Outsourced Responsibilities and New Public Management: The Context of Swedish Crisis Management As Seen From County Administration Boards

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In this article, a storm named Hilde is the entry point for an exploration and analysis of the consequences of public sector reforms on the crisis management system in Sweden. We are particularly interested in reforms of decentralization, privatization, and the adoption of New Public Management (NPM) mechanisms. Empirically, we study the views of Civil Defence Directors at County Administration Boards (CABs). The 21 CABs represent the central government at the regional level and are required by law to coordinate crisis management between national agencies, municipalities, and private interests. Our empirical investigations indicate that the Defence Directors perceive and adapt to reforms differently depending on the size of CABs, thereby bringing to the fore critical matters of equivalence. It also appears as if the discretion that the reforms were supposed to provide for crisis management actors is severely hampered by NPM inspired regulations, competitive features, and instruments of control.

Keywords: decentralization, outsourcing, NPM, crisis management, Swedish County Administration Boards.

Introduction

The storm Hilde struck the Swedish county of Västerbotten by nightfall on Saturday, November 16, 2013. With wind speeds of up to 56m/s, roofs were in some areas ripped off houses, trees were scattered like matches dropped on a floor, and at one point about 16,000 households were out of electricity (Meyer 2013, p. 14).

Telecommunications collapsed and caused rescue operation delays. People in remote parts of the county were stuck in their homes, some without supplies and only candles to keep warm. In several rural areas in Västerbotten, fixed telephony has been dismantled for years. When mobile phone masts are brought down by heavy winds or snowfall, there are generally no backup systems, no auxiliary diesel units, and no power generators safely stored away in case of emergencies. Operators on the Swedish telecom market are not legally required to keep such systems and units in stock. During Hilde, it was therefore impossible for people in some rural and mountainous municipalities to place calls to relatives, family members, and rescue services. Adding to these difficulties, RAKEL, the national system (designed to manage storms like Hilde) for communication and cooperation between the police and rescue services also failed (Fjällström 2013, p. 14).

In the aftermath of the storm, the local radio station, P4 Västerbotten, received an endless stream of incoming calls from citizens dismayed and outright angered by what they perceived as unacceptably low levels of municipal and county crisis preparedness during the storm-stricken weekend (Dahlgren 2014). Massive criticism was also directed at the major telecom operator, Telia. Municipal rescue services complained that not only was Telia unable to provide dependable information on how many citizens were affected by the collapse of communications, the operator seemed uninterested in participating in cooperation conferences. Frustrated municipal crisis managers turned to the County Administration Board (CAB) in Västerbotten for advice, support, and action. However, the CAB could do little more than acknowledge their observations and promise to initiate a national discussion on the responsibilities of telecom operators in crisis situations (Johansson 2013a, p. 20). Interviewed in a local newspaper, Hans G. Larsson, a spokesperson for Telia, said that the company simply did not have enough resources to be able to cooperate with individual municipalities and that people must realize that this is so because it operates on a market of fierce competition. He also stressed that Telia should not be compared with its predecessor, a state-owned telecom business (Televerket): "Nobody wanted to keep it but people still expect us to operate like it. It is impossible" (Johansson 2013b, p. 20).

Although comparatively limited and causing no major human injuries, Hilde raises a number of challenging questions concerning the ownership of critical infrastructures, crisis preparedness, and public expectations. We would like to address some of these issues by directing attention to the broader context in which outsourcing, competition, and cooperation are all parts of a package of reforms intended to improve quality and performance in the public sector in general. We argue that these reforms need to be scrutinized from a crisis management perspective.

Swedish governments facing escalating public sector costs and problems with perceived (and experienced) inflexibility and inefficiency with regard to service deliveries have since the 1980s launched a series of organizational and institutional reforms and changes. Such changes have come in the shape of decentralization, inter-agency cooperation, and New Public Management (NPM). (Bäck and Larsson 2006; Montin 2008). Decentralization processes, intended to allow for innovative solutions

