempted. With regard to this process, the Commission concludes:

"There are ... considerable misunderstandings about which of the regulations actually apply. Among the propositions from the free communes to the government, a not insignificant proportion could have been implemented without any change in national regulation. The local authorities have not been aware of which rules apply. In some cases, a recommendation has been regarded as binding and in other cases, a rule has been interpreted wrongly... This is probably the case in all municipalities and counties" (SOU 1988:26, p 61, my translation).

From the perspective of the Commission, representatives of local authorities were seen as sometimes misinterpreting the rules. We would regard this observation as support for our hypothesis that discretion is interpreted differently.

If variation in discretion is assumed, our next question deals with how and in what sense this can be explained. A principal demarcation line within the epistemological debate in social science concerns whether explanations are at all possible and, if so, whether they should be looked for externally to the actors involved or by an examination of subjective processes. All forms of interpretative understanding, in the sense of Weber
as well as the interpretative paradigm, are united by the notion that actions or assumptions have to be understood from the point of view of the actor himself, by a reconstruction of his/her way of reasoning and view of reality.

However, Weber aimed at bridging the gap between the two epistemological traditions by stressing the causal element in explanations to a greater extent than the interpretative paradigm. His sociology combines a focus on interpretations with an attempt to reach causal explanations, for example, by analyzing motives for action in relation to ideal types. Thus, Weber tried to bring together the focus on the actors’ inner motives with that of the researcher as an external observer, able to interpret and compare these internal motives. The aim is to arrive at general conclusions about causes and effects (Weber 1947, Campbell 1981).

Our position resembles Weber’s approach in the sense that we emphasize subjective understanding but attempt to obtain causal explanations. We claim that it is possible to explain discretion causally as it, according to the theory of discretion used here, develops as a result of experience gained by affected actors in the social contexts in which they have been involved. Thus, discretion, as we define it, is a construct in the minds of actors and accordingly, its particular shape can be reconstructed by a study of how these assumptions have been built up. In this endeavour, it should be possible for the researcher to compare different individuals and draw general conclusions about factors of importance for the development of discretion.

Discretion and its Explanations

Having established that discretion can be explained causally, we now turn to the question of what, more particularly, are the likely influences. Since the dependent variable is discretion as perceived by relevant actors, a general suggestion is that attention must be focused on the social processes through which these assumptions have developed. This may be undertaken from a perspective dealing with the psychology of assumption formation (compare Björkegren 1989, Löwstedt 1989). However, we will confine
ourselves to a theoretical analysis on a more general level.

Our starting-point is simply that these assumptions are likely to have developed as a result of social processes and individual experiences. This is in line with basic notions within socialization theory, emphasizing the importance of the social setting for the building up of such assumptions (Goslin ed 1969). Thus, in the ideal case, it should be possible to reconstruct those impressions which are conducive to the actors’ judgement of the amount of discretion available. This could be said to be the purpose of an interpretative understanding of actors’ assumptions. However, in practice, this is a very complex task and, therefore, we will rely on a more crude approach. Explanations will be looked for, not by an examination of the minds of the actors, but more indirectly by studying the social contexts of relevant actors. This is not to argue that assumptions are determined by contexts, but rather develop through actors interaction with their social environments (Young 1977).

Two lines of division will be drawn to illustrate the content of the actors’ social context. Firstly, experiences are not expected to derive solely from the particular setting in which the actor occupies a discretionary position. Naturally, the specific conditions of, for example, a policy sector must be expected to be of major importance. However, impressions from other social contexts where the individual is or has been involved, such as family and friends, voluntary organizations and other workplaces, are also likely to be relevant. The second line concerns development over time. It is recognized that actors’ judgement of discretion is likely to be influenced not only by present impressions, but also by previous ones, for example, by socialisation processes during childhood and youth. Without any pretensions to be exhaustive, a number of specific hypotheses are suggested, dealing with the social context of these actors.

The first area in which we look for explanations is directly related to our definition of the concept of discretion. Since this is seen as the scope for choice vis-à-vis formal superiors, the relationship with policy-makers both at the national level and also within the local authority itself, becomes particularly interesting. Therefore, the first two hypotheses focus on the central-local government context of those in discretionary positions.

Generally, it should be expected that the actors’ own experiences of the
way in which the system of government works, will influence how discretion is perceived. One aspect of the system of government, which we consider to be particularly important, is the functioning of the control system. Within sectors where national government aims to influence local decision-making, it not only issues rules (which are expected to be binding) and other means of guiding the actions of implementing agents, but it also provides a control system which has been developed with the purpose of investigating whether these rules are complied with, the goals met and also, to some extent, to readjust decisions regarded as out of line. Compliance may also be controlled by others, such as local government auditors and various interest groups.

The legal positivist would have to take it for granted that these controls are sufficiently efficient to guarantee the proper working of the legal system as a whole, i.e. not allowing for any substantial amount of slack. However, our position is that there might be considerable difficulties involved in controlling implementing actors and thus, compliance cannot be presupposed. Within the street-level bureaucracy tradition, it has been claimed that there is a connection between the risk for discovery and the independence of the street-level bureaucrats:

"A general rule in the analysis of power is that an actor with low 'compliance observability' is relatively autonomous. If it is difficult or costly to determine how an actor behaves and the actor knows this, then he is under less compulsion to comply. The compliance observability of street-level bureaucrat slotting is typically low" (Prottas 1978:298).

The already mentioned problems of governing the welfare state are likely to emphasize this relationship even more. Not only governing, but also control, is likely to have become more problematic. Our point here is that there is a connection between the efficiency of the control system and how discretion is apprehended. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posed:

(H2) The weaker the efficiency of the control systems, the larger the amount of discretion available.

A second aspect of the central-local government relationship concerns the
extent to which local actors identify themselves with the centre, rather than with the locality. In the Swedish system of government, local authorities are expected to perform certain tasks on behalf of national government. National interests are to be adjusted to local conditions. However, this relationship contains an in-built conflict between national and local, and it may be expected that actors at the local level vary in the extent to which they see themselves as the long arm of national policies. Indeed, a Royal Commission analyzing sanctions connected with the control system suggests that, in such cases, identification with the locality is common:

"When there is imbalance between, on the one hand, what local authorities and counties perceive as their interests and, on the other, what laws and regulations protect as the interests of others, there is a certain tendency for local governments to give preference to what they perceive of as their interests." (SOU 1989:64, p. 100, my translation)

This tendency may well be reinforced by the increasing problems of governing the welfare state, which have put emphasis on the role of the local level. We expect that the particular shape of this pattern of identification will influence the amount of discretion perceived to be available:

(H3) The stronger the identification with the local interest and the weaker it is with national policies, the greater the amount of discretion available.

The central-local government context is not the only source of possible explanations for variation in discretion. To a large extent, previous research on local government in Sweden has focused on the characteristics of the local setting when explaining variation in local political conditions. In the comprehensive studies undertaken by the Local Government Research Group at the end of the 1960’s, local authorities were selected according to three main criteria, namely population size, population density and political majority constellation. It was expected that much of the variation would follow these lines (Westerståhl 1970, 1974). The local setting was also emphasized in the second wave of comprehensive local government
research in Sweden in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. A stratified selection of local authorities was taken in order to achieve representativeness in terms of demographic, economic and political features (Strömberg & Westerståhl, 1984).

Thus, in previous research, the characteristics of the local area have been expected to be important for variation in local politics. Therefore, it is reasonable to investigate whether discretion also varies along these lines. However, when it comes to more specifically hypothesizing what the relevant conditions in the local setting may be, the choice is more difficult. The guidance to be gained from previous studies is limited, even if there are examples of hypotheses dealing with the role of the local setting for concepts related to discretion. For example, Clark (1974) suggests that local community autonomy is greater, the further away from the national capital the local area is situated. However, we will suggest that population size is a useful starting-point when hypothesizing about how discretion varies according to the local setting. Undoubtedly, this variable represents fundamentally different conditions locally. At the time of study, population varied between 653 500 (Stockholm) and 3 200 (Bjurholm).

Ekker (1981) argues that local authorities with large populations have greater scope for choice (handlefrihet) because of the actors' greater competence and capacity. Along similar lines was an explicit assumption among the policy-makers behind local government amalgamation reforms in Sweden that larger size increased local self-government (Gustafsson 1980). However, Ekkers definition, as well as the concept of local self-government, appear to include aspects relating to capacity, and are, therefore, as was clarified in the previous chapter, wider than our concept of discretion.

Nevertheless, the population hypothesis is, also with specific reference to the concept of discretion, supported by Berman & Martin (1988). In a study of American state-local relationships, they conclude that large local authorities have greater discretion since they are more difficult to control or manage by state authorities. According to this line of reasoning, the efficiency of the control system is seen as an intermediate variable between population size and discretion: the larger the population, the less efficient the control system and the greater the amount of discretion available. We
will expect this to be valid also in the Swedish case. It is reasonable to expect that control problems are particularly severe vis-à-vis larger organizations, such as local authorities, not least with regard to the problems of governing the modern welfare state. Our hypothesis deals with the relationship between population size and discretion, even if the intermediate function of the efficiency of the control system is kept in mind:

(H4) The larger the local authority population, the greater the amount of discretion available.

The local setting may not only be conceived of as the specific conditions of the local authority area, but may also contain other features of the actor’s surroundings. For example, the organizational culture in which discretionary decision-making takes place is likely to influence how discretion is perceived.

Each organization is characterized by a pattern of more or less dominant "ideology, beliefs, opinions and ways of behaviour and doing things that distinguish between what is acceptable and what is unacceptable" (Barrett & Fudge 1981:268, see also Stewart 1986). The particular shape of the organizational culture has been suggested as an important explanation of discretion:

"At any time there are accepted values, assumptions and beliefs, reflecting established organisational interests. They will set the limits of perceived choice as well as determining choice in practice." (Stewart 1983:163).

Of course, the organizational culture has no place in legal positivist theorizing on discretion. However, in an actors’ perspective, this is likely to be highly relevant. Dominant assumptions in the organization about where the limits for choice are drawn are likely to influence how these are apprehended by the individual actor.

Our hypothesis in this field concerns a more specific aspect of this relationship. We would expect the organizational culture to contribute to
the development of coherence within the organization, not least if it is involved in struggles for resources and the pursuit of its own interests vis-à-vis those of other sectors or units. This could be reflected in common assumptions among individual actors connected to the same organization. The hypothesis is specified to deal with the discretion available to organizational units involving both politicians and officers in its decision-making:

(H5) Politicians and officers in the same organizational unit make similar assumptions about the amount of discretion available to the organization.

Our final hypotheses focus more directly on the characteristics of the individual actor. Of course, these also get their meaning in a social context. However, they concern conditions which clearly vary with the individual, and therefore, will be discussed separately. We focus on two such characteristics, namely time in office and sex.

Beginning with time in office, it seems that whether this is positively or negatively related to discretion is not an entirely straightforward matter. On the one hand, it could be claimed that, as actors gain experience from decision-making, the limits to discretion are gradually extended. Clark’s (1974) suggestion that the length of time in office of local political leaders has a positive impact on local community autonomy, may be regarded as being in keeping with this line of reasoning.

However, we will suggest the opposite hypothesis. It is expected that the longer the time in office, the more limited the perception of discretion. As Löwstedt (1989) argues, cognitions tend to be stable once they have been established, especially if they concern complex and abstract structures. This is in line with the well-established fact that new information reaching an individual is more easily adopted if it corroborates his/her already established basic beliefs.

As was shown in Chapter 1, the system of government in Sweden has undergone major organizational transformations during recent decades. An ideal of government by rules dominated within the public sector during the first post-war decades. The issuing of formal rules and a comprehensive
system of controls and sanctions was seen as a necessary prerequisite for efficient government. However, largely during the 1970s, a different ideal emerged. This included the notion that national government should mainly provide frameworks and goals and leave decisions about the final implementation to actors on lower levels. A conscious effort to decentralize decision-making has been conducted along these lines.

We would expect that actors who acquired their initial experiences from the steering system during the period before these transformations, will still be influenced by the ideal of government by rules, even in the new era. Hence, the actors’ assumptions concerning the amount of discretion available are expected to be influenced by when they were socialized into the conditions of public affairs.

(H6) The shorter the experience of the steering system, the greater the amount of discretion perceived to be available.

Finally, gender is also likely to be important in the assessment of discretion. We consider two circumstances to be particularly significant. Firstly, it has been shown that women generally relate to the rules system in a different way than men. For example, women, to a greater extent than men, claim that rules should be complied with. Further, they tend to regard the possibilities to influence their own situation to be more limited (Petersson et al 1989a). We will assume that this effects how discretion is perceived.

Our second line of reasoning deals more specifically with the position of women in a male-dominated setting. Local politics and administration is still very much a matter for men. In the middle of the 1980s, 70 per cent of the Councillors were men and women were underrepresented in most local government committees. Most major administrative positions were occupied by men. In 1985, only 10 per cent of the chief officers in local authorities were women. (Statistiska Centralbyrån 1986b). Hence, the organisational culture of local policy-making still seems to be predominately male. As Randall argues, "political institutions can be uninviting to women. Simply because they have been until recently exclusively male, because men still dominate their leadership positions,
women are discouraged. Then also male dominance tends to generate a 'masculine' style and atmosphere." (Randall 1987:92f, see also Pateman 1983 and Asplund 1984).

Women in policy-making positions within such a system have the multiple task of handling not only the normal duties expected to be performed by actors in leading positions, but also a male dominated organizational culture. Hence, under such conditions, women are subjected to double barriers. In conclusion, both our lines of reasoning lead us to suggest the following hypothesis:

(H7) Female actors, in leading positions, within an organizational unit in local politics or administration are more likely to assume that little discretion is available to this unit.

Together, these seven hypotheses suggest not only that discretion can vary in similar formal/legal contexts, but also how this variation can be understood. The main explanations are looked for in the central-local government context, in the local setting and among characteristics of the individual actor. In the next chapters, these hypotheses will be tested empirically.

Conclusions

The overarching aim of this chapter has been to outline a theory of discretion which can provide an alternative to the theories currently dominating. An actors' perspective has been selected and we started by clarifying the position of this perspective vis-à-vis other approaches to discretion. This was done by relating it to a framework consisting of two dimensions. The first concerned the outlook point in relation to the formal hierarchy, i.e. whether discretion is approached from the top or from the bottom. The other dimension was an ontological/epistemological scale, sorting theories along a classical subjective-objective dimension. It was concluded that the actors' perspective used in this study takes its outlook point from the bottom and occupies an intermediate position on the
ontological/epistemological scale.

Further clarification of our perspective was made in relation to the literature on the matter. It was emphasized that our focus is on assumptions of actors in discretionary positions, but does not aim at explaining actions. A dividing line was also drawn with regard to implementation studies. It was claimed that our perspective is different from, but nevertheless related to, the implementation study traditions.

From this, we moved to a more specific development of a theory of discretion. It was made clear that its area of applicability is mainly within a central-local government context, particularly in areas where local authorities are seen as formally performing tasks on behalf of the central level. The theory is also limited to questions of variation in discretion on a nation-wide basis and how this variation can be explained.

Because of the limitations in the basis of the knowledge in this area, theory construction has mainly taken place along inductive lines. However it has also been influenced by the need to develop an alternative to conventional approaches, together with an analysis of the on-going restructuring of the welfare state.

In the theory, discretion is treated as equal to what the affected actors perceive as the scope for action. The existence of a formal/legal structure is taken as given, but contrary to legal positivism, it is emphasized that it has to be viewed through the interpretations made by the actors involved.

Under these conditions, it has been hypothesized that discretion will vary despite similar formal/legal structures. The uniqueness of the assumptions of each participating actor, enhanced by the vagueness of the circumstances under which discretionary decision-making takes place, contributes to the expectation of variation in discretion. It was also claimed that this can be causally explained. Assumptions are likely to have developed in a social process and, therefore, the search for explanations will focus on the social contexts expected to be conducive to this development.

The more specific relationships suggested are represented by a number of hypotheses. The first area of explanations concerns the central-local government context of actors in discretionary positions. It was hypothesized that the efficiency of the control system and the extent to which actors
identify themselves with local, rather than national policies influences discretion. Secondly, the local setting, more specifically local authority population size and organizational culture, were also seen as important. The final hypotheses concern a number of characteristics varying with the individual, namely length of experience and gender.

From this outline of a theory of discretion, we now turn to its empirical application to Swedish Education Committees. This is undertaken in Chapters 4 to 7.
In the Swedish system of government, the politically appointed Education Committees have an overarching responsibility for education in the local area. They are committees within the framework of the local authority, at the same time, however, they are supposed to function as implementers of national policies, thus performing tasks on behalf of central government. Hence, Education Committees have a dual role comprising of both central regulation and local self-government.

The position of Education Committees has undergone major changes during the post-war period. From the mid 1970s, there has been a conscious policy of decentralization of power and responsibilities within the education sector which previously, in an international perspective, had been regarded as highly centralized. Education Committees have been allocated new tasks and responsibilities, which have reinforced their position. However, at the same time, the limits to Education Committee discretion have become more unclear as frames and goals have replaced detailed regulation. The present problems of governing the welfare state have also contributed to making Education Committee discretion less straightforward.

This suggests that Education Committees are suitable for an empirical application of our theory of discretion. Not least, their role in a central-local government relationship between central regulation and local self-government corresponds to some of the major assumptions behind the theory. The formal/legal structure of Education Committees is characterized by its uniformity. Formal rules have been established which are applicable to the school sector throughout the country. Certain organizational
structures, such as Education Committees, and a number of formally defined roles, such as Headmasters and Chief Education Officers, appear in all local authorities and have formally defined functions. Nevertheless, there is a component which may vary between local authorities, since the local Council can establish rules of its own, with relevance for the Education Committee. Hence, from a legal perspective, discretion is practically identical for all Education Committees. However, in line with the theory previously outlined, we would expect assumptions of discretion to vary between different actors involved in conducting Education Committee affairs.

The remainder of this chapter serves as a bridge between theory and empirical application. It introduces the Swedish Education Committees and the setting in which they operate. Also, a brief overview is provided of the decentralization changes within the system of governing Swedish education. Finally, the operationalization of the concept and the methodology used in the study are discussed. In line with the theory, our empirical application will focus on two aims. One is to analyze the extent to which Education Committee discretion varies, which is undertaken in Chapters 5 and 6 and the other is to explain influences on variation in Education Committee discretion, which is the concern of Chapter 7.

Local Education Committees

Position and Functions

What are the particular characteristics of the Education Committees, and under what conditions and in what context do they operate? These committees are obligatory, politically appointed and have an overarching

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1 The Education Committees are described as they were at the time when the empirical study was undertaken, i.e. in 1985-86. Subsequently, major changes have occurred. For example, from 1992 the appointment of an Education Committee will no longer be obligatory for local authorities (Proposition 1990/91:117).
responsibility for education in the municipality\(^2\). The position of the Education Committees reflects the dual character of the Swedish school system\(^3\). On the one hand, the Education Committee is a local government unit, executing local self-government. On the other hand, it implements national policies formulated in so-called frame-laws or other policy documents.

In 1842, when attendance in primary schooling became compulsory, each parish was required to appoint an Education Committee. The church’s responsibility was further emphasized by the fact that the vicar was the obligatory chairperson. With the introduction of the 1862 Local Government Ordinances, ecclesiastical and secular tasks were separated. However, primary schooling remained in the hands of the parishes. The new generations were to be socialized by the church.

Gradually, responsibility was transferred to the local authorities by explicit decisions made by the Swedish Parliament or by the Government. Accordingly, local government Education Committees were established. The first steps were taken in the cities and towns. In 1930, a process of major change started, as a Bill was passed in Parliament, which handed over responsibility for primary schooling to local authorities in which the Council was the main decision-making body\(^4\). As more local authorities adopted a system of representative, as opposed to direct, democracy, church responsibility for schooling decreased. By 1955, 1025 out of 1037 local authorities were in charge of primary schooling. However, local authority responsibility was divided between a number of separate Education

\(^2\) The Swedish local government system consists of two tiers; 23 counties, mainly responsible for health care and 284 municipalities, performing various local services, such as social services, primary and secondary education, physical planning and environmental protection (see further Gustafsson, A 1983). The county level will not be further dealt with in the study. When terms such as "local government" and "local authorities" are used, they refer exclusively to the municipal level.

\(^3\) For overviews in English about the Swedish school system, see for example Hamber & Wallin (1984) and Stenholm (1984), and entries on Sweden in educational encyclopedias, such as Kurian (ed, 1988) and Husén & Postlethwaite (eds, 1985).

\(^4\) In most rural authorities of that time, the municipal meeting was the supreme decision-making body. The meeting could be attended by all those resident within the local authority area with a right to vote.
Committees, each covering a different kind of school, e.g. basic compulsory, vocational or upper secondary.

With the introduction of the comprehensive school reform, it was decided that these committees should be replaced by one overarching Education Committee in each local authority. This was to be given the ultimate responsibility for primary as well as secondary schooling, including some schools previously run by central government (SOU 1955:31). The new Education Committees were established in 1958 and constituted a significant move towards strengthening the position of local government in the Swedish school system (Munknäs 1981). Also, the merger of local responsibility for different types of school facilitated the subsequent implementation of the comprehensive school reform (Sönnerlind 1989).

The Education Committees are obligatory and must consist of at least five members. These and a number of deputy members are appointed by the Council for a period of three years. The political parties are represented in relation to their strength in the full Council. On average, 40 per cent of the members are women. Female representation in Education Committees is slightly above the average for all local government committees (Statistiska Centralbyrån 1986b).

Some of the committee members have a more significant position than others (Wallin et al. 1981). The most important is the chairperson, together with one or two vice chairpersons specifically appointed by the Council. The chairperson usually represents the political majority of the Council. He or she is often salaried on a full or part-time basis and has normally a key position in Education Committee decision-making as well as in its external relations.

Local authorities may decide to set up a preparatory sub-committee within the Education Committee. This is most common in larger local authorities (Gustafsson 1988). It is appointed by the Council and consists of a few Education Committee members including the chairperson and vice chairpersons. The sub-committee prepares and provides suggestions in all matters to be dealt with by the full committee, but it may also make its own decisions in routine matters on the basis of powers delegated from the Education Committee. The preparatory sub-committee can be regarded as
the inner circle of the Education Committee.

The Education Committee normally meets once a month. The preparatory sub-committee meets separately, but with approximately the same frequency. The same rules apply as for other local government committees, for example, sessions are closed to the public. Only members, deputy members, principal officers and one representatives of each local trade union within the school sector are entitled to be present.

Education Committee decision-making concerns overarching policy-making and administration of schooling in the local authority. The committees derive their formal powers from a specific authority granted by the Parliament and the Government, and from the scope given to it by the local Council. Examples of decisions taken by the committees are the long-range planning of the school organization, budget requests and the allocation of resources, including some central government grants. Decisions may also concern the employment of personnel, construction and maintenance of school buildings, issuing of guidelines for school meal production and organization of transport to and from school. In principle, Education Committees are not expected to take decisions on pedagogical matters. Activities in the classroom are regarded as the responsibility of the teaching profession within the limits of the curriculum. However, as a consequence of decentralization, this previously very strict borderline has become somewhat blurred (Odin 1984).

