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### Abstract

This article explores how council leaderships act as agents in promoting reputational policies. It introduces a public policy perspective to research on public sector reputation. It asks how the political leader and the administrative leader are agents in reputational policies and to what extent different interests and coalitions can influence thought patterns and behaviour in the municipal organisation. What has been found is that the political leader and the administrative leader may have different interests and strategies and that they are likely to be engaged in networks that might be narrow or broad in focus, scope and membership. These reputational agents and coalitions have an impact on reputational policies. They have an impact on the understanding of ‘proper roles’ and routines in municipalities and this again may lead to changes in the workings of the municipal organisation.

### Introduction

Keywords:  
Reputation management  
Public sector,  
Public policy  
Networks  
Municipalities

Up to now, studies of reputation management in the public sector have tended to treat reputation management as “‘organisational’ and taken for granted prescription with allegedly universal validity ready to be installed in any context” (Luoma-aho, 2007; Nielsen and Salomonsen, 2012; Ryan, 2007; Wæraas and Byrkjeflot, 2012; Wæraas and Maor, 2015) and where actors’ interests and motives endure a secondary status (see for example Røvik, 2007; Wæraas and Bjørnå, 2011) if touched upon at all. This article<sup>1</sup> introduces a different perspective; one that sees public managers not only as receivers of ideas, aiming to adapt to and translate reputational ‘recipes’ into the organisation, but as actors with their own motives for reputation management and politically conscious strategies. The point of departure is that reputation management represents a new policy for municipal council officials and politicians. It is well known that policy entrepreneurs have played a role in promoting policy changes (King and Roberts, 1987; Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom and Vergari, 1996; Polsby, 1984; Weissert, 1991) and that most policymaking occurs within networks and what are referred to as policy subsystems (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999). However, little is known about reputation policy entrepreneurs in the public sector who spearhead reputational change, i.e. those who do the footwork to get reputation policies onto the public agency agenda, how they go about this and to what degree they succeed in getting reputational policies adopted on a permanent basis.

This article draws on insights from a public sector reputation perspective and introduces a public policy perspective to inquire how council leaderships act as agents to promote reputation policies. What are their objectives, and to what extent can different interests and coalitions influence changes in thought patterns

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and behaviour in the municipal organisation? The aim is to explore the heuristic value of applying a public policy perspective in the study of reputation management, i.e. to assess the benefits of looking at this phenomenon through a 'new' theoretical lens with a view to the potential it may have with regard to further investigations.

The questions are investigated in relation to Norwegian local governments. As many as one third of Norway's municipalities have had, or are currently involved in, 'reputation building projects'.<sup>2</sup> These projects are designed to overcome challenges related to, for example, economic growth, ethics in the workplace and in dealings with the public, the delivery of public services, and improving people's living and working conditions. The media have shown a remarkable interest in reputation management (Wæraas, Byrkjeflot and Angell, 2011). KS, the association of Norwegian municipalities, highlighted reputation building in its 2007 employer strategy (KS, 2007) and the former Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (through the Center of Competence on Rural Development) set up a 'Reputational School' for municipalities in 2008. Besides this, we find several regional and other public agency initiatives (Wæraas, Bjørnå and Moldenæs, 2014). A number of municipalities have also initiated reputation policy projects of their own. This is a case study of two medium sized municipalities that have set up and worked on their own reputation projects over a long period. One reputation project is mainly driven by the mayor, the other mainly by the chief executive.

The article starts by defining the concept of organisational reputation as applied to the public sector, along with a discussion of what it is that allows us to look at Norwegian municipalities as a special form of public agency. We review the theoretical foundations in the article and discuss agenda setting, the policy entrepreneurship model, coalition networks and enduring policy changes. We then explain the study's methodology before describing the contexts, aims, initiators, partners, coalitions and achievements in the two case municipalities. This is followed by a discussion of the aims, interests, and coalitions involved in municipal reputation building. The article closes with some concluding remarks about different policy change strategies and their likely outcomes.

## Public organisations' reputation

How the word reputation is conceived and defined varies in both emphasis and scope. A commonly used definition in the American literature on the reputation of public organisations is Carpenter's: "a set of symbolic beliefs about the unique or separable capacities, intentions, roles, obligations, history, and mission of an organisation that are embedded in a network of multiple audiences" (Carpenter, 2010: 33,45). This definition highlights the evaluation of the organisation's unique character and activities by multiple stakeholders, and on evaluations based on past observations and experience. A reputation in this perspective is not reduced to a binary choice or outcome related to what a public agency has or does not have, or to something that an agency has 'more' or 'less' of as it

focuses on the richness of administrative behaviour (Carpenter and Krause, 2011). The organisation's reputation derives from external audiences' perceptions of the quality of its policy outcomes. However, organisations face multiple audiences and multiple, often conflicting, expectations, and must choose the dimension they want to address (see Maor, 2015). According to this 'bureaucratic reputation' literature, there are four critical dimensions of an organisation's reputation that will have an impact on its audiences' reactions (Carpenter, 2010: 46-7; Carpenter and Krause, 2012);

- Performative reputation (can the organisation do the job?)
- Moral reputation (does it protect the interests of its clients?)
- Procedural reputation (does it follow generally accepted norms and rules?)
- Technical reputation (does it have the capacity and expertise to deliver as promised?)