tailor-made to fit local contexts, have been initiated together with an emphasis on the importance of horizontal inter-agency and cross-sector cooperation. The origins of NPM can be traced to New Zealand when the country in the mid-1980s sought to reform its' public administration. Great Britain and a number of other countries soon followed. Reforms and definitions are not uniform but at the core NPM involves the introduction of business principles to steer public administration and enhance its results and effects. These business principles involve competition, purchaser-provider models, and outsourcing of services to external and private entrepreneurs. The latter is underpinned by the conviction that the ingenuity of private entrepreneurship will bring about a more cost-efficient provision of high-quality services (Gustafsson and Szebehely 2009; Höjer and Forkby 2011). However, compensating for a loss of control on the part of the central government, these changes have been accompanied by a development of a host of monitoring mechanisms, criteria for evaluating performance, accountability standards, quantitative performance targets, and supervision techniques. These mechanisms, criteria, standards, targets and techniques are also important ingredients in the NPM-recipe and are employed as means to the end of "finding new forms of control, regulation and strategic management" (van Berkel, de Graaf, and Sirovátka 2012, p. 264).

Pointedly illustrated by Hilde (and indeed by similar events such as the massive wildfire that raged for 11 days and swept through the forests of the county of Västmanland in early August 2014) and against the backdrop of the organizational and institutional reforms briefly commented on in this introductory section, we find the regional arena—the county level—especially interesting for an investigation of the consequences of these reforms seen from a crisis management perspective (involving prevention, preparedness, response and learning). The 21 County Administrative Boards (CABs) are the regional representatives of the government and among their many responsibilities are coordination of crisis management activities within their respective geographic areas and initiation (followed by active coordinating leadership) of cooperation between all relevant actors in the case of extraordinary events not manageable by local government. CABs are the links between local, regional, and central levels and actors are the ones required by law to initiate, support, and develop cross-sector cooperation for the purpose of achieving a sustainable ability to manage crises. They do so while politically steered by overarching objectives allowing for a considerable amount of discretion and in a context where some critical infrastructures are in the hands of private profit-driven interests; purchaser-provider models prevail together with market logics; and crisis managers are regularly monitored, evaluated, and assessed with regard to their preparedness and performance. How do they experience this, and what are the potential consequences for effective crisis management?

The aim of this article is to examine the institutional and organizational context of crisis management in Sweden through the experiences of CABs, or more precisely, through the experiences of Civil Defence Directors employed at the Boards. We are interested in how they perceive and adapt to public sector reforms. What are the main challenges and difficulties in their view?

The article is organized as follows: we begin by giving a brief account of the crisis management system in Sweden, focusing on the county level. We then raise analytical questions drawing on literature on public sector reform. We use these questions to discuss the views of the directors. Next is a section on research design and methods used in this study. Findings are then presented as a number of observations on challenges and difficulties, followed by an analytical and concluding discussion of these observations.

Crisis Management in Sweden

The Swedish system for crisis management is arguably one of the most decentralized in the world. Its stepping stones are the principles of responsibility (all organizations and institutions are responsible for their areas of activity also in a crisis situation), parity (organizations must endeavor to change the way they operate as little as possible in a crisis situation and maintain normal services), and proximity (the ones directly concerned should manage the crisis where it occurs) (SOU 2001, p. 41). Furthermore, the government expects all actors—public, private, and voluntary ones—to cooperate in a manner that effectively and successfully meets any disaster, challenge, and crisis; from storms to flooding and major power failures (Uhr 2011).

The Swedish government has the overarching political responsibility of crisis management through the Ministry of Defence which in turn acts through its national agency, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB). MSB is to provide coordination support at the local, regional, and central levels. The local level is pivotal in terms of assuming an operative role in crisis management. Our focus, however, is the regional (the county) level. As briefly discussed in the introduction, County Administration Boards (CABs) are responsible for coordinating actors and leading their cooperation in extraordinary events. They do so within a constitutional framework of strong municipal autonomy and independent national agencies. CABs are thus unable to lead cooperation by command; they cannot force other actors to comply. In addition, private actors are not legally required to engage in networks or committees devoted to crisis preparedness and crisis management (Wimelius and Engberg 2014). According to Förordning om krisberedskap och höjd beredskap, (the Ordinance for Crisis Preparedness), CABs are obliged to—apart from leading cooperation and coordinating activities—analyze risks and vulnerabilities on the county level; in the event of crisis keep the government informed; make common progress reports available; coordinate information to the mass media; and make sure that exercises and training in the county include a regional dimension (Förordning om krisberedskap och höjd beredskap, SFS 2006: 942, p. 942). CABs are also charged with oversight in relation to municipal analyses of risks and vulnerabilities.

