OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN POLITICAL DECISION MAKING – AN EMPIRICAL STUDY THROUGH AN INSTITUTIONAL LENS[1]

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Biographical Note

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Abstract

Openness and transparency, i.e. free and fair elections and the idea of enlightened citizens that can hold governments accountable, are cornerstones in modern democratic thinking. However, the aspirations of openness and transparency also inherit challenges, also in Sweden considered being

one of the most open countries in the world. This is also the case in a regional context, characterized by collaborative planning, multi-level governance and network governance. In this qualitative empirical study based on interviews with political leaders from the Stockholm region, it is explored how openness and transparency is interpreted in regional political decision making. An institutional framework of four levels of social analysis (Williamson, 2000) and theories relating to democratic ideal, governance and the public sphere are used to understand and explain the mechanisms operating when dealing with openness and transparency in political decision making.

Keywords: openness, transparency, institutions, regional government, regional policy

JEL classification: R50

1. Introduction

Openness and transparency are necessary elements of a well working democracy that build upon the idea of informed citizens, open and just elections and an accountable government. Although democratic systems may vary, it is hard to think of a democracy where the notions of openness and transparency are absent. Hence from a democratic perspective the issue of openness and transparency, is not only about making information accessible it is also an issue of accountability. A development towards increasing openness and transparency in democratic states has been encouraged by legislation of freedom of information, and international initiatives such as Transparency international (www.transparency.org) and Open government partnership (www.opengovpartnership.org). It has also been facilitated by digitalization, allowing for new tools to collect and share large amounts of information and permitting ideas to rapidly spread from one country to another.

However, openness and transparency also inherit challenges, and has been accused for being a myth and a metaphor (Christensen et al., 2015), taken for granted (Flyverbom, 2015), having costs and unintended consequences (Hansen et al., 2015) and for being a buzzword (Hood in Hood and Heald, 2006; Lundgren and Westlund, 2016). Meijer et al. (2015) distinguish research of openness and transparency between the political realm, where the core question is how and when transparency contributes to the democratic quality of government, and the administrative realm where the key question is how and when transparency contributes to the executive competence of government. Despite the clear links between democracy and openness and transparency, and between the public realm and the administrative realm, openness and transparency seem to have mostly been researched in public administration. In this study the aim is to study how openness and

transparency is interpreted in regional political decision making, i.e. in the political real min what is considered being one of the most open countries in the world, Sweden. The case chosen is within the regional political context, a context where the practice of collaborative planning, multi-level governance and network governance can be assumed to bring additional complexities to the issue of openness and transparency in political decision making (e.g. Bache and Flinders, 2004; Healey, 1997, 2003; Sörensen and Torfing, 2007, 2009).

2. Openness and transparency in a theoretical framework

"Transparency has become one of the most cherished and celebrated, yet unquestioned ideals and aspirations of contemporary society" (Christensen and Cheney, 2015, p.70). Openness and transparency do not only have clear connections to democracy which often renders it a status of normative ideal, but also to digitalization and the emerging networked knowledge and information society. Open source, open innovation, open education, open data, open government – all these new ways of interacting, consuming, creating, producing and distributing with subsequent applications and practices breed openness and transparency. Some even claim openness is a virtue or an ethos (Benkler, 2006; Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006; Peters and Roberts, 2012). The full implications and the potential radical changes that may follow upon the digitalization sweeping around the world are too early to be determined, however already today digitalization has to a large degree changed the way people access information, make business and interact with one another. In the government sector, this trend of openness and transparency has been encouraged by freedom of information laws, open government initiatives (e.g. the Obama administration declared to be an open government when coming into office 2009) and international associations such as the Open government partnership in 2017 declaring 75 countries as members (Open government partnership, 2017).

The different contexts where openness and transparency have been explored in research are of rich variety, e.g. on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the business sector, accessibility to court proceedings or legal protection for whistleblowers in the legislative sector and relating to governance and public administration openness of federal and state executives to the public (Fenster, 2006). In research of openness and transparency in relation to government it is often associated to the notion of good governance (Christensen and Cheney, 2015).

