

Self-Government in the Nordic Countries

Claudia GILIA

Page | 64

ABSTRACT

The public administration in the Nordic countries has specific elements due to both the geographical conditions, as a result of the location of these territories on Europe's map (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), and the way in which the lawmakers in these countries designed the structure of their countries. In this study, we are presenting how the territorial division was achieved over time and the administrative reforms through which the administrations in the Nordic countries achieved local government processes, more efficiently and closer to the citizens, and made smart approaches to public spending.

The establishment, organization and functioning of the local government bodies, as well as the reflection of both the decentralization principles and the local autonomy in the northern communities is another aspect we are highlighting in this study.

The way in which the competencies are allocated to the central government and the local communities reflects the extent to which the local public administration authorities manage to meet the interests of the citizens in the local communities.

KEYWORDS: *territorial communities, decentralization, local administration, competencies, reform.*

1. Introduction.

On the territorial division of the local communities in the Nordic countries

Denmark, Norway and Sweden are constitutional monarchies. Iceland and Finland are republics. They are unitary states with small populations.



They are multiparty, parliamentary democracies and their governments are coalition governments.

They all have three level of administration: national level, regional level and local level. The Nordic countries have much in common in their history, religion and social structure. They have a long history of political unions and other close relations. Page | 65

DENMARK. Denmark is a unitary and relatively decentralized country. Under the strong tutelage of the state, during the absolute monarchy, the Danish administration obtained, since 1849, a certain amount of autonomy. Until the important reform of the 1960s, *the parish* was the mainstay of the local administration¹. The reform led to a significantly smaller number of local authorities and power transfer from state to local authorities.

Denmark's constitution does not define the state form but enshrines the uniqueness of power². Prior to 1970's administrative reform, from an administrative point of view, Denmark had been divided into 86 boroughs, 1,300 parishes, and 25 counties (*amtskommuner*)³. In 2007, a new administrative reform was implemented. Denmark was split, from a territorial point of view, into 5 regions (*regioner*), which had been divided, in their turn, into 98 municipalities⁴. In 2007, the small municipalities merged in order to form larger administrative units. Thus, the number of municipalities dropped from 270 to 98. Prior to 2007's reform, 206 out of 271 municipalities had less than 20,000 people. After the reform, only 7 out of the 98 municipalities counted less than 20,000 people⁵. Most municipalities have a population of at least 20,000 people, which gives them financial and administrative sustainability.

These administrative entities were given a number of responsibilities in areas such as public health and social services.

¹Ziller, J., 1993, *Administration comparées. Les systèmes politico-administratifs de l'Europe de douze*, Paris: Motchrestien, p. 50.

²Idem, pp. 83-84.

³Fromont, M., 2006, *Droit administratif des États européens*, Paris: P.U.F., p. 69.

⁴These administrative entities were given a number of responsibilities in areas such as public health and social services.

⁵ More details here:

http://www.kl.dk/ImageVaultFiles/id_64104/cf_202/The_Local_Government_Reform_in_Brief.PDF



Due to various historical and geographical realities, the Kingdom of Denmark (REALM) acknowledged the statute of Greenland and of the Faroe Islands as self-governing territories. The allocation of independent competencies to these territories was achieved by enacting the following common documents:

- *Home Rule Act of the Faroe Islands* (which was enacted in 1948)⁶
- *The Greenland Home Rule Arrangement* (which was enacted in 1978 and came into force in 1979).

The Act on Greenland Self-Government, which was enacted on 21 June 2009, acknowledged the Greenland authorities the right to exercise legislative, executive and judicial powers in the areas of responsibility they assumed⁷. Thus, *Inatsisartut* - the Greenlandic Parliament - exercises the legislative power and *Naalakkersuisut* - the Government of Greenland - exercises the executive power.

The Greenlandic Parliament (*Inatsisartut*) has 31 members, who are elected for a 4-year term, through the proportional representation system⁸. The Danish government is represented in Greenland by the High Commissioner of Greenland⁹.

Through the *Danish Act Relating to the Takeover of Affairs and Fields of Affairs by the Faroe Islands Public Authorities - Takeover Act*, enacted on 24 June 2005, the Faroese authorities were given new powers and responsibilities. According to this agreement between the Kingdom and the Faroe Islands, the authorities of these islands have exclusive competencies in areas such as: local government, municipal affairs, fire protection service, spatial planning, healthcare, social assistance services, direct and indirect taxes, primary and middle school education, environmental conservation, ports, coast guard, local transport, agriculture and rural issues, etc.

⁶Act no. 137 adopted on 23 March 1948.

⁷The document can be consulted here: http://www.stm.dk/_a_2957.html.

⁸More details here: <http://en.inatsisartut.gl/>

⁹Details here: http://www.rigsombudsmanden.gl/_p_14135.html



The Parliament of the Faroe Islands (*Løgting*) consists of 33 members, elected for a 4-year term, through the system of proportional representation¹⁰. The executive power is exercised by the Government - *Landsstýrid*.

The High Commissioner for the Faroe Islands is the representative of the Danish Government in the islands, and is responsible for the relations between the Danish and Faroese authorities. Page | 67

FINLAND. Finland is a unitary state. Until the 2010's administrative reform, from a territorial organization point of view, the Finnish state was divided into the following territorial communities¹¹: *provinces*, *regions*, and *municipalities*. In terms of administrative organization, the main objective is to create territorial divisions compatible with one another, enabling the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking people to access services in their own language, by virtue of the identity principles¹². The 5 administrative provinces (*Läänit*) made the first administrative division of Finland. The country had also an autonomous province - the Åland Islands. At present, Finland is divided into 18 regions, plus Åland¹³.