If public organisations successfully form, cultivate and manage reputations, they become "valuable political assets – they can be used to generate public support, to achieve delegated autonomy and discretion from politicians, to protect the agency from political attack, and to recruit and retain valued employees" (Carpenter, 2002: 491; Maor, 2015). Strong reputations, in other words, are assets for public organisations.

Reputation building and brands can operate as catalysts within organisations by facilitating the integration of strategy, organisational change, organisational culture and marketing (Kornberger, 2010). The organisational culture dimension of reputation management in local government is critical in developing stakeholder trust. This is developed through customer service, vision and leadership, emotional appeal, the service offered and corporate governance (Ryan, 2007). From studies of local governments in Australia, we find that such elements can affect the quality of service delivery, workplace and customer satisfaction (Jones, 1999; Ryan, 2007; Tucker, 1997).

Local governments differ from most public agencies in being both political units and administrative agencies and this is likely to affect reputational policies (Bjørnå, 2014, 2015; Salomonsen, 2011; Wæraas and Bjørnå, 2011). The administrative and political leaderships have many of the same tasks and challenges. They are responsible for implementing policies; they identify strategic problems and solutions, and they motivate each other and junior officials. However, the success of the political leadership also depends on its management and change of municipal and community identities, attitudes and values and on how it handles internal conflicts (Sørensen and Torfing, 2013). Identifying new and innovative solutions to problems is another part of the political process and a crucial factor in the rivalry between the political elites of different hues (Polsby, 1984). From research in Sweden, however, we find that implementation of reputation-oriented

policies can be a problem as practical considerations can hinder political agreement on how to act and that higher political ambitions can be lost on the way (Brorström, 2015). Research from Denmark finds that both local government politicians and administrators are involved and that reputation management is neither a depoliticised activity nor a topic of much disagreement (Salomonsen and Nielsen, 2015).

Norwegian municipalities take the lion's share of public welfare and they occupy a prominent position within the government structure.<sup>3</sup> Politically, most of the Norwegian municipalities have an aldermanic system, an organisational form in which positions are allocated among the main political parties according to their strength in the local council (Baldersheim, 2005). Political decisions are usually based on consensus and coalitions (Bjørnå, 2014; Larsen, 2005). Norwegian councils also have an administration headed by an appointed – and powerful – official known as the chief executive (Mouritzen and Svava, 2002). The chief executive is responsible for the workings of the administrative apparatus, the purpose of which is to deliver services and execute political decisions.

This distinctive feature of municipal organisations – their two-tiered leadership – prompts questions about how they promote reputational policies as agents of reputational change. We assume that attitudes to reputational management and change will vary with positioning in the municipal bureaucracy or political hierarchy. Like Salomonsen and Nielsen (2015), we start out with the assumption that political and administrative leaders will have different interests and strategies, which may lead to different policy outcomes. The political and administrative agents of reputational change may emphasise the different dimensions of organisational reputation based on the differentiability of their subunits' task activities (see Carpenter and Krause, 2012).

## Policy entrepreneurship, agenda setting, networks, and change

We define reputation management as political action to capture and display the uniqueness of a municipality or its subsections on different organisational dimensions. This differs from reputation management seen as an idea or a movement that involves imitation processes and how agencies accommodate and practice various reputation management 'recipes' found in textbooks on management and offered by reputation consultants (Byrkjeflot, 2011; Røvik, 2007). Our concern is to highlight the different contextual motivations and strategies of organisation's internal actors and the role of networks and coalitions.

In the public policy literature, policy processes are conceived of as more or less independent 'streams' of problem definitions, solutions and the politics involved in selecting alternative options (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972; Kingdon, 1995). These may be connected by chance or design in 'policy windows' that appear whenever a major incident occurs that requires action. The agenda setting literature holds that criticism and failure can be drivers for change but also that new policies can be driven by political ambitions (Kingdon, 1995;

Polsby, 1984).

