

**Women and  
Representation in Local  
Government**

International case studies

*Edited by*

**Barbara Pini and Paula McDonald**



Routledge Research in Comparative Politics

# Women and Representation in Local Government

*Women and Representation in Local Government* opens up an opportunity to critique and move beyond suppositions and labels in relation to women in local government.

Presenting a wealth of new empirical material, this book brings together international experts to examine and compare the presence of women at this level and features case studies on the US, UK, France, Germany, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Canada, Belgium, China, Australia and New Zealand. Divided into four main sections, each explores a key theme related to the subject of women and representation in local government, and engages with contemporary gender theory and the broader literature on women and politics. The contributors explore local government as a gendered environment; critiquing strategies to address the limited number of elected female members in local government and examine the impact of significant recent changes on local government through a gender lens.

Addressing key questions of how gender equality can be achieved in this sector, it will be of strong interest to students and academics working in the fields of gender studies, local government and international politics.

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**Paula McDonald** is an Associate Professor in the School of Management, Faculty of Business, Queensland University of Technology, Australia.

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# Women and Representation in Local Government

International case studies

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Paula McDonald**

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## 9 Transforming local politics?

### The impact of gender quotas in Finland

*Anne Maria Holli*

#### **Introduction**

Since the mid-1990s the issue of gender quotas has been the subject of intense debate and discussion within feminist political science. This chapter contributes to this literature in documenting a case study of the use of gender quotas in Finnish local government. The Finnish gender quota statute, adopted in 1995, may be described as a second generation type of quota, and, in addition, a strong form of such, in that it not only targets policy preparatory bodies, but, importantly, executive political structures at the local and regional level. These executive bodies in Finland, as well as in the other Nordic countries, are major sites of power. This is in contrast to many European countries where executive power at the local level resides in the office of a politically elected mayor.

The chapter<sup>1</sup> begins by describing the evolution of various types of quota arrangements before outlining the key features of the Finnish gender quota statute. Following this the chapter draws upon a range of data, including municipal documents and statistics as well as 70 semi-structured qualitative interviews with male and female municipal actors. The interviews, undertaken in the period when municipalities were implementing the quota legislation for the second time, reveal the multiple and often mutually contradictory impacts and consequences of the quota law at the municipal level in Finland. In this respect the chapter contributes to addressing a significant gap in gender quota research, namely the lack of empirical data on the consequences of gender quotas. Whereas there has been ample research on the adoption of quotas, and recently, also an increasing interest in studying the implementation, barriers and possibilities of quotas, more comprehensive analyses of the consequences of quotas in their specific context have not been undertaken (Squires 2004). In part, this may be because, as Squires (2004) notes, this kind of an endeavour would require a multi-faceted qualitative approach that would take into account the interaction among discourses, institutional settings and gendered power relations at the local level. This kind of approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods was adopted for research presented in this chapter.

### **Three generations of gender quotas**

From an international perspective, gender quotas are most commonly applied to electoral candidate lists or legislative seats reserved specifically for women. The earliest quotas of this type were introduced in the 1950s (Paxton and Hughes 2007: 151). They became gradually more common from the 1970s onwards (Caul 1999), gaining particular popularity in the 1990s and 2000s, partly due to the adoption of international treaties on women's rights and the political programme embodied in the United Nation's Beijing Platform for Action (1995).

The form and effectiveness of such electoral gender quotas varies greatly. On the one hand, quotas may be voluntarily adopted by political parties in order to assure a gender-balanced candidate list. This strategy has been successfully engaged, for example, in Sweden. On the other hand, quotas may be codified in laws or even written into constitutions and supported by various sanctions for non-compliance (Dahlerup 2006a). France, for example, adopted a strict 50–50 per cent parity law with explicit sanctions (party fines) for non-compliance. Unfortunately, however, this did not have the intended outcomes, since many political parties preferred the sanction of a fine in lieu of a gender-balanced electoral list (Freedman 2004; Green 2003; Murray 2010).