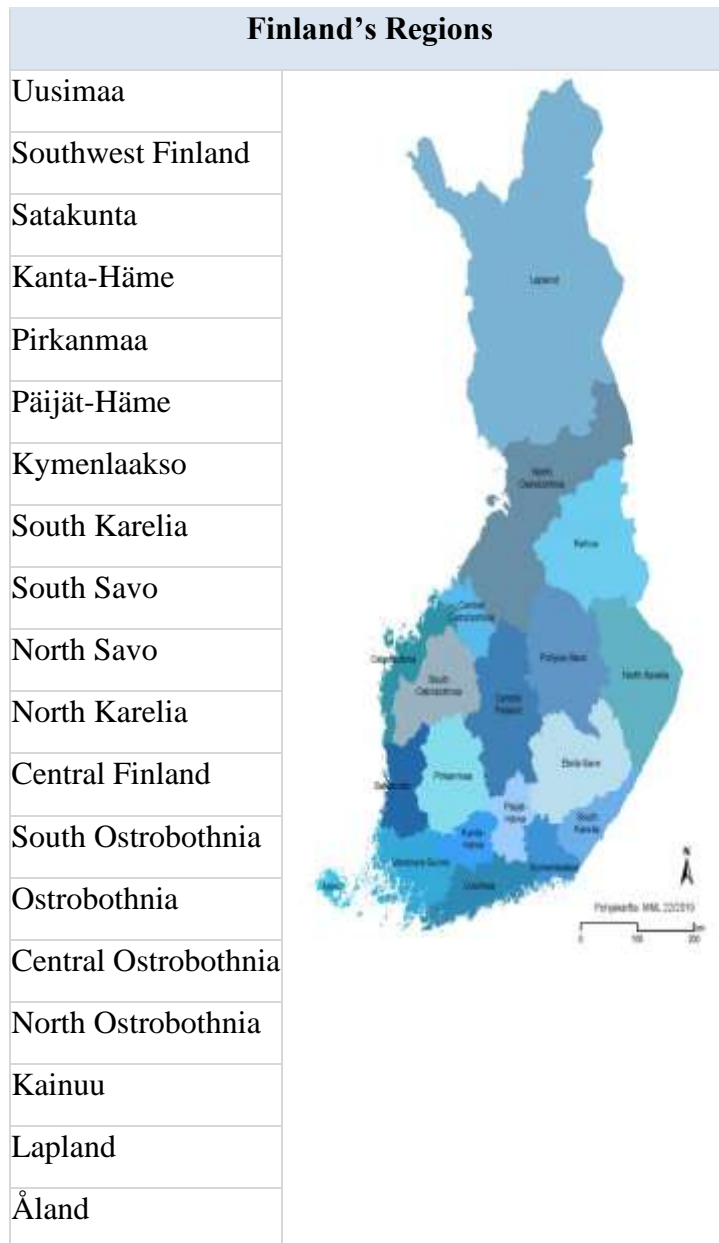
¹⁰Mătușescu, C., Gilia, C., 2011, *Puterile regionale și locale în Uniunea Europeană*, Bucharest: Universul Juridic Publishing House, pp. 114-116.

¹¹For more details, Gilia C., 2020, *Instituții politice și administrative în statele nordice*, Bucharest: Pro Universitaria Publishing House, pp. 88 - 89.

¹²Section 122 of Finland's Constitution

¹³See: <https://www.kuntaliitto.fi/elinvoima-ja-tyollisyys/maakuntien-liitot>





According to Section 121, paragraph 1 of the Constitution: “*Finland is divided into municipalities, whose administration shall be based on the self-government of their residents*”.



Local Government Law no. 410 issued in 2015 makes provisions on municipalities¹⁴.

At the beginning of 2021 there were altogether 293 *municipalities* in continental Finland and 16 in the Province of Åland (*kunnat*)¹⁵. The Constitution makes provisions for the municipalities' self-government and guarantees them a high degree of independence¹⁶. The number of municipalities has dropped from 448 (in 2002) to 309 (in 2021). Finland's national languages are Finnish and Swedish. 49 per cent of Finnish municipalities are either bilingual or Swedish-speaking. There are 16 Swedish-speaking municipalities and all of them are located on the Åland Islands.

ICELAND. In Iceland's Constitution there is only one article concerning the local administration that makes provisions on the principle of local autonomy for municipalities: *The municipalities shall manage their affairs independently, as laid down by law. The income sources of the municipalities and the municipalities' right to decide whether and how to use their sources of income shall be regulated by law*¹⁷. Article 2 of the Act on Local Authorities also reiterates the right of self-government. It states that the special interests of a local authority shall be finally determined without the local authority's opinion.

Historically, Iceland was divided into 23 counties (*sýslur*) and 23 independent cities (*kaupstaðir*). The independent cities existed until 1983. Since then no distinction has been made between rural and urban municipalities. Iceland is one of the biggest islands in Europe. It has an area of 103,000 sq. km. The population of Iceland is only about 369,870 people¹⁸. Iceland is therefore one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. The entire country is divided into regional municipalities that have self-determination and responsibility in terms of their own affairs. More than 60 per cent of the population lives in the capital city area.