In the latter case policy entrepreneurs convert new ideas into ‘good currency’ (Mintrom and Vergari, 1996). They have a primary interest in selling ideas aimed at effecting dynamic policy change and seek to change the way things are done. In this process, the agenda setting literature suggests, policy entrepreneurs identify and define problems in a way that attracts the attention and support of decision-makers. The entrepreneurs indicate the various options and do so in a way that will generate support (Kingdon, 1995; Polsby, 1984). The ways in which they seek support are critical to the progress of the policy debate, and in this process they are likely to be receptive to different audiences, pressure groups, the national mood, personnel changes and new legislative moves (see Greve, 2006; Zahariadis, 1999). Knowledge of the organisation, its values and social norms allows policy entrepreneurs to create convincing strategies that attract supporters (King, 1988; Kingdon, 1995).

Assembling and maintaining policy communities or coalitions in support of specific policy ideas is important, because they can prove valuable political resources in discussions of policy change. Such coalitions are understood to share a common culture and understanding within specific policy domains, as well as basic values and problem perceptions (Kingdon, 1995; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999). These policy communities are likely to include ‘policy brokers’, people who are concerned to keep the level of political conflict at a minimum and seek reasonable solutions to perceived problems (Sabatier, 1988). Such coalitions or networks can be diverse and fragmented or closed and tightly knit, and once they are formed, they will seek to inject their shared beliefs into public policies; i.e. they are important for shaping policies (Mintrom and Vergari, 1996).

Policy changes and policy learning can be the outcome of policy processes. Policy-oriented learning is understood as relatively enduring alterations of thought or behavioural intentions that result from experience and which is concerned with the attainment (or revision) of policy objectives (Hecló, 1974; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993, 1999). It has to do with changes in values and beliefs. Values can be very stable and fundamental. Known as ‘deep core’ beliefs, they are nearly impossible to change. Second, they can be ‘policy core’ beliefs. These guide how elected officials, civil servants, and experts view and perform their roles. The policy core beliefs serve as a normative image of how things ought to be, acting as visions that guide strategic behaviour (Weible, 2007). A third set of values is related to specific policies, priorities and designs. This set of values addresses, for example, detailed rules, and budgetary priorities in a programme, public participation guidelines, etc. Policy core beliefs can be adjusted in response to new evidence, experiences and information, but the specific rules, priorities and designs are said to be much easier to change (Zafonte and Sabatier, 1998). Therefore, the likely effect of policy programmes will be changes in values and the normative images of how things ought to be (major changes) or changes in specific policies, priorities and designs (minor changes). The latter, minor changes, are the more likely outcome.

## Municipal agents of change in reputation policy

It is well known that the public sector faces certain challenges. For instance, decision makers have to maintain public support; they have to shield themselves against opponents; and they have to balance consistency and flexibility (Carpenter and Krause, 2012). It is argued that reputation policy initiatives in the public sector is often contingent of an exogenous crises or events, or a perception of policy failure that is generating dissatisfaction (Carpenter, 2001). With this comes a demand for doing something new. Carpenter (2001: 30-7) argues that bureaucratic entrepreneurship, i.e. processes by which agency leaders experiment with new programmes or introduce innovations to existing programmes, are incremental and oriented to assemble network-based coalitions. This type of incrementalism is wise because it reduces the risks associated with trial and error and demonstrates a capacity to build coalitions around new programme ideas.

Politicians' rationale is discussed in the agenda setting literature and politicians are assumed to have the same concern for failures that generates dissatisfaction (Kingdon, 1995). They want to offer a protective shield in the presence of opposition in the form of hostile external audiences (Hood, 2010). Politicians may however also be motivated by political ambition. Their ability to direct solutions through innovative and carefully thought out strategies is essential for a political party to succeed and might well be one of the main driving forces behind a political agent (Polsby, 1984). Political entrepreneurship is of vital importance in the political competition for support. Support, in turn, relies on the sensitivity of politicians to outside signals, on what they know and on their ability to rally coalitions. All this may involve processes of a more radical nature.

The literature referred to leads us to suggest that administrators are likely to cultivate a reputation that will enable them to gain autonomy, seek protection from political attack and recruit and retain valued employees (Maor, 2015) and to seek incremental changes. The politicians are more likely to attune themselves to political entrepreneurship and political competition (Polsby, 1984), showing responsiveness in times of crises and applying a broader perspective to questions of importance. As agents of change in the field of reputational policies, their objectives and preferences are likely to differ. The way they construct and make use of networks will likely affect the outcome of their respective reputational policies. It is in recognition of this situation that we have undertaken a case study to determine how reputational policies are promoted and to what degree policies leads to behavioural changes in one municipality in which the chief executive officer has the upper hand and a municipality in which the mayor was the advocate of the council's reputational policies.