Generally, the decentralization policy of recent years has provided Education Committees with extended powers. However, in practice, a significant amount of their decision-making is delegated, usually to the preparatory sub-committee or to officers, such as the Chief Education Officer and the headmasters (Magnusson & Norrving 1988)

The Context of the School Sector

Responsibility for policy-making within the Swedish school sector is divided between state and municipal authorities. Central government formulates the general goals for education such as the principle of uniformity and equality of standards. It specifies the rules within which
local school activities are expected to take place. Central government also supplies grants, providing, on average, 42 per cent of the resources of the schools in 1988.

Local authorities are responsible for running primary and secondary education. The nationally outlined policy is to be adjusted to local conditions. Further, they provide facilities such as buildings, meals, pupil health care and school transport. The local government share of the school costs is practically 50 per cent (Statistiska Centralbyrå 1989).

The principal decisions on Swedish school policy are taken by Parliament, based on propositions from the Government and its Ministry of Education. Parliament decides the goals and the organization of the school system. It also passes educational legislation and establishes the general framework for central government financial assistance to local education. The policies decided by Parliament are often further specified by the Government. For example, the Government decides on the general content of the curricula.

Most administrative and implementation tasks at the national level were, at the time of the study, performed by the National Board of Education (NBE). It had a general responsibility to follow and evaluate developments within the school sector and suggest changes to the Government and Parliament. Its other functions included coordination of administrative tasks, planning, initiation of research and development work and production of commentaries on problems in the curricula.

In each county area there was also a Regional Board of Education (RBE). These were state administrative units, performing tasks specified by central government⁵. The Regional Boards decided on the distribution of most of central government resources to local schools. They appointed headmasters and deputy headmasters and were also responsible for inspection and control of the schools.

As is elaborated later, in 1990 and 1991, the Parliament decided to abolish the NBE as well as the RBEs. These were replaced by a much smaller National Agency of Education and regionally based units for

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⁵ It should be observed that these boards belonged to the state organizational structure and were not a part of the County level of local authorities.
evaluation. However, at the time when the empirical studies were undertaken, the old system applied.

The Education Committees in the Local School Community

The actual implementation of the school policies is a local government responsibility. On the one hand, local government is regarded as performing this according to centrally outlined policies. On the other hand, they are expected to adjust these to meet local conditions.

In the Swedish system of government, local authorities have an important position (Gustafsson 1980). They provide a wide range of services to the citizens and their elected representatives can be held politically accountable by the local community. Local authorities also have a constitutional right to levy income taxes, although this has now been restrained. Nevertheless, as noted by a foreign observer, Swedish society is characterized by a cultural commitment towards strong local government (Greenwood 1979).

The formal decision-making power of a municipality lies in the hands of its Council. This consists of representatives elected for a three-year period. The Council appoints members to a number of committees, dealing with the administration of municipal tasks. Most important of these is the Policy Committee, dealing with over-arching municipal affairs, such as finance, and it is usually regarded as possessing the key decision-making power of the municipality. Other committees are in charge of activities within separate sectors. The Education Committee has the overall responsibility for the educational functions of the local authority.

Some actors and interests in the local community are of particular significance for Education Committee decision-making. Very closely linked to the committee is the local government Education Department and its officers. Headed by the Chief Education Officer, this is responsible for coordination and various administrative tasks not requiring decisions by the committee. It also provides administrative services for the Education Committee. These include preparing decisions to be taken by the committee by gathering and supplying relevant facts and information and often also suggesting a specific decision. The Education Department is often seen as
powerful in relation to the Education Committee (SOU 1975:18). Officers are employed on a full-time basis, they are often experts in their fields and usually remain in their posts for a longer time than the politically appointed members.

Each local government area is divided into one or more **school management districts**. Every district is led by a headmaster and consists of one or just a few schools. The headmaster is assisted by one or more deputy headmasters, and has extensive powers in the day-to-day running of the schools. Some of these powers are delegated from the Education Committee, other are performed on the basis of authority outlined in central policy documents.

Ultimately, the Education Committee decision-making concerns the **schools** with their pupils, teachers, headmasters and other employees. According to the School Act, a main objective of the Education Committees is to provide good school conditions for the children. However, in the day-to-day running of the schools, the committees play a marginal role. They set some guidelines and provide certain resources but these are usually only allocated once a year. The actual running of the schools and the classroom activities are the responsibility of the headmasters and teachers. However, some problems within schools can appear on the Education Committee agenda. The committee may be asked to provide extra-ordinary means, for example for the improvement of school buildings or in order to supply better school books. Also, through specific authority invested in them in school legislation, Education Committees can decide on certain matters concerning individual pupils, for example exemption from compulsory attendance at school.

Various **interest organizations** with particular focus on the school sector are also significant for Education Committee decision-making. Besides the parents’ interest organizations, most important are the local trade unions of teachers and other school employees. These are formally integrated into the decision-making process through an extensive system of information and negotiations. They are given the opportunity to put forward their views before decisions are taken in committee. They are also entitled to be represented at committee meetings and have the right to express their opinion in most matters.
Trade union influence seems to be particularly strong in Education Committees. According to empirical studies undertaken at the end of the 1970s, Education Committee members regard trade union involvement as a limitation on the committee’s room for manoeuvre to a greater extent than members of any other local government committee (Lundell & Bergström 1988).

The Policy of Decentralization

During the last half-century, the Swedish school system has undergone basic structural changes. In the first decades after the Second World War, the creation of a coherent and comprehensive system, consisting of nine-years compulsory schooling and a revised upper secondary school, was the primary aim. The result has been characterized as a system which is highly centralized, uniform and totally in the hands of the public authorities (Heidenheimer et al 1983).

However, the role of local authorities should not be underestimated. Local responsibility for primary schooling has deep historical roots. As mentioned previously, parishes, and later municipalities, have been in a position to provide the means necessary to adjust education to meet local needs. Therefore, the level of service provision has varied between local authorities. For example, during certain periods, comprehensive schooling in the big cities was generally of a longer duration than in rural authorities (Marklund 1980:9).

Nevertheless, principal decisions about the structure of the school system are still taken at the national level. Schools are organized according to a uniform pattern, with private schools being virtually non-existent, and education is expected to be in line with a centrally decided curriculum. Thus, the principle of uniformity and equality of standards was established as a cornerstone of the official Swedish education policy. Not only was the education system supposed to be uniform all over the country, the quality of education provided should also be the same. Differences generated by gender, geographical location or social or economic conditions should be counteracted. A pupil in the remote parts of Norrbotten should have the
same standard of education as someone living in the prosperous areas of Lidingö or Djursholm on the outskirts of Stockholm.

The centralized style of decision-making, which was seen as a necessary requirement for the successful implementation of the comprehensive system, was itself under attack during the next phase, the second reform cycle (Lindensjö & Lundgren 1986). Beginning around 1975, a number of changes were introduced which clearly transferred power and responsibility downwards in the system.

At the end of the 1960s, great concern was expressed about the state of the school system. For example, it was argued that discipline was a major problem and that an increasing number of pupils had learning difficulties. The Government appointed a commission - the SIA-Commission, with the task of investigating the internal working of the schools.

In 1974, the Commission presented its main report (SOU 1974:53). Of principal importance, were the proposals aimed at decentralizing responsibilities, which ran contrary to the previous tradition. According to the Commission, the improvement of the internal working of the system required a greater scope for adjustment to specific local conditions. Therefore, decision making powers should be transferred from central to local level. For example, it was proposed that the use of central government grants should be less restricted by detailed rules. It was also stressed that other interests at the local level, such as parents, pupils and trade unions, should have more influence over local decision-making. During the second part of the 70s, other commissions dealing with problems in the school sector, such as the SSK-Commission (SOU 1978:65), suggested measures along the same lines.

Most of the proposals of the SIA-Commission were adopted by the government (Proposition 1975/76:3) and in principle accepted by Parliament in its 1975/76 session. From then onwards, a number of

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6 A recent trend is the redefinition of the concept of equality, permitting greater variance within education. Compare Gustafsson & Lidström (forthcoming) for a further analysis.

7 Whether implementation was successful or not, is a matter of debate, which will not be dealt with here. Rothstein (1986) argues that the reform did not increased equality in educational opportunities. The use of the already existing NBE, characterized by a bureaucratic culture, was a major obstacle.
decisions were taken aiming at gradually transferring power and responsibility from central to local level. In 1978, a new system of central government grants for compulsory schooling was introduced. The previous system of numerous earmarked grants was replaced by a limited number of block grants. Local authorities were able, to a greater extent, to set their own priorities for the use of resources. In 1980, the Government introduced a new curriculum covering the years of compulsory schooling (Lgr 80), adjusted to the new principles of decentralization. It contained less details than previous curricula, and instead emphasized the goals of the school system.

Measures aimed at improving upper secondary schooling have also been taken during the second phase of the reform movement. Here, the reform path, in itself, has followed decentralist principles. Instead of presenting a finished product, local authorities were invited to take their own initiatives in experimenting with new ways of organizing upper secondary schooling. A major restructuring of the upper secondary school system was suggested at the beginning of 1990 (Proposition 1990/91:85) and, after compromises, accepted by the Parliamentary majority. As a result, local authorities will be in a position to decide, to a greater extent than previously, what upper secondary courses to offer.

The position of the local authorities was further strengthened in the late 1980s, when a new Minister of Education, with extensive municipal experience, was appointed. Full responsibility for the employment of teachers was transferred to the municipalities, despite strong opposition from one of the teacher trade unions and the bourgeois parties (Proposition 1989/90:41). A new system of central government grants was introduced, replacing the previous ear-marked allocation of resources with a lump sum for each local authority. Further, decisions on how to use these resources were handed over completely to the local level, although these were expected to lie within the framework established by nationally set goals, curricula and regulations. For example, local authorities without upper secondary schools were given the right to decide whether to buy this service from a neighbouring authority or to provide it themselves (Proposition 1990/91:18).

In order to adjust the administrative organization to the decentralist
changes, the role of the National and Regional Boards of Education was revised. The strong position of the National Board (Heidenheimer 1977), arising from its extensive powers to issue and interpret regulations and curricula, was reduced at the end of the 1980s. Instead, it was given a more supervisory and advisory role with respect to the local authorities and the schools. Correspondingly, the tasks of the Regional Boards of Education were altered towards an emphasis on supporting local school development (Proposition 1988/89:4).

As mentioned previously, it was decided in 1990 to abolish the entire level of Regional Boards of Education and to reduce the size and functions of the National Board of Education (see Proposition 1988/89:154). One year later, decisions were also taken to abolish the NBE. It was replaced by a much smaller National Agency of Education which included a limited regional organisation. The previous administrative superstructure was regarded as unnecessary in the decentralized school system now taking shape. Instead, the new state administration was to focus mainly on evaluating the implementation of national goals and controlling the performance of schools and local authorities (Proposition 1990/91:18).

Hence, the decentralization movement within Swedish education has clearly meant that tasks and responsibilities have been transferred downwards in the system. However, at the same time, tighter controls has been introduced with respect to outcome evaluation and goal fulfilment. It remains to be seen whether this is a reappearance of centralist policies, but in new forms.

The story told so far has taken for granted that the process of decentralization is a conscious effort by rational and goal-oriented actors. However, a different and complementary way of understanding the changes is as an adjustment to more general structural transformations of society. Obviously, decentralization within the Swedish school sector is not an isolated event. A similar development during the 1980s can be observed in public administration and politics within Western societies generally (Sharpe 1979, Batley & Stoker eds, 1991) as well as within their educational systems (Lauglo & McLean 1985, Boyd & Chapman eds, forthcoming). Further, the introduction of decentralization policies has also characterized other sectors of public administration. Therefore, educational
decentralization must be seen in the context of more general developments, of which the problems of governing the welfare state outlined in Chapter 1, are particularly important.

Design of the Empirical Study

From a concern with the characteristics of Education Committees and the setting in which they are located, we turn to a discussion of how Education Committee discretion can be studied empirically. First, some principal considerations with regard to design of the study, including how it may be operationalized, will be contemplated. Later, the methodology and materials used in our study will be introduced.

The use of an action perspective approach has implications for the choice of method. Therefore, our starting-point will be that a method must be chosen which takes into account the assumptions of the actors involved, but at the same time recognizes that they are structurally constrained. When more specifically deciding what methodology to use, a number of further problems have to be considered. In the following, some of these will be discussed and exemplified by other studies of discretion or similar concepts. Most examples will be taken from studies treating discretion as more or less independent of the perceptions of actors, since empirical studies focusing on the assumed side of discretion are very rare.

Selection of Constraining Factors

A difference between autonomy and discretion concerns the particular constraining factors taken into account. Discretion is usually only seen in relation to higher levels of government, while local autonomy, for example, is also related to local social and economic forces. However, some uses of

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8 This argument is further developed in Gustafsson & Lidström (forthcoming). Compare also Weiler (1989).

9 Constraining factors are here seen in the broad sense discussed in Chapter 2. Hence, structural conditions may also be enabling for actors.
the concept of discretion also take into account the working of other forces. A principal difference between the approaches of Davis and Jowell has been identified along these lines.

In order to empirically specify the amount of discretion available to Education Committees, this will be related to a specific set of constraining factors. An extensive list of external constraints on local government, which to a large extent are also relevant for their Education Committees, is presented by Stewart. Local authorities, he argues, are located within a web of constraints providing limits to the range of options open:

"the constraints of statute; physical constraints imposed by the local authority's area; constraints imposed by the social and economic environments; constraints of public attitude and expectation; constraints imposed by other organisations, both public and private; constraints imposed by the authority's inheritance of property and equipment; constraints of resources" (Stewart 1983:150).

A study of local autonomy may have to take all of these into account. However, the concept of discretion has a narrower focus and deals exclusively with the relationship between superiors and subordinates in a formal division of functions. Therefore, an operationalization of Education Committee discretion has to be related to constraints formally deriving "from above".

Relevant rules and the resources provided are generally seen as important elements in the structure setting the limits for Education Committee discretion. Rules are mainly decided nationally, but to some extent also by the local Council. Theories vary in the extent to which rules are seen as the dominant constraint, but they are always taken into account. Resources are allocated by central as well as local government and are also conceived of as a major limitation on discretion. Indeed, Rhodes (1981) argues that the heavy emphasis on the role of resources represents an inadequacy in the literature on local discretion. Our study will concern discretion available within the limits of general rules, as well as those regulating the use of resources.

A similar stance is taken by Page & Goldsmith (1987). In a framework for a comparative study of central-local government relations in Western
Europe, they suggest that local government discretion consists of four components: the general legal framework; rules and standards within particular areas of local government services; non-legal influences from central government; and financial discretion. These are all constraints emanating from a formally superior level and, apart from the third component, they concern rules and resources as limitations on local government discretion.

The Degree of Specificity

Another problem in relation to the choice of methodology concerns the measurement of the concept. Can discretion be grasped with general, overarching measures or is an examination of details required? We will call this "degree of specificity", which will be assumed to vary along a scale, from general to specific.

A measure suggested by Lane & Ersson (1987) represents the general end of the scale. In a comparison of West European democracies, local government discretion is represented by a figure, varying from zero to two. The allocation of values is made by the researchers on the basis of a study of the particular conditions in each nation. The latin speaking countries are generally given low scores, whereas a large amount of local government discretion is found in the Nordic countries and in Switzerland. Of course, this offers only a very approximate measure of the phenomenon.

A number of measures have been suggested by Clark (1974) in order to grasp the autonomy of a local community. One example is local government revenues and expenditures as a proportion of total governmental revenues and expenditures. Others are time spent by local officials in contacts with higher levels of government, or the frequency and duration of contacts. These are also rather crude and general kinds of measures.

Somewhat more specific, but still close to the general end of the scale, is the measure used in studies undertaken at the end of the 1970s by Wallin
et al (1981). Their concern coincides with the interests of this study, since their focus was on actors' assumptions of discretion and autonomy.

In questionnaires to members of local government committees and to local government officials, a question was included asking to what extent they judged the autonomy of their committee to be constrained by a number of specified factors. These included recommendations from the Local Government Association, rules and central agreements on wages but also concerned economic and demographic constraints such as the situation on the local labour market and population growth. In relation to each factor, four alternative replies were possible, from agreeing with the statement "to a very large extent" to "no extent whatsoever".

Naturally, a question of this kind will only give a very general picture. The factors were not adjusted to the specific situation of the committees under study, such as the rules relevant for them. Therefore, a higher degree of specificity is required in order to obtain valid answers.

An example of a measure at the specific end of the scale is the one suggested by Dunsire (1978) and summarized in his already cited "scale of discretion". The starting-point is a decision taken by someone in a discretionary situation. Every decision implies the existence of choice options. A low degree of discretion means that only two alternatives are available - either/or. A high degree is prevalent where a large number of choice options are available.

However, a number of problems are connected with an empirical application of Dunsire's approach. Obviously, a sample of decisions must be taken, otherwise the research task would be overwhelming (compare Clark 1974:23). Even so, we are still faced with the problem of establishing a feasible way of empirically identifying a decision. Another problem concerns the concept of option. What is an option and according to which criteria should it be distinguished?

A high degree of specificity also characterizes Lundquist's (1988) measure of bureaucratic autonomy. In order to grasp this, Lundquist suggests an examination of the bureaucrat's activities in detail, along two dimensions. First, it is necessary to clarify during which stages of the

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10 See also Strömberg & Norell (1982).
policy process bureaucrats exercise autonomy. Lundquist distinguishes four: initiation; preparation; implementation; and evaluation. Second, within each stage, a variety of actions can be performed which represent different ways for the bureaucrat to use or extend his/her autonomy. These include interpretation of the steering signals, problem formulation, mobilization of resources and support, gathering and interpretation of information and formulation of propositions, which may all provide varying amounts of autonomy. Together, these two dimensions produce a matrix with 36 cells, all of which have to be examined by anyone who wants to study the autonomy of a particular bureaucrat.

Lundquist's measure has the obvious drawback of being very resource-demanding, when applied empirically. As long as just a few bureaucrats are examined, the scheme may well be feasible. However, if the aim is to give a general picture of bureaucratic autonomy and perhaps make comparisons between different categories of bureaucrats, the gathering and examination of vast amounts of information will be necessary. Therefore, it has limited use as a basis for drawing more general conclusions.

In this study, a method will be used which focuses on discretion on a general level, but which utilizes questions specific to the particular conditions of Education Committees. Thereby, it is hoped that the obvious drawbacks of the extreme positions on the scale of specificity will be avoided. To a large extent, data will be gathered using the method of Wallin et al (1981), but with a higher degree of specificity. Questions will be asked about the constraints imposed by centrally and locally established rules and about regulation of the use of resources. Both of these have been identified earlier as particularly relevant.

Quantitative or Qualitative Method?

Establishing methodological principles for our study also requires a decision about whether the method used should have a quantitative or qualitative emphasis. Both kinds of approaches are represented in the literature. The previously reviewed "scale of discretion", suggested by Dunsire, implies that discretion can be quantified.
This is also the argument of Zimmerman (1983). He has developed indices of local discretionary authority, empirically applied to an American context. The indices represent four dimensions: "the ability of local government to: levy and raise taxes; add to, delete, or alter the functions they perform; make personnel decisions; and change organizational structures without grants of additional authority from the state" (Berman & Martin 1988). Zimmerman used data collected by postal questionnaires and from a review of legal material.

An example of a qualitative method used to study a concept resembling discretion is Lundquist's measure of degree of decentralization. A high degree of decentralization of a unit implies a large amount of autonomy in relation to the authoritative decision-makers in society11. However, to get high scores, the decisions made by the unit are required to be important and able to be influenced by their members (Lundquist 1972:74).

Lundquist develops a scheme of analysis in which his measure of degree of decentralization has a principal role. Ideally, the scheme should be possible to use as a basis for comparative studies, between different organizational units, across boarders and over time. A major part of the book consists of an application of the scheme. By using a qualitative method, Lundquist aims at identifying means and goals present in the decentralization debate during two periods of Swedish history.

In our study, both quantitative and qualitative measures will be combined. Our aim to investigate variation in discretion on a nation-wide basis and, at the same time, understand this from the actors' perspective, requires that different means of collecting data are combined. In order to gather information, nation-wide questionnaire studies as well as semi-structured interviews have been undertaken. We now turn to a more detailed discussion of the methodology and materials used in the study.

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11 This corresponds to the way in which the concept of discretion is used in this study.
Method and Material

The aim of the empirical investigations, as outlined in the introductory chapter, is both to provide a picture of the variation in Education Committee discretion, as perceived by individual actors on the Education Committee level, and to find explanations for this variation. As previously concluded, the particular approach of this study requires the use of quantitative as well as qualitative methods for collecting information.

The most important Education Committee politician and the principal officer of the Education Department, i.e. the Committee Chairperson and Chief Education Officer, were selected as relevant actors on the Education Committee level. Other alternatives were considered, such as all members of the Education Committees in a selection of local authorities. However, Chairpersons and Chief Education Officers were expected to have sufficient knowledge about Education Committee matters to provide well-informed assessments. Also, they represent different angles with respect to knowledge about the conditions of Education Committees. The role of the Chairpersons is oriented towards political action, whereas the Officers are expected to be experts on formal and legal conditions. Further, confining the study to only two persons per local authority made it possible to collect data from a large number of cases. Thus, all Education Committees throughout the nation could be investigated and a representative picture of the variation in discretion achieved on a nation-wide basis. This was regarded particularly important since no mapping of this kind has been carried out previously.

Hence, conclusions cannot be extended to Education Committee members generally. The study is confined to only the two categories mentioned and it cannot be taken for granted that their views correspond to the general opinion in the committees as a whole. Thus, assumptions will be treated as properties of individuals, and not collectives. As argued by Rose (1978), organizations are not living entities with pseudo-biological needs, nor can they act independently of their human members. Whether there is a collective assumption depends on the extent to which there are
similar assumptions among the members of the organization. Before undertaking the major empirical investigations, the study began with a **pilot study phase**. The purpose was to develop and test methods but also to gain insights conducive for theory development. First, in 1983, a reanalysis of the study undertaken by Wallin et al. (1981) was carried out. As has already been mentioned, they investigated a representative sample of members of different local government committees, using questionnaire techniques. One of the questions concerned the extent to which their committee was constrained by a number of specified external factors. These were rules, regulations, binding agreements and recommendations, but also the local labour market situation, economic fluctuations and population development. This question was not thoroughly analyzed by Wallin et al., but it nevertheless served our purpose of making an initial empirical investigation of variation in discretion.

Our study clearly indicated differences between the different types of committees. Not surprisingly, those most regulated by central government were seen, by their members, as most constrained (Lidström 1983). However, when it comes to explaining variation, the picture is more diffuse. Different variables emerge as important explanations for different committees and hence, more general traits were difficult to trace. Therefore, it was decided to narrow the focus to just one or two types of local committees and that questions should focus more directly on the particular conditions of these committees.

The second pilot study took the form of interviews with Chairpersons of the Education Committees and Cultural Committees in four local authorities and the related Chief Officers, a total of 16 respondents. Questions concerned the limits of discretion, including how the system of government functions and whether rules are exceeded and why (Lidström 1985).