However openness and transparency has also been criticized for being taken for granted (Flyverbom, 2015), being a myth and a metaphor (Christensen et al., 2015), and for being

simplistic, a *"... result from a simplistic model of linear communication that assumes that information once set free from the state that creates it, will produce and informed, engaged public that will hold officials accountable"* (Fenster, 2006, p.855). Hansen et al. (2015) point at costs and unintended consequences, such as extensive workloads to fulfil requirements of transparency, and the risk of projecting an image of transparency. Although there are many frameworks for evaluation of government transparency, Mabillard and Zumofoen, (2016) claim that transparency and accountability have traditionally been studied one at a time. They attempt to make the link, and suggest content of information should be included, but still find the relationship difficult to clarify. Another critique deals with the concepts, where politics of open government and technologies has come together into what is called open government data (Yu and Robinson, 2012), which has more to do with transparency than accountability. Perhaps a more realistic view is to look upon openness and transparency as an ideal that all organizations have to deal with, as *"...a matter of managing visibilities, in ways that contribute to organizational control and societal governance."* (Flyerbom, 2015, p.180)

In this study openness and transparency the political realm at the regional territorial level is at focus. One of the characteristics of the regional political context in Sweden, the second tier of government in a three tier political system, is the shared responsibilities with other tiers of government and multi-level governance (Bache and Flinders 2004; Hedlund and Montin, 2009; Sörensen and Torfing, 2009). One of the assumptions in this study is that these characteristics of the regional level will increase the complexity of the issue of openness and transparency in political decision making.

To analyse openness and transparency in regional political decision making, an institutional framework will be used. Different branches of new institutional theory share in common that they understand institutions as formal and informal rules that create structures and regularities which in turn guide actors and behaviour (North, 1990; Williamson, 2000; Ostrom, 2005). Whereas rational choice institutionalists focus on exogenous rules and incentives, normative institutionalism focuses on endogenous norms and values (e.g. Peters, 2005). The analytical framework of four levels of social analysis of Williamson (2000) includes both the notion of formal and informal rules conceptualized as institutions at different levels that change in different time frames. The advantage of using this framework is that it may help us understand how different institutional levels frame the behaviour of actors with regard to openness and transparency. It may also help us understand the

interaction between different institutional levels with regard to how openness and transparency is interpreted in political decision making.

Williamson (2000) identifies four interrelated levels for social analysis:

- Level 1 Embeddedness: This level refers to culture, traditions, religion and social norms. The pace of change is very slow, 100-1000 years.

- Level 2 Basic institutional environment: This level refers to what is often called the formal rules of the game; constitution and basic legal, political and economic systems. The pace of change on this level is slow, 10-100 years.

- Level 3 Institutions of governance: This level refers to the play of the game and is where governance structures and policy is being developed. The pace of change is 1-10 years.

- Level 4 Short time resource allocation: This level refers to the daily operations within the framework of the other three levels and the pace of change is continuous (Williamson, 2000).

Yet, another perspective relevant to the context explored here is what March and Olsen (1989) call 'the logic of appropriateness' which signifies appropriated behaviour to a person, a role and a situation that complement the rational 'logic of expected consequences'. According to March and Olsen (1989), politics is a field which *"…is organized by a logic of appropriateness"* (p. 160). Although recognized for their theoretical contribution, the logic of appropriateness has proven difficult to empirically study (Goldman, 2005). Hence, in this study the logic of appropriateness is brought up as a relevant perspective, however as a tool for analysis the four levels for social analysis are used.

3. Methods

The aim of this article is to analyse how openness and transparency is interpreted in regional political decision making in Sweden. The research questions are:

1. How is openness interpreted?

2. How is openness and transparency interpreted in political decision making?

Sweden is considered being one of the most open countries in the world from several different aspects, e.g. more than 50% of GDP comes from export (Statistics Sweden, 2017), high levels of migration (Statistics Sweden, 2017), and scoring among the first in international press index (Freedom House, 2017). The notion of openness may have many different interpretations, which has been shown in earlier literature studies (e.g. Lundgren and Westlund, 2016) and in

empirical studies of regional development strategies (Lundgren, 2016) where it was found that openness was mostly interpreted along two strands; 'openness to people' and 'openness to knowledge, information and ideas'. Hence, in this study it is assumed that many different interpretations of openness may be expressed and the first research question opens up for different interpretations.

