

## Local political leaders

- a collage of discourses

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Malgorzata Erikson, School of Public Administration, Göteborg University, Box 712, S-405 30 Göteborg, Göteborg 2004.

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### Abstract

In order to save what is left of the public trust in the political system, one of the most important tasks is to relegitimize the politicians. The general image of this group, the negative stereotypes and the lack of understanding of their complex duties, must be balanced, and the intention behind this study is to make a small contribution towards a more nuanced picture.

The aim of the study is through discourse analyses try to answer the questions: How do local political leaders, i.e. members of the municipal executive committees, interpret their roles as politicians, including their relations with others and the circumstances under which they work? And which consequences do these interpretations have on their political practice and their status in society?

A number of local politicians in two Swedish municipalities have been interviewed, and I have observed on several occasions how these politicians interact in political meetings. It is the text constructed during these interviews and observations that represent the data collected for this study.

In the dissertation I have consistently tried to carry three theoretical perspectives with me, perspectives that help me to sort my empirical findings and make them meaningful in a context outside my cases. The first of these three is the power incorporated in the discourses. From theories of freedom and structural oppression I have tried to find examples of how discourses limit our thoughts and how some groups benefit while others suffer.

One of the main goals of my study has been to erase the oversimplified image of our politicians. But as it turns out, they are not afraid of creating stereotypes of their own, both of themselves and, which is the second theoretical theme of the dissertation, of mass media. The third and final theme has been the alleged conflict between leadership and democracy. Theories of democracy and leadership are created by two different scientific disciplines, political science and organization and management studies, where the latter more often than not concentrates on the private sector. In the study I show how the ideals from a managerial discourse collides with a more traditional idealistic one, and how these two discourses are fighting each other, thus forcing the politicians to take sides. This is sometimes difficult since the battle is fought inside the head of individual politicians. I also try to point out how the discourse of organizational democracy glides between these two other discourses.

### Keywords

Political leadership, discourse analysis, local government, democracy, identity, politicians, roles, stereotypes, public administration, constructionism, organizational theory, Sweden