After evaluating the pilot investigations, the **major research phase** started in 1986. Because of their particular relevance in testing our theory, it was decided to limit the focus even further to just the Education Committees. A nation-wide questionnaire study was undertaken and similar

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12 As suggested by Björkegren (1989), the thinking and learning of leading actors may dominate the organization as a whole. Whether this is the case among Education Committees is not possible to establish within the frame of this study.
sets of questionnaires were distributed to the Chairpersons serving during the election period of 1982-85 and to the Chief Officers in office at time of the study. Questions were asked on assumptions about various aspects of rules and resources as constraints on Education Committee discretion. Questions were also included which could be used as independent variables in the analysis. In 1987, an additional survey of all Local Government Treasurers was undertaken. The questions concerned principles for resource allocation in local authorities. The questionnaires achieved response rates of between 79 and 88 per cent. We return to this later in the chapter when the reliability of the method is discussed.

After a preliminary analysis of the questionnaire replies, the study continued along more qualitative lines. On the basis of the questions about rules and resources, a number of indices\(^{13}\) were constructed, together representing a scale of discretion. Thus, respondents scoring low on the different indicators were regarded as representing the view that discretion was severely limited, while the other end of the scale was occupied by respondents claiming the opposite.

A total of 28 respondents were selected for in-depth interviews. Most of them were chosen from the opposite ends of the scale, but a few occupied positions in the middle. The same number of Chairpersons and Officers was included. Most of the selected respondents were pairs of Chairpersons and Officers from the same local authority. Among these, different combinations of positions on the scale were represented; Chairpersons and Officers with the same as well as different assumptions were included. However, the method of selection did not aim at gathering a sample representative for all Chairpersons and Chief Officers.

The purpose of the interviews was threefold. Firstly, they were intended to be used to illustrate the span of variation already discovered and reach a more in depth understanding of the respondents' way of reasoning. By choosing mainly actors occupying the extremes on the scale, it was expected that the most important motives and views would be represented (compare Holme & Solvang 1991:114). Despite the advantage of the questionnaires for gathering representative data, the tool is too inflexible to

\(^{13}\) The indices are presented in Appendix 2.
be the sole source of data. Thus, interviews were expected to add valuable information to the results provided by the questionnaire study. Secondly, the interviews aimed at controlling the validity and reliability of the questionnaire study. Thirdly, despite not being selected according to a criteria of representativeness, the interviews were, nevertheless, expected to provide information which could be used for tentative tests of hypotheses and to provide additional information in tests mainly based on quantitative data.

Interview respondents were selected according to a step-by-step procedure. At each step, a few actors were chosen. This continued until it was expected that very little further information would be obtained by adding yet another group of respondents. Once it became obvious that the marginal utility was low of additional interviews, the selection process ended. At this point, 28 respondents had been interviewed.

This part of the study was carried out during 1987. Respondents were guaranteed full anonymity. During interviews, questions were asked from a check-list. However, these were supplemented by follow-up questions. Thus, whilst they followed a structured pattern, they, nevertheless, left room for variations. The interviews consisted of three sections. The first and major was a follow up of specific questions in the questionnaire, namely those used as indicators of discretion. Each respondent was provided with a copy of his/her replies and asked to develop the motives behind them. Further, more detailed questions were asked until a more thorough picture of the position of the respondent appeared. Second, our previously mentioned scale of discretion was briefly presented to the respondent. Then, as a test of validity, he/she was asked to assess his/her own position on the scale. Finally, the respondent was asked to elaborate what he/she regarded as the reasons underlying the development of this view. This self-assessed picture was later used as a help when analyzing variation in discretion.

On average, an interview lasted for just over one hour, varying from 45 minutes to two hours. It was subsequently summarized in written form and

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14 The check-list is reproduced in Appendix 1.

15 These are introduced and discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.
a copy was sent to the respondent with a request to control its accuracy and to make additional comments.

Validity and Reliability

To what extent is the methodology used relevant for the purposes of the study? Has the study been carried out in an accurate way, making the conclusions trustworthy? It is essential for the methodology of any study to be able to deal with these problems of validity and reliability.

The validity of a scale, defined as "the appropriateness of the index or operational definition" (Blalock 1979:13), basically concerns whether operationalizations correspond to the theoretical definitions used. In our case, the question is whether the different indicators selected to represent discretion are accurate for that purpose? Should others have been used?

As discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6, Education Committee discretion is operationalized as three indicators about the function of rules and two dealing with the scope for disposing of resources. In practice, several of them consist of a number of more detailed indicators. What are the reasons for choosing these, rather than any other set?

Previously in the chapter, a number of alternative methodological approaches were considered. Some of them were ruled out because they would give too crude a picture, others on the grounds that they would require vast amounts of information and, therefore, would be difficult to handle within time limits and amount of resources available to a study of this kind. Accordingly, the particular methodology of this study was chosen to represent an optimal point between conflicting demands.

Nevertheless, several problems of validity present themselves. For example, studying discretion using an actors’ perspective necessitates a selection process. It is impossible to map all assumptions and, therefore, focus will be on the assumptions expected to be relevant for the purpose of this study (compare Edwards 1981). This is further elaborated in Chapters 5 and 6.

Additional problems are connected to the questioning technique. Firstly, it has to be taken for granted that the actors have sufficient knowledge
about the rules and resources in question and the relationship between these and the Education Committee's responsibilities. Secondly, at least when using questionnaires, it has to be presupposed that the questions are properly understood. For example, respondents must be concerned with Education Committee discretion and not with their own, personal scope for choice.

In practice, validity is often difficult to control. However, it can be established by using several, independent means of measuring the same phenomenon (Hellevik 1971). One of the purposes of the interviews was to illuminate the validity of the questionnaire results. First, the level of knowledge of the respondents was controlled. A variation was observed, with Officers generally being more well-informed about rules and resources than Chairpersons. Nevertheless, practically all those interviewed seemed to possess sufficient knowledge to be able to provide accurate answers to the questions. Second, the respondents' understanding of the questions was checked. This led to the conclusion that, with a few minor exceptions, the respondents understood the questions as had been intended.

The actor's assessment of his/her own position on the scale of assumed discretion has provided a further means for control. The respondent's own judgement has been compared with the conclusions drawn from the questionnaire and the impression gained by the interviewer. In practically all 28 cases, correspondence was total. Thus, the interviewer, the actor himself and the analysis of the questionnaire came to the same result. In spite of the limitations inherent in using the same indicators in this control, it seems possible to conclude that validity is high.

The question of the reliability of the study or a scale, or "the extent that repeat measurements made by it under constant conditions will give the same results" (Moser & Kalton 1971:353), is a second methodological problem to be observed. Reliability has to do with whether the study has been carried out in an accurate way. To increase reliability is very much a question of reducing errors during the research process, for example by taking measures to reach a high response rate, to make sure that coding of questionnaires is performed without mistakes and safeguard that interview questions are presented in a similar way to different respondents.

The questionnaires to all Education Committee Chairpersons, Chief
Education Officers and Local Government Treasurers were returned by between 79 and 88 per cent of them, which may be regarded as adequate. However, some of the analyses are undertaken on the basis of information from two questionnaires, thus requiring that data is available for both categories in each local authority. Hence, the response rates are necessarily lower in these cases. Table 4:1 provides information on response rates for the three questionnaires as well as combinations of these.

### Table 4:1 Response Rates for Different Respondent Categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent category</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questionnaires:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Committee Chairpersons</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>79.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Education Officers</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>84.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government Treasurers:</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combinations of Respondents:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairpersons and Officers</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>67.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairpersons and Treasurers</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers and Treasurers</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: One local authority has no Education Committee, hence the lower figure for populations where Chairpersons are involved.

Whether respondents are representative for the population as a whole has been analyzed separately (Appendix 3). In conclusion, no significant bias was detected, neither for each of the respondent categories, nor for combinations of these.

In order to further safeguard high reliability, coding and other technical matters have been constantly checked during the entire research process. Nevertheless, a major reliability problem is obvious from the design of the interview study. By necessity, interview situations will vary, especially as
we have used semi-structured interviews. Apart from the questions on the interview check-list, most other questions were different. However, this reduction in reliability is a price which has to be paid if interviews are to be made in depth and provide information which would otherwise be difficult to obtain.

In the next three chapters, results from the empirical studies will be presented, discussed and analyzed. It should be emphasized that the conditions concern the situation in 1985-86. Thus, subsequent changes in the formal structure will not be taken into account in the analysis.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to build a bridge between the theory of discretion and its empirical application to Swedish Education Committees. In each municipality, there is an Education Committee, consisting of politicians appointed by the local Council. They have an overarching responsibility to implement national policies at the local level, but at the same time, they are expected to adjust the education service to specific local conditions.

The policy context of Education Committees has undergone major changes during recent years. After the establishment of a nine-year compulsory school and a new upper secondary system, focus shifted towards the inner workings of the schools. This was the starting-point for an extensive decentralization process, taking place at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s. Powers and responsibilities were transferred from central to local level and the position of the local Education Committees was strengthened. However, at the same time, since this process contained a reduction in detailed regulation and a shift towards greater reliance on governing by the setting of general goals, the limits to the scope for choice locally in relation to education have become less clear.

Empirically, Education Committee discretion is identified in relation to

16 In a previous version, Chapters 5-7 were included in Gustafsson & Lidström (1989). However, the version in this thesis is a result of major revisions and alterations.
general rules as well as regulations concerning the use of resources. These limits are mainly set nationally, but also to some extent by the local council. Focus is on how these limits are perceived by actors at Education Committee level. Two respondent categories have been selected, namely the Chairpersons of the Education Committee and the Chief Education Officers. It was expected that these had the necessary insights and knowledge to provide well-informed answers.

Data was collected using both quantitative and qualitatives means. First, an extensive questionnaire study was undertaken. Education Committee Chairpersons and Chief Education Officers were asked about rules and resources as limitations on Education Committee discretion. On the basis of their answers, indices were constructed which summarized their positions. A number of respondents were selected for further investigation along more qualitative lines. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of their way of reasoning and the motives behind their questionnaire answers, semi-structured interviews were carried out with them.
5 RULES AND DISCRETION

In Sweden, policy areas in which the national level explicitly aims at protecting the uniformity of the services provided, are not always highly regulated. For example, within health care, which is a county council responsibility, considerable room is left for local discretion, despite the objective at national level of equal access (Hydén 1984). However, within the school sector, there is a long and not easily broken tradition of central regulation. The protection of the principle of uniformity and equality of standards has motivated an extensive system of rules as a means to steer the local government education service. These rules are numerous as well as detailed (Riberdahl 1984). Compared with other local government responsibilities, the school sector is very strictly regulated.

Following the general trend towards decentralization in Swedish public administration, the school sector has also entered the road to deregulation. As was more thoroughly described in the previous chapter, from the mid 1970s onwards, a number of measures have been taken in order to reduce the central regulation of school policy implementation. For example, an extensive system of grants for specific purposes has been replaced by a block grant system. A revised national curriculum was introduced, providing greater scope for local decision-making.

Nevertheless, at the time when the empirical investigations of this study were undertaken, deregulation had been sporadic and could hardly be regarded as comprehensive. Indeed, as argued by Riberdahl, "the detailed central government steering... remains fairly untouched over time, despite claims of the opposite" (Riberdahl 1984:10, my translation). Therefore, a
focus on discretion within the limits of rules is justified.

Rules can be regarded as a kind of norms for behaviour. However, different types of norms can be distinguished. First, they can be specific or general (Lundquist 1971, 1987). Specific rules refer to one single case, while general ones concern all cases of a certain kind. Central government regulation of local education committees is of the latter type.

Rules may also be formal or informal. Formal rules may be permissive, expressing what is normally allowed to be done or they may be mandatory, stating what must be done. Further, these rules are open to the public. Informal rules, on the other hand, are valid only within a limited group of people, such as a work group, and are usually not easily accessible, or often not even available to the public. A further distinction can be made between written and unwritten rules (Gustafsson 1987). Written rules only represent a minor part of all rules regulating human behaviour.

In this analysis, the term rule is reserved for those which are general, formal and written. The purpose of this chapter is to show how the Education Committee Chairpersons and Chief Education Officers perceive the amount of discretion available in relation to these rules.

Turning to the concrete reality of the Education Committees, what are the important general, written and formal rules to be identified? Basic rules are presented in the School Act, which also includes a general outline of the objectives of the school policies. In addition, the Act gives each local authority the duty to appoint an Education Committee and sets out its major responsibilities. In the School Ordinance, these tasks are further specified and a large number of other detailed rules are added. Another significant set of rules are the grant regulations, specifying how central government grants may be used. Education Committees can also be affected by rules established by the National Board of Education. Normally, these NBE regulations can only be issued on the specific authority of national government or Parliament. Other important documents relevant to Education Committees are the Curricula, even if their main purpose is to influence classroom activities.

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1 The distinction is further elaborated in Gustafsson 1987:15ff.

2 For a similar overview, see Lgr 80 (1980:8f).
As employers, Education Committees are affected by labour market rules and agreements, such as the Co-determination Act (Medbestämmandelagen) and the Public Employment Act (Lagen om offentlig anställning), and by agreements, on different levels, with the trade unions. Being a local government committee, the Education Committee is also under the jurisdiction of the Local Government Act. A final set of relevant rules are those established by the local Council.

In this and the subsequent chapters, the assumptions of Education Committee Chairpersons and Chief Education Officers about these rules as steering instruments will be discussed. Discretion vis-à-vis rules of a general kind is dealt with in this chapter, and with regard to those regulating the use of resources in Chapter 6. The overall purpose is to test our first hypothesis on variation in discretion. Two chapters are devoted to testing this hypothesis, permitting the issue to be elaborated in greater depth. This has been regarded necessary as this hypothesis plays a such crucial role in the accuracy of our theory of discretion, as presented in Chapter 3.

The Relevance of Rules

As outlined in Chapter 2, rules perform a special role as a limit for discretion. This is sometimes referred to as "the rules-discretion continuum". Rules are often regarded as the crucial or sometimes even the only constraint on discretion: "A study of discretion must involve ... a study of rules, and may alternatively be defined in that way as being concerned with the extent to which actions are determined by rules" (Ham & Hill 1984:149).

However, the impact of rules as constraints on discretion is not always uniform or clearcut (Sannerstedt 1984). Within a particular policy area, there are often a large number of rules regulating the same conditions. They may be extensive, ambiguous and conflicting to such an extent that, in practice, their effect as steering instruments is severely limited. Using a

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3 On the notion of a continuum, compare Davis (1969) and Crook (1989).
large number of rules as a means to regulate a policy area creates scope for implementers to choose which rules to base their decisions on. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, extensive regulation may increase discretion (Lipsky 1980, Ham & Hill 1984, Lundquist 1988).

There are also other reasons why an extensive system of rules may enhance discretion. Rules may authorize an implementer to do certain things, or otherwise improve his/her position vis-à-vis others. Thus, rules not only put limits on actions, they also enable actors to do things they would otherwise not be able to do (compare Giddens 1979:69). An example from the school sector may illustrate the phenomenon. According to the School Act, the Education Committee has a duty to provide certain kinds of education for the pupils in its area. However, in pursuit of this object, the buildings and materials required are expected to be supplied by the local Council. Thus, the rules system puts the Education Committee in a position to be able to claim resources from the Policy Committee and the Council. This underlines that structural conditions may be both enabling and constraining, which was emphasized in Chapter 2.

Thus, rules do not always reduce discretion. The rules-discretion relationship is also problematic from another point of view. Education Committees may be able to increase discretion by affecting those who decide on the rules. This is clearly expressed by one of the interviewed Chief Officers:

"When rules do not provide the scope we want, attempts are not made to exceed them. Instead, we try to influence decision-makers on the national level. We may visit the Department of Education and present our claims for changing the rules, or we may apply for permission to undertake an experimental project, which would include exemption from these rules."\(^4\)

This indirect way of increasing discretion has been labelled "access" by Page & Goldsmith (see also Hernes 1977 and Lane’s 1981 concept of

\(^4\) This and subsequent quotations from Education Committee Chairpersons and Chief Education Officers were originally in Swedish. The interview replies have been translated by the author.
"Local government may have limited discretion, being subject to central constraints in the form of laws, advice, grants and so on. However, if local actors themselves have a significant influence on central decisions, they have greater scope for shaping state services..." (Page & Goldsmith 1987:7).

When outlining the design of an empirical study of the problems presented here, attention is confined to a more limited task, possible to handle empirically. In order to reduce complexity, discretion emanating from the case where rules provide implementers with authority, i.e. when rules are seen as enabling action vis-à-vis others, is excluded from the study. Nor is the access aspect of discretion, suggested by Page & Goldsmith, investigated empirically. Instead, we focus on rules as steering instruments and within this frame, three aspects are highlighted.

The first aspect, which we label "steering intention", concerns whether rules are mainly seen as nonstatutory advice for behaviour or as dictates, ordering certain actions to be taken. Within the school sector, it is mainly the National Board of Education and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities which issue directives in the explicit form of recommendations, i.e. the Education Committees are left to decide themselves whether or not to follow them. However, Education Committees are also subject to rules, which they, according to central government, are obliged to follow.

Hence, how Education Committee representatives perceive the steering intention of relevant rules, is an important expression of discretion. As Young has argued, "(p)eripheral agents place their own construction upon central advice or directives. Within their 'interpretive space' central intentions may be assimilated, ignored or inverted; response to them is essentially discretionary" (Young 1981:36).

Actors are expected to apprehend the steering intention of the rules differently. Strong steering intention represents the case when Education Committees are seen as having a duty to comply with rules and weak steering intention implies that rules are regarded as recommending behaviour. It is suggested that the weaker the steering intention, the larger the amount of discretion available, since the scope for choice will be
The second aspect of rules as steering instrument concerns the **scope for interpretation** regarded as available. Rules can never be constructed in a way which totally excludes interpretation (Hydén 1984). By necessity, general rules cannot be expressed too specifically, and therefore, terms like proper, appropriate and reasonable will be common. Thus, actors will have to exercise "discretion in identifying and interpreting purposes" (Galligan 1986:22).

Some of the rules concerning Education Committee responsibilities have been constructed with the explicit purpose of providing large amounts of scope for interpretation. As a consequence of the recent development more towards governing by goals and the introduction of frame law regulation, rules have become less specific. Thus, this conscious effort by central government has created an extended scope for local interpretation (Du Rietz, et al. 1987:219f). However, rules can also provide unintended opportunities for interpretation, by being vague, unprecise or ambiguous or simply by being understood in ways which were not anticipated by the formulat ors. The latter is a constantly occurring phenomenon in other settings, for example with regard to tax regulation.

In our study, the crucial point concerns how the scope for interpretation is regarded from the Education Committee perspective. Despite the uniformity of the rules system, assumptions are expected to vary. Actors judging the scope of interpretation to be considerable, are seen as representing the position that a large amount of discretion is available.

The third aspect concerns assumptions about **possibilities to exceed rules**. This deals with the extent to which Chairpersons and Chief Officers find it possible to act in ways other than those prescribed by the rules. This aspect is underlined by Ham & Hill, claiming that "students of discretion must be concerned with rule-breaking since in real-life situations the interpretation of the extent to which rule following allows discretion merges imperceptibly into the witting or unwitting disregard of rules" (Ham & Hill 1984:150). Indeed, as discussed in a previous chapter, Bull (1980) even argues that the concept of discretion should be reserved for situations where

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5 Compare also Lundquists (1987) dimension of precise-imprecise steering.
actors overstep rules.

However, in this study, the disregard of rules is included as one of several aspects of discretion. In the literature on discretion, the question of if, and in what situations, exceeding the rules is justified has been subject to considerable debate (see for example Kadish & Kadish 1973, Galligan 1986 and Morgan 1987), not least since it is a crucial ethical problem in public administration (Lundquist 1988).

To some extent, there is scope for disregarding or exceeding the rules relevant for Education Committees. However, even in this respect, assumptions are expected to vary. Education Committee representatives claiming that opportunities to exceed rules are frequent will be seen as representing the view that a large amount of discretion is available.

What are, in practice, the actors’ assumptions regarding these three aspects? We now turn to this question.

Do Rules Recommend or Dictate Behaviour?

What are the actor’s assumptions about whether relevant rules recommend or dictate behaviour for Education Committees? Chairpersons and Chief Officers were asked to assess the steering intention behind a number of rules concerning Education Committee activities (Table 5:1). The answer "general guidelines" is seen as representing the assumption that a large amount of discretion is available.

According to most respondents, rules are to be followed to the letter, rather than having the status of nonstatutory advice. In particular, labour market rules and agreements and rules about the use of central government grants are seen as containing a strong steering intention. When the answers from the two respondent categories are compared, the similarities, at least on a general level, are striking.
Table 5:1  Assumptions about Steering Intention. Percentages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rules</th>
<th>Resp.</th>
<th>Gener. guidelines</th>
<th>Both*</th>
<th>To the letter</th>
<th>Other reply/no opinion</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Act, School Ordinance</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricula</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour market rules and agreements</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules established by the local Council</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants regulations</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulations set by the Nat Board of Education</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The formulation used was: Partly general guidelines, partly complied with to the letter.

Note: The following question was asked: "How do you judge the rules concerning Education Committee activities; are they primarily to be seen as general guidelines for the Education Committee or are they to be complied with to the letter? Please state your answer in relation to the following rules."

Whether these assumptions correspond to the aims of central government is a different question. Obviously, Parliament, the Government and the National Board of Education and also the Local Councils would like to see the rules they establish followed. As illustrated by the table, most rules are perceived in this way by Chairpersons as well as Chief Officers. Thus,
assumptions made at the local level can be regarded as conforming to central governments intentions. However, these intentions are not unambiguous. At the present time, central government is encouraging a transformation of the public administrative culture, from traditional forms based on hierarchy and the exercise of authority to the establishment of a more consumer-orientated, service-mindedness. In this endeavour, it is emphasized that rules need not be complied with too strictly but with reasonableness and sound judgement (Söderlind & Petersson 1988). Our results provide support for the conclusion that this new administrative culture is already partly established at the local level. For example, every third Chairperson and Chief Officer regard the School Act and the School Ordinance, at least to some extent, as having the status of recommendations.

In this and the subsequent chapter, the questionnaire results will be illustrated by interview replies. They will be used to show what Chairpersons and Chief Officers had in mind when they answered the questionnaire and thus, provide a more thorough picture of the aspects under consideration.

The steering intentions inherent in central government and local Council steering are perceived differently by different Education Committee representatives. Respondents regarding the steering intention as being strong, emphasize rule-compliance even with regard to minor details. The Education Committee Chairperson of a small southern local authority summarizes his position:

"Most rules are to be followed to the letter. The School Act and the School Ordinance are to be complied with since they are the result of decisions by Parliament. The goals of the curriculum must also be strived after, because they are about providing equal standards of education to pupils. When it comes to labour market laws, it is even more important to stay within their limits. Decisions by the local Council should be complied with, since this is the supreme decision-making body of the local authority."

A common theme among these respondents is the reference to what they see as the proper role of the Education Committee in a democratic system
of government. Education Committees should comply with the rules because these have a democratic legitimacy. The Chief Education Officer of one of the suburban local authorities in the Greater Stockholm area develops his view accordingly:

"I regard the status of these documents to be of such a kind that they must be followed. It is a part of our task as a subordinate authority. This reflects my view on democracy: We, on the local level, should not question decisions made according to democratic principles at the central level. My aim is to be the obedient tool of central government. But of course, I cannot always achieve that."

