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Local E-government in Sweden: establishment of Municipal Contact Centers with focus on the citizens and the public administrators

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Local E-government in Sweden– establishment of Municipal Contact Centers with focus on the citizens and the public administrators

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1. Introduction

eGovernment is a rapidly-growing phenomenon at the local, national and international levels (see e.g. Worrall, 2011; Rabiaiah & Vandijck, 2011) and different international organizations like e.g. the European Union, UN, OECD, ASEAN¹ and the World Bank all support and push for the development of e-government (Lahlou, 2005; European Commission 2010; Jansson, 2011). The back-ground of the development leading to the existing e-government and a digital era can be referred to the context of the economic development of the world that often historically is seen in the context of different eras or economies (Westlund, 2004, 2006; Stough, 2006), like the agricultural or mercantilist era, industrial and services era or ages and starting in the late 1960s and 1970s post-industrial era or postindustrial economy. There are different concepts used to characterize the era such as “digital revolution” and “information age”, (Freundreis, 1989; Castells, 2001), “information economy” (Heeks, 1999; Cohen et al., 2002), the “digital economy” (Fang, 2002; Johansson et al. 2006), “new economy” (Johansson et al., 2001), “learning economy” (Lundvall & Borras, 1998) or the “knowledge economy”² (Stough, 2006; Westlund, 2006). One aspect of the digital revolution is e-government. ICTs were recognized to have tremendous administrative potential e.g. they could help governments in information, create service delivery, efficiency and effectiveness and online channels of service-delivery promised significant financial savings (Nelson, 1998; Heeks 1999a, 1999b, 2001a, 2001b, 2006). According to e.g. Nelson (1998), Heeks (1999a, 2006), Cohen-Blankshtain & Nijkamp (2009) and Worrall (2011) this digital revolution not only have had impact on modern business life but also entered the public domain seeking new ways to control costs and improve organizations efficiencies, which led to the today existing era of e-society or electronic age. The economic and financial crisis beginning in 2008, has forced governments to focus strongly on one hand how to maximize savings and on the same time ensure improved public services (OECD, 2009; Worrall, 2011) and to develop shared service arrangements and to integrate their back-office functions (Worrall, 2011). Implementation of e-government is often associated with increased citizen availability to public e-services, but means also a fundamental organizational change of public organizations (Grönlund, 2001; Worrall, 2011). Heeks (1999a) stress that the development and implementation of e-government has potential to improve economic efficiency, democratic legitimacy and trust, but there are also social and digital divides new inequalities and vulnerability built into the systems. One enduring aspect of the ICT revolution is the powering up of local citizenry (Baum & Mahizhnan, 2011 forthcoming).

Cohen-Blankshtain and Nijkamp (2009) argue that in particular on the local level, where the interaction between citizens and government is more direct, they have recognized that they can gain efficiency.

¹ Association of Southeast Asian Nations <http://www.aseansec.org>. Accessed 2011-04-01

² The concept “Knowledge economy” was however launched already in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s (Drucker, 1959; Machlup, 1962)

This paper has focus on local eGovernment within the public domain as it studies the implementation of municipal contact centers (CC) in Swedish municipalities - quite a new phenomenon - and one expression of e-government. The relatively high internet penetration among Swedes opens for as well as asks for improved and developed governmental services on-line. Several Swedish municipalities have recently established contact centers and implemented more public e-services. In Sweden, an “e-Government Delegation” was established in 2009 which for five years will contribute to achieving their goals and steering the Swedish public sector in a common direction in order to strengthen the development of e-government within public administration and authorities. A summary of the objectives that the Swedish Government has set up for e-government is to “have simple, open, accessible, effective and secure eGovernment” (Regeringskansliet, 2008). They stress that the needs of the users are to govern the development.

A CC is aimed at contribute to increase citizen access to municipal service. It refers to the use of ICT in form of telephone, internet, municipal websites and Web based applications (e-services) and they are usually also open for personal visits. These function as the single entrance to the local government regardless if you want to make a service request or need long term child care. Local government contact centers are front offices with generous opening hours, staff with broad competences to supervise and re-direct citizens to the right section of the public administration. They also guide and supervise citizens on the web. They also have the competence to stretch into back-office functions by solving standard errands (Bernhard, 2010; Bernhard & Grundén, 2010). A related concept is the term “one-stop-shop” which according to (Karagiannaki, 2005) is a European phenomenon and a single point of public contact providing public service from authorities on both national and local level. But the term is also used referring to a single point of contact place (welfare office) organized specifically as a partnership between the state and the local municipalities as equal partners where the central government keep responsibility for the national services and the local governments keep responsibility for locally provided welfare services (Haugli Nyhuus & Thorsen, 2007).

1.2 E-government and the digital divide

The concept “digital divide” generally refers to the socio-economic gap between communities that have access to computers and the Internet and those who do not. The term could also refer to e.g. aspects affecting availability to quality, useful digital content such as ICT literacy and technical skills (see e.g. Findahl, 2009, 2010 & 2011). The eGovernment development with more public on-line services relates to the digital divide problem and has serious implications if only certain groups in the society are able to access online services and information. Some of the aspects that are important from the citizens’ perspective are the access to public municipal service, experiences of the delivered service, how fast the service is delivered and how they are being treated both in person and on the telephone (Findahl, 2009; SOU 2008).

Although more than 84 percent of Sweden’s inhabitants use the Internet today (but not daily), about 1.5 million of the Swedish citizens are still outside the world of the Internet - 1.3 millions among these are elderly people - which mean that there is still a digital divide (Findahl, 2010; 2011). The reason for this is first of all an extensive lack of interest among those who are outside the internet world, (this is above all elderly people). Other reasons are technical adversities, not enough technical knowledge, too complicated and too expensive (ibid). Five percent declared in 2008 that they were, to some extent, unable to use the Internet due to various physical disabilities. Problems with bad eyesight and motor skills problems are the most common reasons. Dyslexia is another reason (Findahl, 2009; Hadenius et al, 2008).

Also, even in the year of 2010 and 2011 there is a connection between age, education and income when it comes to using the Internet. This connection is the strongest among the elderly people (Findahl, 2010; 2011).

