**Local elections**

**– second-tiered elections in amalgamated municipalities and regions**

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**Introduction**

The media coverage of the 2017 local elections in Denmark were intense – as intense as when parliamentary elections are held. Not only the local media but also the national news outlets covered the elections extensively in the four weeks from when the lists of candidates were filed and until election day November 21. And in the few days after when the mayors were elected among and by the newly elected councilors. But as described in chapter xx Denmark is also the most decentralized state in the world with municipalities and regions responsible for almost two thirds of the public expenditures. A lot of important political decisions regarding health care, public schools, social policy, elderly care, planning, child care etc. are taken by the municipal and regional councils put together at the local elections.

Traditionally local elections have been analyzed as being “second-order” elections – a concept developed by Reif and Schmitt to grasp the then new direct elections to the European parliament and since extended to all elections not being for national parliaments (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). The second-order view of local elections imply that there is less-at-stake in the legislature and that the voters care less about casting their vote based on a traditional authorization/accountability way of thinking (for instance by staying home at election day or casting a midterm vote signaling to the national party leaderships instead of the local candidates). However, there is a discrepancy between local political units, such as the Danish municipalities and regions, which are performing key tasks within the Danish welfare state, and an analytical tool which under the label second-order a priori categorize local elections as second-rank. Hence, the way of seeing local elections has recently been reformulated into a second-tier view (Kjaer & Steyvers, 2018) acknowledging on the one hand that each local election is held within a nation-wide political system but also that they are elections in their own right, with a majority of the voters actually casting their vote based on local issues and an evaluation of local candidates. In this chapter we will analyze local elections in regard to how they compare to parliamentary elections and evaluate how “local” voting is at local elections.

The local elections in Denmark are actually taking place within an institutional set-up which is relatively new. The electoral system has been the same for a long time but the municipalities and the regions themselves have not. In 2007 a major Structural reform was implemented (see chapter xx) and 271 municipalities were amalgamated into the present 98 municipalities and 14 counties were amalgamated to 5 regions. The arguments behind the reform were economies of scale and professional sustainability but the radical change of the local public sector might also have had unintended political consequences for the local political system and ultimately for the local elections and the electoral behavior at these elections. While the focus in this chapter will be on the most recent local elections of 2017, we will also look into some of the trends over the last decades with a special focus on how the amalgamations have (or have not) affected the elections.

In the next section we will briefly outline a number of the features of the local electoral institutions. These features will then form the basis of the empirical analyses in the following sections after a section addressing the question raised already at the outset, namely how local the voting is.

**The local electoral institutions**

In Denmark the local elections are held every fourth year at the third Tuesday of October (The local electoral law). From the electoral rules it follows:

The suffrage is extended to include not only residing Danish citizens but also (contrary to elections *Folketinget*) residing EU citizens and citizens from non-EU countries which have had residency in Denmark for more than three years. Everybody who has the right to vote is also eligible.

The electoral formula is d’Hondts method where all candidates are running on lists (apparantement is allowed) and where the voters can vote either for the list or cast a preferential vote for one of the candidates on the list. The lists can choose whether an open list or semi-closed list seat allocation method should be applied (describe numbers will be supplied).

The nationwide parties can run in all municipalities and regions under the same label and symbol that they use at national elections. Local lists (or individuals forming their own list of one) can run if they can collect 25 signatures from electors in their municipality.

While the number of seats at the regional assemblies are fixed at 41, it varies between 9 and 31 at the local councils (although in the capital of Copenhagen the *Borgerrepræsentationen* has 55 seats). There is no legal threshold but the natural threshold varies between 3 and 11 percent.

The government formation process starting right after the election is not regulated – the mayor (and regional mayor) who is an important political figure is indirectly elected and will be formally appointed after a vote at the council approximately three weeks after the election.

**How local is the local vote?**

First of all the results of the 2017 elections

*Table 1: The results of the 2017 local elections. Votes, seats and mayoral offices by party (municipal and regional) compared to vote intention at national election.*

From this we can see the net inter-level split-ticket voting. However, to see the gross level we have crosstabulated the two votes in Table 2.

*Table 2: Crosstabulation of votes at local and national election (vote intention) 2017.*

From Table 2 we can see the level of split level. And we can distinguish between inter-bloc and intra-bloc splits.

But how locally/nationally were the voters in their thinking when they casted their local votes – this can be seen from Table 3.

*Table 3: How local / national was the voter when voting at the local elections 2017*

**Who votes and who don’t?**

The turnout is lower at local elections.

*Figure 1: Turnout at local, regional and national elections 1966-2017*

Figure 1 demonstrates that the present turnout 70,8 % is very average. It also demonstrates that amalgamating can lead to drops in turnout (and that campaigns to increases) (Hansen et al. 2013, 2017).

The turnout varies between socio-demographic groups – describe (Hansen et al)

**Who gets elected?**

The preferential vote counts but who gets the preferential votes and gets elected?

*Table 4: Reasoning for preferential votes 2017*

Focus on women in local politics.

*Figure 2: Female representation at the local, regional and national level 1966-2017.*

**The local party system**

The party system has been more and more nationalized (Rokkans claim).

*Figure 3: The nationalization of the party system 1966-2017*

And the consequences of the natural threshold – would more parties be represented with more seats at the councils?

**The mayors**

Who gets the mayoralty? The biggest party, the median party, the incumbent mayoral party?

*Figure 4: The mayoral parties 1966-2017.*

**Conclusion: Assessing local elections**

Not second-rank elections.

But reform has professionalized party system. And had short term effects on women’s representation, turnout etc.

But what do the voters think:

*Table 5: The voters’ assessment of the electoral campaign, the councilors and the debate*

This warrants a discussion of a number of the more normative dimensions of local democracy: who should the councilors be, how should the national politicians intervene in the campaign, how consensual should the political culture be locally etc.