Some respondents, for example this Chairperson from Western Sweden, develop their view as a combination of reasons:

"First of all, my assumptions mirror fundamental values that I hold. If there are rules and regulations, they must be complied with, and if we are provided with resources for particular purposes, they should be used for these.

Secondly, my view is based on experiences from local politics. On one occasion, pupils from one catchment area were bussed to another in order to fill empty places in the classes. However, the Regional Board of Education stated that this was not permitted. For me, this case was a reminder of the need to comply with regulations.

Thirdly, I believe that there should be an equal standard of education throughout the country. Thus, centrally issued rules have to be accepted."

Those regarding the steering intention to be weak also underline rule compliance, but not so unconditionally as those previously cited. In the words of a mid-Swedish Chief Education Officer:

"As a principle, rules should be followed to the greatest possible extent. This applies particularly to grant regulations, which have to be complied with in detail. Adherence to them may be scrutinized by the auditors and, therefore, everything must be correct.

However, one has to keep a distance to the regulations. If anyone brings the statute-books to a meeting, it is often because he is uncertain. Rules are used as arguments against others."
My position is that the first section of the School Act\textsuperscript{6} is more important than all the detailed regulations. The objectives must be kept in the back of one's mind constantly. The broad perspective might get lost if one concentrates too much on the details.

Labour market rules and agreements must be treated with common sense. It is most important to be sensitive to topical currents."

The respondent suggests that rules should be complied with "to the greatest possible extent". However, their details are regarded as of minor importance. The objectives of the school policies, as expressed in the School Act, must have priority over other rules.

Different rules being of different status is also a theme in the replies of other respondents. One Chief Education Officer stresses the necessity to distinguish between important and unimportant rules:

"Nowadays, our freedom when it comes to applying the rules is considerable. We are not scrutinized by any judges. Also, the provision of our particular kind of services requires adjustment to practical problems.

However, some rules can not be disregarded. For example, specific regulations covering the length of the school year and rules concerning the formal qualifications required by the teaching staff, cannot be questioned.

Whereas other rules can be treated with less respect. For example, when applying the rules about when to begin the school day, and about out-door activity days\textsuperscript{7}, etc, adjustment has to be made to the plans for school transport, even if the solutions chosen would conflict with the rules.

Over the years, the attitude towards legislation as well as precedent has changed. The law has provided greater freedom, but at the same time, the Education Committee has acquired more freedom on its own account."

Finally, it is claimed by some respondents regarding the steering intention to be weak, that rules are out of step with current trends, for example, they

\textsuperscript{6} This paragraph expresses the objectives of the school policies.

\textsuperscript{7} A specific form of school days, entirely devoted to out-door activities (friluftsdagar).
are too detailed. Therefore, it is simply not possible to comply with them to the letter. The reply by a Chief Officer outside Stockholm illustrates this point:

"The development of the School Act and the School Ordinance lags behind compared with the curricula. Many rules are too detailed to be followed, and under all circumstances, they do not reflect the conditions under which a modern administrative organization is working."

In conclusion, from the point of view of actors on the Education Committee level, whether rules are seen as recommending or dictating action varies to a large extent between different rules as well as between different actors. Those emphasizing the dictating aspect tend to underline duties connected with the position of the Education Committee at the receiving end of the chain of command. Respondents with opposite assumptions stress the distinction between important principles and minor details in the rules, and sometimes even argue that the sheer mass of details make rule-compliance impossible.

**How Large is the Scope for Interpretation?**

In order to grasp the actors’ assumptions about the scope for interpretation, two questions were asked: the first required the respondents to make a general assessment of the scope for interpretation; and the second concerned whether or not rules were clearly formulated. The questions were designed as opinion statements (Table 5:2).

Respondents have not been able to state their views in relation to specific sets of rules, as was the case in Table 5:1. Instead, they were asked to summarize a judgement with regard to the whole system of rules relevant to the Education Committees.
Table 5:2  Assumptions about Scope for Interpretation. Percentages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement and response alternatives</th>
<th>Chairpersons</th>
<th>Chief Officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Rules relevant for Education Committees leave considerable scope for own interpretations&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree totally</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree partly</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree partly</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree totally</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reply/no opinion</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Rules relevant for Education Committees are generally clearly formulated&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree totally</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree partly</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree partly</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree totally</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reply/no opinion</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whether the rules provide scope for making one’s own interpretations is obviously something which causes disagreement, even if most respondents tend to congregate around the middle alternatives. The second statement tends to be less controversial. On this general level, the pattern of Chairpersons and Chief Officers’ replies are similar.

In the interviews, those claiming that scope for interpretation is limited often refer to the way rules have been constructed. In the view of a Chief Education Officer from the South, rules within the school sector are generally unambiguous:
"Yes, regulations only provide limited scope for interpretation. They are also formulated clearly. I seldom have to ask the Regional Board of Education for advice in matters concerning Education Committee responsibilities."

According to many of those interviewed, different rules offer different amounts of scope for interpretation. Therefore, providing an answer which they felt summarized the situation was often regarded as difficult. The rules in the School Ordinance concerning the formal qualifications required by the teaching staff is an example often quoted of rules leaving only narrow scope for interpretation.

Those regarding the scope for interpretation to be considerable also refer to the construction of the rules. However, rather than stressing their lack of ambiguity, they emphasize instead the trend towards the use of legislation which only provides a framework. A Chief Education Officer from a local authority in Western Sweden puts it in the following way:

"My assessment is based on, firstly, that I want to perceive the rules in this way, and, secondly, that the system of rules within the field of education has actually undergone major changes during recent years. New rules often provide greater scope for interpretation.

The bureaucratic view, previously characteristic for the steering of, among others, the school system, attempted to regulate all events that might possibly occur. If the rules did not cover all cases, additional regulations had to be issued. The rules within the school sector are bureaucratic documents, unable to foresee all possible situations."

Hence, also the scope for interpretation is perceived differently by actors at Education Committee level.

Is it Possible to Exceed Rules?

The extent to which subordinates in public administration disregard or exceed rules, is very difficult to measure. Naturally, those undertaking such activities are generally interested in concealing it. Therefore, non
compliance with rules is likely to be more frequent than officially reported. Hence, if conclusions are based on the number of cases actually ending up in the administrative courts, the proportion is probably an underestimation (compare SOU 1989:64, p 93). Indeed, some observers have concluded that illegal discretionary action is common, at least in the American system of government (Davis 1969:12ff).

Our focus is on actors' assumptions about the possibilities for Education Committees to exceed rules. A question on the matter was included in the survey (Table 5:3). Clearly, assumptions vary considerably. It is a commonly held view that rules can be exceeded, at least to some extent. However, labour market rules and agreements are an exception to this pattern. According to a majority of Chairpersons as well as Officers, it is not possible to disregard these.

From one point of view, the results suggest that peripheral agents in the school system hold a very strong position. Their independence from central control is so considerable that even exceeding rules is seen as possible. This may be regarded as an advantage in a system where decentralization implies strong units at the local level with an ability to take over new and extended tasks.

However, from another perspective, the results can be interpreted as a malfunctioning of the steering system. Local units may have become too independent. Indeed, central control of the implementation of national policies may even be at risk. Perhaps decentralization has gone too far so that the upheld values of uniformity and equality of standards can no longer be guaranteed. Both interpretations are possible and give rise to different pictures of expected future development.

On a general level, the two respondent categories appear to respond in similar ways to the question, even if Chief Officers tend to regard the possibilities to exceed rules as slightly greater than is the case with Chairpersons.
Table 5:3 Assumptions about Possibilities to Exceed Rules. Percentages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rules</th>
<th>Resp.</th>
<th>Totally imposs.</th>
<th>Some poss.</th>
<th>Largely poss.</th>
<th>Other reply/no opinion</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The School Act, the School Ordinance</td>
<td>Chairp 45.4</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>218</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers 41.8</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>239</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricula</td>
<td>Chairp 15.2</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers 15.1</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>238</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour market rules and agreements</td>
<td>Chairp 74.1</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>216</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers 64.9</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>239</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules established by the local Council</td>
<td>Chairp 41.7</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>218</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers 36.7</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>240</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulations set by the Nat Board of Education</td>
<td>Chairp 17.8</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers 10.1</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>238</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The following question was asked: "Suppose an unanimous Education Committee would like to do something which runs contrary to the rules regulating its activities; how would you regard the possibilities for the Education Committee to undertake activities exceeding these rules? Please state your answer in relation to the following rules."

Whether rules can be exceeded or not is a matter which has been penetrated extensively during interviews. Actors regarding the possibilities to be limited often point to specific obstacles which make it impossible to act contrary to rules. The Chairperson of an Education Committee in the South states:

"In relation to the School Act and the School Ordinance, I would argue that it is very difficult to do anything else than what is proclaimed in the rules. The same goes for labour market rules and agreements. If we do
anything against the law, the risk that the decision will be challenged is great. One would expect that someone who feels unjustly treated would make use of this possibility."

The same position, slightly more systematized, is taken by the Chief Education Officer in a mid-Swedish local authority:

"I would assess it to be practically impossible for the Education Committee of our local authority to exceed the rules. It is my belief that, along the road, the Education Committee is faced with at least three obstacles:

First, as a Chief Education Officer, I see it as my task to counteract such proposals. As I have previously stressed, I would not assist an attempt to exceed the rules, but would rather do what I could to obstruct it.

Second, the Education Committee is obliged to negotiate with the trade unions about its proposals. Here is another potential obstacle, since the trade unions may react and demand that it is made a matter for negotiations at national level.9

Third, different organized interests, affected by Education Committee decisions, may also obstruct attempts to exceed rules. These include parents, pupils, etc and also the Regional Board of Education, in its inspection function. If the Education Committee would consider exceeding the rules, it is very likely that someone would leak information about it to the Regional Board of Education."

Common among those regarding the possibilities to be limited, is the assumption that the obstacles are insurmountable. Respondents regarding the possibilities to exceed the rules as large, claim the opposite. The view of an Education Committee Chairperson from the West of Sweden contrasts

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8 Decisions taken by the Education Committee can be challenged by anyone affected by them and, in some cases, by all the inhabitants of the local authority area. Challenged decisions are referred to an administrative court which would uncover attempts to exceed the rules.

9 Based on regulations in the Co-determination Act (medbestämmandelagen), local trade unions have the right to be informed about practically all proposals to the Education Committee, as well as other local government committees. Information takes place before decisions are taken in the committee and may sometimes be in the form of formal negotiations. In cases of disagreement during negotiations, the issue may be transferred to the national level, which normally delays the decision-making process.
"There is considerable scope for exceeding rules because control over Education Committees is very poor. Also, even if one breaks rules, sanctions are unusual.

Labour market rules and agreements are the only exception. In relation to these, trade unions keep a tight control over us. But if they are on our side, these rules can also be exceeded."

This Chairperson also refers to the efficiency of the control system. However, contrary to those previously cited, the system is regarded to be inefficient. A similar view is taken by an experienced Chief Education Officer, whose answer in this matter is worth quoting at length:

"Of course it is possible to exceed rules if one dares and has the right basic values. We do not want to do anything that clearly and undoubtably runs against the rules. However, in all other cases, the responsibility for the local educational services and the needs of the pupils will act as a guide. One way of exceeding rules can be to call things differently.

After many years, I think I have become skilled in disregarding rules. It is necessary to have this type of knowledge in the present school system.

By tradition, schools have always been governed by rules. Too many within the school sector have looked upwards, rather than amongst themselves, for guidance. When King Gustav VI Adolf died, confusion spread among many Chief Education Officers: Should schools hoist the flag or not. Many of them telephoned the National Board of Education to find out what the rules said, but no support for any particular course of action was to be found.

A concrete example of how we have chosen to act concerns school transport. Private firms are hired to provide the service. But instead of each year inviting a number of different firms to compete for the service, which is the prescribed way, we have asked only one firm over the last few years. The administrative court (Kammarrätten) has tried a similar case in Rättvik local authority and came to the conclusion that the meaning of the rules is that several firms must be invited. But we regard annual decisions on hiring as too complicated and, therefore, we will continue as we have started, despite it formally being wrong.
It is my view that the central government control system is no major obstacle to an Education Committee wanting to exceed the rules. Central government control is limited. Despite the Regional Board of Education’s task of performing ‘active surveillance’, we see very little of them. Only on one occasion during the last ten years have they visited us to control our use of resources.

Control may also be exercised by auditors from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, but their main objective is to examine the activities and performance of schools. This year, a study was undertaken of compulsory schooling in all local authorities within the county area and two years ago, upper secondary schooling was examined."

This answer not only illustrate the assumption that it is possible to exceed rules, but also provides examples of how this might be done in practice.

It seems obvious from the interviews that assumptions about possibilities to exceed rules very much depend on how potential obstacles are perceived. The efficiency of the control system, the position of local interests and the view of the Chief Officer has been referred to as of particular importance.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to show how the Education Committee Chairpersons and Chief Education Officers perceive the amount of discretion available in relation to general, formal and written rules. The overall aim has been to start the test of hypothesis (H1) on variation in discretion. It has been emphasized that the relationship between rules and discretion is not unambiguous and that an increased use of regulation does not necessarily reduce discretion.

Empirically, rules as limits to Education Committee discretion have been represented by three aspects, dealing with the functioning of rules as steering instruments:

Assumptions about the steering intention behind rules concern the extent to which these are seen as recommending, rather than dictating a certain behaviour. Most of the respondents claim that rules are to be complied with to the letter. However, some regard rules, at least to some extent, as having
the status of recommendations. Hence, every third Chairperson and Chief Officer claim that the School Act and the School Ordinance are to be treated as such.

The scope for interpretation offered by the rules is also important. Whether there is scope or not may be due to conscious decisions by central government, but it can also be a result of how rules are interpreted at the level of implementation. Approximately half of the Chairpersons and Chief Officers regard rules as providing considerable scope for their own interpretations. One in five regards them as being unclearly formulated.

The third aspect is the assessment of the possibilities to exceed rules. Large possibilities are seen as an expression of large amounts of discretion. However, different rules are judged differently in this respect. Most of the respondents find it impossible to disregard labour market rules and agreements, but when it comes to the School Act and the School Ordinance, every other Chairperson and Chief Officer claim that it is possible to exceed them.

Common for all three aspects considered is the variation among the views of the respondents. When it comes to rules generally, hypothesis (H1) is clearly supported. The system of rules is basically the same for all local Education Committees, but the amount of discretion available is perceived differently. The next chapter aims at investigating whether this hypothesis is also valid in relation to rules dealing with the use of resources.
What resources were available to the Swedish school system at the local
government level\(^1\) at the time of the study\(^2\)? In 1985, total resources were
41.3 thousand million SEKs, which is almost 5,000 SEKs per inhabitant. Central
government provided 44 per cent and local authorities 49 per cent. The remainder consisted of incomes deriving from certain charges and fees.

Primarily, the division of financial responsibilities between central and
local government, is made according to the following principle: Central
government provide resources for teachers’ salaries in compulsory and
upper secondary schooling, while local authorities finance school buildings
and premises, teaching materials, school meals, school transport and pupil
health care. The distribution of the costs for different activities within the
school budget is shown in Table 6:1. The main part of the central
government share is distributed as block grants\(^3\).

The scope for Education Committees to increase resources themselves
is very limited. Only to a marginal extent can they acquire resources from
rents or fees or by marketing tailor-made courses. Of course, indirectly,

---

\(^1\) Refers to the municipal level only, not the county level.

\(^2\) It should be observed that the resource system here described and analyzed was the one in use during 1985-86. Major changes have taken place since our study was conducted. For example, the grants system described here has been replaced by a system by which a lump sum is allocated to each local authority. Its size depends on demographical and structural conditions and is no longer related to teachers’ salaries (Proposition 1990/91:18).

\(^3\) The grant system is described more fully in Du Rietz et al (1987).
Education Committee representatives may influence the amount of resources provided by the local Council or central government. For example, a Chairperson who simultaneously is a member of the Policy Committee or the local Council may influence resource allocation decisions in favour of the Education Committee. Nevertheless, Education Committees are practically totally dependent on resources provided by others.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Revenue expenditures</th>
<th>Central governm. grants</th>
<th>Local governm. taxes</th>
<th>Local fees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School buildings</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School meals, transport, pupil health care, etc</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory schooling</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary schooling</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal adult education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other forms of education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistiska Centralbyran 1986a:36 ff.

Therefore, the mapping and analysis of discretion vis-à-vis resources will be confined to those allocated by the local Council and by central government. Discretion will be regarded as concerning the scope for using resources for purposes decided by the committee. The less the committee is restrained by rules regulating resource use, the larger is the scope for choice and thus, discretion. In an American context, this has been suggested as an organizing principle, according to which different degrees of agency discretion can be identified among different types of grants (Gordon 1986:163).
This chapter discusses how the regulations from central and local government on the use of resources limit the discretion available to Education Committees, as perceived from Education Committee level. The purpose is to test whether hypothesis (H1) is also relevant in relation to these rules. In the social science literature, the concept of resources has been used with varying breadth. However, in this study, it will refer only to the money allocated for the purpose of financing revenue expenditure at the local government level. Other resources, such as capital assets or the level of knowledge and skill of employed personnel, are not included in the analysis.

What is the Scope for Using Local Resources?

Generally, the budgetary systems of the Swedish local authorities are fairly standardized and uniform, largely due to the strong influence of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities. However, in one, for this study particularly important respect, the resource allocation systems may be different. This concerns the degree of specificity with which resources are allocated, which is decided by the local Council and often stated as written financial regulations (anslagsbindningsregler).

Some Councils provide resources for a large number of very specific purposes within each sector, leaving only limited scope for the responsible committee to decide on their use. If for example money is left over at the end of the year or tasks can be performed in a cheaper way than expected, committees are not allowed to reallocate resources between different purposes without specific permission. Other Councils make fewer stipulations, or even provide a lump sum, allowing the committee to reallocate resources more freely. Altogether, this financial regulation is of the utmost importance for the scope available for the disposition of resources. In a sense, it represents the extent to which decision-making on the use of resources is decentralized within the local authority.

Resource allocation is usually made at one of four different levels of
specificity: sector; activity; subactivity; and account⁴ (Svenska kommunförbundet 1982). If a lump sum is provided, resources are allocated to service sector level. A more specific means of allocation is available if activity level is chosen, and the next, subactivity level, is even more specific. The most detailed allocation takes place when account level is chosen.

Applied to the school sector, resource allocation to the service sector level would provide the Education Committee with the right to reallocate resources between different purposes within the whole sector. If activity level is prescribed, resources may not be transferred between different activities⁵, for example between comprehensive schools and administration, without permission. Allocating resources to subactivity or account level even further restricts these possibilities.

It should be kept in mind that other rules, such as those regulating the use of central government grants, or specific decisions by the local Council, may also limit the scope for the Education Committee to dispose of resources, even in local authorities applying more general levels of specificity. Nevertheless, the level of specificity is a general expression of the degree of freedom prescribed, especially for the share of resources for local education, financed by the local Council.

Each local authority decides itself which level of specificity to apply. In order to map the development of these rules during the 1980s, a survey was undertaken in 1987 of all local government treasurers. The results are provided in Table 6:2.

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⁴ The Swedish terms for the four levels of resource allocation are huvudprogram, program, delprogram and konto.

⁵ In Table 6:1, the seven most commonly used activity levels within the school sector are listed.
Table 6.2 Principal Level of Specificity to Which Resources are Allocated in 1982, 1985 and 1988. Percentages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of specificity</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1985</th>
<th>1988</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service sector level</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity level</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subactivity level</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account level</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know/other reply</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table contains information from 249 local authorities.

As evident from the table, the subactivity and account levels dominated in the beginning of the 1980s. At that time, most local authorities aimed at governing the use of resources very much in detail. However, a radical change has taken place during the rest of the decade. In 1985, when the empirical studies of Education Committee Chairpersons and Chief Officers were undertaken, subactivity and account levels still dominated, albeit to a lesser extent. In 1988, the number of local authorities adopting a more general level of specificity had increased even further. The change corresponds to the general trend towards decentralization and frame law regulation, characteristic of other fields of Swedish public administration (Gustafsson 1987). Thus, service sector level of specificity may be regarded as an innovation which has gradually been adopted by local authorities during the 1980s (Schmidt 1986).

The level of specificity by which resources are allocated represents a statutory frame for the use of resources. However, with an actors’ perspective, it becomes crucial to investigate what the assumptions of the actors are in this respect. Are rules about level of specificity regarded as possible to exceed? Is there any connection between these assumptions and the actual level of specificity chosen by the local authority?
**Table 6:3 Assessed Possibilities to Exceed Prescribed Level of Specificity Concerning Locally Financed Resources. Percentages.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response alternatives</th>
<th>Chairpersons</th>
<th>Chief Officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totally impossible</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible, but only concerning smaller expenditures</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible, also concerning larger expenditures</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reply</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The following question was asked: "Through the budget, the Education Committee is allocated resources for various purposes. The scope available to Education Committees for disposing of resources and reallocating them to other purposes, is represented by the level of specificity, chosen by the local Council. In practice, how would you estimate the possibilities for the Education Committee, without specific permission, to use or distribute locally financed resources differently than is prescribed through the chosen level of specificity?"

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to assess the possibilities to exceed these rules as regards the locally financed share of the school costs (Table 6:3). Both response categories seem to make similar assessments. It is possible to exceed these rules, but only to a limited extent. However, it is commoner for Chief Officers to consider that such possibilities exist. Perhaps these answers reflect the officers’ more immediate contact with financial management. They may simply be more aware of the opportunities available.

Are the answers affected by the particular level of specificity prescribed by the local Council? Is it easier or more difficult to exceed rules in a system where regulation of the use of resources is very tight? Table 6:4 indicates certain connections which, however, appear not to be statistically significant.
Table 6:4 Prescribed Level of Specificity and Assessment of Possibilities to Exceed These Rules. Percentages claiming that it is totally impossible to exceed rules.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prescribed level of specificity</th>
<th>Chairpersons</th>
<th>Chief Officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service sector or activity level</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subactivity level</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account level</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to get an overall measure of the scope for disposing of resources, an index has been constructed, taking into account the prescribed level of specificity as well as the actors' assumptions about the possibilities to exceed these rules.

Respondents were also asked to comment on the question accounted for in Table 6:3. Those claiming that these rules cannot possibly be exceeded often refer to the methods of control used by those providing the resources. Another restraining factor is the long term credibility of the Education Committee. A Chief Officer from the West of Sweden states:

"Through our budget, resources are allocated in a fairly detailed way. To transfer any larger amounts of money between activities is practically impossible. It requires special permission from the Council.

It is also important only to use resources for the purpose for which they have been allocated. Otherwise, one will not be trusted next time one asks for money."

Politicians tend to emphasize the need for loyalty with regard to the budget decisions of the Council. In the words of an Education Committee Chairperson from the North:

"It is totally impossible. We have a duty to comply with the decisions of

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6 The construction of this index is further presented and discussed in Appendix 2.
the Council. Moreover, we applied for the money in the first place. But this is my personal judgement. My predecessor as Chairperson would probably not regard it as impossible."