1.3 Questions of issue - Aim of the study

The aim of this paper is divided into answering the following four research questions:

- How has the implementation of the contact center affected the citizens' access to public municipal service?
- How has the implementation of the contact center affected the citizens from a democratic perspective?
- How has the implementation of the contact center affected the work of the public administrators within the contact centers regarding their role as supplier of service?
- How has the implementation of the contact center affected the work of the public administrators at the back-office of the municipalities as their supplier of service?

1.4 Outline of this paper

After this introduction, the paper has the following disposition: in section 2, definitions and dimensions of e-government are discussed, Swedish settings and the municipal contact center concept is presented followed by a brief overview of previous related research findings based on the aim of study and a brief discussion of the citizen-centric concept. In the next section the method - 4 cases in a Swedish context - is presented, followed by findings (based upon questions of issue) in section four. In the fifth section, analysis will be presented followed by the conclusions in the sixth section. In this section questions for further research are proposed.

2. E-Government

2.1 E-Government rather than e-governance

There is a difference between governance and government and e-government and e-governance. Governance is broader than government and aims to include networks with different actors and activities making up public policy processes and implementing the same. The governance approach explains the more open and network-oriented decision-making processes, including an intricate interplay among public, private and non-profit organizations. It is both explanatory and used as inspiration for policy makers to create "good governance". Peters and Pierre (2004:78) conclude with a broad definition of governance as:

... the process through which public and private actions and resources are coordinated and given a common direction and meaning.

The traditional government approach highlights the formal steering chain of public organizations and decision making by political actors. It implies that governing takes place within governments and their formal institutions and the state's monopoly on the use of legitimate coercion is in focus (Boyer, 1990; Stoker, 1998). E-governance is also different from governance, since it relies on the use of information technology. E-government is more limited than e-governance and focuses on resource coordination and distribution in the public sector alone. This paper will have the focus on e-government.

2.2 Definitions of e-government

There are many expressions of e-government and although it is a common but still broad and quite diffuse concept. There is no universally accepted definition of this concept (Halchin, 2004). The origins of e-government can be found not only in motives for cost-cutting, but also in the realization of new public management type reforms. It aims at making public

administration more citizen-oriented, efficient, transparent and responsive to the needs of the public (Wihlborg, 2005; Bock Seegard, 2009).

According to DeBenedictis et al, (2002), e-government can be defined as the use of primarily Internet-based information technology to enhance the accountability and performance of government activities. These activities include a government's execution of activities, especially service delivery; access to government information and processes and the citizens' and organizations' participation in government. A slightly different definition of e-government is offered by Carter & Belanger (2005:5) who see it as:

... the use of information technology to enable and improve the efficiency with which government services are provided to citizens, employees, businesses and agencies.

According to Schedler, et al. (2004) and The World Bank, (2006), e-government refers to the use of ICT as a tool in order to improve the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of government, to achieve efficient e-services to the citizens and they claim that e-government has the potential to i.e. reduce costs and improve services. Moreover, an important stimulus for e-government is to bridge the gap between the government and the citizens (Homburg 2008: 90-91). There is also a strong emphasis on internal administrative efficiency in the development of e-government (ibid).

According to Heeks (2006) e-government is defined as "all use of information technology in the public sector" (p.1). He refers e-government not merely confined to the Web or Internet based applications but encompasses all use of digital information technology in the public sector which means that it consists of technology, information and human beings who give the system purpose and the meaning and the work processes that are undertaken.

Grant and Chau (2006:280) define e-Government as "A broad-based transformation initiative, enabled by leveraging the capabilities of information and communication technology; (1) to develop and deliver high quality, seamless, and integrated public services; (2) to enable effective constituent relationship management; and (3) to support the economic and social development goals of citizens, businesses, and civil society at a local, state, national, and international levels".

According to Homburg (2008:87), e-government refers to "the strategic use of ICT in and around public administrations, for the purpose of creating a "wired" or "digital" government. E-government is in this context further referred to as the redesign of information relationships between the administration and the citizens, in order to create some sort of added value.

From the perspective of this study the most useful definition of e-Government is the definition of Heeks (2006) as he summarizes almost all various dimension of e-government that is exemplified through municipal contact center. The contact centers encompass the use of Web or Internet based applications and digital information technology (including telephones), information and human beings (citizens and public administrators). However the concept of municipal contact center also includes a broader way of communication possibility as there also is a possibility of personal visits of the citizens and reorganization within the municipalities.

The key characteristics of e-Government can be defined according to their relationship to different actors (see Figure 1). These are e-democracy (relationships between the electorate and the elected i.e. the political interplay of citizens and elected politicians) e-services (in the

relationship between the public administration and the citizens) and finally e-administration for the internal usage of information technological tools within governmental organizations and provides reports and support for decision making (Wihlborg, 2005:7, Bernhard & Wihlborg, forthcoming 2011).

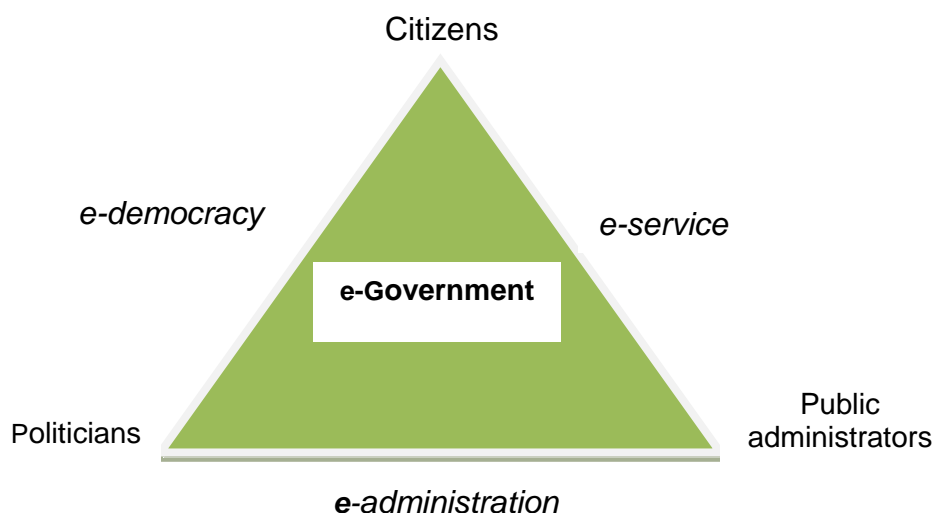


Figure 1: Three dimensions of e-government

Source: Adapted from Wihlborg, (2005:7)

The model was developed from the view of e-governance including both public and private actors. However in order to analyze these cases studied I will use the concept of e-government since the focus is on the public sector. In this study the e-government initiatives are expressed by the establishment of municipal contact centers and the analyses are based on the view of the citizens' and the public administrators.