While increased attention to what may be labelled the first generation of gender quotas, that is, electoral gender quotas, has, in many respects, been beneficial, it has also had some unintended negative side-effects. For example, it has served to shift attention away from the fact that electoral gender quotas are just one particular form of this type of affirmative action, the intention of which is to remedy the under-representation of women in (more or less) democratically elected political bodies and remove barriers to their participation. Focused interest in electoral gender quotas has also deflected attention from indirectly elected or nominated political and administrative bodies, where women are still very much under-represented and the types of methods available for tackling the strong horizontal segregation of politics, whereby women and men tend to be recruited to different subfields. Gender inequality in broader spheres of public life (for example, the economy or business) and strategies to redress this inequality have also been overlooked as electoral gender quotas have become a key focus for scholarly investigation. This is despite the fact that even in the internationally renowned 'gender equality laboratory' of the Nordic region women continue to be excluded from key economic decision-making forums (Niskanen and Nyberg 2009, 2010).

Consequently, what may be termed 'the second generation of gender quotas' have received little scholarly attention. In particular, the second generation quota arrangements attempt to address the problems in women's representation beyond elected bodies. As with the first generation quotas the arena of application is the public sphere consisting of politics and administration, but unlike the first generation, the quota rules of the second generation are applied to appointed or indirectly elected bodies and institutions, such as committees, public boards, advisory bodies or executive organs. In adopting a broader agenda for change

second generation gender quotas address the manifestations of power beyond the legislative assembly and/or party system. As Anne Phillips (1995: 183) explains in relation to policy preparatory organs, 'The politics of presence seems self-evidently appropriate to these further institutions of governmental power.'

Today, second generation quotas in the narrow sense of the term (numerical, legal quotas) exist at least in Norway, Finland, Iceland and Belgium. Norway was the forerunner, as it adopted a Royal Decree in 1973 which required all authorities to nominate two candidates, one of each gender, to public bodies. The nominating authority was then responsible for the final gender-balanced composition of the organization in question (Dahlerup 1989; Haavio-Mannila *et al.* 1985: 129–130). Owing to problems in implementation, the statute was strengthened several times over the years. From 1988 onwards, all publicly appointed boards and committees had to comprise at least 40 per cent men and women (Bergqvist *et al.* 1999: 198). In 1992, a similar clause about a minimum 40 per cent gender quota was also adopted for application to municipal boards and committees (Guldvik 2005: 7). This regulation has been enacted since the 1995 municipal elections.

Other Nordic countries soon followed Norway's lead, albeit with considerable variety in form (whether there was an explicit numerical quota requirement or not), strength, scope and monitoring arrangements. The legislation pertaining to second generation gender quotas has also been substantially modified and strengthened since their adoption by the Nordic nations. Denmark, for example, adopted a law mandating a gender-balanced representation on public boards and committees in 1985 after several recommendations had failed to remedy the problem; however, there was no numerical quota requirement. More recently, in 2009, Denmark adopted stronger legal sanctions for non-compliance: if the gender balance requirement is not implemented, the seat in question remains vacant (Fiig 2009). Similarly, while Iceland initially followed the Danish example (Bergqvist *et al.* 1999: 198–199) it consolidated the gender quota law in 2008 to decree a numerical 40 per cent minimum representation of both sexes in boards and committees (Styrkársdóttir 2009). In turn, Finland instigated a Gender Equality Act in 1986 which was strengthened in 1995 to equal and in some respects even surpass the scope of the Norwegian law. In contrast, Sweden has continued its tradition of 'voluntary' approaches to accommodating gender equality with the Swedish government requiring public authorities to observe the goal of gender-balanced representation on public boards and committees (no legal or numerical quota requirement) with very successful outcomes (Alnevall 2009; Bergqvist *et al.* 1999: 199). Across the Nordic countries the most critical difference in terms of second generation gender quotas is whether the laws include only policy preparatory bodies or whether they also apply to bodies wielding executive power. Since the mid-1990s only Norway and Finland have explicitly legislated to include municipal (and regional) executive bodies within the strict 40 per cent numerical quota requirement.

The final categorization, the third generation of gender quotas, may be seen as a direct successor to the second generation. Namely, many of the second

generation quota laws in the Nordic countries recommended gender-balanced representation on boards of state-owned or municipally owned companies or in companies where the state or municipalities are majority shareholders or stockholders. In 2006 to 2008, Norway extended these regulations so that the 40 per cent regulation would apply to the boards of private enterprises listed in the Oslo Exchange. The Norwegian law is additionally reinforced by the imposition of sanctions: if the requirement is not fulfilled, the company in question may be dissolved (Heidenreich 2009; Teigen 2010). Thus, by contrast to the first and second generation quotas, the Norwegian pioneering third generation gender quota is applied to the economic field in its entirety; that is, the private as well as the public spheres of business. While there has been intense debate mobilizing around the adoption of similar legislation in other Nordic countries, this has not yet eventuated in Sweden, Finland and Denmark, with these countries introducing diluted recommendations and Codes of Conduct to regulate gender equality in the private business sector (see e.g. Niskanen and Nyberg 2010). By contrast, in March 2010 Iceland adopted a Norwegian-style third generation gender quota law, which decrees at least a 40 per cent representation of both sexes on boards of private companies having more than three board members and 50 employees (to be enacted from 1 September 2013).