With regard to the second research question, how openness and transparency is interpreted in political decision making, a political issue that since long has been considered a politically difficult and complex issue has been chosen, i.e. the political issue of establishing a new administrative region in Stockholm County. Since the 1960ies there have been several attempts of a radical restructuration of the Swedish regional administrative organization that date back to the 17th and 19th century. It is a complex issue, not least because it involves many actors and because opinions are known to cut across organizations and political parties (SOU, 2016 a).A proposal to merge county councils into larger regions in Sweden as from 2019 was put forward by a government committee. It is expected that this reform would have implications on the efficiency and quality of government, but it is also likely to imply a reduction of total number of political seats. With regard to establishing a new administrative region in Stockholm county, two proposals were on the agenda at the time for this study; changing responsibility for regional development affairs from the state's regional authority, i.e. the County administrative board, to the publicly elected county council, and a merger of the County of Stockholm with the County of Gotland.

According to Seawright and Gerring (2008) case selection should always be purposive. The choice of Sweden represent an extreme case which is expected to contribute with a rich variety of interpretations of openness, and the choice of a complex political issue in a regional context is expected to give a rich material with regard to openness and transparency in political decision making. The regional decision making context, characterized by representative democracy and deliberative decision making processes (Lidström, 2013) in a multi-level and network governance context, implies that many stakeholders have a say on the issue; the local authorities, state administration at the regional level, and the business and civil sector that are involved in the consultation process foregoing the political decision (Dryzek, 2000; Bache and Flinders, 2004; Hedlund and Montin, 2009; Sörensen and Tofing, 2007, 2009).

To answer to the research questions an empirical qualitative case study has been conducted. Interviews with 10local and regional leaders[2] from political parties were conducted in June-July 2016. 5 of the interviews were conducted with political leaders from the local level and 5 from the regional level. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The institutional analytical framework of four levels of social analysis (Williamson, 2000) through which the interviews with political decision makers have been analysed, has been operationalized by attaching key words to the institutional level with the aim of facilitating the classifying of results into different institutional levels. (Table 1)

Table 1. Operationalization of institutional levels

Institutional level		Key words
I.	CULTURE, NORMS AND VALUES 100 years-	Freedom, democracy, equality, justice, knowledge, truth
II.	INSTITUTIONS 10-100 years	Local authorities, county councils, political parties, media
III.	GOVERNANCE 1-10 years	Legislation, regulations, government rules permitting or restraining
IV.	PRACTISE 0-10 years	Economic, political, social and cultural practises.

The methodological perspective of this study is abductive, where empirics delve into the theoretical understanding and contribute to the development of theory. In this case that means for instance that the key words were identified after a first couple of interviews had been conducted. The generalizability of the results in this case study, are expected to be more of analytical character than empirical (Yin, 2014). It is however assumed, that the institutional framework used may contribute to the analysis of openness and transparency also in other territorial or organizational contexts.

4. Discussion of results

In this section I return to the two research questions:

1. How is openness interpreted?

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[2] Local and regional political leaders from political parties are here defined as chair of the party at local or regional level. Requests for interviews were sent to party offices in the city of Stockholm, party offices in the Stockholm County Council and to regional party organizations of the eight parties represented in the Swedish parliament, i.e. local parties were not included. Requests were also sent to a selection of local party leaders in municipalities selected to represent the periphery and small municipalities. A total number of 30 requests were sent out. The selection of interviews was based on who responded first and the interviews were conducted June-July 2016.

2. How is openness and transparency interpreted in political decision making?

In the interviews the respondents were asked how they interpret openness in relation to themselves, to their party, their organization, the Stockholm region and society. They were also asked to tell whether they considered openness being a characteristic feature in relation to themselves, to their party etc. and how important they considered openness to be with regard to the relations in the previous question. As we shall see different notions of openness were brought up in different contexts.