In this paper two of the key-dimensions of e-government – the perspectives of the citizens and the public administrators – are in focus.

2.2 Previous research on municipal contact centers

Implementation of e-government is often associated with increased citizen availability to public e-services but means also a fundamental organizational change of public organizations (Grönlund, 2001). The Swedish municipal contact centers' implementation can be seen as a result of the new way of organizing the public sector that has developed from the concept called New Public Management (NPM) (Andrews, 2008; Homburg, 2008). The ideas of NPM have been used for over twenty years in the public sector in Sweden and it is a reform inspired by the private sector which includes methods of efficiency in the governing of the public sector (Forsell 2002; Girtli Nygren and Wiklund, 2010; Worrall, 2011). However, the results of previous research show that rationalizing tendencies and efficiency trends sometimes dominate at the expense of the citizens' perspectives and democracy (Haque, 2004; Ilshammar et al, 2005; Bekkers & Homburg, 2007; Sefyrin & Mörtberg, 2009). Also the implementation of e-government has earlier been criticized for focusing too much on technical aspects (Grönlund, 2001; Schedler and Summermatter, 2003).

Although that there are a number of studies related to local e-Government initiatives I have not found many studies on similar Swedish municipal contact centers. However in a recent study of a Swedish contact center implementation, focusing on the social aspects of the public

administrators' the results show that there were some negative attitudes from the public administrators at the back-office (Grundén, 2010). In a recent related study, which has a strictly organizational perspective, of two Swedish municipalities the local e-government initiatives both appear as a model for administrative reform and an approach to reach out in communities and improve trust towards governmental authorities and local government in particular (Jansson, 2011). This study sets out to increase the understanding of the relationship between local values in public administration and e-government by trying to find out the answer to what happens to local core values when public e-services are implemented in a municipality. The results of the study show the significance of the local institutional setting in defining the process and outcomes of the public e-service implementation. The local contact centers are more like a one entry to local public administration than the one-stop-government where issues are more administered than directed to the main administration.

In a related study of a Flemish governmental public-private collaboration contact center (Flemish Infoline) it is argued that a multi-channel contact center can be set up and managed successfully in a spirit of growth, leadership and innovation (T'Jampens, 2010). However, it is also pointed at the need for further research on contact centers, both to conceptualize them and to provide improved interpretations of their roles in the community and for the life quality among citizens. Based on these arguments Gelders and Walrave (2003) recommend one 'umbrella' contact center for government information in Belgium.

According to Kroukamp & Lues (2008) one-stop shop is a form of realization of the increased emphasis of administrative reforms towards citizen-centered management and organizational practices. One-stop government focusing on the relations to customers either they are citizens, businesses or other organizations have true customer focus. There is an ambition to identify their needs and demands and form services in relation to them.

According to Löfstedt (2008), public e-services have often been developed in order to meet internal challenges within the public organizations rather than to respond to the citizens' needs. User involvement and participation create potential to identify "unknown" needs and users of different categories have different needs and requirements for local public e-services depending on their situation. Löfstedt argues that it therefore is important to involve users of different categories in the design and development process.

2.3 Swedish settings

The Swedish multi-level government system is based on three levels: the national, regional and local/municipal levels. This approach is meant to strengthen the local autonomy of Swedish municipalities. In Sweden there are 290 municipalities and the municipalities in Sweden make up 70% of the total public administration. They are considered to be the closest to the citizens in terms of public service (Regeringskansliet, 2008). The development towards e-government varies strongly between the Swedish municipalities. The reasons for this are the numbers of inhabitants and the economy of the municipality (SALAR, 2009). Another reason is that local autonomy and self-government has historically been one of the cornerstones of Swedish government and political life (SFS 1974: 152; Gustafson, 1999). Swedish municipalities do not have a regulated obligation to set up offices for citizens or similar service places for their municipality inhabitants. However, it is regulated by Swedish law that all Swedish municipalities should provide individual service, e.g. to meet visitors and to answer telephone calls from citizens (SFS, 1986). This service should have as high a quality as possible from an economic resources perspective in the municipality. Many municipality services concern the inhabitants in their everyday lives and work to a great extent, and this is

one reason behind the responsibility for the municipality activities lying within the local municipality itself. The service to the inhabitants concerns e.g. planning permits, environmental permissions, matters regarding social services and schools, healthcare, day-care and welfare and it can also concern the booking of public halls (SOU, 2008).

2.4 Municipal Contact center concept

The main function of a municipal contact center is to supply services to the citizens more efficiently by primarily using the telephone and ICT in order to handle citizen contacts. There is no universal definition of the concept (Norman 2005), but Andersson Bäck (2008:3) defines contact center as “a ‘new’ type of organizational form, where the organization of actions and the use of technological tools are underpinned by the logics of cost-effectiveness and customer-focus”. Figure 2 shows a conceptual model of the contact center in the perspectives of the citizens and the public administrators.