## Methods

The two cases were chosen from a larger sample of municipalities (13). Both have reputation projects administered by different reputation agents, the first led mainly by the mayor, the other mainly by the chief executive officer. Both have

been actively involved in reputation building processes for some time (since 2005 and 2007) and are likely to have experienced changes resulting from their respective reputation building policies. They have not attended the aforementioned 'reputation schools'. Both are medium sized municipalities (populations 10,000–20,000); they have some similar growth related challenges but have had the same people in leadership roles for some time (the mayors and chief executives are the same then as now). This does not make them representative of all municipalities in the same situation, nor of how administrative or political reputation agents work. They are examples we can learn from and use to make sense of the phenomena in terms of how individual rationality, context and specific opportunities can influence reputation management in municipalities. They shed light on differences in agenda setting, implementation and implications of reputation policies in the municipalities. The two municipalities were chosen because they have certain socioeconomic similarities in common, while displaying different reputation policies, different ways of pursuing reputation building within the municipal organisation and different outcomes in terms of revised values, beliefs and behaviour. Interested parties, policy entrepreneurs and networks are therefore likely to have mattered when they formulated and practiced their reputation policies. This makes these municipalities a good substrate for demonstrating the heuristic and to some degree the explanatory value of a policy entrepreneur perspective.

This is a comparative longitudinal case study. The two municipalities were monitored for more than three years and are kept anonymous. The empirical fieldwork was complemented by additional interviews, some by telephone, after a more precise definition of the research problem had been adopted. Information emerging in the interviews was validated through document studies and corroborated against information in municipal documents, media reports and statistics. Further information was obtained by studying statements by council leaders in minutes of council meetings, reports and web pages concerning their reputation promoting efforts and visions. Statistics Norway provided data on population, migration, service provision and finances. This form of methodological triangulation was adopted to verify information obtained in interviews.

The main theoretical assumption is that different policy change agents are involved in the formulation, adoption and implementation of municipal reputation policies. Elite politicians and elite administrators are likely to focus on different interests and strategies and align themselves with different network in the pursuit of reputation policies. These differences might in turn lead to different outcomes in terms of revised or amended values and behaviour.

We therefore chose as our key informants the mayors and the chief executive officers in both municipalities. The four key informants had all held office for many years, and had been involved in the reputation building process from the start. They were interviewed for about an hour in their office in their municipality, with supplementary, shorter interviews later. We also interviewed a senior council officer and two politicians in each municipality, and a key external advisor in each municipality.

Table 1. Overview of empirical data sources

	Interviews	Municipal documents	Media reports	Statistics
Sources of empirical data from the two municipalities	Two key informants, six additional informants. Interviews followed up by telephone over time	Council minutes, reports and websites	Search in newspapers to verify data about challenges and reputation promoting efforts	Population, migration, service provision and finances

These latter interviews were intended to verify the information provided by the key informants, their understanding of the processes, and to obtain a broader picture of the process. The empirical data are from councils involved in reputation building processes, that is, councils with a special interest in making a good impression. This, and the personal interests of the informants, may have influenced what they said in the interviews and how they said it.

### North town municipality

North town has around 10,000 inhabitants. It is growing and situated in a region with no other city of comparable size. A major hydrocarbon plant was built in the municipality a decade or so ago and triggered an extraordinary rise in prosperity and employment. The mayor holds a strong position regionally and his party has commanded a solid majority on the council for decades. The mayor works closely with the long-serving chief executive officer. Since the beginning of the millennium, growth has been powered by the hydrocarbon plant. There have been challenges, much to do with major investments made in preparation for the prospective hydrocarbon ‘boom’. Indeed, the flow of money into the municipal treasury from the hydrocarbon works seemed at first to reduce efficiency in the municipal apparatus. Compared to neighbouring municipalities, North town city council had a great many employees on its payroll.

This council started its work of improving the municipality’s reputation eight years ago. The challenge back then concerning service provision was well known. Although council services were very well staffed (as nearly one in ten inhabitants worked for the council, Statistics Norway; Kostra data), public service standards were rated rather poorly in a large local poll. Another main challenge was to attract qualified personnel. The municipality had lost several key employees during 2007. It was, according to the chief executive officer, something “we had to do something about”. The council also wanted the public both locally and further afield to know about the good things the council was doing and that it was indeed a professional organisation delivering good

services. They wanted to be known as a good place to work and live, both to attract and retain highly skilled workers. They looked at how other municipalities tackled similar problems, and had been introduced to an employer strategy worked out by the association of Norwegian municipalities intended as a means to helping councils in similar straits. There was much talk about it in the media as well. “At the time we were inspired by reputation management” (council member). This strategy came with tools that helped them achieve some of the targets (i.e. as they interpreted it, at least) as the package was geared to generate public support and satisfied employees.

The council believed it was the job of the administration to ensure the quality of municipal services and the municipal workplace. The chief executive took charge and proposed a project called “Better use of resources”, to address shortcomings in the municipal economy, organisation and reputation. Planning began in 2008. One of the strands of this project was “Reputation and Quality”.