¹⁴The Local Government Act has undergone a number of changes over time. The last legislative amendment was made by Law no. 175/2019.

¹⁵They tend to be small. More than half of the municipalities have fewer than 6,000 residents. The smallest municipality, the Swedish-speaking town of Sottunga, has less than 100 residents, whereas the number of residents of Finland's capital Helsinki was about 656,920 (on 31.12.2020). For more details: https://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html#Demographic%20dependency%20ratio%20by%20municipality.

¹⁶Wiberg, M., *La Finlande*, in De Waele, J.-M., Magonette, P., 2008, *Les démocraties européennes. Approche comparée des systèmes politiques nationaux*, Paris: Armand Colin, p. 158.

¹⁷Article 78 of Iceland's Constitution.

¹⁸The inhabitants of the Capital Region were 237,470 and 132,400 lived in other regions. For more details: <https://www.statice.is/publications/news-archive/inhabitants/population-in-the-1st-quarter-2021/>



Iceland has two administrative levels of government:

- the national level;
- the local authorities:

Local authorities	Population ¹⁹
1	100,000 and more than 100,000 people
2	10,000 to 99,999 people
2	5,000 to 9,999 people
8	2,000 to 4,999 people
12	1,000 to 1,999 people
15	500 to 999 people
9	300 to 499 people
12	200 to 299 people
22	100 to 199 people
15	50 to 99 people

From an administrative point of view, Iceland is divided into:

- 8 regions;
- 6 constituencies
- 69 municipalities²⁰.

Until 2003's reform, the constituencies had had the same geographical area as the 8 regions. Since 2003, they opted for a new territorial division in Iceland, that is 6 constituencies to be used for the legislative elections. They have no administrative relevance, but a purely electoral one.

¹⁹For more details:

http://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Ibuar/Ibuar__mannfjoldi__2_bygdir__Byggdakjarnar/MAN03500.px/?rxid=3443a840-847e-44f4-afe6-8c9ecb77bcb.

²⁰Reykjavík had the biggest population (133,262 people). Árneshreppur had the smallest population (42 people). 36 municipalities had less than 1,000 people, but only 11 municipalities had 5,000 people or more.



The law on the income bases of Icelandic municipalities can be traced more than 900 years back. Income bases were first determined in the Tithing Law that was enacted near the end of the 11th century (1096/1097) at the initiative of Bishop Gissur Ísleifsson. Municipalities, which were then called *parishes*, were responsible for collecting the tithe, and a part of it went to support the poor. This law was so ingrained in Icelandic society that part of it had been still in force until the last century.

The municipalities were re-established by a directive of Christian IX of Denmark, on May 4 1872. The first Act on Local Authorities was issued in 1905²¹. Municipalities are public entities with legal personality. Municipalities are independent authorities that are governed by democratically elected local authorities that act on behalf of the residents of the municipality²².

To create a municipality, at least 50 people are needed. The number of municipalities has changed over time as follows:

Year	Number of municipalities
1950	229
1990	212
1994	171
1998	124
2002	105
2006	79
2010	76
2014	74
2018	72
2021	69 ²³

²¹See: <https://www.samband.is/media/enska/SIS-enska.pdf>.

²²Article 3 of paragraph 1 of Local Authorities Act (Iceland).

²³See: <https://www.statice.is/publications/news-archive/inhabitants/the-population-on-january-1st-2021/>



NORWAY. According to article 1 of the Constitution: “The Kingdom of Norway is a free, independent, *indivisible* and *inalienable* realm (...).”.

The Kingdom of Norway has three administrative levels of government:

- national level;
- county/regions;
- municipalities;

The 1837 Alderman Act defined the local authorities’ rights and responsibilities for the first time.

The administrative reforms that took place in the 1970s aimed at re-establishing the relations between the local, regional and national levels. The reforms also led to a reduction in number of the local authorities. Thus, the number of counties dropped from 23 to 14, and the number of the municipalities dropped from 1,300 to 277.

The administrative reform²⁴ was enacted by Parliament in June 2014. All municipalities were invited to make a decision whether to merge or not by 2017. Out of the merging of 119 municipalities there resulted 47. Likewise the 19 county councils became 11.

At present, there are 356 municipalities and 11 regions in Norway. The reform has decentralized some tasks and responsibilities from central government to new regions. Six counties made mutual decisions to merge. The Parliament decided that 19 county councils would merge, resulting 11 regions.

The Norwegian government deemed that the administrative reform would strengthen each region and improve coordination between the municipalities, regions and the state as well.

At present, the Norwegian administration is governed by Local Government Act no. 25/1992, with subsequent amendments and completions²⁵. This normative act establishes the basic rules for the organization of municipal and regional authorities.