To answer the second research question, the answers from the interviewees were grouped into four themes recurrent during the interviews; a question of democratic ideal, multi-level and network governance, a question of being part of the majority or a coalition, and the arena for public opinion and political debate.

4.1 How is openness interpreted?

The two major strands of interpreting openness as 'openness to people' and 'openness to knowledge, information and ideas' (Lundgren, 2016) were also found in this study, and discussions on 'openness to people' turned out to be more common.

In general the respondents consider themselves being *open persons*. With regard to their role as leaders for their political party in the local or regional council, there was a general perception of a duty of being open in the sense of being accessible and to communicate with voters and citizens. This has also been facilitated by digitalization. Other aspects of being an open person mentioned was the notion of being open-minded, i.e. to have a curious mind, be open to new ideas, and to be tolerant towards different ways of life. When discussing openness *in relation to the political party*, the discussion generally dealt with the rules and procedures within the political party or the party's ability to attract members and voters of different backgrounds and different ways of life. This was a context where reference to tolerance was done fairly often. It was only when discussing *openness in relation to the organization* (i.e. the local authority or county council) that 'openness towards information, knowledge and ideas' was brought up more often; the principle of public access to official records, internal rules for accessibility to information, internal rules for transparent processes and how digitalization may improve the citizens access to information and services.

When discussing openness *in relation to the Stockholm region,* openness to people and openness to business by being an attractive and open minded dynamic region was often brought up. This was often followed by a subsequent discussion of obstacles to this kind of openness, especially

the lack of housing, but also the importance of a welcoming attitude, and good transports and communications internally within the region and externally. With regard to *openness in relation to society*, the respondents perceived Sweden being characterized by being an open society and motivated this in terms of freedom of speech, democratic values translated into laws and rules, and equality.

In the interviews two dimensions of 'openness to knowledge, information and ideas' were highlighted; in the sense of bring out, disseminate or make information accessible, which is the association to which transparency is most frequently made, and in the sense of bring in or let in new information, knowledge and ideas as in the notion of open mindedness. This seems to be an important clarification that should be taken into consideration. Another distinction that was made, was between requirements for society and societal functions (such as the political role) to be open vs requirements for individuals to be open.

4.2 How is openness and transparency interpreted in political decision making?

In the interviews all respondents considered openness being an important value both to themselves, to their party, to their organization, to the region and to society, although the motivations differed with the different contexts. This is consistent with the idea of a logic of appropriateness which means that a person will act in consistency with their role, the rules and routines of the organization and the situation (March and Olsen, 1989).

When asked how openness and transparency is interpreted in political decision making, most of the respondents generally considered it being complex and many also considered it problematic. However also here the respondent had different motivations as to why it was considered complex or problematic.

The political issue of establishing an administrative region in Stockholm, which had been selected by the researcher as a a example of a complex and difficult political issue, was considered complex by the interviewees in the respect that it was deliberated in many different forums, and to several of the interviewees it was not quite clear where and when the final decision was to be taken. However it did not seem to be a more problematic political issue than any other issue that the interviewees were dealing with in their daily work. Several of the respondents referred to this political issue as being an issue mainly with relevance to the political parties and not so much of relevance to the citizens in the Stockholm region, and hence the issue of transparency vis à vis voters and citizens in this particular issue seemed to be of less relevance. Several of the respondents

noted that the issue of establishing an administrative region is more complex and difficult in other parts of Sweden where a change of territorial administrative borders is expected to have larger implications than in the Stockholm region. One conclusion is that the political decision makers are used to handle political issues of rich complexity with many stakeholders involved, and that perceived difficulties with regard to openness and transparency increase when the issues are of high interest to citizens, voters and media.