The chief executive appointed a project group of five persons, two politicians, and three senior officers. The mayor was interested in the project and supported the idea of the council making an effort to create a reputation for delivering high quality services, but when people mentioned this reputation strategy to him, he referred back to the administrative officials in charge. Two other key politicians were included in the project group. They had worked with the political aspects of service provision. The council did not want anyone to spend time at the Reputation School, nor did they want to hire any of the big consultant agencies “as we know people wouldn’t like us spending money on that sort of thing” (chief executive). Nonetheless, the project team asked a prominent advisor from a larger municipality in the region to brief them on reputation management. This advisor stressed the citizen focus: “The important things are involvement, information and quality.” The council created a slogan based on the values of ‘togetherness’ and ‘cooperation’. It encapsulated who they were, according to the mayor.

After this, the project group was largely left to learn what they could from the literature and from other municipalities. They read up on the corporate reputation literature, held a series of meetings and divided tasks among themselves. They were particularly concerned about service delivery and the idea of local people being ‘ambassadors’ for the municipality. They did internet searches and looked at how other municipalities had approached reputation planning but did not actually visit other reputation building municipalities. They compiled a simple ‘reputation map’ based on interviews with council officers, leaders, members of the public and service users. They read municipal documents, such as the main municipal plan, reports on how to make better use of resources, employer guidelines, communication plans and briefs on recruitment.

In 2009, they submitted their strategy. It was however, in this first round, a “massive plan with masses of targets, not particularly geared to operationalization and use” (chief executive). In addition, it was less attuned to what was considered the main problem “You can’t build a good reputation without control of the economy. And without good services”, the chief executive said. The council

will never get a good reputation by building a new cultural centre; it will only come when people start talking about the fabulous activities going on in there. “It’s the substance that’s important” (reputation plan head officer).

This 2009 plan was revised and geared more to practicalities. A new project team was appointed in 2012, but this was too dominated by council officials with a couple of politicians with briefs in service task areas. The team sent a draft to the different council departments for consultation. The response indicated that more could be done to improve working conditions and environments. It also indicated that council staff needed media training, and the council’s visual profile needed to be improved. Public meetings about municipal services were suggested. Many of these suggestions were included in the revised strategy of 2013. In the words of project leader, the “reputation plan aimed at dispensing some ‘internal medicine’”.

The revised reputation project produced a plan that called attention to how the council should work to heighten the municipality’s profile and service reputation. This materialized as specific targets: Leaders would attend leadership training; the organisation would work to build a good corporate culture; they would improve the ethical guidelines; and they would consult with employees while ensuring workable procedures for internal communication. This work is already under way. The reputation project also led to an awareness of ways of raising the municipality’s profile, not least in the media. The project led to plans to conduct surveys of the opinions of users and citizens every three years (but these are yet to be implemented).

### South town municipality

The municipality has nearly 20,000 inhabitants. It is located near a large city and benefits from being a residential area for people working in the city. The mayor was then, as now, well known nationally and holds a strong position regionally. His party had a majority in the council during the study (2005). He works closely with the long-serving chief executive. Demographically, the municipality was growing fast, and like other growth municipalities, struggling to provide sufficient housing and public services. Another challenge at the time was the ‘death’ of the town centre; a new shopping mall had diverted trade and activity away from Main Street. There were economic challenges, but the council was not interested in charging a property tax.

It is difficult to get a clear answer on why this municipality started a branding process. The official reason is that it wanted to attract new residents and business from the wider region and be known as a good service provider and for its cultural centre. On the one hand, the reputation strategy seeks to visualize the entire span of municipal activity while on the other creating a bond between the council and the community, including voluntary organisations, the private sector and the public. The project is not only about building the reputation of the council in the local community, but in the region and the country as well. A long-term plan to build a road to a nearby city would also benefit from a good reputation.

The mayor wanted people to associate the municipality with something positive. Building a reputation was also a political issue because his party articulated some very controversial policies back in the 1990s and represented a sort of new political culture. The real reason behind the project is probably more complex. The mayor had recently survived a personal scandal that made national headlines. He had been in, but was now out of national politics as a consequence, and “wanted the municipality to be known for something else than his scandal” as one anonymous informant put it.

The mayor was the main driving force in putting reputation policies on the municipal agenda. Reputation building was adopted as a council strategy and project in 2005, although only reluctantly by the opposition at first. The chief executive was to some degree a key figure. The municipality also hired a private consultancy with experience in marketing and attitude campaigns for private and public companies. An experienced developer (chief developer) of brands and attitudes led the consultancy and was familiar with the literature on marketing and corporate reputation, and also familiarized himself with the city branding literature. The mayor, the chief executive, and the consultancy took firm control of the project.