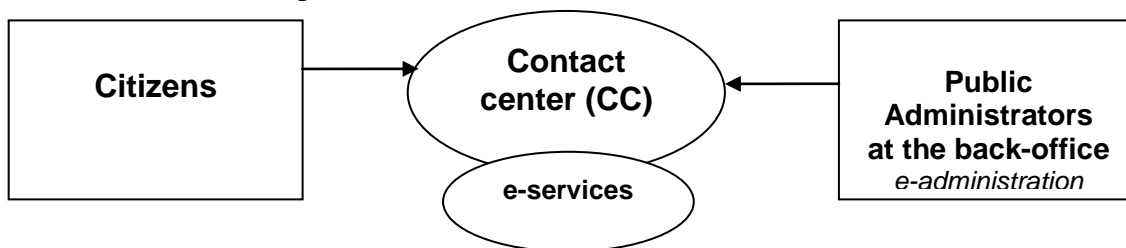


Figure 2: A conceptual model of a contact center in relation to citizens and administrators at the back-office

Seen from an international perspective, the organization of the work within the contact centers can vary due to national context (Andersson Bäck, 2008). Many Swedish municipalities have been inspired by the implementation of public contact centers in other countries where it is common to have only one telephone number for reaching the contact center by telephone. One example is from New York City in the USA (Rundle, 2009). According to Norman (2005) the background to the public contact centers are the call centers that were developed and used mostly for telemarketing already in the beginning of the former century in the USA. Call centers were during the 1990s the most striking phenomenon in service work internationally (Frenkel et al., 1999). However, the Swedish municipal contact centers are quite different. One difference is that they have an extended function as they can be reached in many ways; by telephone, fax, letters or email and in most cases also by personal visits. The public administrators at the contact centers are educated in different subject areas to be able to directly answer and solve routine questions and tasks that are not too complicated without having to send the questions to the back office of the municipality organization. Different simple work-processes have to a varying extent been transformed from the back-office of the municipality to the contact center. E.g. of this reason this e-government initiative can be seen as a fundamental organizational change within the municipalities (Bernhard, 2010; Grundén, 2010).

In Sweden, there are different names for service offices or centers providing municipal service to the citizens, e.g. customer centers, contact centers or service centers (Bernhard, 2010). In this study I will use the concept contact center; in spite of the slight differences among municipalities and the names they are given.

The contact center as a concept is very close to e-services. The main driving force behind e-services is often explained in terms of efficiency, an ambition to decrease costs in public administration and making services more readily available and accessible. These are also

efficient when seen from the management's perspective, as they reduce some of the earlier manual tasks and also transfer some of the earlier work tasks to the citizens. According to Grönlund (2006), Giritli Nygren and Wiklund (2010), e-service is one of three dimensions of e-government.

A closely related concept to contact center is a One-Stop Government Office (also named Civic Office) which is a common public service unit (front-office) where personnel with general competencies provide services across administration, authority and sector. Although some municipalities are providing just municipal service and the municipality usually host the offices, the big difference compared to contact center is that the service given to the citizens' concerns issues usually not only from the municipal but instead concerning more than one public authority or sector, hence the concept "one-stop" (SALAR, 1997; Björk & Boustedt, 2002). Also legal or economical counseling can be offered which is a difference compared to the contact centers.

2.5 A Citizen-centric concept

What the citizens' roles are called reflects different perspectives on the relationship between citizens and government. Traditionally, the citizenship in democratic countries refers to the rights of freedom, ownership and justice, but also to democratic rights of participation in national elections and to a minimum standard of welfare. The implementation of e-government and new organizational paradigms may have challenged the traditional citizen role. Due to this development new roles are added, such as clients, customers and users (Lips, 2007; SOU 2008:97). The customer role is more market-oriented compared to the citizen role, for example (Collins & Butler, 2002; Michel, 2005; Wallström et al., 2009). A reason for using the customer concept could be that most e-applications have developed as market tools in e-commerce, e-marketing, e-buy etc. However, by considering citizens to be customers, the perspective shrinks to only include customer relationships instead of the participation in a political system and seeing the citizen as a holder of "rights" (Collins & Butler, 2002; Michel, 2005). When considering the citizen from a strict service perspective, it can be argued that using the concept customer is useful (Lindblad-Gidlund, 2010). The working definition of citizen-centered activities in this paper is, however, based on citizens having rights and duties rather than being customers interested in obtaining as much service as possible for the lowest costs achievable.

3. Methods and 4 cases

The empirical work in this study was primarily conducted through qualitative methods as the data collection and the data mostly consist of interviews. Interviews as a method give the advantage to get a picture of an area you do not know so much about and in this study to direct perspective from the municipalities as well as from the citizens as a primary source. According to Jacobsen (1993) an interview mediates knowledge, experience, opinions, attitudes, and valuation from the person being interviewed to the interviewer. This method also gives detailed and nuanced descriptions in order to rather understand than to measure a problem (ibid). There are different types of interviews, those where you meet the respondent personally and those made through telephone contacts. It is recommended to use personal interviews, when the questions are complicated and the answers acquire a large amount of time (ibid). I have therefore started with personal interviews with public administrators but also made a pilot telephone interview study with citizens from one municipality regarding their opinion of the new contact center e.g. access to the public municipal service, experiences of the delivered service, how fast the service was delivered and how they were being treated. As this study will focus on both the users' (citizens') perspective as well as on the public

administrators' perspective I started the study by interviewing different personal categories within the municipality in order to receive more understanding before I made interviews with citizens.

The municipalities are Skellefteå, Botkyrka, Stockholm and Jönköping municipalities and they are named Case A, B, C and case D in this study. The data consists of both 40 semi-structured recorded interviews with different personnel categories from these four municipalities and of a pilot study with 21 citizens from Jönköping municipality. Besides this the data also consists of document-studies. The interviews with different personnel categories took about an hour each, and were tape-recorded. Content analysis was used for the analysis of the interviews. These interviews were all recorded during the spring of 2009, except for those in Jönköping municipality (D) which were recorded in the spring of 2010.

The study with citizens was based on semi-structured telephone interviews, using primarily questions with predefined alternatives, to which were added some open-ended questions. The interviews were held during two half-days about four weeks after the CC was implemented in the late 2009. When citizens, who had been in contact with the municipality guides at the CC, had ended their phone calls, they were asked if another person (a researcher) could call them back and make an interview regarding their opinions of the service delivered by the new municipal contact center and about how this implementation has affected their access to local municipal service in general. Of the citizens (14 women and 7 men) interviewed, 6 people were over 65 years of age; one citizen was younger than 24 and the other 14 were between 25 and 65 years of age.