### **The Finnish Gender Quota Statute of 1995: a strong second generation gender quota**

The Finnish Gender Equality Act of 1986 was modified in 1995. Its new fourth paragraph decreed that 'state committees, boards and other similar organs as well as municipal organs, except for municipal councils, must have at least 40 per cent of both women and men as their members, unless there are special reasons for the contrary' (Law 206/1995). Three key factors relating to gender quotas are intrinsic to the legislation. First, the clause referring to municipal organs also includes municipal executive boards (i.e. the local 'cabinets') and municipal committees (which have both preparatory and executive functions as the 'ministries' of the municipality) within the quota rule. These bodies are elected by the local councils, and largely consist of council members. Municipal councils, on their part, are democratically elected by popular poll every fourth year. The specific electoral rules used for the election of local executive bodies assure that they proportionally reflect the political composition of the local council. A second key aspect of the legislation is that it was originally meant to include inter-municipal and regional decision-making structures in which the representatives are elected by the councils of the member municipalities. Notably, it is the member municipalities that are major actors in Finnish regional decision-making structures. However, owing to problems in implementing the quota statute in this arena, the Gender Quota Statute was amended in 2005 to explicitly name these regional organs (Law 232/2005). The final dimension of the legislation which is pertinent to this discussion is that it includes an additional clause extending the principle of gender-balanced representation to

economic decision-making as far as the public sector is involved. However, this part of the legislation does not include the strict numerical percentage requirement. The Act rather more loosely decrees that there should be 'a gender balance' in the decision-making bodies (insofar as they are composed by political representatives) of state-owned enterprises, companies in which the state is the majority shareholder and similar bodies, including enterprises owned by the municipalities (Law 206/1995).

The amendments made in 1995 did not change the basic intent of the Act which had, from the outset, stated that 'there shall be both women and men' involved in municipal bodies (Law 609/1986). What did change was that there was now a minimum numerical requirement for male/female participation; that is, 40 per cent. This change resulted from the reported difficulties of interpreting the original clause by municipal authorities. While the Gender Equality Ombudsman had argued repeatedly that 'women' and 'men' were written in plural terms in the law, a 1990 ruling by the Supreme Administrative Court determined that it was not a breach of the Gender Equality Act to select a single woman or man to a public body. The ruling was understandably contested by Finnish women's groups (Holli 2004; Holli and Kantola 2005). Thus, in 1994 when the Right-Centre government proposed a reform of the *Gender Equality Act*, once again, with no specified numerical quotas included in the bill (Gov. prop. 90/1994), there was considerable objection from women both within and outside politics. The 40 per cent minimum quota requirement, which was added during the reading of the bill in the standing committee of the Parliament, was eventually included as an amendment when the majority of female members of the ruling parties voted against their own government, and joined forces with their counterparts on the Left to support the numerical quotas. This outcome was possible because at the time the Finnish Parliament had a very high proportion (39 per cent, the world record at the time) of women MPs (Holli 2004; Holli and Kantola 2005; Raevaara 2005).

The Gender Quota Statute has been applied from 1996 for newly appointed state bodies and from 1997 for municipal bodies. Many local authorities tried initially to continue their previous practice of ignoring the requirements for gender-balanced representation (Holli *et al.* 2003, 2006, 2007; Pohjola 1997). However, ultimately they were compelled to implement the quotas. This was due, first, to the fact that another law, the Local Government Act (Law 365/1995) gives any local inhabitant a formal right to complain about the illegal composition of municipal decision-making bodies. If such complaints were made as a result of the Gender Equality Act (Law 206/1995) it could result in the dissolution of the municipal body in question and a re-election process. Rather than engender this risk, the municipalities – after some bitter experience – complied with the new quota requirements. Interestingly, nobody – not even the proponents of quotas – had paid any attention to this legal implication in the parliamentary proceedings for the quota law (Holli 2004). The Gender Equality Act has also been rendered effective by the Supreme Administrative Court which has, since the mid-1990s, been firm in its interpretations of the legislation's

purpose. Accordingly it has consistently declined to afford municipalities dispensation from compliance with the Gender Quota Statute and has also decided against local authorities which have reinterpreted the legislation in novel and less obligating ways (Parviainen 2006).