Although the council had approved this project, “the first job was to ‘anchor’ it at the political level” (chief developer) and he started by interviewing members of all the political parties in groups, asking what they wanted the municipality to be known for. At first, interviewees tended to think of their own political programmes but later adopted a broader view. The consultancy then interviewed local business people, representatives of NGOs and people in the culture and entertainment business. There were also interviews and shorter surveys to the municipal employees. Following these interviews, a group was put together consisting of politicians, the chief executive, members of the business community, culture, entertainment and voluntary sectors. This group worked with the consultancy to distil core values. These included innovation, ‘way of life’ and good services. These core values were met with enthusiasm; it was no longer conceived as just a project of the mayor’s political party. However, something needed to be done to prove that the municipality actually delivered on these values. According to the chief developer, “seeing what is done works much better than just saying what you do” (chief developer). “We do what we say” (mayor). They had a logo and a slogan made (South town inspires), and both were mounted on all municipal buildings, projects, cars, etc. This was done to tell the citizens what the municipality does and was a deliberate marketing ploy. The municipality did not advertise their brand in newspapers or other media because the council did not find such use of funds legitimate. There was, however, a very clear strategy to put the different values into practical terms and follow up the branding idea with action. “We needed to be specific, and do things to show that we mean this” (chief executive). He listed numerous targets based on the values of innovation, way of life and good services. The list contained strategic plans and specific targets. At the time the targets were a new road to attract

businesses and residents, to create a vital city centre and erect a new cultural centre as well as a new senior citizens' centre under a new form of management.

Another important thing was to develop an internal culture in the municipal organisation. "We want results, we listen with respect, we are enthusiastic and will support anyone who accomplishes anything and we do what we say" was the new mantra of council staff and politicians. The project culminated in a large public meeting with 200 people present, including all the different stakeholders. The organizers wanted to make sure everyone was aware of the strategy and to encourage them to take 'the message' further afield.

South town municipality has gradually established "a sort of culture where the people who dislike new approaches have to prove their case" (mayor) and "this has made many think differently". The senior citizens' centre, the vacation tours and building projects are examples of a political vision translated into practical politics, according to the chief executive and the mayor. The senior citizens' centre is divided into two parts. One half is run by a private firm, the other by the council. It was an alternative to privatizing the whole thing or keeping it public. The two units are frequently evaluated to find out which performs best. The model has attracted much publicity and has been studied by other local councils, some of which have adopted the idea. Holiday trips for the elderly to the Mediterranean are another example. Pensioners pay their own fare but are accompanied by municipal staff. The council organizes the tours. It is a highly popular initiative and has been extended to people with disabilities. Other municipalities are following suit. Today, the principle of public innovation is perhaps especially apparent in the building and planning sector; the council has one of the shortest periods for deciding on planning and building permissions. Ideally, there should be a split between the political and administrative units in such projects, but in this municipality, they have project teams that involve both politicians and administrators. "The innovative oriented mantra is what we live by", say both the mayor and chief executive and the opposition agrees. "We ask every applicant for a council job in the initial interview if they can adhere to these values [want results, listen with respect, enthusiastically supporting, do what we say]" (chief executive).

The council has developed a distinct approach to its environment. "When I speak to people in surrounding municipalities I tell them about our municipality and what we stand for," says the mayor. "They come to me with their ideas and ask me to help them put them into practice." "People know that they can trust us when we say something," says the chief executive. The council's reputation policy is detailed and expressed in very practical terms. It is summarized in a small business card-like folder that outlines the reputation-building programme with a diagram and a few but coherent ideas and words.

The council has pretty much reached its aims; it has now a new cultural centre, an innovative way of managing care for the elderly and a new highway planned and financed. On the other hand, reviving the city centre has proven difficult. South town is clearly an innovating municipality, unique in its approaches to problem-solving and service delivery. For this it is well known in the

region and even wider afield. The process has led to a consensus about 'what matters most' for the municipality's reputation' in the minds of the politicians. There is no disagreement about having chosen innovation as the core value.

## Analysis

In these cases, reputation management is firmly embedded in council procedures and philosophy, and in their respective missions. The councils build their reputation by 'doing something'. This article has inquired how the council leaderships act like agents to promote reputation policies, the role of networks and their implications. In city council it is advanced by the chief executive and associated with the values (corporate values of a more general nature) prevailing among the council officers. In South town, the mayor is the one advancing reputational policies and the policy is associated with the values of innovation. From the public policy perspective, we have learned that personal ambitions and political interests (Polsby, 1984) can drive new policies. This is what characterizes the mayor's agenda in the reputational policy in South town. Further, we have learned that new policies can be promoted and made part of the common values and behaviour through networks (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999) which was evident in both municipalities. We have also seen that private agents of change can play a very important role in policy processes (Kingdon, 1995) that involve reputation management.