A question of democratic ideal

In the interviews it was revealed that perceptions of openness and transparency were related to different expectations with regard to democracy and different democratic ideals. Representative democracy, where people in open and fair elections select their representatives, is perhaps what we think of when we in daily talk speak of democracy. However, democracies and political systems also contain other elements that regulate the relation between the state, society and citizens. Examples of other forms or ideals of democracy are participatory initiatives aiming at direct democracy, and deliberative democracy where networks and partnerships have evolved to manage a more complex society. In most countries we find a mix of these ideals, although with different emphasis. In comparison to other countries, interactive governance has a long tradition in Sweden (Hedlund and Montin, 2009). Some of the respondents note that increased interaction and public private cooperation, e.g. privatizations of publicly funded services within the welfare sector or public procurement processes, have complicated the relationship between politicians and the citizens with regard to openness and transparency. It is not far fledged to think that the expectations and requirements for politicians to be open and transparent differ depending on what democratic ideal is prevailing in society and what democratic ideal their political party is aiming at. Also here it seems that a logic of appropriateness might be at play. Different democratic ideals and different cognitions of what constitutes the demos, and to what degree it is based on territory or on affectedness, is thus likely to affect the view on behaviour with regard to openness and transparency.

Multi-level and network governance

Another set of answers to the difficulties of openness and transparency in political decision making relate to the context of multi-level and network governance. A recent study shows that in a Swedish local and regional context, network governance is still increasing (Olausson, Nyhlén and Bolin,

2015). Although multi-level and network governance have clear advantages with regard to coping with externalities and flexibility (Bache and Flinders, 2004) they also inherit disadvantages: "*Networks are brilliant constructions to coordinate autonomous actors with different interests, but they are problematic in terms of recruiting, decision making, steering ability and accountability*" (Pierre, 2009, p.50). Hence, the informality of networks may be both an asset and a detriment.

Politics and political systems consist of a multitude of formal and informal actors and arenas. Examples of the former are local authorities whose rules are stipulated both in legislation and internal rules, but also the political parties who are governed by their internal rules. Examples of informal arenas are networks, friends, interest groups, media, neighbours or simply "corridor talk". One may also talk of formal and informal power, where the former most often has to do with a role or a function, and the latter may have to do with knowledge, influence and networking capacity. Also critics of multi-level governance adhere to the fact that efficient governance requires both formal constitutionally defined interaction and informal contextually defined interaction, as long as the informal interaction stays embedded in a regulatory framework (Peters and Pierre, 2004).

The issue of creating a new administrative region in the Stockholm County is an issue formally dealt within several instances or jurisdictions; the local authorities, the county council and the national parliament. In parallel it is an issue handled within the political parties at local, regional and national level. Each political party is governed by their respective by-laws reflecting history, traditions and practice. Through the interviews the perceived independence and delegation of responsibility to the individual politician seemed to differ from one party to another. It may be assumed that differences are also found from one region or constituency to another. A key point however, brought up by several, is the importance of openness being translated into clear and transparent processes that are embedded in a constitutional and regulatory framework; i.e. in the by-laws and regulations of the political parties just as well as in the democratic constitutional framework and regulations of society.

A question of being part of the majority, or not

Another set of answers relate to the political composition and whether the respondent represented a political party being in majority or minority, and whether the political party was part of a coalition. In Sweden the right and left wing scale is still very dominant. Party politics is important not only at the national level but also at the local and regional levels, and to a large extent the same political

parties are represented in the national parliament as in the county and local councils (Karlsson and Gilljam, 2014). The party organizations play an important role to coordinate common ground between the levels. Sweden has a tradition of strong local governments, and hence the influence of the local actors in forming party politics cannot be neglected. Steering by majorities has become common in local authorities, although with variations in composition. In the interviews it was revealed that representatives from a political party being part of the governing majority or coalition perceived they had access to more information and to certain other arenas that representatives from political parties being in minority could not access. Clear and transparent processes were also in this context brought up as a key concern. By those in minority, the restricted access to information and to arenas for discussion was considered being a problem, but by most it was also understood to be part of the rules of the game.