The documents studied consist of different kinds of secondary sources e.g. the customer surveys which the municipalities had conducted. For this study, I have reanalyzed these documents.

3.1 The cases

Case A is by Swedish standards a middle-sized municipality (72 000 inhabitants) and covers a large geographical area compared to other municipalities in Sweden (for a broader description see Bernhard, 2009). There are rural areas and one bigger central city where almost half of the inhabitants are living (www.skelleftea.se) Results from customer surveys in 2007 showed that most of the citizens in this municipality wanted to use the telephone for contacting the municipality to get service (Hedestig & Söderström, 2007). The municipality is organized in eight different governmental administrations with responsibility for different areas within the municipality. In April 2007, the first phase of a contact center was established covering some of the administrations and in February 2009 a contact center for all administrations was set up within the central city of the municipality.

Case B is situated in the Stockholm region and also this municipality is by Swedish standards, a medium-sized municipality (80 000 inhabitants). It is one of the most international municipalities in Sweden since almost a third of the inhabitants have roots in more than 100 countries around the world (www.botkyrka.se). This municipality encompasses both densely populated urban and sparsely populated rural areas. The management of the municipality has a citizen communication strategy decision aiming to work towards both contact centers using phones, the One-Stop government Offices for personal visits, and towards implementing more e-services. This resulted in the establishment of a contact center in the summer of 2007. It has five One-Stop Government Offices established already in the 1980s, which the citizens can visit to get public service. Therefore this municipality has great experience of communicating

with their citizens. The One-Stop government Offices are situated in the areas where most of the immigrants live.

Case C is the capital of Sweden and compared to the three other municipalities in this study, this municipality has a very large organization with a high degree of decentralized responsibilities, and the official organization includes 14 district administrations in charge of most municipal services (www.stockholm.se). These district committees are responsible for much of the municipal services within their geographical area. The implementation of the contact centers started as a pilot project in two of their municipality districts in 2005 and then spread to the whole municipality in 2009. A big difference compared to A, B, and D is that due to them having a lot more citizens, they established one contact center giving public service only to elderly inhabitants providing one telephone number just for questions and services for eldercare issues. They have another telephone number for the contact center that concerns other issues. They have an e-strategy that aims towards implementing more e-services and they have a few One-Stop Government Offices in areas where many immigrants live.

Case D ranks among Sweden's ten largest municipalities (127 000 inhabitants) (www.jonkoping.se). The management of the municipality decided to implement a contact center and to work towards more e-services in 2009. The contact center opened up in November 2009. At this first stage the contact center has only moved one work-process to the CC but they plan to transform more in the next stage. The aim of the municipality guides at the CC answer simple questions and to guide the citizens to where to find the answers to their issues. At the time when the interviews were made there was not a possibility for citizens to visit the contact center but it was planned to open for personal visits in early 2011.

4. Findings

First the findings regarding the perspectives of the citizens are described and discussed and then the findings regarding the public administrators' will follow.

4.1 Findings from the citizens perspective

In Table one the results from the cases regarding the citizens' perspective on how the implementation of the contact center has affected them from the perspectives of access to public municipal service and from a democratic perspective are described.

Table 1: Overview of results from the citizens' perspective

Municipality	A	B	C	D
CC open	7.00 a.m. – 7.00 p.m. Mon-Fri	8:00 a.m.- 4.30 p.m. Mon- Fri	8:00 a.m.- 4.30 p.m. Mon-Thurs. 8:00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m. Fri	7.00 a.m. – 4.30 p.m. Mon-Fri
CC open for personal visits	Yes	No	No	No, but planned to open 2010
Tasks of public administrators at CC	Customer service administrators	Society administrators	Service administrators	Municipality guidance councillors
Competence of the public administrators at the CC	Specialists	Generalists	Specialists	Generalists
Main function of CC - Service to citizens	Answer simple questions and handling of simple matters. E-services	Answer simple questions. Rather many questions are forwarded to the back-office. E-services	Answer simple questions. Handling of simple matters. E-services	Answer simple questions and guide them to the public administrators in charge of the question or to the website
One-Stop Government Office	No	Yes (5)	Yes (4)	No
Organization of CC	Different response groups for different field of activities	Divided in accordance with different field of activities	Two different CCs; One unit for “hard issues”, one unit for “soft issues”	No division for different field of activities
Registering of all questions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Communication Strategy	phone calls, e-mails & physical visits to CC, e-services, website information (web assistant)	Phone calls, emails (to CC), physical visits to the One-Stop Government Offices. e-services, website information	Phone calls and emails to CC, e-services, website information	Phone calls & emails to CC, e-services. Physical visits & direct communication to the public administrators at the back-office of the municipality
Striving towards Citizen-centric perspective within the whole municipality	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partly
Touch tone technique	yes	yes	Only in one of the CCs	Yes (but very simple)
Citizens participation in the development of e-services	Yes (partly)	No (but planning)	No	No (but Planning)

According to the results of the case studies, the accessibility to municipal services had increased in all cases due to the implementation of the CC and the citizens were satisfied with the increased accessibility to the CC. The results show that 18 of 21 citizens received answers to their questions immediately upon contacting the CC and the other three almost immediately. 15 of the citizens had used the telephone in order to receive local governmental service from the municipality because they wanted to talk to a human being and six of them because they thought it was the easiest way to contact the municipality. The comments from the respondents regarding why they had chosen the telephone mostly stated that they wanted quick feedback to their questions. Another comment was that they had not found the answers on the Internet, and another one said that: “I am not a computerized human being; I’d rather talk to a human being”. Half of the citizens had not visited the website of the municipality or used e-services. The reason mentioned was that they had no computer. One citizen comment that she would in the future get information on the website as she had been guided and

received knowledge in how to find information and use e-service on the municipal website of the public administrator at the CC. Two-thirds of the citizens were satisfied with the opening hours of the CC. The other would prefer to have the CC open an hour longer in the evenings and also in the weekends.