In conclusion, the Finnish quota statute may be regarded as a strong form of a second generation quota in that it is also applicable to local-level executive structures. As the next section of the chapter will demonstrate, it has also been successfully implemented in Finnish municipalities, in that it has increased women's numerical representation in local government as well as positively transformed local institutions.

### **The numerical impacts of gender quotas for local government**

Finnish women gained suffrage in municipal elections in 1917, 11 years after they had been granted the right to vote in national elections and the right to stand in Parliament. As with the other Nordic countries, Finnish women's representation in municipal councils has consistently lagged behind their representation in the national Parliament. Until the end of the 1960s, women made up under 10 per cent of municipal councillors; the limit of 20 per cent was broken only at the beginning of the 1980s; while the 'critical mass' of 30 per cent was finally reached in 1992 (see Figure 9.1). Moreover, the differences in the number of female representatives between the municipalities have been, and remain, significant. For example, in 2001, the municipality of Värtsilä had a majority of 60 per cent women councillors, whereas Enontekiö in Northern Finland had only 4.8 per cent of women in local elected positions. Generally speaking, urban, prosperous municipalities have had a greater proportion of women in their councils than rural, peripheral municipalities, although the gap has diminished over time (Pikkala 1997, 2000).

Until the latter part of the twentieth century, it was not only that women had traditionally been under-represented as members of local government in Finland. It was also that women who were elected tended to be in lower level positions. This is, as Haavio-Mannila *et al.* (1985: 165) have commented, 'the iron law' of politics. That is, the higher the position, the fewer women participants. The vertical segregation of local politics was particularly evident in the composition of the municipal executive boards, in which, typically, the proportion of women was not reflective of women's involvement in the councils. Again, this was most marked in rural locales where councils often selected all-male executive boards.

When the gender quota statute was implemented for the first time in the late autumn of 1996 there was an immediate and dramatic change in women's position in the sector. Three issues are salient. In the first instance there was an increase in the number of women representatives. Before 1996 women constituted 24 per cent of members in municipal executive boards. However, following the legislative change the proportion of women rose to 45 per cent. The number of female members in municipal committees also increased from 35 per

cent to 47 per cent (see Figure 9.1). The gender balance in these bodies has remained virtually unchanged ever since.

A second key impact of the legislative change was that it affected where women were represented. In the past, women had largely been elected to committees associated with normative definitions of femininity such as those related to social issues, health and education, while men monopolized committees focused on what are traditionally seen as masculine arenas such as technical issues, economy and urban planning. However, since 1997, there has been a gender balance in all committees (see Figure 9.2). The most dramatic transformation occurred in committees of the technical service sector where the proportion of women more than doubled, from 19 per cent to 44 per cent. Similarly, in committees dealing with economic development and agriculture women's share increased considerably, from 22 per cent to 44 per cent.

A third impact of the gender quota statute was that it eliminated the regional differences as far as the descriptive representation of women in local executive bodies was concerned. The quota statute must be applied without regard to the gender composition of the local council; that is, even when democratic elections have resulted in the appointment of just a few women councillors. For example, in 2001, 34.4 per cent of Finnish municipal councillors were women compared with 46 per cent as members of executive boards. In 2009, the corresponding figures were 36.7 per cent and 46 per cent. Thus, women are in fact over-