As has been shown in Table 6:4, most respondents find it possible to exceed rules about the prescribed level of specificity, at least to some extent. One Chief Education Officer, regarding it as possible to also use larger amounts of resources in a different way than prescribed, makes the following comment:

"As a principle, we must report all redispositions between different activities. But certainly, we have neglected to do so in some cases, and obviously, it can be done more often."

However, the predominant position is that only limited possibilities are available. In the words of a Chief Officer from the Stockholm area:

"According to our financial regulations, accounts are lumped together into more general ones; teaching materials, school library, "school under canvas"7, etc. Within each of these, resources can be used relatively freely. Some deviations are possible. But if we were to disregard these rules to any great extent, for example by setting up a teaching post, financed by resources intended for materials, the local authority auditors would react immediately."

Thus also in this context, the local control system is referred to as a restraint on using resources in other ways than those prescribed. However, certain opportunities are available. When the rules concerning resources are applied, all expenditures must be classified according to which type of cost they belong to. This creates a scope for discretionary decision-making, which is underlined by the following Chief Officer from the North:

"Some possibilities exist, and in practice, rules are exceeded. For

7 A short period of a few days, during which the school transfers to a camp and lessons take place out-of-doors (lägerskola).
example, it happens that items are bought which really should be paid for from a different account than the one used. Items costing more than 1000 kronor and expected to last longer than five years are regarded as capital costs. However, we sometimes use revenue accounts to buy capital goods."

The last example concerns the responsibilities of the Education Committee if these decisions are explicitly delegated.

In conclusion, actors on the Education Committee level vary in their assumptions on the scope for the disposition of locally financed resources. Depending on their views in this respect, different factors are underlined as important. Those regarding the scope to be limited emphasize the control system, long term credibility and the position of the Education Committee vis-à-vis formal democratic structures. Actors with the opposite view underline the lack of control and the room for interpretation.

Can Grants be Disposed Differently?

The previous section has mainly dealt with the possibilities available in the disposal of the locally financed share of the resources. Now, the focus is shifted towards central government funding of schooling. What is the scope provided by the central government grants system according to actors on the Education Committee level?

The purpose of central government grants is to finance tasks prescribed by the national level, but performed locally. Some grants aim at covering the full cost of certain tasks, while others are only a partial contribution. Grants are allocated for certain tasks, though these have tended to become less specific during the recent reform movement. In Table 6:5, the main types of grants for compulsory education are listed.

The most important grant is the basic resource (basresursen), providing almost half of central government financing of compulsory education. Money is allocated to each school by the Regional Boards of Education. In principle, the amount is related to the number of pupils, with account taken of the varying costs for teaching staff on different levels of the school
system. For each pupil, the basic resource is supposed to safeguard the minimum amount of resources necessary for his/her education. It is distributed in a way which is expected to be immune from local priorities. Thus, Education Committees are not expected to be able to affect the allocation of these resources (Du Rietz et al 1987:133).

The reinforcement resource (förstärkningsresursen) is also of major importance, representing a fifth of central government financing of compulsory education. Its size is related to the number of pupils in the local authority area and it is allocated to the Education Committee as a lump sum. The Education Committee decides on the further distribution of these resources, but a guiding principle should be the specific needs among the schools and the pupils. In line with the principle of uniformity and equality of standards, the reinforcement resource should be used to counteract disadvantages of all kinds; physical, social, mental or other. For example, it can be allocated to provide remedial support for pupils with difficulties or permit the dividing of classes into smaller units.

Table 6:5 Central Government Grants for Compulsory Education During the Budget Year 1985/86.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of grant</th>
<th>Million SEK</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic resource</td>
<td>6 029.4</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement grant</td>
<td>2 582.4</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplementary grant</td>
<td>757.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant for headmasters and deputy headmasters</td>
<td>457.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant for remedial teaching in Swedish</td>
<td>255.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant for home language education</td>
<td>254.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant for integrated school day</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant for specific measures</td>
<td>203.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant for local experimental activities</td>
<td>199.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant for social insurance charges*</td>
<td>2 127.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other grants*</td>
<td>170.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13 077.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Will not be dealt with in the subsequent analysis.

Source: Du Rietz et al, 1987:120.
The remaining grants are allocated for more specific purposes and each of them represents only a minor share of central government financing. The supplementary grant (tilläggsbidraget) is calculated as a proportion of the total basic and reinforcement resources and is supposed to contribute to the costs for financing supply teachers. The grant for headmasters and deputy headmasters (bidrag till rektorer och studierektorer) is aimed at financing the salaries for these categories of employees. From July 1st, 1986, this grant has been amalgamated with another grant.

The size of the grant for remedial teaching in Swedish (bidrag för stödundervisning i svenska) and the grant for home language education (bidrag till hemspråksundervisning) are related to specific needs in each local authority. The former is mainly intended for pupils not having Swedish as their mother tongue and the latter aims at contributing to the financing of education in developing the pupil’s home language when it is other than Swedish.

Local authorities may decide to extend the school day in order to create space for other activities outside teaching. These activities are chosen by the pupils themselves and aim at developing personal interests of varying kinds. As a contribution to the costs, a grant for an integrated school day (bidrag till samlad skoldag) can be provided.

The grant for specific measures (SÅS-medel) as well as the grant for local experimental activities (bidrag till lokal skolutveckling) are distributed by the Regional Boards of Education. The former is expected to contribute to some extra needs for support to pupils with special problems and the latter provides resources mainly for teaching staff wanting to develop new methods of teaching.

The question to be addressed here is whether grants can be used in other ways than prescribed by central government. This is used as one measure of Education Committee discretion. For comparative reasons, analysis is confined to grants for the compulsory school system. These are allocated to all local authorities, whereas grants for upper secondary schooling (gymnasiet) are only distributed to the larger ones. In the questionnaire, Chairpersons and Chief Officers were asked to assess the possibilities for overstepping grant regulations (Table 6:6).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of grant</th>
<th>Resp.</th>
<th>Tot.</th>
<th>Poss., small expens</th>
<th>Poss., large expens</th>
<th>Other reply/no opinion</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic resource</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcem. resource</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplementary grant</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant for headmasters and dep. headmasters</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant for remedial teaching in Swedish/ home lang. education</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant for integrated school day</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant for specific measures</td>
<td>Chairp</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The following question was asked: "In practice, how would you estimate the possibilities for the Education Committee, without specific permission, to use or distribute grants differently than the way prescribed by central government? Please state your answer in relation to the following types of grants:

The response alternatives were the following: Totally impossible; possible, but only in the case of smaller expenditures; and possible, also in the case of larger expenditures.

On the whole, both Chairpersons and Officers make similar judgements, but variation is considerable, at least when it concerns whether deviations
are totally impossible or possible to a limited extent. Further, different types of grants are seen as providing different amounts of scope for their disposal. The majority of both categories regard it as impossible to use or distribute the basic resource and the grant for headmasters and deputy headmasters for other purposes than the ones prescribed by central government. However, the other types of grants, together representing 33 per cent of central government financing, are seen as providing greater scope for deviations.

The variations in the answers provided are supported by evidence from interviews. In the following, interview replies will be used as an illustration and to exemplify how respondents reason when making their judgements.

According to the results presented in Table 6:6, most respondents claim that the basic resource cannot be used for purposes other than those for which it has been allocated. Interview respondents emphasize that the Education Committee is not involved in the distribution of these resources. The Regional Board of Education makes the decisions and specifies the amount of resources allocated to each school. Also, the function of the basic resource as a major source of finance for the teachers’ salaries makes it even more difficult to touch. Among the small number of those interviewed who claimed that it could be used to finance other tasks, reference was made to their size, which was seen as providing at least some scope.

Spending the reinforcement resource differently from the way prescribed by central government is generally regarded as possible by most respondents. Central government has outlined what the resource is supposed to be used for, but according to respondents, subsequent control is weak. Frequently, reference is made to cases where these resources have been used for other purposes. For example, classes have been divided into smaller groups without any specific needs being present. Also, despite one part of the reinforcement resource being reserved for non-teaching measures, in some local authorities this has been used to finance teaching

\[8\] It should be emphasized, that statements or cases referred to in the interview replies will not be evaluated from the point of view of their legal accuracy.
activities⁹. Respondents commonly refer to research or investigations showing that the reinforcement resource is often used contrary to the intentions of central government (Odin & Åhs 1985. For a slightly different conclusion, see Sannerstedt 1988. Compare also Löfquist 1988).

However, there are respondents who claim that the rules covering the reinforcement resource are so vague that it is difficult to overstep them. According to some of these, so much is permitted by these rules, that in reality, they encompass practically all purposes for which the Education Committee could consider using them.

The supplementary grant is aimed at contributing to the financing of supply teachers. According to most questionnaire replies, this grant can be used for other purposes. However, as underlined in the interviews, the extent to which ordinary teachers are absent is of crucial importance, since it affects the need to employ supply teachers. In the words of a Chief Officer, claiming that the grant can be used for other purposes:

"To a large extent, the use of the supplementary grant depends on whether teachers are absent. One year, money might be left over, another year, it might not be sufficient. If no one is away, scope is available for using the resources for other purposes, since the costs for which the grant is intended, do not exist."

According to other respondents, this grant can only be used for its specified purpose. They tend to argue in the same way as the following Chief Officer from the North of Sweden:

"The supplementary grant might be used for other purposes, but in reality, this hardly occurs. This is because the grant is too small for its purpose. In our local authority, central government only covers 81 per cent of the costs the supplementary grant is supposed to finance."

The general view among respondents is that it is impossible to use the grant for headmasters and deputy headmasters to finance other purposes. Respondents refer to the constraining function of trade unions. An

⁹ This was not permitted at the time of study, see Du Rietz et al 1987:138f.
Education Committee, planning to use these resources differently, can expect the unions to protest to such an extent that the implementation of its proposal will be practically impossible.

As regards the grants for remedial teaching in Swedish and home language education, respondents express different views. Those claiming that these resources can not possibly be used for other purposes emphasize the very detailed and specific nature of the rules covering their use and the obligation of Education Committees to account for how the money has been spent. Others claim that control is insufficient, and thus, there is scope for using these resources differently. In the words of a Chief Officer from mid-Sweden:

"To some extent, we could use these grants differently. No one controls our use of the money. Further, I have not seen anyone asking for information about this, for example lists of pupils for which the grant is intended."

The three remaining types of grants, included in the question, the grants for an integrated school day, specific measures and local experimental activities, all represent small shares of the total amounts of grants. However, even in relation to these, there are different assessments of the possibilities to use them to finance other tasks. Those claiming that the rules for these grants cannot be overstepped emphasize that spending has to be accounted for, or that the money is insufficient or that trade unions exercise tight controls. Others, such as the following Chief Officer, make the opposite judgement:

"The grant for an integrated school day provides considerable opportunities for deviations. No one would comment if we used some of these resources for other purposes, since so many different constructions of the integrated school day are represented among the local authorities. The use of the grant for local experimental activities is not regulated with sufficient accuracy to enable someone to challenge a decision based on these rules. The rules only establish some general principles, but on the whole, considerable power remains with the Education Committee. Most certainly, our Education Committee would be able to take actions
which deviate from the rules."

In summary, the scope available to use central government grants for purposes other than the ones established centrally, is perceived differently by different actors, although some types of grants are generally regarded as permitting greater room in their disposition than others. The efficiency of the control system, together with the size of the resources and the extent to which these cover costs for prescribed tasks, are major factors referred to by the respondents asked to comment on their assessments.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a picture of how Education Committee discretion vis-à-vis resources is perceived by the Chairpersons and the Chief Education Officers. Two components of particular importance have been identified: the scope for disposition of locally financed resources and the scope for choice provided by central government grants.

Appraisals of the scope for the disposition of locally financed resources vary considerably. First, the financial regulations, clarifying to which level of specificity resources are allocated, differs from authority to authority. In some areas, Education Committees are provided with a lump sum for the whole service sector and are given considerable freedom in the way in which they allocate these resources. The opposite conditions prevail when the Education Committees have their resources allocated at the accounts level and are thus, accompanied by very detailed instructions as to their use. In correspondence with the trend towards decentralization in the 1980s, local authorities have tended to adopt more general forms of resource allocation.

Second, the actor’s judgement of the extent to which these rules are binding, also varies. Four out of five Chairpersons and Chief Officers regard it as possible, at least to some extent, to use or distribute locally financed resources differently from the way prescribed by the financial regulations.

Assessments also vary with respect to the scope for the disposition of
central government grants. Some claim that the rules regulating the use of these grants cannot be overstepped, for example by spending these resources on other purposes. Others argue that this is possible and some even claim that large amounts of expenditures can be used in ways other than those outlined by central authorities. However, different types of grants are perceived differently in this respect. For example, it is generally recognized that the basic resource cannot be used to finance other purposes, while the reinforcement resource provides considerable scope for an Education Committee to carry out activities other than those prescribed by central government, if it so wishes.

In sum, hypothesis (H1) on variation in discretion despite similar formal/legal structures is accurate also with regard to rules about the use of resources.
In the theory section of the thesis, it was hypothesized that a study of discretion using an actors' perspective would reveal a pattern characterized by different amounts of discretion among actors under similar formal/legal conditions. The previous two chapters have verified the hypothesis. Whether, and in what sense formal rules are seen as constraining Education Committee decision-making varies between the Chairpersons as well as the Chief Education Officers of different local authorities.

We now turn to the question of how this pattern might be explained. In Chapter 3, it was argued that different conceptions of discretion among local actors are likely to have developed through their experiences from the social contexts to which they belong or have belonged. Six hypotheses about possible explanations were suggested concerning the central-local government context, the local setting of the Education Committee and characteristics of the individual actor.

This chapter aims at empirically investigating the validity of the hypotheses. The test is based on quantitative as well as qualitative data. Hence, information gathered through the questionnaires and from statistical sources about conditions in the local authorities (SCB 1985b) will be used, and also evidence from the interviews with selected Chairpersons and Chief Officers. Thus, the use of different kinds of information is not only confined to the illustration of variation in discretion, but will also be used in the actual testing of hypotheses. However, it should be underlined that tests which are only based on qualitative data must be treated as tentative, as the respondents for interviews were selected to represent extreme values and not the population as a whole.
In the previous two chapters, five aspects of discretion were identified, three dealing with the scope for choice provided by rules generally and two with rules regulating the use of resources. Each aspect is represented by an index, which is calculated for both categories of respondents. Hence, taken together, ten variables provide the operationalization of the concept of discretion.

Four of these indices, namely those dealing with the actors' assessment of the steering intention, scope for interpretation, possibilities to exceed rules and possibilities to overstep grant regulations, are constructed as measures of the actors' average position on all questions covering the particular aspect. The remaining index, representing the actors' assessment of the scope for disposing of resources, is calculated according to a different principle. The actors' assumptions about possibilities to exceed rules regulating the use of the resources deriving from the local authority, are related to the particular construction of these rules, which varies between local authorities\(^1\). Because of the way the survey questions were formulated, indices constructed on the basis of them will be on ordinal level. Respondents are ranked from low to high, but nothing more specific can be said about the distance between the values\(^2\).

The use of ten variables to represent the concept of discretion is likely to make the empirical analysis a very complex task. Therefore, before proceeding any further, it should be examined whether any underlying dimensions can be identified among these variables on empirical grounds. With this purpose in mind, a factor analysis has been carried out (Table 7:1). This must be regarded as only a crude estimation, since our data is on an ordinal level. Nevertheless, the pattern emerging suggests the existence of three underlying dimensions, together accounting for 53.4 per cent of the variance. The first represents a general scope for choice, as perceived by Chairpersons. The second factor concerns the scope for disposing of resources for both respondent categories. The third factor, corresponds to the first but deals with the Chief Officers' general scope for choice.

\(^1\) The basic construction of these rules was presented in Chapter 6.

\(^2\) In Appendix 2, the indices and their properties are summarized.
Table 7:1  Factor Analysis of Indicators on Discretion (Varimax Rotation).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chairperson’s assessment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering Intention</td>
<td>.566</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Interpretation</td>
<td>.588</td>
<td>-.106</td>
<td>-.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding Rules</td>
<td>.730</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overstepping Grant Regulations</td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>-.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Disposing of Resources</td>
<td>.236</td>
<td>.915</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Officer’s assessment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering Intention</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Interpretation</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>-.113</td>
<td>.599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding Rules</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>-.044</td>
<td>.688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overstepping Grant Regulations</td>
<td>-.131</td>
<td>.284</td>
<td>.552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Disposing of Resources</td>
<td>-.044</td>
<td>.941</td>
<td>.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of variation</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data has been included according to a pairwise procedure. A test with a listwise alternative provides basically the same set of factors, thus indicating the reliability of the pairwise alternative. The criteria for eigenvalue was set to 1.1, since this resulted in a solution which was more easily interpretable than the four-factor solution emerging if the standard criteria of 1.0 was used.

The two variables representing scope for disposing of resources are linear combinations of each other. It has been argued that such variables should not be brought into a factor analysis (Bennet & Bowers 1976:8). However, when these are excluded, factors 1 and 3 remain practically unchanged, which suggests that they do not disturb the overall solution.

Hence, in our empirical case, discretion appears to consist of three major separate components. Therefore, the concept cannot be treated as coherent and one-dimensional. Rather, the particular characteristics of each component should be given more rigorous attention.

It seems that the scope for disposing of resources lives a life of its own, independently of the other factors. The fact that it concerns formal conditions which actually vary between local authorities may contribute to its uniqueness. All other indicators refer to formal conditions expected to be similar for all Education Committees. In summarizing the variation in
these variables, the category of the reporting actor appears to be of crucial importance. Whether his/her role is to represent the popular will or to be the principal bureaucrat of the Education Department is clearly significant for how discretion is apprehended. For each of the categories, a "general scope for choice" appears as representing a common core among several indicators of discretion.

As the concept is multi-dimensional empirically, this implies that it can no longer be expected that the hypothesized explanations of variation are relevant for all components. However, the empirical investigation will show whether the theory is more accurate for some dimensions than others.

The empirical test of the hypotheses on variation in discretion is undertaken in the remainder of the chapter. Before turning to this, it is necessary to make some brief comments on the design of the analysis. First, when testing hypotheses on the quantitative data, a measure of association is used to indicate whether the suggested connection exists and its strength. Since the indices representing the dependent variable are ordinal scales, an appropriate measure of association has to be selected accordingly. A number of alternatives are available, but we have chosen to use Spearman's rho. This measure expresses the linear relationship between two series of rankings and varies between -1 to 1. It is connected with Pearson's r, in the sense that it can be regarded as the product-moment correlation between two ranks (Blalock 1979:434). For each coefficient, the level of significance will be reported.

However, each measure of association has its own characteristics and problems. Obviously, other alternatives could have been selected. Therefore, a number of tests have been undertaken with the purpose of investigating whether the choice of Spearman's rho influences the results of the analysis. The conclusion to be drawn is that other tested measures, including Kendall's Tau B and Tau C and the interval-scale based Pearson correlation coefficient, provide practically the same results, even if the values of Kendall’s Tau C tend to be slightly smaller. However, these are not less significant than the ones obtained with the other measures.

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3 Throughout the chapter, the following symbols will be used to indicate the level of significance (one-tailed test) for Spearman's rho: * .05-level, ** .01-level and *** .00-level.
Therefore, associations indicated by Spearman’s rho can be regarded as reliable.

Second, apart from bivariate analyzes, hypothesized relationships are investigated one step further through the introduction of control variables. Basically, a common set of control variables are used throughout the analysis. These are listed in Table 7:2.

Table 7:2  Control Variables.

Characteristics of the Individual:

Chairpersons:  
Sex  
Time as Educ. Committee member  
Time as Chairperson  
Party Affiliation  
Position in local politics

Chief Officers:  
Time as school sector employee  
Time as Chief Officer

Characteristics of the Local Authority Area:

Area size  
Population size  
Population density  
Population development 1975-85

Political majority constellation  
Stability of majority constellation

Geographical region  
Distance from the national capital

Note:  Position in local politics concerns whether the Chairperson also is a member of the key decision-making bodies of the local authority, primarily its Policy committee.

In the analysis, continuous control variables are introduced in dichotomized form. As a standard, these are divided along the median.

Third, the chapter ends with a tentative multivariate analysis where the
common influence of the investigated relationships is analyzed. This is undertaken on the basis of multiple regression analyzes, despite these requiring interval scale data. However, for our tentative purpose, this is considered to be sufficient.

Central-Local Government Context

As a first field of possible explanations, the theory in Chapter 3 directed attention towards the central-local government setting of actors in discretionary positions. Two hypotheses were developed relating to this context. It was expected that the efficiency of the control system and the identification with local interests would explain why discretion was apprehended differently.

Our first task is to examine the functioning of controls with regard to Education Committees. Control systems exist within the education sector as well as other sectors of Swedish public administration. Their tasks include investigating whether rules are complied with and goals met, but also, if necessary, to rescind decisions regarded to be out of line. This may involve changing decisions taken locally or reclaiming resources used for purposes other than the ones prescribed.

At the time of study, major controlling functions were performed by the National and Regional Boards of Education (NBE and RBE). The Regional Boards, in particular, were expected to carry out "active surveillance", including supervision and inspection of the schools and other units responsible for implementing national education policies. Another source of control is exercised by the Parliamentary Ombudsmen (JO, Justitieombudsmannen), but their resources are more limited and they are expected to cover the entire field of state and local government administration.

The Education Committees are also subject to checks by the local government auditors. These are politically appointed by the Council and are usually selected mainly from the opposition parties. However, in the day-to-day controls, they are assisted by professional auditors, some of whom are employed by the local authority, others are provided by the regional office of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities.
During recent years, the formal controls undertaken on behalf of the state and the local authorities have gradually changed from the scrutiny of details towards a more supportive and supervisory role (Riberdahl 1984). The local government auditors have become more concerned with questions of efficiency and policy outcome than with checking the figures in the books. Nevertheless, despite the changes, they still retain the task of discovering when rules are not complied with or resources not used in a proper way.

Apart from state and local government units with specific control tasks, an important control system in the Swedish system of government is the citizens’ right to challenge decisions. In the case of Education Committees, a decision may be challenged by any one affected by it and in some cases even by all members of the local authority. If a decision is challenged it is referred to an administrative court, which is likely to discover whether the rules have been exceed.

Finally, Education Committee activities may also be scrutinized by others, not integrated into the formal control systems. Interest organizations such as parents’ organizations and pupils’ associations and, not the least, the trade unions of the school employees, are likely to examine the decisions of the Education Committees as a means of defending their own interests. Mass media such as press and local radio are also expected to perform controlling functions.

Our assumption is that the efficiency of these control systems is important for the amount of discretion seen as available. Therefore, it has been hypothesized (H2) that **the weaker the efficiency of the control system, the larger the amount of discretion available**.

As a measure of the efficiency of the control system, Chairpersons and Chief Officers were asked to assess how likely it would be that a transgression of rules would be discovered. The answers are summarized in Table 7:3.
Table 7:3 Assessment of the Likeliness that a Transgression of Rules is Discovered. Percentages assessing that discovery is very likely or likely.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Form</th>
<th>Chairpersons</th>
<th>Chief Officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Board of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control and surveillance</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Board of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control and surveillance</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary ombudsmen</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government auditors</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens' challenge</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest organizations</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A hypothetical case was presented to the respondents. It was suggested that the Education Committee made a decision with the effect that rules were exceeded. Respondents were asked to assess the likeliness that this would be discovered by each of the control forms, specified above. The response alternatives were very likely, likely, fairly likely and very unlikely.