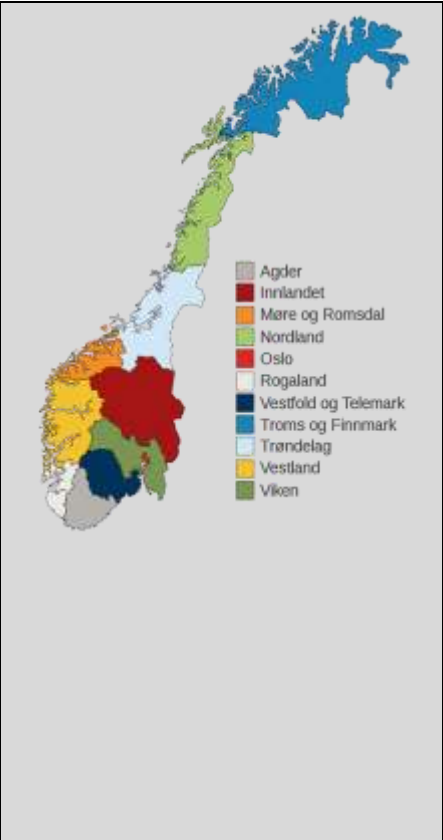
²⁴The government set a number of goals for the reform: - good, equal services for citizens; - comprehensive and coordinated community development; - sustainable and financially strong municipalities; - strengthened local democracy.

²⁵Act No. 107 of 25 September 1992: Act relating to municipalities and county authorities - The Local Government Act: <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/krd/tx-23249-kommuneloven-eng.pdf>



Regions of Norway (2021)

No.	Region	Merged counties
1.	Oslo	Oslo City and County
2.	Viken	Akershus, Buskerud Østfold
3.	Innlandet	Hedmark and Oppland
4.	Vestmark	Telemark and Vestfold
5.	Agder	Aust-Agder and Vest-Agder
6.	Rogaland	Rogaland
7.	Vestlandet	Hordaland and Sogn & Fjordane
8.	Møre og Romsdal	Møre og Romsdal
9.	Trøndelag	Sør-Trøndelag and Nord-Trøndelag
10.	Nordland	Nordland
11.	Nord-Hålogaland	Troms and Finnmark



Municipalities are the basis of the Norwegian administration. More than half of the municipalities have less than 5,000 people, and 14 have more than 50,000 people. Oslo is the largest municipality. It has a population of about 620,000, and the smallest is Utsira, with a population of 209 people.²⁶ Any municipality with a population exceeding 5,000 may use the word “town” provided that it has a dense population area, which is one of the characteristics of a town.

²⁶ See: <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/statistikker/befsett>.



SWEDEN. Decentralization has classical aspects. Sweden is a good example of a unitary state, but with a strong decentralization footprint²⁷. In Sweden, local autonomy is an element of national sovereignty, as it is attached to democracy²⁸.

Article 1 of the Constitution: “Swedish democracy is founded on the free opinion formation and on universal and equal ballot. It shall be achieved through a representative and parliamentary policy and through *local self-government*”.

The law making provisions on the local government organization in Sweden is the Law on Local Government, which was adopted in 1991²⁹ and has undergone a number of changes over time.

The Swedish administration has 2 levels:

- national governmental level;
- local level (county/regions and municipalities).

Sweden is divided into *municipalities* and *county councils*³⁰.



²⁷ Blomgren, M., Larue, Th., “*La Suède*”, De Waele, J.-M., Magnette, P., *cited book*, pages 425-426.

²⁸ Grewe, C., Ruiz Fabri, H., 1995, *Droits constitutionnels européens*, Paris: P.U.F., page 286.

²⁹ See: <http://www.government.se/content/1/c6/02/95/35/ca584fee.pdf>.

³⁰ Chapter 1, Section 1, paragraph 1 of Local Government Act (Sweden).

The counties (*län*) were established in 1634, upon Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna's initiative, in order to organize a modern administration.

The main goals of the public administration reforms since the 1970s have been *decentralization, marketing and management principle implementation, and network governance*³¹. The change from *counties* into *regions* marks the triumph of a two-decade process of regional reforms in Sweden. It started with an experimental reform in 1999, when 2 merging county councils in the South formed the new Skåne Region, whose main centre is Malmö, and 3 merging county councils in West formed the Västra Götaland Region, whose main centre is Gothenburg (Göteborg). In addition to the territorial enlargement, this reform also included the allocation of additional competencies, such as responsibility for physical planning, culture, environment, infrastructure and other regional development issues from the state agencies (the county administrative boards, *län*) to the regions³². In 2010, this reform became permanent and has then been gradually expanded, to transfer the regional development issues to the assemblies of Gotland and Halland, as well as other forms of regional and municipal cooperation. Since 1 January 2019, all county councils have become *regions*.

The communes are the basic units of Swedish local government. There are few communes and they share a fairly large territory. In 2006, there were 290³³ communes. The reunited communes form the counties / regions. There are 2 different types of municipalities (*stadsdelsnämnder* and *kommundelsnämnder*).

The central government decides when a new commune is formed. The size of the communes is variable, from those with about 3,000 people to those with over 700,000 people. In

³¹Wockelberg, H., Öberg, S. A., 2018, *Public administration characteristics and performance in EU28: Sweden*, in Report "The Public Administration in the EU 28", Publications Office of the European Union, pages 1004-1028. Full document: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a33dfde6-9602-11e8-8bc1-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

³²Berg, L., Oscarsson, H., *The Swedish regional elections 2018, Regional & Federal Studies Volume 30, 2020 - Issue 3: Annual Review of Regional Elections*, - Pp. 511-524. For details: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13597566.2020.1739656?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

³³Local authorities have the same status. There are no different regulations for them, even if the population varies between 2,500 and 975,551 people (Stockholm, 31.12. 2020).



their turn, the communes are divided into 2,512 parishes (*församlingar*), whose importance is marked during censuses and elections.