The Civil Defence Director is responsible for making risk and vulnerability analyses; for preparing cooperation and coordination by initiating partnerships, networks, and committees; and for organizing training for the entire CAB staff. The principles of responsibility and parity state that the entire CAB should be able to

transform itself to a crisis management organization (led not by the Civil Defence Director, but by the County Governor) if necessary. The number of employees who are engaged full time in crisis preparedness and crisis management range from two to four in smaller CABs and up to 10 in larger ones.

Crisis Management and Public Sector Reform

Decentralization, inter-agency cooperation, and NPM have been the objects of intense study in the vast literature on public sector reform. The advantages and disadvantages of decentralization have been mapped out, factors that promote and impede inter-agency cooperation as a corner stone in network governance have been identified, and countries adopting NPM-reforms have been systematically compared (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000; De Vries and Nemec 2012; Gossas 2006; Moynihan, 2006;; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004; van Berkel et al. 2012). Reforms have also been investigated as to their consequences for elderly care, education, and health care. Scholars have inquired to what extent reforms actually deliver what they promise (Sobis 2013). Not counting the numerous studies on crisis management and horizontal inter-agency cooperation and the growing literature on critical infrastructures (to which we will return later in this section), comparatively little attention has been paid to the consequences of NPM-mechanisms such as outsourcing, competition, and monitoring for public sector crisis managers (such as CABs). Attention has tended to be directed at health care professionals, social workers, and teachers, exploring how their everyday work revolves not only around professional obligations but frequent audits, follow-ups, and quality controls (Broadbent and Laughlin 2002). In this section, we provide a short overview of these reforms in order to illustrate ways in which they are problematic, something that enables us theoretically to discuss potential challenges for public sector crisis managers employed at CABs.

Decentralization has been hailed as a programmatic solution to problems related to public sector inefficiency and inflexibility. Proponents argue that local actors are better equipped to find context-specific solutions and use resources more wisely. In Sweden, the central government chose to delegate a growing number of responsibilities to local governments in the 1990s (Bäck and Larsson 2006; Häggroth 2005). However, decentralization risks creating inequalities, as well as uneven access to and standards of services. Local government performance must therefore be evaluated and monitored. In the words of van Berkel et al.: "decentralization of service delivery is often accompanied by centralization tendencies in their regulation" (van Berkel et al. 2012, p. 263).

In Sweden, decentralization has been followed by outsourcing and privatization, often introduced as central components of NPM-reforms. As local governments have been delegated responsibilities from the state, they in turn have decided to outsource, expecting positive impacts on efficiency, effectiveness, and quality (Bäck and Larsson 2006, p. 237). NPM has had a tremendous impact in Sweden, something that is often

overlooked from a crisis management perspective. As discussed in the introduction, NPM concerns the introduction of business principles to guide the ways in which governments steer public agencies and the creation of quasi-markets on which citizens (or rather, customers) make informed choices (Assmo and Wihlborg 2012; van Berkel et al. 2012). Key words or phrases often associated with NPM are: politics of performance, management by objectives, transparency, accountability, benchmarking, monitoring, evaluation, and incentivizing by performance steering (van Berkel et al. 2012, p. 264). NPM is commonly characterized as competitive, mission-driven, (rather than rule-driven), results-oriented, market-oriented, and enterprising (De Vries and Nemec 2012, p. 6). However, according to Moynihan (2006, p. 1030), NPM is best described as a series of doctrines or "administrative arguments that provide a plausible—though neither empirically nor scientifically based—explanation of the problems of the public sector and the means to solve those problems."