In all municipalities, the citizens still to a certain extent also have the possibility to phone the public administrators at the back-office of the municipality directly even if there was a push to minimize such direct contacts. Another reason for the increased accessibility for the citizens is the development of more public e-services (self-service). The municipal websites have also been developed with more varied types of e-services including e.g. citizen assistant and more distinct information which has improved the accessibility. It has also become an improved contact area for the citizens through the accomplishment of just one public telephone number to all municipal services. Most of the citizens do not need to call more than one time in order to get the required service. However this study also implies a lack of confidence regarding the CC-establishment and the systems due to that some of the citizens prefer to have direct communication with the handling-officers at the back-office that have the authority to make decisions on the citizens' questions.

Municipality B had a long tradition of dialogues and providing services for their inhabitants, mainly by the implementation of One-Stop Government Offices. This aspect can be seen as contributing to an increased access to the municipal services as it made it easier to transfer work processes to the CC. A similar example is the organization of One-Stop Government Offices and CCs in municipality C which could contribute to the inclusion of more groups of citizens using the municipal service. Personal contacts seem to be especially important for immigrants and disabled people.

All citizens but one was very pleased with the simple touch-tone technology with just one choice to make.

"The less choice the better, especially for elderly people, multiple choices is hard for old people".

Another respondent, who was very pleased with the simple touch-tone technology, comment that when there are many different choices, one does not know what to answer (or which button to press). Another citizen (who at the time lived abroad) commented that this was very good and made a comparison with the situation in England:

"Much better than when there are multiple choices. Here in England we have more than a hundred choices. It is really tough!"

In Case A and B the touch-tone technique can be problematic for certain groups especially for the groups of elderly people and contribute to less access to the CC. However less in case B due to One-Stop government Offices and long experience of communication with citizens. The simple touch tone technology in municipality D contributed to the fact that more citizens (for example those who are unwilling or unable to handle touch-tone technology) could easily contact the CC and access the municipal service. A similar aspect of including more citizens by increasing their possibility to access municipal services was the establishing of a special CC just for issues regarding the care of the elderly as in municipal C. These groups of citizens did not have to use the touch-tone technology in order to contact specialists on elderly issues.

Half of the respondents had visited the municipality website. The reason why three had not visited the website was that they did not have access to the Internet. One respondent commented that he or she would do it later on, due to the fact that the handling officer at the CC recently had guided the respondent to where to find the information needed on the

website. Another respondent had visited the website, but could not find the information needed; therefore that respondent used the phone instead in order to obtain the information.

To the question which way they would prefer to contact the municipality, most of them answered that they preferred to use the telephone but almost one third of the respondents answered that they also could try visiting the municipality's website.

Increased level of equality

To implement CCs which also enable personal visits, to transfer more processes and more e-services to the CCs, is a way of contributing to greater equal treatment of the citizens, provided that the municipalities clearly maintain other channels of communication as well, for example clear information on their website, fax, letters, information in newspapers etc. In a democratic perspective this is a positive development. The citizens were very pleased with the way they were treated and the municipality guides' attitudes. Even the citizens who did not have a direct communication channel to the administrators within the municipality before now have the same opportunity to access the municipal service. This can on the other hand be negative for the group of citizens who knew whom to contact before or had had earlier contacts with a particular handling-officer in the municipality. The implementation of more e-services (which obviously requires access to and knowledge in how to use them), should however be considered in the light of the digital divide that still exists. There is still, however, need for improvements of the existing e-services as there are problems in how to use them (OECD, 2009). To make it possible for the citizens to choose what communication channel to use and to be able to communicate with the municipality through different channels are thus extremely important factors, seen from a democracy perspective. To establish CCs with "one simple path" via the phone and also open up for physical visits means to enable access to municipal services for groups outside the Internet as well. This is a further example of efforts to minimize the digital divide and to include more groups of citizens and a step towards an inclusive e-government municipality.

Common citizen centric concept

The establishment of a common citizen centric concept within the whole organization of the municipalities has worked out quite well in three municipalities even if there were some shortcomings in municipality A (see Bernhard, 2009). In case B, the public administrators in the back-office had extensive experience of working with One-Stop Government Offices to which they had moved some work processes before. This aspect has been contributing to a positive citizen-centric development for the citizen service. In municipality C they also had worked with this, although one respondent's view was that it could be improved even though the management of the municipality already from the start of the contact center had decided to hire a person with communicative skills to work with consolidating the common citizen centric concept among the employees.

The way the citizens are being treated when contacting the CC can be seen as a measure of a citizen-centric approach. Even if the results of the interviews resulted in that some of the respondents' opinion was that there was a lack in the internal work towards a citizen-centric perspectives in case D the citizens interviewed were very satisfied with the way they were treated of the public administrators at the CC.

Lack of confidence

According to the results of the interviews some of the citizens preferred to have direct communication with public administrators at the back-office as they were in charge of making

decisions on their issues. They indicated a lack of confidence for the system which may generate negative influence on democracy.

“Learning municipality”

One common aspect of all four case studies was that all issues and questions coming from the citizens to the CC, either via telephone, personal visits or email, were registered and documented, e.g. via a digital registration tool. This statistical information source implicates knowledge about the citizens’ needs of municipal service. This assumes that the statistics are followed up and evaluated by the municipality managers. The registration of every issue also means that it becomes obvious for the municipality managers which type of service the citizens are in need of and helps them in localizing the public service. This new knowledge contributes to a citizen-governing of the municipality services as their needs have been highlighted. The use of statistics could also be the basis for the continuous professional development of the public administrators at the CC.

4.2 The public administrators perspective

How has the implementation of the contact center affected the work of the public administrators working at the CCs and those working at the back-offices of the municipalities regarding their role as supplier of service? In the first section below the findings of the public administrators within the CC followed by the findings of the public administrators at the back-office in the next section.

Perspectives of the public administrators at the CC

In table 2 some of the results that are in table I are included due to the fact that these results may affect the public administrators work as supplier of service.

Table 2: Overview of some the results from the public administrators’ at the CCs aspects as their role as supplier of service.