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES IN THE NORTHERN STATES

DENMARK. Every person who, on the election day, is aged 18 years and over, who has permanent residence in a municipality or region, who is also a Danish citizen or a citizen of another EU member state, except for Iceland or Norway, or who has continuously been a permanent resident in Denmark for the past 3 years prior to election day can run for a mandate³⁴ in a local or regional council³⁵.

Each *regional council - regionsrådsformand*³⁶ - consists of 41 elected representatives constituting the highest decision-making body in each of the five individual regions. At the centre of each regional council there is the *chairman* of the regional council, who is elected by the members of the regional council. The members of the regional councils are elected for four years. The President of the regional council is elected from among the members of the council. The list of candidates for regional council elections must be signed by at least 50 voters in the region, as supporters.

The municipalities are governed by *municipal councils - kommunes råd* -. The elections for the local councils are held every 4 years according to the d'Hondt formula. The number of members in the municipal counties³⁷ with a population of more than 20,000 shall be uneven, ranging from minimum 19 to maximum 31³⁸, but in the case of Copenhagen there shall be no more than 55³⁹. The local council shall elect the chairman from among its members. The local council

³⁴The next election of members to local and regional councils will be held on 16 November 2021.

³⁵Part 1, article 1, paragraph 1 of Local and Regional Government Elections Act no. 138 of 7 February 2019.

³⁶Currently, there are 205 councillors compared to 357 during the administrative-territorial division of the county.

³⁷The number of members in the municipalities with less than 20,000 inhabitants shall be uneven, ranging from minimum 9 to maximum 31.

³⁸The number of inhabitants shall be established as of 1 April of the year when local council election is held.

³⁹Part 2, article, 5 paragraph 1 of Act on Local Government, consolidated Act No. 47 on 15 January 2019 (Denmark)



shall decide when and where to hold the ordinary meetings. They shall generally be held at least once a month. The local council shall elect the members of the committees and commissions.

Greenland and the Faroe Islands have their own municipal organization. Greenland is divided into 4 municipalities. Each municipality has a municipal council, consisting of 15 to 21 members who are elected for a 4-year term, according to the system of proportional representation (*d'Hondt* method). The Faroe Islands have 30 municipalities. Each municipality has a municipal council, which is elected for a 4-year term. The mayors are elected by the municipal councils.

FINLAND. There are 19 Finnish regions (*Maakunnan liitto*)⁴⁰. They are led by a *regional council (alueneuvosto)*. The regional council is in charge of the local development and is responsible for the regional planning. At regional level, the administrative organization is ensured by an administrative office, which is part of the administration at this level and has the responsibility to fulfill the tasks of the Government at the regional level, to keep permanent contact with the Government, to check the legality of the activities, and to coordinate the local level policies.

A municipality is governed by a *municipal council (kunnanvaltuusto)*. A local council is responsible for the municipality's activities and finances and exercises the municipality's power of discretion⁴¹. The municipal council consists of members who are elected by direct ballot (based on the population number), every 4 years, by the municipality's people⁴². Following the 2015 reform, the number of the elected local councillors shall be an odd number, according to the population of the municipality:

⁴⁰For details: <https://www.localfinland.fi/expert-services/finnish-municipalities-and-regions>.

⁴¹Part II, Chapter 4, Section 14 paragraph 1 of Local Government Act no. 410 of 2015 (Finland).

⁴²See: <http://www.vaalit.fi/uploads/alugf0gy9e5.pdf>



Population/Municipality ⁴³	Minimum number of local councillors
no more than 5,000	13
20,001 – 50,000	27
50,001 – 100,000	51
100,001 – 250,000	59
250,001 – 500,000	67
more than 500,000	79

Local councillors and deputy councillors shall be elected to the local council during the local elections held within the municipality⁴⁴. A local council term shall be of four years⁴⁵, beginning at the start of June in the election year⁴⁶. In 2017 municipal elections, altogether 8,999 councillors were elected to the councils in mainland Finland⁴⁷.

A municipal council elects both the *municipal executive (kunnanhallitus)* and the mayor, from among its members. Often called “*municipal mayor*”⁴⁸, the mayor is appointed by the city council for the same term as the city council. The mayor is the leader of the administration and prepares the decisions of the municipal executive. The local councils elect the vice-presidents from among their members. For the smooth running of the council's work, the councillors meet in

⁴³Part II, Chapter 4, Section 16 paragraph 1 of Local Government Act no. 410 of 2015 (Finland).

⁴⁴Election Law no. 714/1998, amended by Law no. 563/2015.

⁴⁵The 2021 municipal elections will not, however, be held in April due to the COVID-19 epidemic, but Election Day is 13 June 2021 (Act on the Postponement of the 2021 Municipal Elections 256/2021).

⁴⁶Part II, Chapter 4, Section 15 paragraph 1 of Local Government Act no. 410 of 2015 (Finland).

⁴⁷The councilors elected in 2017 represented 13 different political parties. About 44% of the elected councilors were new, and the remaining 56% had previous experience concerning the council work. The women account for about 39% of council chairpersons and for 31% of first deputy chairpersons. The average age of the council members elected in 2017 municipal elections was 50, and that of chairpersons was 52. The number of elected people of foreign origin (whose parents were born abroad) was 66. For more details: <https://www.localfinland.fi/local-elections>.

⁴⁸Mătușescu, C., Gilia, C., *cited book*, p. 109.



different working groups. Each municipality must have a municipal strategy. The strategy shall include the long term goals that the local council sets in relation to the activities and finances of the municipality. The council carries out its activity in meetings. City council meetings are public⁴⁹, unless they deal with issues or documents which the law provides that they must be kept secret or if the authority, for an important reason, decides that the meeting should be secret.