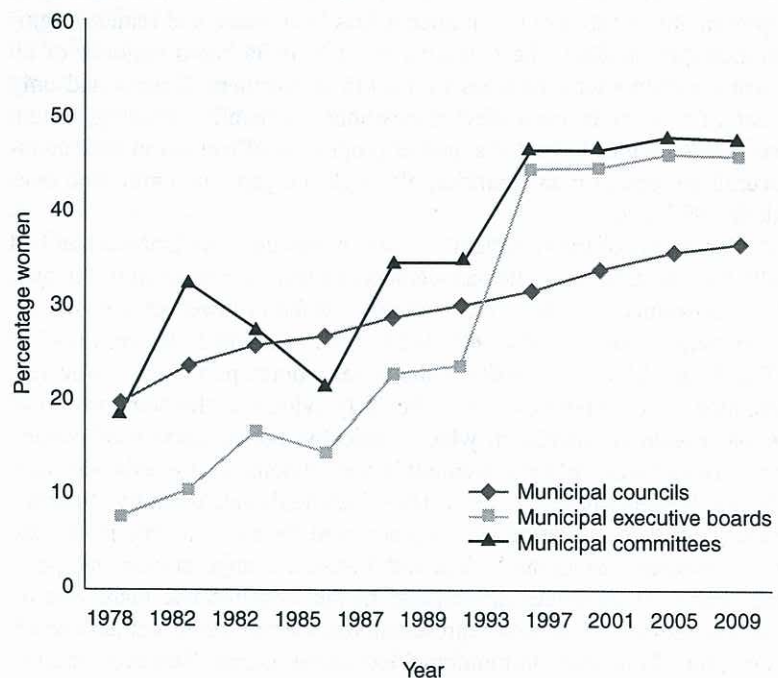


Figure 9.1 The proportion of women (%) in municipal decision-making.

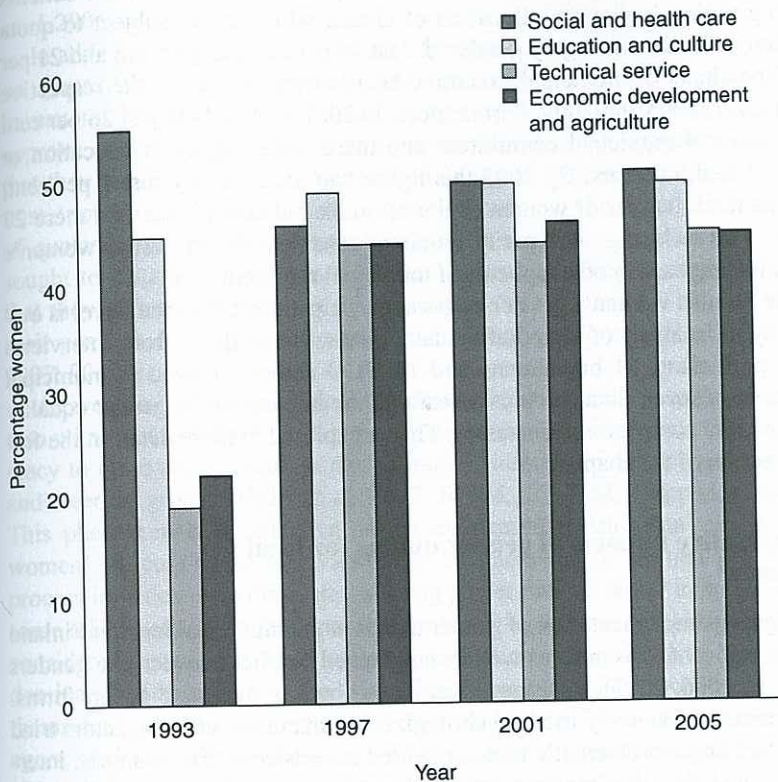


Figure 9.2 The proportion of women (%) in municipal committees by sector (1993–2005).

represented in positions of executive power at the local level, at least if one focuses solely on the gender composition of the councils, not the composition of the population at large, as our point of departure for comparisons.

This fact produced new kinds of problems especially for those municipalities which had a very low proportion of women councillors. In 2001 to 2004, 8 per cent ( $n = 35$ ) of the municipalities<sup>2</sup> had less than 20 per cent women representatives. Another group, that is, 37 per cent ( $n = 161$ ) of municipalities, had less than 30 per cent women councillors; and in as many as 74 per cent ( $n = 318$ ) of cases women's municipal representation was short of the 40 per cent limit. In practice, this has meant that in more than 300 local government areas women councillors had a competitive edge over their male colleagues in terms of selection to local executive bodies.

Overall, significant change occurred in women's representation across the 450 Finnish municipalities when the gender quota statute was introduced in 1995. This has continued and today many of the constraints to women's involvement



in local politics have been alleviated. Indeed, a potent illustration of the benefits of the legislation is that the allocation of chairs, which is not subject to quota regulation, still remains highly gendered. Just 16 per cent, 22 per cent and 21 per cent of the chairs of municipal executive boards were women in the respective years of 2001, 2005 and 2009. Furthermore, in 2001 women held just 26 per cent of the chairs of municipal committees and these were largely in education or social and health sectors. By 2005 this figure had increased by just 1 per cent, taking the total number of women chairs of municipal committees to a mere 27 per cent. This lack of gender parity stands in considerable contrast to women's quantitative increase in other spheres of municipal representation.