With regard to the political issue of establishing an administrative region, the responsible government committee ('Indelningskommittén') has published proposals and maps along with reports on the results of consultations, seminars and public hearings etc. on their official website (SOU, 2016 b). Also Stockholm County Council has published information, and the results of the consultations sent out to the local authorities may be downloaded (Stockholmslänslandsting, 2016).It should be noted that the principle of public access to official records is an important concern to public authorities in general, however this right does not apply to what is considered as working material. While being a part of a majority might imply you get access to working material, this is usually not the case when you are part of a minority. Hansen et al. (2015) talk of complexities and unintended consequences when dealing with issues of transparency, and with regard to political decision making Pierre (2009) describes this dilemma well: *"In one way we argue governance to be open and transparent. We want an open political debate, and we want to know what is in the heads of the elected. On the other hand that kind of transparency might lead to a decreased efficiency in governance. If politicians and other leaders have to be open in all they do, that might prevent a solution in delicate issues"* (p. 53).

The arena of public opinion and political debate

A fourth set of answers can be grouped into what I call the arena of public opinion and political debate. The public sphere in the Habermas (1962/1991) understanding was the intermediate sphere between the public and the private in the 18th century, an arena for the bourgeoisie i.e. intellectuals and the land and property owning strata of the population. With the development of mass media the

study of the public sphere changed to the new forms of interaction between political parties, mass media and special interest groups. Even though the Habermas public sphere was successively wiped out, the ideas of raison and mutual understanding where no power is involved but 'the forceless force of the better argument' is still prevalent in much of today's understanding in liberal democracies of what the democratic conversation ought to be. With the deliberative turn in the study of politics, emphasis was directed outside the formal democratic institutions, towards issues such as knowledge, participation and equality (Dryzek, 2000; Fraser, 1990). This change of perspective implies a shift not only with regard to the public sphere, the arena, but also with regard to actor's political behaviour outside the formal institutions and the preconditions for their behaviour. What is going to be deliberated? Where? When? How? And by whom? These are all questions that have been brought to the front by the deliberative understanding of democracy, and are also reflected in the interviews. It seems that the deliberative perspective in some cases has involved misconceptions or a blurring of roles in the relations between politicians as decision makers and the citizens. One example raised is the difference between making your voice heard and getting the decision going your way. This discussion is also linked to the idea of the demos and the principles of representation vs. affectedness.

However at the forefront of the discussion of the public sphere of today, is digitalization which has provided not only a new arena where more participants can be involved, but also a radically different change of pace. City council decisions that formerly in best case could be read about in tomorrow's newspaper, are today found on Twitter or Facebook the very same minute they are deliberated – with subsequent commenting on line in real-time… With regard to the public administration, the respondents perceived openness and transparency as rather uncomplicated, as it is regulated in Freedom of information acts and other regulations related to transparency and accountability. Digitalization has undeniably strong advantages for the public sphere and the democratic conversation, however it also brings with it challenges. One of the challenges pointed out in the interviews is the risk of parallel public arenas, and that instead of one common arena where the democratic conversation takes place in the spirit of the forceless force of the better argument we can see parallel closed arenas being developed on the Internet. Several of the respondents bring up this concern, and are also afraid that those arenas provide the participants with too simplistic answers to many of today's complex questions. Another challenge with regard to the public arena concerns trust and the climate of the debate. Important preconditions for openness is trust, tolerance and non-fear and most of the interviewees make the distinction of openness towards

friends and family vs. degree of openness in their role as politicians. And the contrary; distrust, intolerance and fear are likely to be negative to openness. Several of the respondents refer to that the discussion climate has become more narrow and more edgy, especially on the Internet, which is perceived as a counterforce to openness and open mindedness in the democratic conversation, and as one of the interviewees sadly puts it, *"Security triumphs openness"*(Representative from Social democratic party, local level).

4.3 Summarising the discussion of results

In this section we return to the two research questions, and discuss how the results relate to the theoretical frameworks of openness and transparency, governance and the institutional framework of four levels of social analysis.