ICELAND. The highest authority within each municipality is called *municipal council* (*sveitarstjórn*). The municipal council is elected according to the provisions of the electoral law of the local authorities. The municipal elections take place on the last Saturday in May. Every Icelandic citizen who is aged 18 years or over when an election takes place and who is legally domiciled in the municipality is entitled to vote in the municipal elections⁵⁰.

The representatives of the municipal councils will be elected by secret ballot, based on the principle of proportional representation. The list of candidates must have an attached written declaration of all persons on the list stating that they agree to run and have their names entered on the list. Also, any list of candidates must be accompanied by a written support statement from voters in that municipality⁵¹. The list of candidates must include a number at least equal to the number of councillors in that municipality, but not more than double.

The number of representatives in a municipal council shall be determined based on the population number. The number of representatives in a municipal council shall be an odd number⁵².

⁴⁹Part V, Chapter 12, Section 101 paragraph 1 Local Government Act no. 410 of 2015 (Finland).

⁵⁰Article 2, paragraph 1 of Local Government Elections Act, No. 5/1998, with subsequent amendments (<https://www.government.is/library/04-Legislation/Local-Government-Elections-Act.pdf>)

⁵¹The Electoral Law stipulates (at article 22, paragraph 2) the minimum number of supporters who must accompany the list of candidates:

- in a municipality with 101-500 residents, 10 supporters
- in a municipality with 501-2,000 residents, 20 supporters
- in a municipality with 2.001-1,000 residents, 40 supporters
- in a municipality with 10.001-50,000 residents, 80 supporters
- in a municipality with over 50.000 residents, 160 supporters

Each elector may only declare support for a single list in, each election.

⁵²Article 11 of paragraph 1 of Local Authorities Act (Iceland).



Population/Municipality	Number of councillors ⁵³
With a population less than 2,000	5–7 council members
With a population between 2,000 and 9,999	7–11 council members
With a population between 10,000 and 49,999	11–15 council members
With a population between 50,000 and 99,999	15–23 council members
With a population of 100,000 or more	23–31 council members

A municipal council has a 4-year mandate. A municipal council shall commence its work within 15 days since the date of the elections. The council shall elect, by a majority of votes, one leader and one or more vice-leaders. The leader’s term of office is 1 year.

The municipal councils organize regular meetings, as the council decides in advance. The meetings take place quarterly. In localities where a municipal executive council is elected, the meetings are held at least once a month. However, councils may decide to suspend the meetings for up to 2 months each summer. The city council may also be convened if at least one third of the councillors so requests. The council meetings are public. Within the municipal council, the decisions are taken with the majority of the votes of the councillors.

The municipal council may decide to elect *an executive municipal committee*.

Concerning the councils that have 7 or 9 members, the municipal executive committee will include 3 councillors, and if the councils have 11 or more councillors, the municipal executive committee will include 5 to 7 councillors. In the municipal councils, there are a series of commissions, which are appointed for a 4-year term. The committees reflect the political configuration of the council. The municipal council may appoint *a municipal administrator*. Two or more municipalities may have the same municipal administrator⁵⁴.

⁵³It is not mandatory to increase or to reduce the number of representatives in the municipal council unless the population of the municipality has been higher or lower than the stated levels for 4 consecutive years.

⁵⁴Article 54 paragraph 1 of Local Authorities Act (Iceland).



NORWAY. The municipalities are governed by a *municipal council* (*kommunestyre*). The election of local authorities is governed by the People's Representation Act⁵⁵. The members of the Council are elected by the citizens who have the right to vote and legal capacity as well, who reside in the respective municipality and who have registered in the Electoral Roll of the municipality⁵⁶. The voters must be aged 18 years or over and they must not be banned to vote⁵⁷. A list of candidates must be supported by minimum 300 signatures. The Government selects the Election Day, always a Monday in September. The act on local government sets the maximum number of councillors for a municipality, depending on the number of inhabitants, and this number shall always be odd. The municipal council is elected by the inhabitants of a municipality who are entitled to vote under the status provisions. The term of office is of 4 years⁵⁸.

Population	Number of councillors ⁵⁹
up to 5,000 inhabitants	11 councillors ⁶⁰
more than 5,000 but not more than 10,000 inhabitants	19 councillors
more than 10,000 but not more than 50,000 inhabitants	27 councillors
more than 50,000 but not more than 100,000 inhabitants	35 councillors
more than 100,000 inhabitants	43 councillors

⁵⁵People's Representation Act - Act No. 57 on 28 June 2002. For more details: <http://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/europe/NO/norway-representation-of-the-people-act-2002/view>

⁵⁶Chapter 3 §3-3 paragraph 2 of the People's Representation Act. At local government elections, the Nordic nationals are entitled to vote provided they were registered as residents in Norway no later than 31 May in the year of the election. Other foreign nationals are entitled to vote provided they have been registered as residents in this country for the last three consecutive years before the Election Day.

⁵⁷According to article 53 of Norway's Constitution: "*The right to vote is lost by persons who are: 1. Sentenced for criminal offences, in accordance with the relevant provisions by law; 2. Entering the service of foreign power without the consent of the Government*".

⁵⁸Chapter 2, Section 7 paragraph 1 of The Local Government Act (Norway).