Problems associated with NPM concern fragmentation of structures and processes; blurred responsibilities and accountabilities; difficulties to do with measurement, co-ordination, and implementation; increased costs; and inequalities (Siverbo 2004). In an extensive overview of empirical studies on the consequences of NPM, Diefenbach (2009, p. 898) argues that "NPM generates even more of the curses it claims to fight". He goes on to quote Hoggett (1996, in Diefenbach 2009, p. 898), who concludes that NPM is "creating new layers of bureaucracy engaged in contract specification and monitoring, quality control, inspection, audit and review and diverting the energies of professional staff away from service and program delivery into a regime of form-filling, report writing and procedure following." In the Swedish context, the consequences of NPM have been examined and analyzed regarding, for example, effects on provision of services in relation to limited choices in rural areas (Assmo and Wihlborg 2012); elderly care (Gustafsson and Szebehely 2009; Sobis 2013); and child protection (Höjer and Forkby 2011). From a crisis management perspective, it has been noted that an increasing amount of responsibilities have been outsourced or privatized.

According to Andersson (2006), privatization and outsourcing has led to a lack of backup systems because service deliverers tend to slim their budgets, increase their profits, and make rationalizations. He goes on to argue: "Despite the fact that most people agree that crisis preparedness is of pivotal importance, the question of who should be responsible for its implementation and costs often remains unanswered" (Andersson 2006, p. 146, *our translation*). Although the state is no longer the main provider of telecommunications, electricity, or financial services, people in general still think that it should "do something" if disaster strikes (Boin and Smith 2006, p. 298). In Andersson's view, the state must therefore support and stimulate the market in order to make it assume responsibilities for crisis preparedness and crisis management. Minimum standards can be legally enforced and by economic incentives private businesses can be persuaded to enter private-public partnerships (Andersson 2006, p. 149–151). However, Svedin (2006) points out that not much is known about how private-public partnerships perform in crisis situations. Underpinning her analysis by American post 9/11 examples, she shows how some of the "early NPM-

proponents" now question the suitability of outsourcing responsibilities (Svedin 2006, p. 185–186). In a more recent study, Kurtz (2011) analyses the relationship between NPM and crisis mitigation (the case of oil spill in the U.S.). His case-study uncovers a number of challenges for NPM when applied to inter-organizational networks. Effective networks require a lasting commitment to training: "The dilution of this component because of mission or policy shifts, budgetary challenges as well as politics may have serious repercussions for crisis management" (Kurtz 2011, p. 31). Other challenges concern maintaining trust and communication and the blurring of roles. By way of conclusion, Kurtz (2011, p. 31) argues that it is not certain that NPM is the appropriate model for organizing or implementing a networked spill mitigation system.

Cooperation, Public-Private Partnerships, and Collaborative Arrangements

Outsourced and privatized responsibilities take us to a point at which literatures converge. Public-sector reforms together with societal complexity and new forms for political steering (epitomized by the network state) lead to a policy context of cooperation, public-private partnerships, and collaborative arrangements. Contemporary crisis management research involves an impressive number of investigations of networks in which trust is supposedly fostered, societal resilience hopefully promoted, and the way paved for effective crisis management when public, private and voluntary network members all pull the same way. Indeed, the literature on interorganizational coordination and cooperation in crisis management is vast (see, for instance, Alvinius, Danielsson, and Larsson 2010; Ansell, Boin, and Keller 2010; Boin and McConnell 2007; Kory 1998; McEntire 2002; Moynihan 2009; Waugh and Streib 2006; Wise and McGuire 2009; Ödlund 2010), and it seems to us that such a focus has been the entry point for research combining insights from literatures on public-sector reform, network governance, and crisis management.

Furthermore, an ever-increasing number of articles discuss and problematize the growing extent to which critical infrastructures are not publicly owned (Boin and Smith 2010; Chen et al. 2013; May and Koski 2013). Boin and Smith (2006) acknowledge that privatization of critical infrastructures has generated problems for public management regarding communication and control. In addition to calling for research that addresses how resilience can be designed into critical infrastructures, they show how the literatures of terrorism, public-private partnerships, critical infrastructure and crisis management would benefit from more extensive exchanges of insights for the purpose of addressing resilience in a more comprehensive way (Boin and Smith 2006, p. 296, 303). Chen et al. (2013) show how countries around the world emphasize the central importance of public-private partnerships for disaster resilience. They are concerned with how effective collaborative arrangements can be formed and sustained against the backdrop of fragmented social responsibilities. Their study identifies a number of problems partnerships encounter and one main conclusion is that social capital, in addition to social, organizational, and economic

mechanisms, is "a significant factor to success in forming and sustaining disaster management" (Chen et al. 2013, p.140). May and Koski (2013) raise the issue of how a balance between governmental and private-sector roles in addressing risks can be struck and how "communities of interest" can be fostered (May and Koski 2013, p.140). They conclude that it is fundamental to identify ways in which the role of the private sector can be strengthened and argue that fostering a sense of shared responsibility is pivotal in this respect (May and Koski 2013, p.156-157).