Municipality	A	B	C	D
Competence of the public administrators at the CC	Specialists	Mainly Generalists	Specialists	Generalists
Main function of CC - Service to citizens	Answer simple questions and handling of simple matters. E-services	Answer simple questions. Rather many questions are forwarded to the back-office. E-services	Answer simple questions. Handling of simple matters. E-services	Answer simple questions and guide them to the public administrators in charge of the question or to the website
Organization of CC	Different response groups for different field of activities	Divided in accordance with different field of activities	Two different CCs; One unit for “hard issues”, one unit for “soft issues”	No division for different field of activities
Approach of work	Highly formalized	More informal	In between formal and informal	More informal
Competence-development possibilities	Satisfied	Satisfied but could be better	Satisfied but could be better	Satisfied but could be better

The public administrators at the CCs’ role as supplier of service can be articulated that they can provide different services combine them and even bridge over different administrative domains from a citizen centric perspective. Different simple work-processes have to a varying extent been transformed from the back-office of the municipality to the contact center, which may affect their role as supplier of service. In case A, B and C there were quite many work-

processes transformed to the CC but only one in case D. Therefore their approaches and work differ. In case D the public administrators at the contact center are generalists instead of specialists of a certain subject, and the public administrators are to be seen more as municipal guides. There are examples of both a highly formalized and rule-based approach (case A), with strict check-lists used for the employees at work, as a more informal approach, where the employees mainly are looking for relevant information online and building up their own informal knowledge (case B and D). There may be various pros and cons of each approach (Bernhard & Grundén, 2010). However the findings show that they all are very service-minded and citizen-centric focused which indicate that their role as supplier of service is good. Some of the results from the citizen study indicate that the work-situation of the public administrators at the CC in Case D is quite well and that they may be satisfied in their role as supplier of service; . The level of the quality of the service was delivered were very good and two-third of the citizens had received answers to their questions in total accordance with their wishes. Six others had received answers partly in accordance with their wishes and only one citizen had not received an answer at all in accordance with his/her wish. The opinion from the public administrators at the back-office were also that the CC-personnel were very service minded at seemed to be satisfied in giving as high service as possible to the citizens. Findings from the interviews with public administrators at the CCs resulted in that they seemed to like their work even if they met new challenges and there were new questions to be answered. However there was a lack in having regularly feedback from the back-office when a matter was solved, which could have negative influence of the quality of the service.

In order to give as high quality of the service as possible to the citizens there is a need for the public administrators at the CC to have continually knowledge within their specific areas and for the generalists to have updated knowledge in general regarding general tasks within their municipality. One lesson to be learned from the study is that it is very important that already from the start of the CCs invent which recruitment skills and which training knowledge is needed. In all municipalities there has been internal education in a varying extent. E. g. in Case C all public administrators at CC received specialist competence in communication. However in all cases except in case A there was a certain lack of time for competence possibilities. Several public administrators comment that they wanted to have more time for competence development within their specific competence area. According to another respondent at CC there was a demand for more specific knowledge within the English language in case C in order to handle all concepts within an authority correctly to those lacking in Swedish language. A public administrator comments that due to both that the work is not strictly governed by check-lists (less informal) and that the working-climate is very human that you learn from each other within the working-group, she felt more competent now compared to when she worked at the back-office due to that she is both specialist within a certain area and generalist in a broader area.

"I think it's really fun, very social, you learn all the time ...".

Another important area for competence-development is to have education within how to use the voice, according to a respondent from the management.

To sum up, the result show that the public administrators met new challenges and there was a need for having more knowledge continuously.

Perspective of the public administrators at the back-office

There are different opinions regarding in how the implementation of CCs have affected their work as supplier of service but results indicates that there is a need for increased focus on the back-office when implementing CCs in order to supply as high service as possible to the

citizens. However one lesson learned is that for many of the public administrators at the back-office their work have changed as supplier of service due to the implementation of CC. There have been reorganizations within all municipalities with public administrators moved from the back-office to the front-office (CC) but to a varying extent. The number of work tasks transferred from the back-office administrations to the CCs varied also among different administration units within the municipalities. A lot of simple questions are now answered by the public administrators at the CC which has resulted in that more public administrator at the back-office now have more time for those citizens communicating directly with them and more time to work and solve issues without being disturbed by many telephone calls. This may influence positive both of the supply of service as on the quality of their work. On the same time, due to easier access for citizen to contact the municipality, a result is that there has been an increase in the number of issues from the citizens for the public administrators to handle. Some of the public administrators at the back-office missed the spontaneous contacts with the citizens as the contacts now are more planned and some of them have kept the possibility to give the direct telephone-numbers to citizens. This may influence negative on the service to the citizens.

To what extent the implementation of more public e-services specifically have affected the work for the back-office administrators is not possible to address the impact of based on the result of this study. What can be addressed from this study, which may affect on the quality of service given to the citizens by the public administrators, is that there were some negative attitudes from public administrators at the back-office in all four municipalities in the implementation phase of the contact center were implemented. Some reasons behind this seemed to be related to fears for losing work tasks or even jobs. Hitherto no public administrators were dismissed as a result of the implementation of the CCs. When implementing the CCs all municipalities have worked towards a more citizen-centric perspective (see Table 1) although there was some lack in this work within in Case D. The traditional focus had been on internal processing instead of focus on the needs of the citizens. The general culture of this municipality was to use few resources but with good cooperation considering the available resources. However there were a lack in the anchoring of implementation and reorganization in some of the municipalities. This may have negative influences on the service from the public administrators at the back office. Even there are different results from the different municipalities the results indicate that the management in all municipalities had their main focus on the public administrators at the CCs in the implementation phase and this lack of attention caused a feeling of inadequacy among some of the public administrators at the back-office. This implies that that is a need for the management to articulate and communicate e-government strategies related to the transfer of work tasks from the back-office to the CCs in order to reduce anxiety which may impact negative on the service to the citizens.

5. Conclusions

The results show that the public administrators at the CCs communicate with both the citizens and the public administrators at the back-office (see Figure 3). Even if the public administrators at the CC have a citizen-perspective, are service oriented and have enough knowledge to answer the issues, the quality of the service also depends on the organization of the work and work-processes within the back-office of the municipalities.