The question is formulated in a very general way, not specifying what kind of rules the transgression would concern. Nevertheless, a crude estimate is expected to emerge about how the efficiency of the different control instruments is perceived by actors in key positions in Education Committee decision-making.

The efficiency of the different forms were ranked practically in the same way by the two respondent categories. Not surprisingly, the further away the location of the control form, the likelier it is to be regarded as less efficient. Interest organizations, local government auditors and other local control forms are seen as being the most efficient, whereas the Parliamentary ombudsmen and the National Board of Education are seen as less able to discover transgressions. Indeed it may be argued that an Education Committee, intending to exceed the rules must have the affected interest organizations on its side in order to safeguard a successful
outcome. Further, the results indicate that auditors, contrary to what is sometimes believed, are seen as having the necessary insights and competence to perform an efficient control.

However, despite the similarity in ranking, Chairpersons generally believe that it is more likely that a transgression of the rules will be discovered. In particular, the control and surveillance undertaken by the Regional Board of Education is rated differently by the two respondent categories.

Reference to the efficiency of controls is a constantly recurring theme in the interviews. The control by the state and the local government are clearly assessed differently by actors with different views of discretion. Those claiming that discovery is likely often refer to this as an obstacle to exceeding the rules or for making generous interpretations of the contents of the rules. One Chairperson made the following comment:

"Yes, it is practically impossible to exceed the rules. Any attempts in that direction would be discovered, especially by the auditors.

The auditors’ control of rule compliance is fairly thorough. They study the minutes of the Education Committee meetings and compare its decisions with the way in which the rules are formulated. Primarily, I have in mind the auditors from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, but also the politically appointed auditors are capable of performing an efficient control. They are educated in the rules system and its interpretation.

A few years ago, we were subject to a thorough audit. I was surprised to see how well informed the auditors were in school matters. I approve of their supervisory role, because this leaves no element of doubt about our remaining within the rules."

Some of the respondents emphasize the ability of the Regional Boards of Education to perform their surveillance role. To quote a Chief Officer:

"There are several opportunities for the Regional Board of Education in our County to discover any transgression of rules. It is common that they visit us and survey the activities within a particular school management district. The results are reported to the Education Committee."
Reference has also been made to the National Board of Education. In the beginning of the 1960’s, one of the Chief Officers was involved in locally adjusting the content of education to the particular needs appearing because of considerable and unexpected influx of immigrants to the local area. Shortly after the new activities had started, a representative of the NBE informed the local school authorities that these adjustments had no grounds in the regulations. The Chief Officer drew the following conclusion from this event:

"After a study of the regulations, I realized that I had been wrong. We were not allowed to do what we had done. I thought that we should have been permitted to do what was best for the children, but we had to accept the interpretation of the NBE.

Having been involved in an event of this kind, one is very careful in the future not to make too generous interpretations of the rules. One simply becomes more cautious."

Obviously, the particular experiences gained from this event influenced the actor’s view that only a limited amount of discretion is available.

Other respondents make the judgement that discovery is unlikely. In Chapter 5, a Chief Officer was quoted, claiming that the RBE’s "active surveillance" is hardly noticeable and that the auditors are not concerned with controlling compliance with the rules. Another example is the following Chairperson, emphasizing the difficulties involved in controlling the adherence to grant regulations:

"The grants should be the strongest of the national government’s instruments for governing the school system. But in practice, it is impossible for the state authorities to control how these resources are being used. This would require that one of us leaked the information, and I cannot see that anyone of us would do so. Moreover, the handling of central government grants is generally a complex task and, for many people, grant regulations are difficult to grasp."

Respondents have also claimed that, even if a transgression were to be discovered, the state authorities do not possess sufficient means to enforce
compliance with the regulations. To quote one Chief Officer:

"I know that in other local authorities, it may happen that rules are exceeded. This is partly due to a very weak state system of surveillance. The local authorities just shrug their shoulders at a reminder from the Regional Board of Education. Further, reprisals such as withdrawing central government grants, are unusual. I think that, in the long term, it is a disadvantage for the school system that these controls are not enforced."

Apart from state and local government units, it has also been suggested that others, outside the formal systems of controls may check the activities of the Education Committees. These include interest organizations with particular focus on school matters. A Chief Officer argues that trade unions within the school sector are particularly significant:

"There is some scope for exceeding the School Act regulations and the School Ordinance. Generally, such a decision is rescinded if challenged. However, if no one in particular is affected or if the parties involved agree, it may be possible to disregard the rules. If the parents agree, it is even possible to exclude pupils from compulsory education, in spite of this not being permitted by the School Act and School Ordinance.

One case where we have disregarded the School Ordinance concerns the employment of a teacher. One of our teachers is not formally qualified but is very capable. At the end of the term, we should have terminated her contract and advertised the post. However, we wanted to keep the teacher and since the trade union was agreeable, we decided not to declare the post vacant."

Respondents have claimed that the teachers' trade unions are particularly active when it comes to matters dealing with the use of resources. A Chief Officer concludes:

"It is fair to say that the trade unions perform a controlling function in relation to the use of central government grants. They are very keen on controlling that all resources which can be used for education, are spent on that purpose. This can be explained by the present surplus of teachers."
If there was a shortage, this control would be less intensive."

Those emphasizing the control function of interest organizations also tend to view discretion as limited. In sum, the qualitative evidence seems to support our hypothesis of the importance of the efficiency of the control system for discretion.

In addition, the hypothesis has been tested on the quantitative data. The replies, summarized in Table 7:3 have been added together into an index representing the perceived efficiency of the control system\textsuperscript{4}. Correlating this index with the two variables on the scope for disposing of resources, provides no significant relationships. Correlations with the remaining indices representing the dependent variable are reported in Table 7:4.

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Chairpersons’ and Chief Officers’ Perceptions of the Efficiency of the Control System and Discretion. Spearman’s rho.}
\begin{tabular}{lcc}
\hline
Indicator & Chairpersons & Chief Officers \\
\hline
Steering Intention & -.09 & -.05 \\
Scope for Interpretation & -.22** & .07 \\
Exceeding Rules & -.31*** & -.08 \\
Overstepping Grant Regulations & -.20** & -.05 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

The quantitative data analysis clearly supports the hypothesis as far as the Chairpersons are concerned. Chief Officers, on the other hand, seem to be almost unaffected by this variable in their assessment of discretion. Later in the chapter, we investigate further whether this lack of a relationship is consistent.

The general confirmation of the expected relationship for Chairpersons has to be qualified in several respects. As the table shows, the efficiency

\textsuperscript{4} In theory, the index may vary between 0 and 100. The lowest value represents the case when the respondent regards discovery by any of the control forms as very unlikely, and the highest occur when all the control forms are seen as very likely to discover the transgression. In practice, the index for Chairpersons varies between 22 and 90 (mean 54, median 52, quartile deviation 9.5) and for Chief Officers between 24 and 81 (mean 50, median 52, quartile deviation 14.3).
of the control system does not seem to affect the steering intention. However, the expected relationship emerges among certain subgroups, especially among Chairpersons from the northern region, Norrland (rho = -.37**) and those representing the Conservative Party (rho = -.31*). Therefore, this indicator also supports the hypothesis, even if only in the case of specific subgroups.

Further, a closer examination of the specific control forms included in the index shows that some of them are more significant than others as explanations of variation in discretion. Basically, the efficiency of the formal controls undertaken at the initiative of state or local government units, are the ones most closely linked to assumptions concerning the amount of discretion available. Hence, the efficiency of controls by interest organisations, mass media or by citizens challenging decisions, influence to a lesser extent how the scope for choice is perceived. This suggests that actors at Education Committee level are basically oriented upwards rather than towards local interests, when identifying the limits of discretion.

Finally, some Chairpersons are more sensitive regarding the efficiency of the control system than others in their judgements of discretion (Table 7:5). Generally, representing the Social Democrats, or operating in a local authority which is far from the Stockholm area or has rapidly changing political and population conditions reinforces the connection.

To some extent, Conservative Chairpersons are more influenced by the control system when assessing the amount of discretion available. However, this connection is even more apparent for Social Democrats. Perhaps belonging to a party which during the post-war period has formed educational policies at national level, makes Chairpersons more sensitive towards the influence of central controls.
Table 7:5  Chairpersons’ Perceptions of the Efficiency of the Control System and Discretion, Controlling for Other Variables. Spearman’s rho.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator:</th>
<th>Steering Intention</th>
<th>Scope for Interpret.</th>
<th>Exceeding Rules</th>
<th>Overstepping Grant Regul.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall relationship</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>-.31***</td>
<td>-.20**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Controlling for:

**Party Affiliation:**
- Conserv. Party  -.31*  -.28*
- Center Party    
- Social Democrat -.25**  -.44***  -.20**

**Political Stability combined with Population Development 1975-85:**
- stable and slow  -.25*
- unstable and slow
- stable and fast  -.33*  -.36*
- unstable and fast -.30**  -.42***  -.42***

**Distance from the National Capital:**
- short  -.29**  -.25**
- long  -.16*  -.16*  -.36***  -.25**

Note: Only coefficients significant on at least the .05-level in a one-tailed test are reported. The control variables are statistically independent of each other, with two exceptions: Social Democratic Chairpersons are more common in local authorities with slow population growth, and political and population conditions are more stable further from the national capital. However, this does not effect the influence exerted by each of the control variables.

The measure of political stability refers to the situation in the local Council. If Social Democrats and Communists (VPK) together hold less than 42 per cent or more than 58 per cent of the seats, political conditions are regarded as stable. If population development during the whole period 1975-85 has been less than the national average of 1 per cent, it is regarded as slow.

The importance of the efficiency of the control system is also reinforced under certain environmental conditions. Chairpersons operating in an unstable environment seem more dependent on the apparently stable control system, when assessing the amount of discretion available. When conditions are more stable, other factors take over as important. The stability of the environment is measured as a combination of two factors: whether the
political leadership of the Council has as a stable position and the extent to which the population is growing.

In the case of actors situated far from Stockholm, discretion is, on the whole, more likely to be influenced by whether the control system is efficient or not. This intriguing finding is indeed thought-provoking. It suggests that, in an era when modern means of communication have reduced barriers to the dispersal of information and contact between different parts of the country, physical distance still counts. In local authorities located in the periphery, the efficiency of the control system matters for the actors’ assessment whereas it does not have the same importance closer to Stockholm.

Returning to the question of the Chief Officers, it has previously been concluded that they are, generally speaking, not influenced by the efficiency of the control system in their assessment of discretion. A further analysis of subgroups of Chief Officers does not change this general conclusion, however, with one, important exception. The indicator representing the scope for exceeding the rules follows a pattern which, interestingly enough, closely corresponds to the one identified for Chairpersons. First, the combined factors of political stability and population development appear to have the same importance. In local authorities with uncertain political conditions and rapid population growth, i.e. where the Chief Officers’ environment is turbulent, rho is -.26*.

Second, the variable representing distance from the national capital exerts the same influence (rho= -.17*). Hence, there seems to be a common pattern, important for both response categories.

The other side of this coin is, of course, that a national government wanting to increase control in order to reduce discretion, is only likely to be partly successful. Chairpersons seem to be more easily influenced than Chief Officers. Further, among both categories, those operating under stable conditions are likely not to be affected by increases in national government control when they assess the amount of discretion available. Chairpersons representing political parties other than the Social Democrats and operating closer to the capital also seem harder to influence. Therefore, it is suggested that a measure which increases control is a blunt instrument. For that matter, reducing control is also unlikely to affect these categories.
In sum, the hypothesis concerning the relationship between the efficiency of the control system and discretion has been clearly verified for Chairpersons. The control forms emanating from national or local government are particularly important in this respect. In addition, it has been shown that the relationship is even stronger among Chairpersons representing the Social Democratic party and those in local authorities which are far from Stockholm and where conditions are unstable. These environmental conditions also appear as important for Chief Officers, although, the hypothesis is, generally, not supported in the same straightforward way. However, in unstable and peripherally located local authorities, the efficiency of the control system is a significant explanation for their assumptions regarding the possibilities for exceeding the rules.

The next hypothesis about the central-local government context concerns the position of local authorities as mediators of national and local interests. Not least, the Education Committees are expected to adjust national policies to local conditions. However, this contains a potential conflict which is also expected to be reflected in the values of the actors at local level. We have hypothesized (H3) that the actors’ pattern of identification in this respect will influence discretion: the stronger the identification with the local interest and the weaker with national policies, the greater the amount of discretion available.

Unfortunately, with regard to Education Committees, we have no data from the questionnaire studies to support our case. However, at least tentatively, evidence from interviews may be used as a test. In several of the interviews, the relationship with the national level is discussed and patterns of identification are touched upon. Generally, the views presented seem to correspond with the suggestion in the hypothesis. Those regarding the scope for choice as limited often refer to their role as primarily being implementers of national policies. For example, the following Chief Officer is prepared to use his position in order to veto suggestions which may run contrary to national policies:

"The main reason why it is impossible to exceed the rules is that I, in my role as Chief Education Officer, cannot accept such behaviour. My role is to comply with what central government and superior authorities
have stated. I want to have a solid ground to stand on, therefore, one has to keep within the rules."

A different Chief Officer with a similar view, presents his way of vetoing unacceptable decisions in the following way:

"In my role as a public officer, the view that laws and regulations must be complied with, is an important component. If the Education Committee should do anything contrary to the rules, I would do everything I could to stop it. First, I would tell the members that they were about to exceed their powers. If that did not help, I would call for a School Inspector to give them the same information. If, despite this, the Education Committee insisted on making its decision, I would not challenge it, but I am sure others would."

However, other respondents, who identify themselves with the local interest, are more inclined to regard the scope for choice as being considerable. They often have a more critical attitude towards steering from the national level and would prefer that the education system was, to a greater extent, shaped locally. The view of this Chief Officer contrasts with the two previously cited:

"My role is to keep track of rules and regulations for the Education Committee, but also to give hints about when divergencies may be feasible and possible in order to protect the interests of the activities for which we are responsible.

Further, I do not see myself as the long arm of the national level. My task is not primarily to represent national interests in the education system, instead I see myself as in an equal position to other Chiefs of Departments within the local authority."

Other actors with this view have referred to a democratic tradition based on local self-government, expressing a distance from or even a suspiciousness of the central level. In sum, identification with the local level and a critical attitude towards the centre seem to be connected with assumptions that large amounts of discretion are available. Those regarding themselves as agents for national policies tend to perceive discretion differently.
The Local Setting

The analysis so far has concerned explanations connected with the central-local government context. We now shift our focus to the local setting of implementing agents, which, in Chapter 3, was identified as a second field of important explanations. Even if the nationally outlined formal/legal system is similar, other conditions vary, sometimes considerably, between local authorities.

Our point of entry to an analysis of the role of the local setting as an explanation of variation in Education Committee discretion is the population size of the local authority. In line with assumptions behind the local government amalgamation reforms, and as empirically verified in an American context by Berman & Martin (1988), we have hypothesized (H4) that the larger the local authority population, the greater the amount of discretion available. The analysis of the relationship between population size and discretion, presented in Table 7:6, shows that two of the indicators in particular are affected by population size, namely those representing the scope for disposing of resources: the larger the local authority, the less restricted the Education Committee is in the use of the locally financed resources.

Decentralized forms of decision-making with regard to the use of resources can be regarded as an innovation which has gradually been adopted by local authorities during the 1980s (compare Schmidt 1986), in line with the general decentralization trend within the public sector. However, when analyzing this pattern, it is necessary to recognize the assumptions of the implementing actors themselves. Therefore, not only the decisions taken by the Council, but also how these are apprehended by those in charge of Committee decision-making are taken into account in our analysis. This is reflected in the way the index for the scope for disposing of resources has been constructed. Its basis is the rules adopted by each local authority concerning how freely committees may use resources, but the actors’ perceptions of opportunities for exceeding these rules are also recognized (compare Appendix 2).
Table 7:6  Local Authority Population Size and Discretion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Spearman’s rho</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chairpersons’ assessment:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering Intention</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Interpretation</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding Rules</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overstepping Grant Regulations</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Disposing of Resources</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chief Officers’ assessment:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering Intention</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Interpretation</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding Rules</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overstepping Grant Regulations</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Disposing of Resources</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A closer examination reveals that it is not population size alone, but rather this variable combined with population density\(^5\), that most accurately explains variation in the scope for disposing of resources (Table 7:7). Indeed, this finding corroborates results from Schmidt’s (1986) study of patterns of innovation diffusion among Swedish local authorities. Degree of urbanization and population size were among the major variables distinguishing local authorities which adopt innovations at an early stage.

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\(^5\) Defined as the proportion of the population living in villages or towns with at least 200 inhabitants, where the distance between the houses is less than 200 meters. This is the standard definition of population density in Swedish demographic statistics.
Table 7:7 Scope for Disposing of Resources in Combinations of Population Size and Population Density. Percentage with large scope for disposing of resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chairpersons:</th>
<th>Population size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population density (%)</td>
<td>-11 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83-100</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69-82</td>
<td>38.9 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-68</td>
<td>27.6 (29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chief Officers:</th>
<th>Population size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population density (%)</td>
<td>-11 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83-100</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69-82</td>
<td>55.6 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-68</td>
<td>35.3 (34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Values are not reported for cells containing less than 5 cases. The percentages represent the share with values 2 or 3 on the scope for disposing of resources index (see Appendix 2). In Table 7:8, the relationships are expressed in terms of measures of association.

Thus, we can conclude that the scope for disposing of resources is greatest in large, urban local authorities. However, by taking the analysis one step further, we can also investigate whether this relationship is stable under different conditions. The pattern emerging clearly indicates that geographical region is an important line of division. The explanations discovered are particularly relevant in the Norrland region, while the relationship remains unchanged in the southern region, Götaland, and practically vanishes in the central region, Svealand (Table 7:8).
Table 7:8 Scope for Disposing of Resources Related to Population Size and Population Density, Controlling for Geographical Region. Spearman’s rho.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair-persons</th>
<th>Chief Officers</th>
<th>median value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall relationship:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- population size</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- population density</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling for geographical region:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Götaland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- population size</td>
<td>.34***</td>
<td>.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- population density</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svealand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- population size</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- population density</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norrland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- population size</td>
<td>.55***</td>
<td>.44**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- population density</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.49***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Only values significant on at least the .05-level are reported.

Both components of the index of the scope for disposing of resources are important for the appearance of this relationship. An analysis with only the component representing the rules for resource use provides a similar pattern, but correlations are generally lower. The most accentuated geographical pattern appears when the actors’ assessment of whether these rules can be exceeded, is also taken into account.

Basically, the regional differences may be explained by the characteristics of the dominant local authority type. Population size and population density varies between regions (also reported in Table 7:8). In Norrland, the inner part consists of a huge coherent block of adjoining rural authorities with small populations. These are likely to be sufficiently dominant to restrain the adoption of this kind of innovation, probably regarding it as unnecess-
ary change. The few large urban authorities, on the other hand, seem more inclined to keep up with developments among local authorities generally.

In contrast, in the central region, Svealand, small rural authorities are fewer and more scattered. They are more likely to be situated next to a large urban local authority. Accordingly, small rural local authorities do not appear as a separate and coherent block. Instead, influences are likely to go between different, rather than similar kinds of authorities. So, if the extent to which decision-making about resources is decentralized does not follow population size and density in Svealand, what might the relevant explanations then be? As a matter of fact, at least among the control variables tested in this study (compare Table 7:2), none of them appear to provide a satisfactory explanation. Hence, it is the lack of an identifiable pattern which is a feature of the way the innovation has been spread in Svealand. Obviously, further research is required in order to understand the specific characteristics of innovation diffusion among local authorities in that part of the country.

Returning to the other indicators of discretion, i.e. those representing the general scope for choice, as identified in the initial factor analysis, it is obvious that population size has no consistent accuracy as explanation of variation in discretion (Table 7:6). Only for one of the indicators does the expected relationship appear, namely with regard to Chairpersons' assessment of the possibilities to exceed rules (rho=.14*). The relationship is reinforced under certain conditions, particularly when the Chairperson is a Social Democrat (rho=.22**) and when the majority in the Council is narrow (rho=.25**).

However, the most interesting is that when the efficiency of the control system is introduced as an intermediate variable between population size and discretion, the original relationship vanishes. This was suggested by Berman & Martin in an American context and further discussed in the theory section of this study. It was assumed that it is easier to exceed rules in large local authorities because the control system in these is less efficient. As far as is indicated by Chairpersons' assumptions about the possibilities to exceed rules, this is also what happens in our empirical case (Figure 7:1).
Nevertheless, in spite of this partial verification, we still have to accept that there is no overall support for the hypothesis. The negative relationship between population size and Chief Officers’ assessment of the possibilities to exceed rules (compare Table 7:6) underlines this conclusion. Contrary to our hypothesis, this suggests that exceeding rules is easier in local authorities with small populations.

Are any other features of the local setting important for how discretion is apprehended? The result of our analysis in this respect is negative. Factors, such as the considerable variation in population density between local authorities and the size of the area, which clearly influence how educational matters are organized and shaped, have not affected how discretion is perceived. Nor do political variables, such as the political majority of the local Council or the stability of this constellation have an effect. It is, however, a different matter that these variables, to a varying extent, appear as control variables, and thus, specify conditions where other explanations of discretion either disappear or are reinforced.

The size of the resources available to the Education Committee can also be seen as a component of its local setting. Is there anything to suggest that a particular relationship can be expected between this variable and discretion? Clark claims that "(t)he greater the resources available to local political leaders, the greater the local community autonomy" (Clark 1974:38). However, in relation to discretion, nothing seems to suggest that the amount of resources should follow any particular pattern. On the contrary, if resources are seen as an expression of an actor’s capacity to
act, and discretion as his/her freedom of action, Lundquist’s autonomy model (discussed in Chapter 2) suggests that the two components should be independent of each other.

A number of different measures have been developed for the test of the relationship. The first is the total amount of resources spent on education in the local authority, divided by the number of pupils. This provides a measure which takes into account the size of the educational task. The second way is also based on resources per pupil, but holds local authority area and population density constant. Hence, compensation is made for the higher costs involved in providing education in sparsely populated areas. For example, in the inner parts of Northern Sweden, circumstances result in more expensive school transport, higher costs for compensation to teachers for the colder climate (kallortstillägg) and higher revenue costs for maintaining and heating school buildings (Statistiska Centralbyråns 1985a, compare also Johansson 1982). In the third, the actors themselves have been asked to assess the relative size of the locally financed resources available for education. None of these tests have provided any significant correlations, which leads us to conclude that the size of the allocated resources cannot explain differences in discretion.

In conclusion, the local setting of the Education Committee has appeared as a powerful explanation only in relation to the scope for disposing of resources. This dimension of discretion varies according to local authority population size and density and the relationship is particularly strong in

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6 The concept of resources specifically concerns the money allocated for the purpose of financing revenue expenditure (see further Chapter 6).