Bringing The Pieces Together and Raising Analytical Questions

The contributions made in the cooperation and critical-infrastructure literatures are rich and valuable, but what we find lacking is an explicit discussion on the potential tensions between intersecting and conflicting logics as demonstrated by competition versus pulling together, market mechanisms versus collective security and the fostering of communities of interests, and so on. As crisis managers, CABs are charged with the task of finding common ground in what is an overarching context of competition and possibly diverging interests. Our previous work on CABs has shown that they engage in building networks, cultivating trust, and establishing links to private actors, but are frustrated over scarce resources and the lack of conflict management mechanisms in networks. The latter makes them question the overall decision-making capacities of the crisis management system (Wimelius and Engberg, 2014). In this article we attempt to analyze the wider context in which crisis management is embedded in Sweden. In analytical terms we are interested in uncovering the consequences of decentralization, particularly how Civil Defence Directors think about outsourced crisis management responsibilities and public-private cooperation and how they characterize their relationship with the MSB from a monitoring, evaluating, and performance assessment perspective. To what extent, and in what ways, are the pitfalls and problems of public-sector reforms also challenging for them and what are the potential consequences for effective crisis management? These questions will help us approach our interviews analytically and advance knowledge on how crisis managers experience public sector reforms.

Notes on Design and Method

Interviews with all 21 Civil Defence Directors in the country were conducted from May 2012 to January 2013 (with complementary interviews in 2014). The interview task was divided equally between us. All interviews were semi-structured and lasted for 1 to 1.5 hours. A theoretically informed thematic interview guide was used, revolving around blocks of questions concerning: (i) The role and mandate of CABs and the roles and mandates of municipalities and the central government. This block focused on the perceived responsibilities of the CABs and the division of responsibilities between national, regional and local levels as well as between CABs and the MSB. (ii) Political steering and legislation. Directors were asked to

characterize political steering and legislation and reflect on the resources (economic and other) made available for crisis management. (iii) Cooperation in general and private-public cooperation in particular. This block involved questions on how CABs prepare for and actively work to coordinate crisis management through cooperation and questions on the characteristics of NPM, focusing on perceptions and experiences of outsourcing, privatization and marketization.

The directors were informed orally and in writing about the purpose of the study and the interview. Ethical guidelines for the social sciences and the humanities were strictly adhered to; the interviews were based on explicit consent as well as promises of anonymity and confidentiality. Interviews were recorded with permission from the directors who were also asked if they wanted to read our interpretations and analysis before publication; the latter was unanimously declined. Summaries were immediately written after each interview, highlighting main points and arguments. Recordings were shared and we worked together and back and forth between summaries and recordings taking our point of departure in the analytical questions presented earlier. Through peer-debriefing sessions and joint discussions, the most central themes concerning experiences of outsourced responsibilities, public-private cooperation and the relationship to the MSB as seen from a monitoring, evaluating, and performance assessment perspective were identified in the interviews. Quotations from the interviews are used to highlight either predominant or unique perceptions or experiences.

Findings

On Decentralization and Networking

Every authority at the national, regional, and local levels has an obligation to prepare for and manage a crisis situation. Authorities are expected to do so within their own areas of jurisdiction (responsibility), to manage normal services and functions even in the event of a crisis (parity), and people expect a response to be implemented at the lowest possible level (proximity). These principles point in the direction of decentralization in two ways. First, there is a clear bottom-up structure among the local, regional, and national levels: first response at municipal level, coordination at regional level, and, if necessary, coordination also at national level. Second, decentralization is a prominent feature within authorities because they are expected to maintain not only normal functions in times of crisis but also an ability to transform their entire organizations into crisis management units. Thus, every civil servant, regardless of normal duties, could in principle be a part of a crisis management effort within that particular authority. Apart from first responders (police, fire brigades, health services, and a rescue leader at the scene of the event), most participants in the crisis management system are non-experts.