The policy processes could be understood as constructed from rather independent streams of problem definitions, solutions and the politics or procedures of choosing between alternatives (Cohen et al., 1972; Kingdon, 1995). A poll of users and citizens revealed a problem with the quality of services. Service provision needed better organisation, better working conditions and there was a need for greater accommodation of customer needs. There was a 'policy window' (Kingdon, 1995) in the municipalities that facilitated the introduction of reputation policies on the municipal agenda. Various parties and sources, including the corporate branding literature, offered credible solutions of how to proceed. Reputation building was the national flavour of the month. The problem was generally acknowledged among politicians who were receptive to whatever a reputation policy could deliver. The 'streams' of problem definitions, solutions and politics involved in selecting alternatives came together apparently by chance in a new 'policy window'.

The public policy literature holds that criticism and failures can be drivers for change, but also that new policies can be driven by political ambitions (Polsby, 1984). South town had different challenges from North town. There were several definitions of what was wrong. In the public debate, the challenges identified pertained to the reviving of a 'vibrant city centre', the need for a new main commuting road and other things that are quite normal challenges for a municipality. However, the mayor and the other informants did not use the word crisis when it came to these challenges. There was however a crisis, and the main crisis at the time was caused by the mayor himself; the scandal in which he

was involved had sullied the municipality's name. Something needed to be done but there were no obvious solutions available. Knowledge of the organisation, its values and social norms allows policy entrepreneurs to create convincing strategies that attract supporters (King, 1988; Kingdon, 1995) and the mayor of South town used such knowledge by referring to the municipal challenges as a motivation for reputational policies. These challenges were perceived as legitimate motivations both by the opposition and by the citizens. In South town, the mayor was driven by his political ambitions. He was also aiming to move attention away from the scandal towards the good things going on in the municipality. In South town, the 'policy window' was opened by the actions of the mayor rather than by chance.

Assembling policy coalitions is important in accomplishing policy change and such coalitions are often based on core values shared by all and a common understanding of problems and solutions within specific policy domains (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999). In North town, the process was mainly driven by the chief executive and a few leading politicians who managed to get the idea debated. They formed groups of people with a strong interest in the project and worked with these people for a long time. They read the relevant literature and council documents; they reached out to employees at different levels of the organisation and to users. This was the proper way of dealing with the council's service departments. They formed coalitions of specialists and political actors with a special interest in service provision. These actors already shared the policy's core values and problem perceptions. The coalition made use of an entrepreneurial strategy in line with the bureaucratic reputation literature by incrementally introducing innovations to existing programmes (Carpenter, 2001).

In South town, the mayor teamed up with the chief executive and a private marketing agency, politicians from other parties, the business community and civil society organisations. This type of broad-based coalitions is common in local politics in Norway. Municipal politicians have to deal with competition within and between the parties and with diverging interests and values (i.e. different policy core values). They attend to several different tasks, addressing different audiences. Scandinavian politicians most often also have to achieve consensus about what policies to pursue (Bjørnå, 2014; Brorström, 2015; Larsen, 2005; Sørensen and Torfing, 2013), to get them onto the agenda and make them last in a multiparty system where solutions often require complex negotiations. This makes a virtue of keeping the level of political conflict at a minimum and to seek compromises and to behave as a 'policy broker' (see Sabatier, 1988) to get enduring support. Such consensus orientation makes it necessary to build coalitions with differentiated representation in order to create common grounds for an enduring and effective reputational policy. This again, implies forging coalitions and building some degree of convergence in reputational policies.

More than one reputation agent was involved and had influence in South town. The chief consultant developer was very much to the fore of the implementation process, and he constructed coalitions that combined people with expertise on different features of the municipality and on running marketing and

attitude campaigns. In this case, reputation management is more radical and distinct as a policy programme, aimed to encourage public support and prevent crises. It is an example of an entrepreneurial strategy as described in the public policy literature (see Polsby, 1984; Kingdon, 1995).

Policy changes can be the outcome of policy processes. There can be changes in values, beliefs and behaviour as a result of such processes and changes can be major or minor (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993;1999) and branding processes can facilitate integration of strategies and organisational change (Kornberger, 2010). These municipalities have worked on their reputation policies for a long time. Are there any implications for behaviour and for how 'proper roles' should be understood that could be seen to result from the reputation management process? Such changes are minor in North town. They affect design and priorities and involve steps to improve leadership and dialogue with the junior sections of the council, citizens, and service users. The project paid attention to procedures and developed a normative view of how public servants should behave. The values and views on how things should be done in the council have however not changed much. The essence is to make a pleasant, productive working environment for the staff, and deliver public services of a high standard. After some initial problems, they decided to be known for adhering to accepted rules and norms of service delivery and proper working conditions. In the 'bureaucratic reputation' literature this is known as striving for a 'procedural reputation' (Carpenter, 2010; Carpenter and Krause, 2012; Maor, 2015).