7 The measure is based on expenditure data from 1985 for all local authorities, gathered by the National Bureau of Statistics (Statistiska Centralbyråns 1986a). The validity of this data has been questioned, since different principles are used by local authorities to classify costs, while uniformity is a requirement for accurate financial statistics. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that it can be used as a crude measure (Magnusson 1983). More recent investigations, such as Svenska Kommunförbundets et al (1990), attempt to overcome these problems.

8 The measure is the residual obtained in a regression analysis with costs per pupil as the dependent variable and measures of area size and population density as the independent variables.

9 Chairpersons and Chief Officers were asked to assess whether their Education Committee received more, less or the same amount of locally financed resources as other local authorities of approximately similar size and structure and performing similar educational tasks.
northern Sweden. Among the remaining indicators of discretion, Chairpersons’ assumptions about possibilities to exceed rules are positively related to population size, even if a closer analysis shows that there is an intermediate variable, the efficiency of the control system, which can account for this relationship. However, apart from that, neither the relationship between population size and discretion, nor any other examined feature of the local setting, including its demography, geographical location, political conditions or amount of resources, can provide any explanations of variation.

If the local setting is thought of not only as characteristics of the local authority area, but also of the closer surrounding of the actor him/herself, further explanations of variation in discretion may be discovered. One of our hypotheses deal with the organizational culture in the setting of implementing agents. Each organization, it has been claimed, has a particular culture, consisting of dominant ideas and notions about, for example, the organization’s function, internal divisions and feasible behaviour of the individuals within it. In our case, the organizational culture of the Education Committee and the connected Education Department is in focus.

It is expected that assumptions regarding discretion have, to some extent, developed in the context of the organizational culture of these units. This culture is expected to contribute to the development of coherence within the organization. We have also argued that coherence is reinforced if the organization is under pressure, for example in a struggle for resources. Therefore, we have hypothesized (H5) that Politicians and Officers in the same organizational unit make similar assumptions about the amount of discretion available to their organization.

A straightforward way of establishing whether or not, in the case of Education Committee Chairpersons and Chief Education Officers, assumptions are similar is simply to correlate indices dealing with the same aspect (Table 7:9). The indicator representing the scope for disposing of resources is omitted from the analysis, since it is constructed as an index containing a variable which is common for both respondent categories (see Appendix 2). Hence, correlations between these indices for Chairpersons and Chief Officers would lead to superficially high values. Instead, the other

---

10 The indicator representing the scope for disposing of resources is omitted from the analysis, since it is constructed as an index containing a variable which is common for both respondent categories (see Appendix 2). Hence, correlations between these indices for Chairpersons and Chief Officers would lead to superficially high values. Instead, the other
Table 7:9  Similarity in Discretion between Chairpersons and Chief Officers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Spearman’s rho</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steering Intention</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Interpretation</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding Rules</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overstepping Grant Regulations</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding Rules for Disposing of Resources</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, the figure illustrates the failure of the hypothesis. Contrary to what we would have expected, these two categories of actors are unlikely to consult each other about the limits set by the rules system. Perhaps the basic differences in their roles are reflected in this result. The Chief Officer’s task is to be an expert on the formal conditions of decision-making, whereas the Chairperson is supposed to represent the popular will.

Rules governing the disposal of resources, on the other hand, clearly follow the expected pattern. These rules are set by the local Council, and concern the use of locally financed resources. Hence, both rules and resources derive from sources outside the education sector. In such matters, the division of tasks between Chairpersons and Chief Officers may well be less clear-cut. In the common task of promoting education sector interests, there is obviously an exchange of views. This is clearly in line with our assumptions behind the hypothesis.

However, the other indicators of discretion are also apprehended similarly, but only within particular subgroups of actors, although no subgroup of general importance appears. Rather, as is illustrated in Table 7:10, the lack of common traits is the main characteristic.

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variable contained in the index, representing the actors’ assumptions about the possibilities to exceed the rules for disposing of locally provided resources, is included in the analysis.
Table 7:10 Similarity in Discretion between Chairpersons and Chief Officers, Controlling for Gender and Population Development. Spearman's rho.

Indicator: A B C D E

Overall relationship .23***

Controlling for:

The Gender of the Chairperson:
- female .75*** -.44**
- male .13* .14* .25***

Population Development 1975-85:
- slow (<1 %) .28**
- fast .23** .21* .19*

Note: The indicators represented by the letters are the steering intention (A), the scope for interpretation (B), the possibilities to exceed rules (C), to overstep grant regulations (D) and to exceed rules governing the disposal of resources (E). Only coefficients with one-tailed significance on at least the .05-level are reported. The control variables are not interrelated.

The gender of the Chairperson is definitely an important variable when it comes to specifying the conditions under which Chairpersons and Chief Officers make similar assessments. Its more precise effect varies between indicators. Chairpersons and Officers tend to agree on three of the five aspects of discretion when the Chairperson is male. However, when it concerns the scope for interpretation, it is more likely for a common judgement to occur if the Chairperson is a woman. Further, and most surprisingly, when the Chairperson is female, the two respondent categories are very likely to disagree on the possibilities to overstep grant regulations, i.e. using grants for purposes other than the ones prescribed by central government. It is very difficult to suggest a reasonable interpretation of this pattern. Obviously, further research is required.

The figure also indicates that similar assumptions occur under certain rates of population development. However, this pattern is not easily
interpreted, even though there is a clear difference between indicators dealing with local resources and those which concern rules generally. When population growth is slow, local resources are likely to be fairly stable over time, hence making it possible for similar assumptions to develop. In contrast, agreement in relation to other rules is more likely under fast changing, dynamic conditions, where the rules system may represent a stabilising factor.

Finally, it could have been expected that the hypothesis would be more valid in local authorities where both the Chairperson and Chief Officer have long experience of their posts, as this would have provided them with more opportunities to develop common assumptions. However, no such relationship has been detected. If similar assumptions develop, they do so independently of whether these actors have worked together for a short or a long time.

To conclude, the hypothesis that Chairpersons and Chief Officers connected with the same Education Committee make similar judgements about the amount of discretion available, is not wholeheartedly supported. There is some evidence in favour of it, as possibilities to use locally financed resources differently than prescribed tend to be assessed in a similar way. Further, positive relationships also occur for other aspects, but only among subgroups of respondents. However, the evidence presented is not sufficiently strong to support the assumption that the organizational culture has a general importance for all aspects of discretion.

Characteristics of the Individual Actor

So far, the empirical test has concerned environmental factors, some of which deal with the local setting, others with the central-local government context. The latter has proved especially fruitful, but we also expect that there are relevant explanations focusing more directly on conditions which vary with individual actors.

In our theory of local discretion, two features were selected which were expected to be particularly relevant, namely time in office and gender. Beginning with time in office, it was hypothesized (H6) that **the shorter**
the experience of the steering system, the greater the amount of discretion perceived to be available. We expected that the first impressions and experiences of the system of government as it functions within the relevant sector would also influence the actor’s view of discretion later in life, despite changes occurring in the steering system. Hence, a certain amount of inertia is expected to characterize the actors in the system. As regards Education Committees, the hypothesis is supported by the evidence presented in Table 7:11. Apparently, the scope for disposing of resources is not related to time in office, whereas variables scoring high on the factors concerning the general scope for choice, are clearly affected by the length of time as an Education Committee member or a school sector employee. The index for the steering intention seems not be significantly related to time in office. However, an analysis within subgroups of geographical regions shows that this indicator is also relevant, but only among Chairpersons and Chief Officers in Norrland. In this region, rho is -.45*** for both categories.

Table 7:11 Chairpersons’ and Chief Officers’ Time in Office and Discretion. Spearman’s rho.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Chairpersons</th>
<th>Chief Officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steering Intention</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Interpretation</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding Rules</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.21***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overstepping Grant Regulations</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Disposing of Resources</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the assumptions behind the hypothesis are valid, there should be a significant difference between actors entering the system before the middle of the 1970s and those socialized into it after the appearance of the first decentralization reforms. Since the study of the Chairpersons was undertaken in 1986, those with more than 10 years of experience should differ from the others. As a matter of fact, as far as Chairpersons are
concerned, a closer examination shows that exactly ten years turns out to be a crucial break-point. In Figure 7:2, this is illustrated for the indicator representing the possibilities to overstep the grant regulations.

![Graph showing Chairpersons' Length of Experience as Education Committee Members and Index for Possibilities to Overstep Grant Regulations.](image)

Figure 7:2 Chairpersons' Length of Experience as Education Committee Members and Index for Possibilities to Overstep Grant Regulations. Mean values.

The relationship between a Chairperson’s length of experience and discretion is reinforced among particular sets of actors (Table 7:12). The time point at which the initial impressions of the system of government are gained is clearly important for male, but not for female Chairpersons. This finding will be returned to as the specific relationship between gender and discretion is discussed later in the chapter. The role of party affiliation is also intriguing. The relationship is stronger if the Chairperson is a Social
Democrat, but does not appear among representatives of other political parties.

Table 7:12 Chairpersons’ Length of Experience as Education Committee Members and Discretion, Controlling for Other Variables. Spearman’s rho.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator:</th>
<th>Steering Intention</th>
<th>Scope for Interpret.</th>
<th>Exceeding Rules</th>
<th>Overstepping Grant Regul.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall relationship</td>
<td>- .16*</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- female</td>
<td>- .20**</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Affiliation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social Democrat</td>
<td>- .17*</td>
<td>-.30***</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Only coefficients with one-tail significance on at least the .05-level are reported. The control variables are not interrelated.

Our interpretation is that the initial experiences of the steering system must have made lasting impressions on Social Democratic Chairpersons. Indeed, these impressions must have been so strong that they have withstood later changes in Social Democratic policies concerning decentralization. Over the last decades, the party’s position has shifted from reluctance to commitment. As late as the beginning of the 1970s, a major obligatory local government amalgamation reform was implemented by a Social Democratic government whereas decentralization policies, such as those suggested by the Center Party, were ridiculed. However, in 1975, the principle of decentralization was added in a revised version of the Social Democratic party programme. Nowadays, the party advocates decentralist policies within all sectors of public affairs. However, Social Democratic Education
Committee Chairpersons, with experience dating from the pre-decentralization era are still influenced by the party’s position at that time.

Turning to the Chief Officers, Table 7:11 showed that the relationships between length of experience and discretion are similar to the ones observed for Chairpersons. However, with regard to Chief Officers, the particular time at which decentralization reforms occurred does not offer any valid explanation. For all but four of them, their original experiences as school sector employees date from the period before 1975. In fact, 80 per cent of them started their employment prior to 1960. Instead, the relationship may be seen as the effect of a more long-term change in values, not connected with the recent reform movement.

Also in the case of the Chief Officers, the importance of the length of experience is stronger under certain conditions (Table 7:13). However, these are not the same as the ones relevant for Chairpersons. The relationship does not appear among Chief Officers with long experience of this post, but instead, is stronger among those with shorter experience as Chief Officers. This seems to imply that other experiences and impressions become more important the longer the length of tenure.

Further, as illustrated in the table, there is a strong tendency for the relationship to appear in local authorities with a stagnant population, even if one of the indicators offers a different result. We would suggest that a stable environment provides more scope for the original experiences of the steering system to influence the judgement of the present conditions. Obviously, stable conditions in the local area generate fewer challenges to the original picture of the system of government. In a dynamic or turbulent environment, actors have more reason to rethink their initial impressions.
Table 7:13  Chief Officers’ Length of Experience as School Sector Employee and Discretion, Controlling for Other Variables. Spearman’s rho.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator:</th>
<th>Steering Intention</th>
<th>Scope for Interpret.</th>
<th>Exceeding Rules</th>
<th>Overstepping Grant Regul.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.21***</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience as Chief Officer:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- short</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.27***</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- long</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Development 1975-85:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- slow (&lt;1 %)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.16*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The median, which is 11 years, has been used to distinguish short from long Chief Officer experience. Only coefficients with one-tailed significance on at least the .05-level are reported. The control variables are not interrelated.

So far, it has been taken for granted that the relationship between the length of experience and discretion reflects differences in conditions at the point in time when the first experiences of the system governing education were gained. However, at least two alternative interpretations are available. First, instead of expecting perceptions of discretion to be stable once established, it may be assumed that the relationship reflects a change taking place over time. According to this line of thought, newly elected members of the Education Committee as well as new employees within the school sector would generally have great expectations about the scope for choice available. However, as time goes on, they experience the problems involved in handling a professionalized organization dealing with knowledge (compare Sannerstedt 1988). Previous expectations are seen as juvenile illusions and are replaced by a recognition of the difficulties.

A second alternative would regard the relationship as an effect of the
extent to which actors decide not to stand for reelection or to change their jobs. This would suggest that Chairpersons and Chief Officers who consider that large amounts of discretion are available are more likely to leave their posts after only a short period. Perhaps they became disillusioned, as expectations met reality. It would mainly be those regarding discretion as limited who would remain. However, the data available in our study is not sufficient for testing whether any of these ways of reasoning are more accurate than the assumption of a value system which is stable for each actor once it has been established.

Nevertheless, despite the scope for different interpretations, it can be concluded that our hypothesis has clearly been supported by the evidence presented. Short experience from the education sector is conducive for assumptions that large amounts of discretion are available and vice versa. The relationship is particularly strong among male and Social Democratic Chairpersons and for Chief Officers with short experience in this position and who are operating in a stable environment. It has also been shown that decentralization reforms are likely to have had an effect on the Chairpersons’s assumptions about the amount of discretion available, while those with experience as Education Committee members dating from the pre-decentralization era seem to be influenced to a lesser extent. Therefore, at least for Chairpersons, it is reasonable to interpret the relationship in terms of influences from the steering ideology which dominated at the time when the initial experiences were gained.

The final hypothesis deals with the actors’ gender. In the theory section, we referred to findings showing that women, to a larger extent than men, claim that rules should be complied with. Also, we argued that in organisational settings which have traditionally been dominated by men, women in leading positions have a double system of barriers to handle. They face not only the performance of the normal tasks, but also an organizational culture which is basically male-dominated. Therefore, we hypothesized (H7) that female actors, in leading positions, within an organizational unit in local politics or administration are more likely to assume that little discretion is available to this unit.

The assumptions behind the hypothesis seems highly relevant for Education Committees and Education Departments. At the time of the
study, 84 per cent of the Education Committee Chairpersons and 97 per cent of the Chief Education Officers were men. It is also likely that most other senior officers in the Education Departments are men. Hence, the organizational culture of Education Committees may be conceived of as clearly male dominated.

When testing the hypothesis on our data, we will use a combination of measures. Spearman's rho is computed, but in addition, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test will be performed, which is more appropriate as a measure of the relationship between an ordinal scale and a dichotomy, in this case gender. The test produces the statistic Z, on the basis of which it will be concluded whether the ordinal distributions are significantly different between the two groups in the dichotomy (Blalock 1979).

The investigation shows that the indicators for **scope for disposing of resources** are not affected by the Chairpersons' gender. However, the hypothesis is empirically supported by the two groups of indicators representing the Chairpersons' and the Chief Officers' general **scope for choice**. Data for Chairpersons is presented in Table 7:14.

**Table 7:14 The Gender of Chairpersons and Discretion.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>Mann-Whitney</th>
<th>Spearm.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering Intention</td>
<td>20.2 (39)</td>
<td>27.2 (185)</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Interpretation</td>
<td>42.2 (32)</td>
<td>43.2 (172)</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding Rules</td>
<td>22.3 (36)</td>
<td>29.4 (178)</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overstepping Grant Regulations</td>
<td>31.3 (38)</td>
<td>37.7 (177)</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Probabilities for Z and rho are one-tailed.
The statistical measures do not provide any high values, but the conclusion must be that female Chairpersons tend to assume that the discretion available to Education Committees is more limited\textsuperscript{11}. Three of the indices provide significant differences. In Table 7:15, these are analyzed further with respect to the influence of the control variables.

Table 7:15 The Gender of Chairpersons and Discretion, Controlling for Other Variables. Mann-Whitney Z and Spearman's rho.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator:</th>
<th>Steering</th>
<th>Exceeding</th>
<th>Overstepping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Grant Regul.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-W Z</td>
<td>M-W Z</td>
<td>M-W Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prob rho</td>
<td>prob rho</td>
<td>prob rho</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall relationship</td>
<td>2.03 .02</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>2.19 .01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Controlling for:

Experience as Education Committee member:
- short 1.93 .03 | .19* | 2.61 .00 | .25** | 2.28 .01 | .22**
- long

Party Affiliation:
- Conserv. 2.51 .01 | .38** | 3.03 .00 | .46*** | 1.89 .03 | .28*
- other

Political Stability combined with Population Development 1975-85:
- stable/slow 2.19 .01 | .27* | 1.70 .04 | .21* | 2.05 .02 | .25*
- unstable/slow 1.74 .04 | .28* |
- stable/fast
- unstable/fast

Note: Only coefficients significant on at least the .05-level in a one-tailed test are reported. Experience is regarded to be short if it is less than 10 years. The measure of political stability and population development is explained in Table 7:5. The control variables are not interrelated.

\textsuperscript{11} The same relationship appears among Chief Officers. However, since only seven of them were female, it is not meaningful to present a corresponding table for this category.
Tables 7:12 and 7:15 indicate that gender and length of experience not only explain variation in discretion, but they are also relevant as control variables. Therefore, we will further analyze the combined influence of these two variables. A fairly consistent picture emerges among most of the indicators, which is illustrated for one of them in Table 7:16.

**Table 7:16** Possibilities to Exceed Grant Regulations in Combinations of Gender and Length of Experience among Chairpersons. Mean values on index.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of experience</th>
<th>Sex:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short (&lt; 10 years)</td>
<td>29.9 (24)</td>
<td>42.8 (83)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long</td>
<td>33.8 (14)</td>
<td>32.9 (92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences between the sexes are reinforced among Chairpersons with short experience but disappear as experience grows. Indeed, the analysis indicates that male Chairpersons with short experience form a category significantly different from the other three. However, to accurately interpret these results, requires more thorough investigations. Nevertheless, at least three different hypotheses may be considered, corresponding to the alternative ways in which the relationship between time in office and discretion have been interpreted.

One way of reasoning would take as its starting point that an actor’s assumption of discretion is stable, once it has been established and that this usually takes place in conjunction with the initial impressions of Education Committee decision-making. However, male Chairpersons with short experience are more influenced by decentralization reforms and connected changes in dominant value systems than their female counterparts, which may be explained in terms of the previously mentioned theory of double barriers. Operating under these conditions, female Chairpersons do not perceive the scope for choice as being as extensive as is assumed by male Chairpersons.

A second alternative hypothesis would see each individual’s assumption
of discretion as something that changes over time. Male Chairpersons enter the system with a belief that there is considerable scope for choice, but are forced to modify their position with increasing experience. Female Chairpersons, on the other hand, gain their initial experiences in a double barriers situation, and therefore, from the beginning already have a more restrained view of the scope available in Education Committee decision-making. Obviously, women with longer experience find no reason to change these initial assumptions. Perhaps their experience confirms the impression that there is only limited scope for choice.

The final alternative hypothesis is based on the assumption that those who enter Education Committees with the view that discretion is considerable, are likely to be shortlived as Chairpersons. Those who stay have a more restrained view of the possibilities available. However, this seems to be valid only for male Chairpersons, as the female, because of the double barriers to which they are subject, are unlikely to view discretion as considerable from the beginning. Unfortunately, our study does not contain the data necessary to test these alternative hypotheses. Nevertheless, it is an intriguing task for further research.

The relationship between gender and discretion is also affected by whether or not the Chairperson belongs to the Conservative Party. Returning to Table 7:15, no significant differences between the sexes can be noted among Chairpersons representing other parties, while differences are considerable among Conservative Party Chairpersons. Our interpretation is that traditional values on the role of the sexes are reinforced by the presence of a conservative ideology.

The domination of traditional values can also explain why the relationship is stronger in local authorities characterized by stable political conditions and slow population growth. We can assume that stability is conducive to the development of a traditional view on the roles of the sexes, which also seems to reinforce how discretion is perceived.

In sum, the hypothesis concerning the role played by the actor’s gender has been confirmed by the data. Moreover, the relationship is reinforced among Chairpersons with short experience of education matters, those representing the Conservative Party and those operating under stable conditions in terms of politics and population development. Hence, where
traditional values on the roles of the sexes can be expected to flourish, the relationship is stronger. Again, the question of whether female Chairpersons do things differently than men lies outside the focus of this study. However, at a different level of the educational structure, namely among school administrators, American evidence suggests that there is a specific female culture among women administrators, which is different from the male (Shakeshaft 1987).

Conclusions

How is it possible for actors, formally in similar positions on the Education Committee level, to assess the amount of discretion available to the committee so differently? This question has acted as a guide for the empirical analysis in this chapter concerning the influences on discretion in practice. The analysis has focused on testing six hypotheses, which were developed in the theory section of the thesis.

Initially in the chapter, it was concluded that discretion empirically consists of three dimensions. These were labelled the scope for disposing of resources; the Chairpersons’ general scope for choice; and the Chief Officers’ general scope for choice. It was also expected that the multi-dimensionality of the concept would make it unlikely that all hypotheses would be relevant for all three dimensions.

The empirical test has clearly verified this assumption. The Scope for disposing of resources appears to vary with population size and density, whereas the other variables tested are not significant. In contrast, the Chairpersons’ general scope for choice has very little to do with the local setting. Instead, explanations have been found in the central-local government relationships and in traits varying with the individual actor. Also the Chief Officers’ general scope for choice seems practically unaffected by the characteristics of the local area. Instead, the individual characteristics of the Chief Officers seem generally to be the most relevant explanations.

In conclusion, several interesting and important features of the pattern underlying the variation in discretion have been discovered. However, much is left to be accounted for and, therefore, our study may be seen as a first
attempt to approach a previously uninvestigated field of political and administrative reality.

In order to get an impression of the extent to which these investigated relationships together account for the variation in discretion, a test has been undertaken, using multiple regression analysis. However, this test has to be regarded as tentative since the dependent variable is measured on an ordinal scale level and regression analyzes require interval data. Nevertheless, with the indices as dependent variables and the explanations with the highest correlation coefficients as independent variables, multiple regression analyzes provide an $R^2$ ranging from .04 to .14 for Chairpersons and from .02 to .12 for Chief Officers. There is a slight tendency for the variables tested to explain more in the case of Chairpersons than Chief Officers. The highest values are obtained with regard to the possibilities to exceed the rules.

A further analysis offers additional insights into the relevance of the suggested explanations. Multiple regression analyzes undertaken within subgroups of actors provide $R^2$ up to .46 among Chairpersons, and to .26 among Chief Officers. This suggests that the investigated explanations are highly relevant, especially in combination with other variables. These variables point out certain subgroups of actors for whom the explanations are particularly valid. The most important subgroups are female Chairpersons ($R^2$ ranging from .18 to .45), Chairpersons representing the Conservative Party ($R^2$ ranging from .11 to .46) Chairpersons and Chief Officers with short experience ($R^2$ .02 to .21) and actors from the Norrland region ($R^2$ ranging from .07 to .45).