While Finnish women's greater political participation at the local level is evidenced by an analysis of quantitative data, qualitative findings from interviews with 35 politicians, 21 bureaucrats and 14 NGO actors involved in municipal government in seven Finnish cities reveal that the impacts of the gender equality quota are more complex and contested. This is explored in more detail in the following section of the chapter.

### **The qualitative impacts of gender quotas for local government**

The obligatory implementation of gender quotas at the municipal level in Finland elicited significant resistance as well as heightened conflict between the genders (Holli *et al.* 2006, 2007). Resistance manifested both in overt and covert forms. Covert resistance typically used psychologized mechanisms whereby actors tried to avoid tackling a problematic issue or denied its existence. For example, interviewees stated that the implementation of gender quotas had repeatedly been 'forgotten' or they claimed that the quotas were unnecessary, since one's own municipality and party were already 'gender-equal'. By contrast, problems in women's position or quotas were projected 'unto others', making one's own community thus look better by comparison (Holli *et al.* 2006, 2007: 87–112).

Overt resistance was visible, for example, in the particular positions about the gender quotas that were identified from the interview data. The most polarized of these positions were the group which one could describe as 'feminists' and another which could be categorized as 'quota opponents'. The 'feminists', all women, regarded the quotas and their impacts in a very positive light and saw them as a necessary tool to counteract problems in women's representation. These women were also aware of problems and misuses of implementing the quotas and often acted as local overseers of gender equality. By contrast to positive evaluations of quota impacts presented by 'the feminists' was a strong all-male group of critics. These men had typically belonged to the old political elites and argued that the the quotas were 'absurd' and 'senseless'. They tended to regard the new female decision-makers and changes wrought as a result of these new female entrants in a very negative light, seeing them as indicative of a deterioration in local democracy. According to these male interviewees, quotas had led to severe problems in the quality of political work since there were now

'uninterested' or 'less competent' people in municipal organs than before (Holli *et al.* 2006, 2007: 90–94).<sup>3</sup>

In addition, there were two groups of respondents with more moderate views on quotas. One of them consisted of 'accepting' respondents; that is, 'loyal bureaucrats' (Holli *et al.* 2006; Lotherington 1992: 101–102) who could either approve or disapprove of quotas at a personal level but nevertheless emphasized that they must be properly implemented owing to their legal character. By contrast, 'non-feminists' were mostly right-wing women who, in principle, approved of quotas as a strategy to promote women's position in politics but who also sought to distance themselves from such a strategy. They strongly emphasized that they themselves were not by any means 'quota women', but had achieved their position owing to their competence, not gender quotas (Holli *et al.* 2006, 2007: 90–94).

As women in local municipalities dealt with the backlash to the quotas they also witnessed a definite shift in power away from the structures of local democracy to other arenas, such as new formal or informal policy preparatory organs and steering groups (Holli *et al.* 2007: 67–68, 159–162; Nupponen 2000: 71). This phenomenon is reflective of the old feminist claim that 'power escapes women'. According to this viewpoint, the inclusion of women can lead to a process in which male élites start shifting power outside these 'invaded' arenas to some other institutions. Importantly, the 'new' institutions established were often considered outside the reach of quota regulations and proved to be very male-dominated in character as the pools from which members were recruited were themselves predominantly male (e.g. high-ranking civil servants, municipal managers, chairs of municipal organs). While escapes of power were visible in all the cities studied, they were more marked in some areas than in others. In Raahe, for example, there was a wide discrepancy between the low number of female councillors and the high number of women in the executive bodies. The objective of introducing a new body consisting of chairs, the 'chairmanship', seemed to be to circumvent the quota regulations and preserve the power of old male élites. As a female local elected representative from Raahe commented:

[W]e have for example an aid to the municipal manager, the 'chairmanship' ... Yes, yes, there are no women there. There are six men there. Three from the council, that is, the chair, first and second vice-chairs are men and then the chair of the executive board and the first and second vice-chairs are men. So here [in our municipality] they for example say that the 'chairmanship', it is not a municipal body. But in my opinion it is, because it is elected and they [the members] are remunerated [for the meetings].