The CABs are no different in this respect. A CAB has some 250–800 employees and a unit devoted to crisis management staffed with 2–10 persons. In times of crisis,

the entire CAB or substantial parts of it can be transformed into a crisis management unit under the leadership of the County Governor. The Defence Directors are the ones who build networks, prepare for exercises, educate the staff, and monitor municipalities in matters involving crisis management. Our interviews show that two potential problems may occur from a decentralised crisis management system such as the Swedish one: one has to do with professionalism – that is, the ability of an entire CAB to fulfil its function as a crisis management unit in times of crisis; and the other is about equivalence – the extent to which the 21 CABs have equal capacity to handle a crisis within in their area of responsibility (the county). In our interviews, most Defence Directors complain about limited resources, saying that resources are incommensurate with what is expected. Others note that the response from other departments within the CAB is somewhat lacking. Preparing for and managing coordination during a crisis calls for efficient staff functions sustainable over time. CABs are expected to maintain operational crisis managing capacity for seven days, but some Defence Directors dispute their ability to achieve this. As two Defence Directors would put it, "Training and exercises are being down-prioritized, competence is declining, and it is very doubtful if we could make it for seven days" (Interview 18). And again, "There is not enough redundancy of people, training and exercises are neglected, and many people are uncertain about their roles" (Interview 6).

However, the picture when it comes to professionalism is not altogether unfavourable. Other Defence Directors report good response from other departments within the CABs concerning training, exercises and endurance, emphasising yearly major exercises, plans for the replacement of staff through regional networks, and cooperation with other authorities: "Despite only four full time employees, we can mobilise 30–40 persons from other departments within the CAB and other agencies, like the police, in leading position during a crisis" (Interview 7).

It appears as if larger CABs, including major cities and many municipalities, report more positive attitudes to their professional ability, whereas smaller CABs have a hard time maintaining expected standards. This raises the question of equivalence—the ability to provide similar crisis management capacity in different parts of the country. Some Defence Directors maintain that "most CABs are too small for their expected role as crisis managers" (Interviews 16, 14). Others argue that size is less important than trust, creativity, and response from other actors involved in crisis management. Different opinions on similar matters normally indicate problems, and it appears that CABs differ greatly in professionalism and equivalence.

On Outsourcing and Public Private Partnerships

Two contextual changes have strongly affected civil protection in Sweden. Both appeared simultaneously: the end of the Cold War and public-sector reforms.

During the Cold War, Sweden had a massive total defence capacity, with an ability to mobilize 800,000 soldiers and provide security for the population with bomb

shelters, food, medical supplies, fuel, transportation, and plans for the evacuation of every large city in the event of a nuclear attack. This idea of a total defence integrating military and civil capacities became obsolete at the end of the Cold War, and the entire civil defence structure was dismantled (as were substantial parts of the military). There are no longer storages of vital resources for the safety of the population, and many services that used to be public are now private. As discussed earlier, telecommunication, energy, transportation, health services, elderly care, and schools may serve as examples of outsourced public endeavours. During these changes in the workings of the public sector, which have taken place predominantly in the last two decades, not many references were made to how these changes would affect the security of the citizens. In any case, critical infrastructure is now to a large extent beyond the reach of authorities involved in crisis management, except for electrical supply and usage of dangerous chemicals. Storages, moreover, have been replaced with "just in time logistics." How do the Defence Directors respond to this changed landscape of civil protection? "This [public-private cooperation] is a difficult area and more should be done here, more legislation perhaps, but then the CAB needs more resources to cope" (Interview 12); "private actors do not always have the time or interest, and they must see immediate value in order to cooperate" (Interview 15); "[i]t is difficult to find private actors; there are more than 400 telecom operators in the country" (Interview 7). With regard to the last quotation on the number of telecom operators, it could be added that – as illustrated by the storm Hilde and the criticism directed at Telia – even if everyone knows who the private actor is, cooperation can still be difficult.

Not surprisingly, most Defence Directors do find public-private cooperation problematic. Answers range from calls for more legislation to more networking and "goodwill" building. Also, some Defence Directors discuss the relation between more regulation and levels of preparedness: "It is not about lack of legislation, [but] rather about unclear expectations. What is it we are expected to deliver in times of crisis?" (Interviews 12, 19).