The results from the interviews confirm that openness is mainly discussed along the two strands of 'openness to people' and 'openness to knowledge, information and ideas' (Lundgren, 2016), with an emphasis on the former. Openness and transparency in this context was not considered a myth or a metaphor (Christensen et al, 2015), rather an ideal where transparency, especially transparent political processes, accountability and legitimacy are key concepts that go hand in hand. The claim that open government has come to be an issue of open government data (Yu and Robinson, 2012) was not supported by the interviews. The selected political issue of creating an administrative region in Stockholm County, was not perceived particularly complex or difficult in comparison to other issues with regard to openness and transparency. However the issue was also considered to be an issue of little interest to the voters and citizens.

With regard to openness and transparency in political decision making, this study gives support to the idea that transparency is best regarded as an ideal and something that organizations, political parties and politicians have to manage, in a *"management of visibilities"* (Flyverbom, 2015). It also becomes clear that transparency in political decision making very much is a matter of governance and more precisely legitimacy in and of governance. The provision of transparent processes and rules of procedures embedded in a constitutional or agreed upon framework, as well as principles, or perhaps even codes of conduct, for the political conversation aiming at enhancing trust and openness, seem to be very important elements to be able to deal with the challenges that the networked governance and the digitalized public sphere(s) within the democratic societies bring along.

The interviews show that openness was discussed at all four institutional levels, i.e. with reference to keywords at the four institutional levels (see table 1). Politics and political decision making in its essence is about enacting democracy, to fulfil the will of the people and to obtain legitimacy. But it is also an issue of storytelling and to give a credible answer to the questions of where do we come from and where are we going. In this sense it is not surprising that openness, an issue that has received increased attention the last years as a result of globalization and the networked knowledge and information economy, is discussed at all four levels. In the operationalization of the institutional levels (table 1), one may note that the character of the levels differ. At level 1 we deal with ideas, at level 2 with organizations, at level 3 with legislation and rules and at level 4 with day to day practice. In fact, one might say that politics work to tie all these four levels together into a credible and coherent system. An example of this, is the use of the term "institutionalization" which means to move an issue up the ladder and perhaps particularly to go from level 3 to level 2.

As illustrated in table 2 below, openness and transparency in political decision making referred to all four institutional levels, however discussions of openness and transparency in relation to different contexts, i.e. democratic ideal, governance or public sphere, referred to different institutional levels.

Table 2. Openness and transparency in political decision making

Openness and transparency in political decision-making			
Level 1	Democratic ideal		Public sphere
Level 2	Democratic ideal	Governance	Public sphere
Level 3		Governance	Public sphere
Level 4		Governance	Public sphere

It seems that openness and transparency in political decision making are tightly knitted in a web of institutional levels where fundamental values of freedom, democracy, justice, truth and equality interact with the way organizations are formed and evolve, with the formulation and effectuation of legislation, rules, policy and procedures, and with the day to day practices guided by both a logic of consequences and a logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen, 1989; Goldman, 2005). What is furthermore interesting, is that the distinction between 'openness to people' and 'openness to information, knowledge and ideas', although a helpful distinction and tool for the analysis, seem to have many interlinkages, where 'openness towards information, knowledge and

ideas' sometimes seems to be a prerequisite or have as a higher end to be 'open towards people', and vice versa.

5. Concluding remarks

The aim of this article was to discuss how openness and transparency is interpreted in a regional political decision making context, an arena where the practice of collaborative planning, multi-level governance and network governance were assumed to bring additional complexities to the issue of openness and transparency in political decision making (e.g. Healey, 1997, 2003; Bache and Flinders, 2004; Sörensen and Torfing, 2007, 2009). Hence, this article deals with the perceptions of openness and transparency, and outcomes or performances of political decision making with regard to openness and transparency have not been studied.

Although both Sweden, considered as one of the most open countries in the world, and the regional decision making context, are to be methodologically considered as extreme cases (Seawright and Gerring, 2008), the analytical relevance of this research does not only go to the Swedish context, but to political decision making in all democratic systems that are today affected by digitalization.