According to the results of the study a conceptual model (Figure 3) of a contact center in relations to citizens and back-office of the municipality and the different perspectives of the users of the e-services can be explained. In order to answer questions and handle simple

issues from the citizens the public administrators at the contact center need to have information from the back-office. The results show that they also to a varying extent send some issues from the citizens to the back-office. The public administrators at the back-office supply e-services in order to be used by the citizens. Questions regarding the e-services and support of them are often taken care of by the employees at the CC.

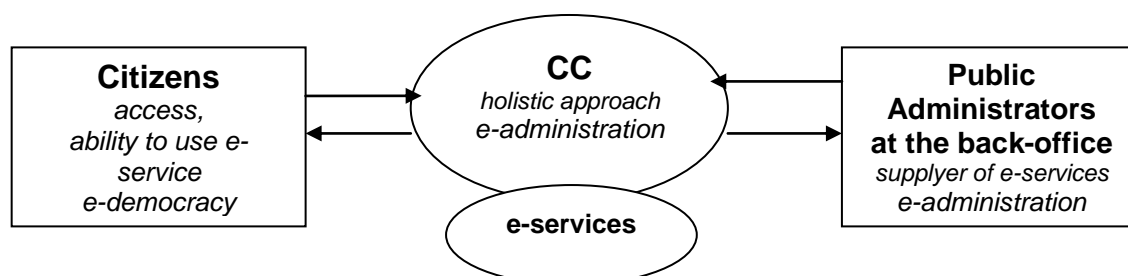


Figure 3: Conceptual model based on results of this study

This study indicates that the implementations of CCs in the municipalities and more public e-services have contributed to increased access for citizens to public municipal services. The citizens now have increased possibilities to choose communication channels in order to gain access to municipal service. The groups of citizens outside the world of Internet have gained increased access to municipal service due to the fact that they can reach the CC easily via telephone and, in most cases, also physically. For citizens who to some extent are unable to use the Internet due to various physical disabilities, the possibilities to use municipal service are still increased. This affects more groups of citizens' access to public municipal service in a positive way. For e.g. elderly citizens and citizens with various physical disabilities the use of simple touch-tone technology facilitates calling the municipality, as in municipality D. Also, establishing a special CC, as in municipal C, just for issues regarding the care of the elderly contributes to the accessibility of more elderly people in the municipal service as they do not have to use touch-tone technology.

To implement CCs to be reached by telephone, but also enable personal visits, the transfer of more processes and more e-services to the CC, is a way of contributing to greater equal treatment of the citizens and towards e-democracy. This depends on the municipalities' clearly maintaining other channels of communication as well, for example clear information on their website, in e-mails, faxes, letters, information in local newspapers, etc. However, it is not only the quantity of e-services that matter. It is still a problem that several public e-services are used to a low extent. A reason for this can be the quality of the e-services. Many citizens seem to be dissatisfied with the design of the e-service. Also, the implementation of more e-services (which obviously requires access to and knowledge of how to use them), should be considered in the light of the digital divide that still exists. Even if the access to public service have increased, a digital divide can form as some groups of people, especially the elderly, still do not have access to the Internet and have problems using the touch tone technology when calling the municipal contact centers.

The citizens experiences of the service from the public administrators at the CCs was very good, which can be seen as step towards a citizen-centric approach. Citizen-centric development work could make the developers more aware of municipal service needs, not least from the citizen groups that do not use the Internet services. A negative aspect of e-democracy may occur in this study due to that some of the citizens may feel a lack of

confidence regarding this e-government initiative as some of them preferred to have direct communication with the public administrators at the back-office administration that have the authority to make decisions.

All issues and questions from citizens to the employees at the CCs were registered in all of the studied municipalities and this contributed to increased knowledge about the citizens' needs regarding municipality services – a “learning municipality”. The municipality services could then be localized and adjusted to the citizens' needs, and hence the production of municipality services became more citizen-governed than before the implementation of the CCs. Sometimes the citizens made the employees at the CCs aware of deficiencies on the website or pointed out e-services that were difficult to use, and by doing so they contributed to the improvement of the municipal services. This information or feed-back was then sent to the responsible administrators at the back-office. This also indicates that the citizens contributed to innovations within the municipal administration. Improving e-services and the website is a way of contributing to more groups of citizens being able to use it than before and this is therefore to be seen as a step towards strengthen democracy and inclusive e-government.

The results indicate that there are two main implications of CCs; they localize public services and they combine different services into a one-stop practice striving to provide a ‘holistic’ approach to the single citizen in her local context. However the CC-implementation also includes an organizational change within the municipalities as there is a need for reorganization of the back-office routines in order to optimize the efficiency and quality aspects. The results imply that there is a need for a process organization as there are interrelated relationships between design of technology and organization and the quality of the service to the citizens will increase if more work process are transformed to the CC. There is also a need for increased focus on competence development for the public administrators at the CC and for a better internal two-way communication to the public administrators at the back-office regarding the e-government strategies in order to avoid as much anxiety about their work.

However even if the citizens access to public municipal service has increased this study indicates that citizens might be more satisfied with the public service if more work-processes had been transformed to the CC from the back-office provided that the public administrators at the CC will have mandate and knowledge to answer the issues.

6. Questions for further research

The introduction of a municipal contact center – a new organizational form, new tasks and new technical practices – can be seen as a new phenomenon within the Swedish municipal e-government context. According to Danermark et al. (1997) a combination of different data is claimed to offer a more thorough understanding of a phenomenon. This study does not involve the views of citizens that have not been in contact with a CC or used the e-services. To have a deeper and broader understanding of the citizens' views and to give a platform for a good e-government planning for the municipals, there is a need to do a broader citizen-survey in a further step and also I propose to do focus group interviews with different groups of citizens. (For a tentative model towards planning for citizen-centric local e-government; see Bernhard, 2011).

Although the Internet use is high in Sweden and in most western countries, recent statistics show a gap between the supply and use of e-government services, indicating problems with user satisfaction regarding public e-services (OECD, 2009). Here there is a need for further

research. Also there is a need for further research focusing on the reorganizations within the municipalities as a whole and more specific with focus on the public administrators at the back-office when implementing CCs and more e-services. Another further issue to study is the role of the statistics of all issues in the CCs in learning and planning perspectives of local e-government for the management of the municipalities.

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