⁵⁹Chapter 2, Section 7 paragraph 2 of The Local Government Act (Norway).

⁶⁰This is the maximum number of councilors.



The municipal council elects the *municipal executive board (formannskap)* with a minimum of 5 members. The members are elected for a 4-year term to the municipal executive council from among the members of the municipal council. The municipal council itself elects its *chairperson* and *deputy chairperson* from among the members of the municipal executive board. The municipal council may appoint the standing committee for municipal authority purposes or for parts of the municipal authority activity⁶¹.

The main representatives of the central government in the counties are the *county governors*. The county governors are supposed to coordinate the activities of other central government bodies at the county level. *The county governor (Fylkesmannen)*⁶² is a traditional Norwegian public service institution, dating back to 1662, which performs a wide range of tasks on behalf of the central state. This institution has a complex organization and has undergone a substantial expansion since 1980 by incorporating several regional government agencies. The governor approves the major economic decisions in the municipal council, such as loan applications and making guarantees⁶³, either at the request of 3 members of the municipal council, or *ex officio*.

SWEDEN. In Sweden, the centralizing tendencies of an industrial society have enhanced the power of the national government in relation to local government. Nevertheless, the tradition in terms of strong local government is long and local governments continue to play an important role, sharing with the national government the responsibilities for many of the programmes.

Historically speaking, the regional political level in Sweden has been represented by a county⁶⁴ (*landsting*), and its assembly (*landstingsfullmäktige*). However, following a Swedish Parliament decision on 1 January 2019, a county is now called 'region' and the assemblies are thus now called *regionfullmäktige*. The *regionfullmäktige*, just like their predecessors, are policy-

⁶¹The committees shall not have less than 3 members.

⁶²For details: <https://www.fylkesmannen.no/en/>.

⁶³Chapter 10, Section 60 of Local Government Act (Norway).

⁶⁴The county councils were established in 1862.

making assemblies, which are directly elected by the residents of the region. They are financed via regional income tax and healthcare has been and still is their main task.

The council is composed of councillors⁶⁵ elected for a 4-year term⁶⁶, who have responsibilities in the field of healthcare (i.e. 95% of the activities they carry out). Many of their powers are delegated by the central government. The county council appoints the executive committees.

Population/County	Number of councillors
140,000 residents or less	31
more than 140,000 and up to 200,000 residents	51
more than 200,000 residents	71
more than 300,000 residents	101

The regional echelon is not considered as being the most important. It is rather the link between the national and local levels. Two thirds of the financing of the local authorities is done from the local taxes and fees, and 1/4 from the annual subsidies granted by the Government.

The municipal councils (kommunfullmäktige) are made up of councillors, who are elected by ballot, based on the principle of proportional representation, for a 4-year term, starting on 1 November. The exercise of the mandate by the elected councillors in the Municipality of Stockholm begins on 15 September in the election year. The law on local government⁶⁷ establishes the number of councillors that each municipality must have, and this number is established according to the population of each administrative unit:

⁶⁵Any person who is registered as a resident of the municipality and is 18 years old not later than the Election Day is entitled to vote in the election of municipal assembly members and their alternates and is: 1. a citizen of Sweden or another EU Member State, 2. a citizen of Iceland or Norway, 3. in case of the foreign residents, if they were registered as Swedish residents for 3 consecutive years before the election day.

⁶⁶Apostol Tofan, D., 2006, *Instituții administrative europene*, Bucharest: C. H. Beck Publishing House, p. 150.

⁶⁷Chapter 5, Section 1 of Local Government Act (Sweden).



Population/municipality	Number of councillors
12,000 or less residents	31
more than 12,000 and up to 24,000 de residents	41
more than 4,000 and up to 36,000 residents	51
more than 36,000 residents	61
Municipality of Stockholm	101

The assembly elects a chairman and one or more vice chairmen from among its members. The assembly decides upon the duration of these mandates⁶⁸. The assembly's meetings are public. The assembly may, however, decide that a particular matter should be discussed in the chamber⁶⁹. A municipal assembly shall appoint a municipal executive committee.

The councils have the global competence⁷⁰ to manage matters of general interest with regard to their territory or their inhabitants, which do not fall within the competence of the state. The councils are assisted by specialized commissions on various fields of activity.

At regional level, an important part of the state's activity is taken over by the 21 prefectures (*länsstyrelser*). The prefect is appointed by the Swedish Government. The prefect is an important link between the population and municipalities, on the one hand, and between the Government, Parliament and central authorities, on the other. He is responsible for enforcing the decisions taken by Parliament and the Government.

⁶⁸Chapter 5, Section 6 of Local Government Act (Sweden).

⁶⁹Chapter 5, Section 38 of Local Government Act (Sweden).

⁷⁰Mainly competencies in areas such as: social services, urban planning, primary and secondary education, healthcare, road maintenance services, etc., mandatory competencies for councils. For more details, please visit: <https://skl.se/tjanster/englishpages/municipalitiescountycouncilsandregions/theroleofthemunicipalities.1302.html>



3. Conclusions

In the Nordic countries, the political culture is one of multi-party parliamentary democracy, dominated by strong social democratic parties and consensus. In these countries, they are often seen as examples of transparency and lack of corruption, with high levels of public trust.

Page | 85

The Nordic countries are often seen as models of government, both from a political and administrative point of view.