It is also emphasised in our interviews that, the greater the demand for preparedness through cooperation with private actors (e.g. in terms of reserve electric power, food, and energy), the more tasks there are for a CAB, and hence a need for more resources (Interviews 18, 19). Interestingly, CABs that are smaller size and population find cooperation with private actors easier to achieve and more effective, because of personal contacts and mutual interests.

On New Public Management

One obvious feature inspired by NPM concerns the funding of crisis management units within CABs. CABs can apply for project means from the MSB every year. For smaller CABs, these extra funds appear to be decisive for their ability to maintain preparedness and general capability in crisis management: "The project funds are entirely pivotal for us, without those means our ambitions would have to be very

different" (Interview 3); "[w]e are totally dependent on project means in order to be visible and to work with cooperation and coordination" (Interview 12). This dependency on project funding seems to be accompanied by some frustration regarding continuity and priorities: "One has to guess what MSB likes or dislikes a particular year; funds should rather be directed towards what the county needs" (Interview 15); "project means are problematic: they cannot be used for what is specified in the legislation, but rather has to be innovative" (Interview 1).

In the case of applying for extra funds, CABs are actually competing with each other to maintain public safety, which again raises questions on professionalism and equivalence. Those who are unsuccessful in raising project money may have difficulties in meeting expectations from other levels in the system as well as from the public. But perhaps other aspects of administrative reforms have an answer to such problems in the way of monitoring, evaluation, and various performance indicators.

Swedish legislation prescribes what a CAB is expected to achieve in formulations like "maintain a capacity," "ensure that cooperation takes place," "make available a common progress report," "coordinate information," "coordinate action," and "ensure implementation". It is evident that such legislative demands provide CABs with a high degree of discretion, but other administrative mechanisms may restrict this freedom. In order to compensate for loss of control, the government needs an agency at the national level that monitors, supervises, coordinates support, and educates the crisis management system. This agency is MSB. It is an agency with a tall order. Its designated goal is to enhance and develop society's ability to prepare and manage accidents and crises. It provides coordinative support to all actors responsible for crisis management, is involved with education, organizes and supports exercises, encourages and finances research, and acts as source for learning and documentation. MSB also monitors and supervises actors at the regional and local levels.

The operative demand on MSB is limited by the nature of the Swedish political system, in which national agencies are independent by law. Under normal conditions (other than war), no national agency can be superior to others. In extreme cases, MSB can, through decision by the government, be ordered to coordinate crisis management actions at the national, regional, and local levels. MSB is also the agency that provides and receives international support in the event of a crisis that has international implications. What, then, is the relation between MSB and the CABs? In the views of the Defence Directors, the relation is ambivalent. On the one hand, a large part of the training, manuals, exercises, and courses from MSB is very much appreciated, but on the other hand there is also frustration. According to one Defence Director, "There is total imbalance in the system. MSB has some 800 employees, and the 21 CABs have about 120 directly involved with preparing for crisis management" (Interview 1). Many (almost all) Defence Directors complain about administrative overload created by MSB through new plans and programs, evaluations, progress reports, performance indicators, reports on levels of preparedness, risk and vulnerability analysis, invitations to courses and exercises, comment reports on governmental royal commissions, rules for supervision of municipalities, and so on. One (small) CAB received 43 such initiatives from MSB in just one year (2013)

(Interview 17); another claimed that, on average, one proposal necessitating major work arrived every week (Interview 10). This may not sound overwhelming, but it has to be taken into account that an average CAB may have 2–4 employees in the crisis managing unit and is expected to work with many other regular tasks apart from initiatives from MSB. What is more, requirements may appear from other governmental agencies as well (e.g. the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish National Grid, the Swedish armed forces, and government ministries, Interview 17).

Not every one of the initiatives from MSB can be regarded in the light of "control" and "supervision," but the totality and content of initiatives indicate a national agency that issues plans and programs to an extent that leaves very little discretion and freedom for individual CABs to act. Initiatives from MSB and other governmental agencies are not all of them obligatory to respond to, but the fact that MSB at the same time is a funding agency and a regulatory and supervising agency, makes it extremely difficult for CABs not to respond. Project money and possibly unfavourable evaluations are at stake.