In conclusion, even if a general pattern has been found, our explanations are particularly relevant for certain subgroups. Therefore, there is much left to account for. This is a challenging task for further research. Our analysis has not only identified important explanations of variation in discretion; it also points out where it is fruitful to continue the investigations. Hence, future research should focus more directly on the groups for which the hypotheses appear to have been less relevant. Especially in the case of male Chairpersons and those representing parties other than the Conservatives and for actors with long experience and from regions other than Norrland, there must be important explanations, waiting to be discovered.
Advancing the Theoretical Analysis of Discretion

Studies of discretion of this kind, attempting to investigate the phenomenon on a nation-wide basis from an actors’ perspective, have been very rare to date. Despite its obvious relevance for the understanding of the conditions under which local decision-making takes place and the working of public administration generally, this focus has only attracted the attention of scholars to a very limited extent. Very little theory is available specifically dealing with our field of study. Therefore, before starting the journey into this previously unchartered land, it was regarded as necessary to clarify the theoretical position of, and assumptions behind, our research. Our point here is that the theory of discretion developed in this process has a more general relevance than as merely a guiding tool in this particular study.

The concept of discretion itself has been specified mainly in relation to the concept of autonomy and an actor-structure context. Discretion and autonomy both concern a scope for choice or action. Discretion, however, is the scope for choice available to actors in formally subordinate positions and deals with the relationship vis-à-vis their superiors. Autonomy, on the other hand, does not presuppose any such formal hierarchical setting. Further, discretion is seen as corresponding to only one of the dimensions of autonomy, namely with the actors’ freedom of action, and not the dimension concerning the capacity to act. Therefore, discretion is regarded as a more limited concept than autonomy, but nevertheless related to it.

We have also argued that theoretical approaches to the study of
discretion may be distinguished in relation to two aspects. First, since
discretion, as we define it, presupposes a formal hierarchy, it is argued that
the outlook point vis-à-vis this hierarchy, is one criteria. Basically, the
question is whether a perspective from the top or from the bottom of this
hierarchical relationship is adopted. Second, the ontological/epistemological
basis of a study also represents a separate dimension. This is a principal
line of division within the social sciences generally. Theories are
characterized by being more or less subjectivist or objectivist, depending
on their basic assumptions of what reality is and how one is to reach
knowledge about it.

The theoretical basis of our study is an actors’ perspective, in the
meaning that discretion is seen as ultimately depending on the
interpretations made by actors in discretionary positions. The theory adopts
a view looking upwards from the bottom in a hierarchical relationship and
occupies an intermediate position on the subjective-objective scale. In line
with this perspective, it was hypothesized that discretion, as perceived by
actors, would vary, despite similar formal/legal structures. This has also
been empirically verified with regard to Education Committees. However,
when attempting to identify a pattern behind this variation, available
theories failed to offer any substantial help. At a general level, basic ideas
in socialisation theory could be used as a starting point, suggesting that
conditions in the actors’ social context should be examined. However, very
limited guidance was available to enable us to more specifically state in
this particular analysis, what the relevant conditions might be. Therefore,
a basically inductive method of theory development was used, relying on
our own and others’ empirical observations. This resulted in the emergence
of a number of hypotheses which concerned three fields of possible
explanations. It was expected that the central-local government context, the
local setting and the actors’ individual traits would all be important.

On the basis of the empirical analysis of Education Committee
discretion, it should be possible to develop our theory one step further, not
least as regards the relevance of the suggested hypotheses. Generally, the
local setting appeared to have limited explanatory value, even though
population size and density are important for variation in the scope for
disposing of resources. Instead, characteristics connected to central-local
government relationships, such as the efficiency of the control system, together with individual traits such as length of experience and gender, were the ones which proved to be most fruitful. Further, despite not being the focus of any particular hypothesis, interview results suggest that more qualitative aspects such as basic values and beliefs and the actors’ personal experiences, add valuable information to the understanding of how assumptions of discretion have developed. Hence, the analysis suggests that theory development, with regard to a pattern of influences on variation in discretion, should concentrate more on traits varying with individual actors and the central-local government context, than with the local setting.

Also, in other respects, the empirical analysis has made it necessary to further specify initial assumptions. From the point of view of testing the hypotheses, the analysis can be regarded as, on the whole, fruitful. Major characteristics of the pattern behind variation in discretion have been revealed. However, the analysis has also shown that these explanations are more relevant in combination with other variables, i.e. under certain conditions. The suggested explanations appear to be particularly relevant if actors are female, have short experience, represent the Conservative Party or operate in the Norrland region. Therefore, future research should focus on further investigating situations where the actors have other characteristics, than those mentioned. Continuing theory development should aim at reaching a more complete understanding of the processes behind the development of assumptions of discretion.

Governing Education in Sweden

The system of governing education in Sweden has undergone a major restructuring during the last 15 years. A traditionally centralized and standardized system has changed as power and responsibilities have been transferred downwards and a greater scope for local variation has been provided. General frameworks have replaced detailed regulation. Resources allocated for specific purposes have been merged into larger block grants. Increasingly, nationally set goals have been emphasized as a steering device.
The empirical data analyzed in this thesis was collected in the middle of the 1980s and, therefore, mainly relates to a specific period during this process of change. At the beginning of the 1980s, it was sometimes believed that educational decentralization had reached its optimal point and that the further transfer of power and responsibilities would seriously threaten basic principles in the Swedish system of education. However, the expected halt has not occurred. On the contrary, the developments occurring at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s suggest that, in certain respects, changes within the education sector are in the forefront in public sector decentralization in Sweden. This can no longer be interpreted as a spill-over from events taking place within other sectors of public administration. Rather, qualitatively new elements have been brought into the reform process.

The abolition of the previous central and regional administrative superstructure and its replacement with a new organisation which is considerably smaller and which has only limited functions, may be seen in this light. This drastic step, hitherto unparalleled in other sectors of public administration, was made with reference to the decentralization process, which was seen as making large central units superfluous. Hence, at the present stage, educational decentralization may well be seen as performing an experimental role in the decentralization development within Swedish public administration.

Another feature of the on-going restructuring, and clearly connected with decentralization, is the greater emphasis on steering devices dealing with the output side of local education. Previously, reliance was mainly on regulating the inputs in the process by specifying instructions, such as detailed rules, for implementing agents. Regulations still remain, but to some extent they have been replaced by broad frameworks and goals, which only outline in general terms what local education authorities, schools and teachers are expected to do. This is combined with softer forms of steering, attempting to influence the ideas and values of those at the implementing end.

Hence, the new system stresses the outputs of education. Central government controls have been shifting towards a greater emphasis on the assessment of the results. Indicators have been developed in order to
facilitate the comparison of educational performance, resource use and goal fulfilment between schools as well as between local authorities.

Our point here is that these major changes are likely to cause considerable uncertainty among implementing agents, not least with regard to what their tasks are and their room for manoeuvre is. Previous limits have been altered and what the new ones are is not altogether clear. Further, as has been described in Chapter 1, the related general problems of governing the welfare state are likely to reinforce this uncertainty.

Hence, the development taking place during recent years has made the focus on discretion from the actors' point of view increasingly important. When the limits to discretion are vague and changing, it is highly relevant to consult the implementing actors themselves for an answer to the question of what the available scope for choice is. Obviously, the research problem in focus in this study is still policy relevant and topical, perhaps to an even greater extent than in the mid 1980s, when our empirical investigations were undertaken.

With no empirical data available for the last few years, conclusions about how recent changes have affected Education Committee discretion must be regarded as highly tentative. Nevertheless, in the light of the analysis undertaken in this study, we might suggest a number of probable lines of development.

One likely tendency is that we should expect local variation to be even greater. Our study has shown that Education Committee discretion, as perceived by actors, varies despite similar formal/legal structures. In terms of rules, formally defined roles, specified functions and tasks, these committees are subject to the same conditions. Nevertheless, the actors' perceptions of the scope for choice vary considerably.

There is reason to believe that this variation has increased even further. The limits set by the formal/legal structure have become vaguer and, therefore, discretion is even more likely to be apprehended differently by different actors. As our study shows, some will keep to what they perceive as the safe ground and confine themselves to previously established limits. Others will be more inclined to take advantage of the new opportunities and extend what they perceive to be the limits of choice.

In our study, variation in discretion has also been observed among
Education Committees in a very specific respect. Their scope for disposing of resources is greater if they are located in large, densely populated areas and smaller if they belong to sparsely populated rural authorities. Partly, this reflects differences between local authorities in terms of the rules set for regulating how freely allocated resources can be disposed. However, account has also been taken of how these rules are apprehended by actors at Education Committee level.

Whether variation follows size and density varies between geographical regions. In Svealand, no such pattern appears. In Götaland it remains at the same strength as in the country as a whole. In the Norrland region, on the other hand, the relationship is strongly reinforced. To a greater extent than anywhere else, a large urbanized population means a less restricted use of resources.

Our study has shown that, during the 1980s, an increasing number of local authorities have provided their committees with greater freedom in terms of scope for the disposition of allocated resources. We suggest that the geographical pattern indicates fundamental differences between the Swedish regions with regard to the way this innovation has been spread. In the North, small, rural local authorities dominate much of the inner parts of the region. They form a coherent force of their own, able to withstand new ideas about more decentralized forms of resource use and collectively resist what they regard as unnecessary changes. In Svealand, on the other hand, small, rural local authorities are fewer and more evenly distributed. Hence, these are more likely to be influenced by larger, neighbouring local authorities.

We suggest that, in correspondence with the general trend within Swedish public administration, it is likely that the process of decentralization within local authorities has continued after the period of study.

Empirical results from this study may, in addition, shed light on the working of the system of steering, as it has developed during recent years. Firstly, it should be expected that there are problems with regard to steering by rules. Swedish education is still governed by a comprehensive rules system. In spite of the official rhetoric claiming that there has been a major shift resulting in a fundamentally different system based on governing by
goals and broad frameworks, formal regulations still retain a strong position.

Our study has shown that, in several respects, rules as steering devices are apprehended differently by actors formally in similar positions. This includes both the steering intention behind them i.e. whether rules are basically seen as nonstatutory advice or as dictates, and the scope seen to be available for interpreting them. The possibilities to exceed rules generally, to overstep grant regulations and to use locally financed resources in a different way than prescribed, are seen differently among Chairpersons as well as Chief Officers. We suggest that the steering effect is dubious under such diversity. At least, rules must be regarded as unreliable steering devices.

Secondly, major problems are also associated with the softer means of steering. The combination of governing by setting frameworks and goals and decentralization requires that steering, more than previously, is focused on influencing the assumptions, beliefs and values of implementing actors. With the purpose of convincing and persuading these actors, central authorities commonly rely on information as well as education.

However, the success of softer steering devices depends on whether these actually manage to influence the assumptions of the actors. Our study indicates that some actors are more easily affected than others. Time in office and gender have appeared to be important variables when identifying those who are most easily influenced.

There is a clear relationship between length of experience from the education system and discretion. This appears for Chairpersons as well as Chief Officers. The longer the time spent as a member of the Education Committee or as a school sector employee, the more constrained Education Committee discretion is seen to be. Even if conclusions are hampered by lack of time series data, this relationship can be interpreted, at least for Chairpersons, in terms of the period when initial experiences were gained. Those entering the Education Committees before the middle of the 1970s, when the period of decentralization reforms started, differ significantly from other Chairpersons in terms of the amount of discretion seen as available. Hence, once socialized into a particular steering system, one appears to always remain influenced by it. Impressions of the dominating
steering ideology at the time of entering the Education Committee are particularly relevant for Social Democratic Chairpersons. Perhaps the party’s system of introducing their representatives into their role as Education Committee members has made a very deep imprint on them. For those who are most experienced, these impressions have been so strong that they have even withstood later changes in the party’s view on decentralization. Correspondingly, those with shorter experience seem to be strongly adherents of beliefs consistent with present decentralization policies.

Hence, it is suggested that establishing a change in the implementing actors’ assumptions is a long-term project, at least as far as the scope for choice is concerned. In a sense, encouraging local actors to extend the scope for choice is at the very heart of decentralization policies. If actors adopt the steering philosophy dominant at the time when they first come into closer contact with Education Committee decision-making, and are unlikely later to change their assumptions, our data suggests that the eventual establishment of a goal-governed and decentralized system may take a matter of decades, rather than years.

Our analysis has also indicated a difference between Chairpersons of different sexes with regard to how discretion is perceived. At least among those with short experience, male Chairpersons tend to regard discretion as being considerably greater than female Chairpersons. This has been interpreted as an effect of female Chairpersons having to cope with a double system of constraints. They not only face problems generally connected with the position of being a Chairperson, but also a norms-system which is basically male-dominated. One of several possible interpretations of the difference is that men have been more influenced by the new value system connected with decentralization reforms. If this is the case, male Chairpersons would be more easily affected by softer devices, aiming at influencing values and assumptions.

In conclusion, on the basis of the results of this study, we have pointed at a few problems connected to the new system of steering emerging within the education sector. We have suggested that rules are unreliable as a steering device, since they are apprehended differently by actors in implementing positions. Softer means of steering, aiming at influencing the
assumptions, beliefs and values of the actors are also blunt instruments. Some actors are likely to be more influenced than others.

A final matter to be considered concerns the working of the control system. As already mentioned, the new system of governing education puts considerable emphasis on output measurement and performance controls.

Our study has shown that the efficiency of the control system is important for the actors' assessments of the amount of discretion available to the Education Committee. In particular, the efficiency of the surveillance controls undertaken by central and regional authorities and those made by local authority auditors, are clearly related to discretion. Chairpersons are particularly sensitive in this respect. The more efficient the control system is seem to be, the more discretion is considered to be constrained. However, as our analysis has indicated, some actors are more sensitive than others.

Therefore, a national government wanting to increase or, for that matter, reduce controls in order to influence Education Committee discretion, is only likely to affect some groups. Chairpersons are probably more easily affected than Chief Officers. The analysis also shows that success is likely to be least among those operating under stable conditions and close to the national capital. Further, it seems that Chairpersons belonging to a party, which over the years, has formed education policies at a national level are more easily influenced. Our study indicates that this is the case for Social Democratic Chairpersons. Therefore, we can conclude that increasing controls is a very blunt instrument if the purpose is to reduce discretion.

Whether the new, output-oriented control system will provide a sharper weapon, remains to be seen. Its main purpose is to assess the extent to which goals are reached and not primarily to control whether nationally set limits for discretion are exceeded. However, on the basis of our studies, it is not unreasonable to guess that these controls will also influence some actors more than others.

We have argued that the continuing decentralization reforms and changes in the system of steering have, together with the general restructuring of the welfare state, created considerable uncertainty with regard to what the limits to discretion are within the education system. This is likely to be a feature of local politics and administration at least in the
1990s. We have claimed that this makes studies of discretion both topical and relevant. However, in addition, the situation provides a challenge for local politicians. To a greater extent than before, it is up to them to define the limits to discretion. In a very basic sense, discretion is indeed the art of the possible.
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APPENDIX 1  CHECK-LIST FOR INTERVIEWS

1. Introduction

Presentation of the interviewer.
Short description of the study and its aims.
Introduction to the purpose of the interview and its disposition.
Notes will be taken and a written summary sent to the respondent and he/she will be given the opportunity to make changes or comments.
Principle of anonymity.

2. Follow-up Questions

Hand over a copy of the respondent’s replies on questions dealing with his/her assumptions of discretion\(^1\). Ask the following question in relation to each one of them:
- Will you please develop your answer further. What did you have in mind when you made your reply?

Add follow-up questions, such as:
- Are there any obstacles?
- Why is this possible/not possible?
- Can you give examples?
- Why is this your view?

\(^1\) These questions are reported in Tables 5:1, 5:2, 5:3, 6:3 and 6:6.
3. Position on the Scale of Discretion

- Let us imagine that different Chairpersons/Chief Officers can be located along a scale which represents the scope for choice they perceive to be available to the Education Committee. Where would you put yourself on such a scale?

4. Self-assessment of Influences

- Obviously, there are other Chairpersons/Chief Officers with different views. What are the reasons behind you having this particular view? Why do you think others make different assessments?

---

2 After a preliminary analysis of questionnaire replies, most respondents were selected to represent the two extremes on a scale of discretion, i.e. scoring either very high or very low on indices representing discretion.
Five indices have been constructed as measures of the concept of discretion. Those dealing with the actors' assessment of steering intention, scope for interpretation, possibilities to exceed rules and possibilities to overstep grant regulations, are constructed as ordinal scale measures of the actor's average position on the questions dealing with the aspect under consideration. These are reported in Tables 5:1, 5:2, 5:3 and 6:6.

To exemplify, the index representing the assessment of the steering intention is based on the various assessments summarized in Table 5:1. Chairpersons and Chief Officers replying that all rules are to be followed to the letter receive the value 0, whereas those claiming that all rules are to be seen as general guidelines are given the value 100. The lower the value, the lower the amount of discretion available, at least in relation to this particular aspect.

Hence, in theory, these four indices can vary between 0 and 100. However, empirically the range is often narrower. Table 1 illustrates basic properties of these indices for Chairpersons as well as Chief Officers.
Table 1  Properties of Four Indices on Discretion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Quartile deviation</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Steering intention</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Chairpersons</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Chief Officers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope for interpretation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Chairpersons</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Chief Officers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possibilities to exceed rules</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Chairpersons</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Chief Officers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possibilities to overstep grant regulations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Chairpersons</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Chief Officers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The similarities between the judgements of Chairpersons and Chief Officers were observed in Chapters 5 and 6 and the relationship has been further discussed in connection with the analysis of hypothesis H5.

The index representing assumptions about scope for disposing of resources has, to some extent, been constructed according to a different principle. As was explained in Chapter 6, rules regulating the disposition of resources may vary between local authorities. This has to be taken into account when the scope for disposing resources is established. Hence, the index is based on a combination of two factors, namely the level of specificity by which the local authority allocates resources and the actors' assessment of the possibilities to exceed the rules laying down this level of specificity. The construction of the index is based on the principle that actors who consider that scope is available to exceed the rules in fact assume that resources are allocated at a more general level of specificity, than the one prescribed. Correspondingly, an assumption that it is totally impossible to exceed these rules is interpreted as an acceptance of the level prescribed by the local authority. Along these lines, an index consisting of four steps has been constructed (Table 2).
Table 2  Construction of Index Representing Scope for Disposing of Resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index value</th>
<th>Level of specificity</th>
<th>Assessment of possibilities to exceed</th>
<th>Chairpersons (%)</th>
<th>Chief Officers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Account</td>
<td>Totally imposs.</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Account Subactivity</td>
<td>Possible Totally imposs.</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Subactivity Activity or service sector</td>
<td>Possible Totally imposs.</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Activity or service sector</td>
<td>Possible</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>183</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The different levels of specificity are introduced in Chapter 6. The index is based on data from two questionnaires, hence the relatively low number of cases. Information is available only for 64% of the Chairpersons and 72% of the Chief Officers. However, as is evident from the analysis of non-response presented in Appendix 3, no significant problems of bias have been identified.
APPENDIX 3  THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE RESPONDENTS

This appendix aims at illustrating the extent to which received responses to the three questionnaires sent to Chairpersons, Chief Officers and Local Government Treasurers are representative for the population as a whole. Among Chief Officers and Local Government Treasurers, the population consists of 284 cases, i.e. one per local authority. However, at the time of study, there were Education Committee Chairpersons in only 283 of the local authorities. Within the frame of a national deregulation programme, Bräcke local authority had been allowed to abolish its Education Committee and transfer its tasks to sub-municipal committees (Rose 1990, Kolam 1987). Further, in Hammarö local authority, there were two Education Committees, one responsible for compulsory and the other for upper secondary education. However, only the Chairman of the first of these was included in the study.

The test of representativeness was undertaken for each of the three questionnaires. However, some of the analyses in the study require information from two separate questionnaire sources, which increases the proportion of missing values. Therefore, it is also important to examine the representativeness of combinations of questionnaires.

Comparisons have been made between those responding to questionnaires and the total population for approximately 20 different local authority characteristics. Differences in means were established by t-tests. Significance level never reached below .250, thus indicating that respondents are representative for the population as a whole. The following tables provide a selection of test results from the three respondent categories, as well as for combinations of these.
1. **Respondent Category: Education Committee Chairpersons.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test variables</th>
<th>Mean values</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>T-value</td>
<td>2-tail prob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area size</td>
<td>1442</td>
<td>1503</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.726</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population size</td>
<td>29 448</td>
<td>29 743</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population development 1975-85 (%)</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (%)</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>-.42</td>
<td>.671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion Socialist parties in the local Council (%)</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion local authorities in geographical regions (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Götaland</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Svealand</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>.725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Norrland</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>225</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Response rate

79.5

2. **Respondent Category: Chief Education Officers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test variables</th>
<th>Mean values</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>T-value</td>
<td>2-tail prob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area size</td>
<td>1449</td>
<td>1413</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population size</td>
<td>29 375</td>
<td>29 689</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.929</td>
</tr>
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<td>Population development 1975-85 (%)</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (%)</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion Socialist parties in the local Council (%)</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion local authorities in geographical regions (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Götaland</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>.714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Svealand</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Norrland</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.973</td>
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<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>241</td>
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Response rate

84.9
### 3. Respondent Category: Local Government Treasurers.

<table>
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<th>Test variables</th>
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<th>Respondents</th>
<th>T-value</th>
<th>2-tail prob</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area size</td>
<td>1449</td>
<td>1520</td>
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<td>.668</td>
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<td>Population size</td>
<td>29375</td>
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<td>3.19</td>
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<td>Population density (%)</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>-.61</td>
<td>.540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion Socialist parties in the local Council (%)</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion local authorities in geographical regions (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Götaland</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Svealand</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>-.55</td>
<td>.584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Norrland</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>250</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Response rate 88.0

### 4. Respondent Category: Combinations of Chairpersons and Officers.

<table>
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<th>Respondents</th>
<th>T-value</th>
<th>2-tail prob</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area size</td>
<td>1442</td>
<td>1467</td>
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<td>30604</td>
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<td>.786</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.44</td>
<td>.658</td>
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<td>Population density (%)</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.911</td>
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<tr>
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<td>50.9</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.952</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion local authorities in geographical regions (%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>.688</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>.939</td>
</tr>
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<td>19.9</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.680</td>
</tr>
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<td>283</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

Response rate 67.5
### 5. Respondent Category: Combinations of Chairpersons and Treasurers.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Mean values</th>
<th>T-value</th>
<th>2-tail prob</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>Population</td>
<td>Respondents</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1442</td>
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<td>29 448</td>
<td>29 925</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
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<td>Population development 1975-85 (%)</td>
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<td>3.02</td>
<td>-.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (%)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Proportion Socialist parties in the local Council (%)</td>
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<td>51.0</td>
<td>.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion local authorities in geographical regions (%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Götaland</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Svealand</td>
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<td>-.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Norrland</td>
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<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>283</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Response rate 70.3

### 6. Respondent Category: Combinations of Officers and Treasurers.

<table>
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<th>Mean values</th>
<th>T-value</th>
<th>2-tail prob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>1477</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population size</td>
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<td>29 287</td>
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<td>Population development 1975-85 (%)</td>
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<td>2.77</td>
<td>-.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (%)</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion Socialist parties in the local Council (%)</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion local authorities in geographical regions (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Götaland</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>-.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Svealand</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Norrland</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>214</td>
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Response rate 75.4