Despite the negative impacts there were also many visible positive outcomes for local institutions as well. We found positive spill-over effects from gender quotas to other municipal organs which were not explicitly included in the gender quota statute and to political parties. In terms of the former, the new gender-balance requirements made many decision-makers more aware of the

peculiarity of strongly male- or female-dominated entities, and as a consequence, quota requirements were sometimes extended to municipal organs outside the regulatory frame. Political parties also improved their recruitment and selection processes as a result of the gender quotas. As one interviewee explained, 'looking for women and men to fill the open executive posts had compelled parties to make their criteria for recruitment and advancement more explicit and transparent'. Some informants even pointed out that candidate competence had become a more prominent criterion in the selection process. It was noted that this was in contrast to the earlier practice which had assumed masculinity/male/men to be the equivalent of competence (Holli *et al.* 2007: 51–68).

A further positive impact of the gender quotas one would expect to witness, given the scholarly literature, would be a shift in the substantive representation of women, in particular, changes in municipal policies to better reflect women's concerns and interests in politics. Such a claim reflects the notion of 'critical mass' which suggests that, when women's numerical representation reaches a 'critical mass' (often suggested to be 30 per cent), qualitative change will occur in terms of, on the one hand, policy contents and, on the other, organizational culture, processes and practices (Dahlerup 1988, 2006b; Kanter 1977).<sup>4</sup> The theory has been strongly criticized for assuming an 'automatic' linkage between quantitative and qualitative change and for naively overlooking the potency of context or the 'rules of the game' which shape institutional experiences for both newcomers and veteran actors (e.g. Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). Moreover, it has been argued that it is 'critical acts' (Dahlerup 1988) and 'critical actors' (Celis *et al.* 2008; Childs and Krook 2008) rather than sheer numbers which are needed for qualitative change to emerge in policies and institutions. Despite these criticisms the concept of 'critical mass' retains some currency in scholarly and in particular, feminist activists' discourse (Dahlerup 2006b). As such, the following section uses interview data to test the efficacy of the theory of 'critical mass' in the context of Finnish municipalities. The increase in women's proportion to exceed 40 per cent in local government structures as a result of the gender quotas provides an excellent empirical case study for observing the impacts of numerical shifts.

### **Exploring the notion of 'critical mass'**

Collectively, the interviews revealed that the increase of women in local government bodies has not resulted in a shift in local government priorities away from what may be seen to be more traditionally masculine concerns to what may be described as more feminized concerns. In fact, participants believed there had emerged what was seen as a 'harder' and 'less women-friendly' policy environment. This was, however, regarded as related to the severe economic crisis which the country faced in the early 1990s rather than the entry of increased numbers of women to municipal leadership. Simultaneously with women's entry to the central arenas of local government, a combination of escalating social policy costs and of decreasing fiscal income (municipal taxes)

forced municipalities to reduce and reprioritize obligatory nationally determined responsibilities relating to education, social policy and daycare. The problems being faced by local governments during this period were exacerbated as national legislation both introduced new responsibilities and extended existing responsibilities (for example, rendering it compulsory for every Finnish municipality to arrange a daycare place for all children whose parents wanted it). It was claimed that in response local governments were forced to prioritize economic needs and to reject any additional initiatives, such as potential 'women-friendly' reforms if they involved costs or were not legislatively obligatory.

In a similar respect the interviewees claimed that the increase of women in decision-making organizations as a result of gender quotas did not act to revitalize municipal equality politics more generally, as the notion of 'critical mass' would suggest. In fact, the study discovered that gender equality initiatives became obscured or were marginalized as the view was that the issue of women's inclusion had been sufficiently addressed through the imposition of gender quotas. Thus, instead of becoming a complementary strategy to other equality work, the implementation of gender quotas proved to be a competing strategy (Krook and Squires 2006), in that it filled the minimal space reserved for gender equality concerns at the municipal level (Holli *et al.* 2007: 73–83). The new framework of 'equalized' executive organs also seemed to fuel existing resentment towards those female politicians who actively raised gender inequality concerns in their work. The interview data therefore suggested that the increase in female representation had, in many respects, actually amplified antagonism towards women (Holli *et al.* 2007: 106–107, 117–127):

Take for example this woman from x party, who always, whatever the matter, asks whether the gender equality issue is taken into account ... And she is stigmatized in people's eyes, so that she can be nullified with it, so that [it is said that] she is always speaking of that [issue].

(Female politician, National Coalition Party)

We have always however had women [councillors] who have kept the gender equality perspective on the agenda ... I have sometimes proposed [the preparation of a gender equality plan] ... [It] has not got any [positive] response and for me it is quite, one should not of course get depressed, but ... nobody supports a proposer like this.