It is also interesting that the agency that supervises the crisis management system in Sweden (MSB) is much larger in terms of employees than the total number of those who work full-time with preparedness and crisis management in all 21 County Administration Boards. In 2011 MSB had 921 full-time employees, and the Counties a total of 146 (SOU 2012: p.182). Since many of the Defence Directors in our interviews have serious doubts about the ability of their CAB to fulfil its role as crisis manager, these figures may indicate an imbalance in the crisis management system in general.

Conclusions and Discussion

We set out arguing that public-sector reforms ought to be scrutinized from a crisis management perspective. Although research on decentralization, outsourcing, privatization, and NPM is vast, we have noted the relative absence of studies explicitly investigating the organizational and institutional consequences of such reforms for crisis management. The literature on public-sector reform has analyzed the pitfalls of decentralization, marketization, outsourcing, and NPM from various professional perspectives, but we were particularly interested in analyzing public-sector crisis managers' experiences, perceived challenges, and major difficulties on the county level in Sweden. To that end we raised questions on the extent to which the identified pitfalls and problems of public sector reforms were also challenging for these crisis managers.

Our empirical investigations indicate that the Defence Directors do experience the downsides of public-sector reforms, and in a way that largely corresponds with mainstream criticism in the scientific literature. This is evident in their views on decentralization. Many Defence Directors complain of a lack of professionalism in terms of scarce resources, limited management sustainability, and insufficient training

with few exercises. Decentralization of the crisis management system in the Sweden was conducted in the aftermath of the Cold War, and as such it was very much decentralization by the stroke of a pencil. New legislation, not new agencies or designated resources, was invented or allocated. Creating new laws was of course less costly than reforming the old Cold War type of arrangement, and it corresponded with dominant ideologies on public-sector reforms. But a decentralized system of crisis management is not cheap. It calls for network building, training (of the entire staff in agencies), capacity to improvise and cultivate trust, and recurrent and sustainable forms of cooperation and coordination.

The Defence Directors appear to recognize that the Swedish system is stingy in its allowance for manual and financial resources. These reflections also carry over to the matter of equivalence. There seem to be great regional variances in the ability of CABs to perform their expected roles as crisis managers: large CABs (in terms of population size and number of municipalities) seem to cope much better with the challenges of decentralization. Apart from scarce resources, perhaps the number and sizes of CABs, invented in the 17th century, are not the optimal order for today's crisis management.

When it comes to public-private cooperation as a means to make actors pull the same way, our results indicate that Directors perceive it as difficult (although experiences are not uniform) but of critical importance. Private actors do not always see the immediate value of engaging in such cooperation, since they are expected to be competitive in a context of quarter economics. It should perhaps be unsurprising that some entrepreneurs, operators, and businesses do not keep backup systems or are unable to cooperate, even in the midst of a November storm, because they are under pressure from shareholders and board members to deliver positive results. As illustrated in the aftermath of the storm Hilde, citizens in general do not seem well prepared for a reality in which crisis management is partly subjected to market forces. Citizens still expect the state, the county, or the municipality "to do something," which suggests that politicians have yet to find ways to effectively communicate and make legitimate to the public the principles of responsibility, proximity, parity, and cooperation. When Defence Directors identify a lack of legally defined levels of preparedness, it is this legitimacy that is at stake. If CABs are unable to determine "what we are expected to deliver," then it is not surprising that citizens may appear to have unrealistic demands.

When the pieces of the public-sector reform puzzle are brought together, the emerging image is one of swings and carousels. What central and local governments lose in terms of control on the swings of decentralization, outsourcing, and privatization, they attempt to take back on the carousels of monitoring mechanisms, accountability standards, quantitative performance targets, and supervision techniques. When the state relinquishes power by transforming the way it governs, it has to develop ways to keep track of, assess, and evaluate the consequences of these shared or outsourced responsibilities. The responses from the Defence Directors indicate a system of intersecting and conflicting logics, at least regarding the

drawbacks of decentralization, the problems of outsourcing and privatization, and the administrative overload created by NPM-inspired regulations and control.

Acknowledgements

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