Traditional northern centralism was diminished following an extensive process of local autonomy, imposed by the many reforms that have taken place over time. The reforms included changes in both the organization of the authorities and the distribution of their responsibilities, in some cases suggesting new geographic boundaries for the administrative units. Subsequently, the emphasis was on the implementation of tools and procedures through which the administration can be efficient and respond to the requirements of the community, such as: e-government, transparency, citizen engagement and coordination.

The politicization is low and the involvement of public employees in the reform process is high in the administration of the Nordic countries.

During the past 20 years, 97% of the population growth in the Nordic countries has occurred in 30 functional urban areas. Accommodating this growing population with housing, infrastructure, services and so forth, in a sustainable way, is the overarching challenge. Even though the Nordic cities and regions are known for social cohesion and social equality, a fundamental challenge is the socio-economic polarization and fragmentation within urban areas.

Local government in the Nordic countries must thus face the new contemporary challenges of an increasingly diverse society, which needs complex public services.

The way in which the communities of the Nordic states are administered is a model for any administration that seeks to serve the citizens.



Country	Administrative division		
	Municipalities	Regions	County
DENMARK	98 - municipalities - <i>Kommuner</i>	5 - regions - <i>regioner</i>	-
FINLAND	311- municipalities - <i>Kunta</i>	19 - regions - <i>Maakunta</i>	70 sub-regions - <i>Seutukunta</i>
ICELAND	69 - municipalities - <i>Sveitarfélög</i>	8 - regions - <i>Landsvæði</i>	6 - constituencies
NORWAY	356 - municipalities - <i>Kommuner</i>	11- regions - <i>Fylker</i>	-
SWEDEN	290 - municipalities - <i>Sveriges kommuner</i>	21- regions - <i>Län</i>	-



REFERENCES

1. Apostol Tofan, D., 2006, *Instituții administrative europene*, Bucharest: C. H. Beck Publishing House.
2. De Waele, J.-M., Magnette, P., 2008, *Les démocraties européennes. Approche comparée des systèmes politique nationaux*, Paris: Armand Colin;
3. Fromont, M., 2006, *Droit administratif des États européens*, Paris: P.U.F.
4. Gilia, C., 2020, *Instituții politice și administrative în statele nordice*, Bucharest: Pro Universitaria Publishing House.
5. Grewe, C., Ruiz Fabri, H., 1995, *Droits constitutionnels européens*, Paris: P.U.F.
6. Lauvaux, Ph., 2004, *Les grandes démocraties contemporaines*, 3^{ème} édition, Paris: P.U.F.
7. Leroy, P., 2001, *Les régimes politiques du monde contemporain. Introduction générale. I. Les régimes politiques des États libéraux*, Grenoble: P.U.G.
8. Lijphart, A., 2000, *Modele ale democrației. Forme de guvernare și funcționare în treizeci și șase de țări*, Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
9. Mătușescu, C., Gilia, C., 2011, *Puterile regionale și locale în Uniunea Europeană*, Bucharest: Universul Juridic Publishing House.
10. Popescu, D., *System of local government in Sweden* - file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/cks_2013_law_art_072.pdf.
11. Sandalow, T., 1971, *Local Government in Sweden*, Am. J. Comp. L. 19, pp. 766-785.
12. Wockelberg, H., Öberg, S. A., 2018, *Public administration characteristics and performance in EU28: Sweden*, in Report “The Public Administration in the EU 28”, Publications Office of the European Union, pp.1004-1028.
13. Ziller, J., 1993, *Administration comparées. Les systèmes politico-administratifs de l'Europe de douze*, Paris: Motchrestien.

DENMARK



***The Constitutional Act of Denmark - <https://www.thedanishparliament.dk/>

***Act on Local Government - <https://elections.im.dk/media/15729/act-on-local-government.pdf>

***Local and Regional Government Elections Act, Act No. 363 of 2 April 2014 - Page | 88
<https://valg.oim.dk/media/16285/local-and-regional-government-elections-act.pdf>

***http://www.kl.dk/ImageVaultFiles/id_64104/cf_202/The_Local_Government_Reform_in_Brief.PDF.

FINLAND

***The Constitution Of Finland-

<https://finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731.pdf>

***The Finnish Local Government Act (365/1995) - <https://vaalit.fi/en/legislation>

***Election Act no.714/1998 - <https://vaalit.fi/en/legislation>

ISLAND

***Constitution of the Republic of Iceland

- <https://www.government.is/Publications/Legislation/Lex/>

***Legal Code Icelandic Acts of Law 20 January 2019. Version 149a-
<https://www.government.is/>

***Local Government Elections Act, No. 5/1998 -
<https://www.government.is/library/04-Legislation/Local-Government-Elections-Act.pdf>

NORWAY

***The Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway - <https://lovdata.no>

***Act No. 57 of 28 June 2002 relating to parliamentary and local government elections
- <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2002-06-28-57>

***<https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kmd/id504/> - Ministry of Local government and
Modernisation

SWEDEN

***The Constitution of Sweden - <https://www.riksdagen.se>

***Local Government Act - <https://www.government.se>



***<https://www.government.se/how-sweden-is-governed/the-swedish-model-of-government-administration/>

***Swedish Association of Local and Regional Authorities -
<https://skr.se/tjanster/englishpages.411.html>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gilia Claudia, PhD., Associate Professor at Valahia University of Targoviste, Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences

Email: giliaclaudia@yahoo.com