(Female politician, Social Democratic Party)

Interviewee reflections on the retraction of gender equity in local government, which, somewhat paradoxically, occurred as women's presence in the local government increased, are supported by a review of municipal documents which demonstrate that by the beginning of the twenty-first century the only municipalities which still considered they could 'afford' municipal equality work were large and prosperous cities such as Helsinki and Oulu, and to some extent the smaller city of Kuopio. These local authorities also had a relatively high

proportion of women in their councils and had a long historical commitment to gender equality dating back to the 1980s.

There was, however, one area of organizational life which participants claimed had changed and become more inclusive as a result of the implementation of the gender quotas. This was the style of decision-making (cf. Mansbridge 1999). According to the interviewees, women asked 'new questions' and expressed viewpoints that had not been common, for instance, in the technical sector. As a result, the deliberations in these fora had become more open and transparent, and sometimes the agenda had become more diversified. The impact of the quota law was especially emphasized in the technical sector committees and similar fields where the quotas had led to a significant increase in the number of women. There were also a greater number of younger and politically less experienced members in these committees than had been the case previously. As a Conservative male politician, involved in a technical committee, explained:

It could be said that women's ... impact means an increasing openness, because they question matters maybe more than the guys would do just among themselves. So that in the old boys' network matters could be agreed upon without everyone going so much through the trouble of getting acquainted with the issue.

A further substantive change in the local government process which had resulted from women's increased presence was a greater emphasis on policy preparation and administration. Women were described as taking their new posts very seriously, studying all the meeting materials carefully, and asking for more information if it was not adequate in the first place. As one participant commented, 'Women are the kind that they like to talk, to put ideas forward, to discuss, and to twist and turn and look for new things'. The style adopted by new female decision-makers also forced the local administrators to prepare policy documents and information for meetings more carefully.

The qualitative data demonstrate that even in the unfavourable context of a prevailing economic crisis, there occurred significant changes at the procedural level of politics as a result of women entering this arena in significant numbers. Most notably this involved the diversification and improvement in local decision-making. In this respect, it seems there is some evidence that women's presence will lead to more inclusive processes and practices being adopted by an organization (see also Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Mansbridge 1999; Young 2000). At the same time the data partly contradict the notion of 'critical mass' which suggests that a sufficient increase of women will produce different policies and a better representation of women's substantive concerns. In the specific context of Finnish municipal decision-making at the turn of the 2000s, there was no such effect visible (cf. Franceschet and Piscopo 2008).

## Conclusion

Recently, Pär Zetterberg (2009) has criticized scholarship on the impacts of gender quotas for being one-dimensional in that work has primarily (or only) been concerned with the descriptive representation of women. In contrast, he argues that the number of women in politics is just one part of a larger story about gender equality in the public sphere. He draws upon an empirical analysis of the impacts of quotas in Latin America to demonstrate that feminist scholars may be mistaken in their optimistic assumption that the positive numerical increase of women as a consequence of quotas will automatically lead to positive developments in women's substantive and symbolic representation. Ultimately, Zetterberg (2009) concludes, the impacts of gender quotas may be different across the multiple dimensions of representation, and that any assessment of their worth should take this multiplicity into account.

Zetterberg's (2009) conclusion resonates with the findings presented in this chapter from an evaluation of the impacts of quotas at the local level in Finland. On the one hand, the Finnish gender quotas have assisted in addressing long-standing problems in women's representation. In particular, women have increased visibility in local government and there is now a gender balance in representation. The gender quotas have also contributed to improving the quality of local democracy. At the same time, these positive developments have been accompanied by negative impacts, such as the transference of power away from local democratic structures, heightened resistance and conflict, and the stereotyping of women politicians. In summary, the outcomes of the gender quotas have been simultaneously positive and negative. The study consequently highlights the need for future research on quotas to retain a focus on impacts as potentially multiple, overlapping and contradictory.

## Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Drude Dahlerup, Ingrid Guldvik and Auður Styrkársdóttir for their comments and help with updating the information concerning the Nordic countries in the background section.
- 2 Continent only; figures exclude the municipalities of the autonomous province of Åland.
- 3 However, survey results (Pikkala 2005) show that these accusations of women lacking competence were at least partly biased. The women decision-makers were indeed younger and with less political experience than their male counterparts – but, on average, they had a *higher* education level (ibid.).
- 4 However, there are few studies targeting the specific effect of gender quotas (which often increase the number of women) on women's substantive representation; see however Zetterberg (2009), Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) and Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004).

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