Using the institutional framework of four levels of social analysis (Williamson, 2000) has contributed to the understanding of how practice, routines and habits (Hodgson, 2007) and governance is framed into long term established institutions and the embeddedness of culture, guided by not only a logic of consequences but also a logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen, 1989; Goldman, 2005). In the interviews forces and counter forces with regard to openness and transparency working at the different institutional levels were reflected. However no conclusions about the relative strength of these forces can be drawn from this study, e.g. political ideology or practices aiming at increasing openness vs organizational bureaucracy holding back and acting as a counterforce. An interesting topic for further studies would be the composition and the relative strength of these forces in relation to the institutional levels, and possibly to identify tipping points. The limitations of the empirical material in this study, 10 interviews within a Swedish context, should be noted, and more empirical work need to be done. Given the high aspirations with regard to openness and transparency in democracies (Christensen and Cheney, 2015) and the openness buzz (Hood in Hood and Heald, 2006; Lundgren and Westlund, 2016), studies of openness and transparency in a regional political decision making context, across geographies, organizations and

time are certainly interesting lanes to further explore, and this article presents a first step in that direction.

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Appendix

Questionnaire (In Swedish)

Questions relating to how openness is interpreted

1. What does openness mean to you as a person? Are you an open person? If you should place yourself on a scale 1-5 where 5 is very open, where would you place yourself?

2. What does openness mean in/to your political party? Is openness characteristic for your political party? If you should place your party on a scale 1-5 where 5 is very open, where would you place your party?

3. What does openness mean in your organisation (municipality/ county council/parliament)? Is openness characteristic for your organisation? If you should place your party on a scale 1-5 where 5 is very open, where would you place your organisation?

4. What is an open society? Do you think Sweden is an open society? If you should place society on a scale 1-5 where 5 is very open, where would you place society?

Questions relating to how important openness is considered

5. How important is openness to you personally? If you should place this on a scale 1-5 where 5 is very important?

6. How important is openness to your party? If you should place this on a scale 1-5 where 5 is very important?

7. How important is openness to your organisation? If you should place this on a scale 1-5 where 5 is very important?

8. How important is openness to society? If you should place this on a scale 1-5 where 5 is very important?

Questions relating to driving forces and counter forces

9. What are the driving forces and counter forces for openness? Relating to yourself, your party, your organisation and society.

10. Changes relating to openness, would you say they substantially change at a quick or a slow (decades, centuries) pace?

Questions relating to a complex political issue in the Stockholm region

The issue of establishing an administrative region in Stockholm county is an issue where there are

different opinions between organizations in the region, and between and within the political parties. The issue contains of two proposals; to let the county council take over the responsibility for regional development from the County administrative board, and to merge the County of Stockholm with the County of Gotland as have been proposed by the government committee (Indelningskommittén). In this investigation I am interested in the disparities in a politically complex issue, not how the respondents position themselves in this particular issue, but how openness is dealt with in a complex issue such as the establishment of an administrative region in Stockholm county.

11. Do you agree that the issue of establishing a region is a complex issue? If yes what makes it complex to you, to your party, to your organisation?

12. Can you generally talk about formal and informal power and formal and informal arenas in politics? If yes, where would you say we find them?

13. Where would you say the formal and informal power in the issue of establishing a region? Motivate.

14. How does formal and eventually informal decision powers in the issue of establishing a region relate to democratic values of openness and transparency?

15. Would you say there is generally a problem when it comes to openness and transparency in political decision making in politically complex issues? If yes how would you formulate that problem? If yes, what is required to solve the problem and who is responsible for doing that?

16. Any further comments on openness that you would like to add?

List of interviews

Representative from Social democratic party, local level 2016-06-20

Representative from Left party, regional level 2016-06-21

Representative from Sweden democrats, local level 2016-06-28

Representative from Christian democrats, local level 2016-06-28

Representative from Liberal party, local level 2016-06-29

Representative from Sweden democrats, regional level 2016-06-30

Representative from Centre party, local level 2016-07-01

Representative from Left party, regional level 2016-07-05

Representative from Centre party, regional level 2016-07-07

Representative from Moderate party, regional level 2016-07-05