South town saw major changes in priorities and core values. These changes can be attributed to the management of reputation in both the political and administrative systems. The values and beliefs that guide strategic behaviour in the municipality have changed, as have dominant ways of thinking within the municipal apparatus. South town has seen a broader and more consistent change in attitudes and beliefs than North town and is accustomed to differentiating how it protects the interests of the community and creates results. It is thus, according to the 'bureaucratic reputation' literature, through the 'moral' and 'performative' dimensions they seek to advance their reputation (Carpenter, 2010; Carpenter and Krause, 2012; Maor, 2015).

Another finding is that the reputation agent in North town, the chief executive, set up and engaged in networks with participants that already shared a set of common norms. This agent inspired reputational policies that in turn led to minor and incremental changes in specific beliefs about policies, priorities and designs. The mayor in South town, on the other hand, used a consultant to help him create coalitions to forge a set of common set of values and norms. These norms informed the design of the reputation building policies and changes in core policy beliefs. The result was a major change in how council politicians and officials approach new tasks and challenges.

The reputation agents' strategies were different in several ways. The way they implemented reputational policies varied as well as the way in which they involved and forged networks and coalitions. This, again, affected the outcome of reputational policies. Public organisations are internally constructed by inten-

tional actors who look for support in ways that are receptive to both their position and signals from networks and different audiences. This is likely to affect reputational processes and their outcomes.

## Conclusions

In municipalities, the reputation policy agents tend to be the chief executive or the mayor, each with their own networks and interests. In this study, these key agents had different roles, interests and strategies; the mayor was much attuned to political entrepreneurship and political competition, showing responsiveness in times of crises and applying a broader perspective to questions of importance. The chief executive was seeking protection from political attacks, and to recruit and retain valued employees. As agents of change in the field of reputational policies, their objectives and preferences differed. The way they set up networks differed. The political actor's network had a broad focus, scope and membership and the administrative actor's network had a narrow focus, scope and membership. This, in turn, influenced and led to different outcomes. In the political, agent-driven reputation policy, it brought about changes in fundamental policy values. The reputational policy driven by the administrative agent increased people's awareness of procedures. This shows that reputation policy agents within a municipal organisation may have different interests and forge different networks and strategies. How they go about this may have a vast impact on what is ultimately implemented and on the results of the process.

Municipal actors relate to diverse audiences, including the media, policy experts, central government, and citizens. In these two cases, reputation management was put on the agenda because the council was persuaded that it could be used to offset crises in confidence and to raise awareness of political uniqueness. In Norway, especially in the years 2000 to 2010, reputation building seemed to have been understood as a panacea. The reputational policies however, vary. Municipalities adopt different approaches in order to appear unique in the public eye.

This article has introduced a public policy perspective to explore how council elites promote reputation management. It has focused on how different policy change agents are involved in the formulation, adoption and implementation of municipal reputation policies, and what this has led to. This is an alternative approach to that of investigating how a reputational 'recipe' is translated into the public organisation and of investigating reputation as an amalgamation of collective perceptions or as a position in reputational rankings. The main findings produced by this approach are that the reputational agent's motives and politically conscious strategies matter and that these may differ with the agent's position in the organisation. We also find that reputation policies are only likely to make it to the local agenda if network coalitions put their shoulder to the wheel and lobby for change. The perhaps most important finding, however, is that reputation management policies can affect how broader governance plays out, particularly if key politicians are involved as agents of change. Reputation policies can

change the thought patterns, values and beliefs that constitute the different roles in the organisation, and new attitudes may lead to change in how things are done on a general level in most parts of the politico-administrative organisation.

These are the findings of a study of just two municipalities that have created and worked individually with reputation projects over a long period. It is a study of actors who have a special interest in giving a selective version of motives, processes and outcomes. These are limitations to this particular study. The advantage of this approach, however, is that it 'forces' us to look at reputation policies from a different and untraditional point of view by drawing on a policy entrepreneur perspective. This has allowed us to study several new strands of what is going on in reputation building agencies and what's coming out of it. It has highlighted different contextual motivations and strategies of organisations' internal actors and the role of networks and coalitions. Further research in the emerging field of research on public sector reputation building and management could aim to be inspired by 'untraditional approaches' as new approaches raise both important and interesting questions and improve our understanding of this particular phenomenon.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> 33% of the municipalities have distinct reputational projects according to survey data from 2012 (40% response from the total population of municipalities).

<sup>3</sup> They run primary schools, kindergartens and homes for the elderly and disabled, provide social and technical services, decide certain environmental issues, maintain local infrastructure, deal with development and local challenges, etc.