TUSELOG PROGRAMME

A descriptive study of networks coordinated by SALAR

FINAL

Filip Vikström
Associate Consultant
SKL International

Abstract: This paper presents six networks that are currently being coordinated by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). The analysis of the case studies points at a number of differences and similarities, and thus patterns in how the networks were established, how they are managed and developed, but also a number of areas where flexibility have been predominant. Embedded in the case studies are policies, guidelines and lessons learnt that have a bearing on the success of establishing, managing and developing networks. Also, and due to its powerful potential for network coordination and exchange between members, web and social media is addressed in a separate chapter - this chapter provides ideas and generic guidelines for municipalities and other public entities alike.

Contents

1 Preparation

1.1 Introduction and purpose

This paper was developed as part of an assignment within the programme 'Tuselog', prior to a study visit to Sweden by representatives from the Union of Municipalities of Turkey (UMT).

The primary audience of this paper is the UMT, while the members of UMT are intended as the secondary audience.

The preparation of this paper had a two-pronged purpose:

Firstly, to provide case studies by describing networks coordinated by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR).

Secondly, to describe existing organisational structures, operational methods, policies and guidelines that have a bearing on the success of establishing, managing and developing networks.

1.2 Scope and methodology

This paper provides five case studies, describing different networks that are coordinated by SALAR. In addition, a chapter on web and social media is included, with particular focus on considerations when selecting web and social media strategy. The paper ends with a conclusion chapter, including review and final comments.

The study for this paper was conducted through a combination of desk research and interviews, with emphasis on the latter.

For the sake of enabling a fair comparison of the networks covered, the following questions guided the interviews:

1. Why was the network established and how were the needs identified?

2. Who are the members?

3. How is the network structured and what is the role of SALAR and the members, respectively?

4. How is the dialogue with members managed in terms of a) information, b) interaction and c) other arrangements?

5. What do you believe are the key factors in order to successfully establish, develop and manage a network?

6. What are the main results achieved through the network?

7. How does the network influence policies?

2 Networks

2.1. Introduction to SALAR networks

During the last decade there has been a large increase in the amount of networks coordinated by SALAR. One reason for this is SALAR's need to better understand the reality of local politicians and civil servants and their respective responsibility areas – not least due to more complexity due to Swedish and EU legislation and increased needs to step up the representation on behalf of the municipalities towards state authorities. Also, new responsibilities have been bestowed upon the municipalities which require possibilities to learn from each other in implementing change to organisational structure and operations.

Insight into the reality at the local level also enables SALAR to provide better and more relevant services to its 290 member municipalities, and it provides an important reality check when big concerted actions are taken, which requires participation of many or all of the municipalities.

Participation in networks increases the visibility and exchange possibilities for SALAR and the municipalities alike. Municipalities, through its politicians and civil servants, can gain knowledge and experience through by engaging in exchange with peers.

The exchange and/or sharing is often problem-oriented and "real solutions to real problems" is a very dominant feature of the networks covered in the following case studies.

2.2. Case studies

Network for Municipal Chief Executives

A network fostering non-formal exchange of ideas between SALAR and top municipal management

Basic facts: 1) The purpose/mission of the network: a sounding board for SALAR/an exchange forum for top management in municipalities. 2) Number of members: SALAR (2) and 30-something municipal chief executives. 3) Membership criteria: one to three representative from each county (depending on size) appointed by the municipalities within the county.

Description of network: After SALAR:s CEO had assumed his office in 2005, he initiated a network for municipal chief executives. SALAR:s aim was to establish a sounding board consisting of top municipal managers in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas and to receive feedback to guidelines and policies that affect the local level. As the network required coordination and administration, two staff members at the CEO:s office were assigned the (part-time) task of managing the network.

The network members meet two-three times a year and the agenda for the meetings are proposed by the CEO (with support of the network coordinator and heads of divisions) with the *municipalities having the possibility to add to the items prior to the meetings.*

It´s important for SALAR to make sure that the efforts of the organization are supported by its members. Öppna jämförelser ("Open comparisons") is an example of a reoccurring topic that requires a general approval. Thus, discussing the topic with the network members is one way of securing this. "Open comparisons" is an annual survey and ranking of the quality, results and costs of a number of service areas operated and delivered by municipalities and county councils; including parameters such as public health, business climate, elementary and upper secondary school, health and medical care, security and safety, social services. The outcome of "Open comparisons" supports municipalities to initiate change and improvement measures based on the ranking results.

One of the current topics being discussed in the network is the problems with demarcation of responsibilities between municipalities and County Councils/Regions with regard to for example care of the elderly, and youth with disabilities/other challenges. This topic is developed together with a corresponding network organised by County Concils/Region Chief Executives.

Usually meeting subjects are opened by one or more SALAR experts who inform or update the network members on the situation (new legislation, new findings, etc.). Some items are however driven by the network itself, with a mix of presentations and discussions being held using a mini-seminar format. In between the meetings there can be sub-groups appointed working with specific topics, for example with regard to said issue regarding demarcation – how to support municipalities and County Councils to develop joint efforts to strengthen services to the citizens.

The network does not have decision-making power, but outcomes from the network are usually communicated directly to the CEO's office who in turn has the possibility to make recommendations to the SALAR board.

Communication and dialogue within the network is most frequent prior to network events, but the network also serves as an ad-hoc Q&A-forum, not least since the collective expertise represented by the members is a great resource for advice on technical issues also on a short notice.

As a transparency effort all 290 municipalities receive the minutes from each network meeting so that they are updated on the main points of discussion. The municipalities who did not attend then have the possibility to request more in-depth information from their county representative – and of course from SALAR. Further, and outside the network, 290 municipalities receive a newsletter from the CEO of SALAR on a weekly basis.

Although not being an expressed task of the network, suggestions for training of municipal staff has been discussed within the network – with a focus on training at chief levels. The members have a good understanding of the needs of their co-workers and can respond to suggestions for training coming from SALAR and other training providers.

The importance of maintaining a continuous dialogue with the members is regarded as key to achieving a fruitful exchange, by, not least, having the members taking active part in the formulation of meeting agendas and propose current topics/issues that municipal top managers are facing. A situation with SALAR just informing the network members about current issues is not an acceptable situation. The network is highly valued by SALAR and regarded as an instrument for reality checks and fine-tuning of policies and regulations.

Network for Local and Regional Development

A way of achieving improved services to the local business community

Basic facts: 1) The purpose/mission of the network: forum for exchange on conditions and improvement of local and regional development. 2) Number of members: SALAR (5-7) and 290 heads of municipal business development department. 3) Membership criteria: municipal head of business development department.

Description of network: In 2005 SALAR started working with local development through a network made up of mayors and municipal heads of business development department. SALAR and the municipalities used the network for exchanging thoughts on current and important issues related to business development, not least due to a growing understanding that the municipality plays a pivotal role in supporting and improving the local conditions for business growth. Some of the initial discussions evolved around commuting and traffic infrastructure and not so much specifically about the conditions for local businesses.

The network operated with a rather broad spectrum of topics until 2008 when many municipalities, in a national survey, requested a network entirely focussed on local business conditions. As a result the already existing network started focussing entirely on local and regional development. In addition to narrowing the topics to local conditions for business and industry the membership became limited to the municipal heads of business development departments. Further, the network started catering for professional development of its members, especially with regard to tools and methods for improving practical services to local businesses, such as improved, shortened and improved adminstrative processes. "One door in" was a concept developed through the network, which basically meant that businesses should only need to have one contact person in the municipality to exchange ideas and administrative matters with.

Another result of the changes made to the network in 2008 was that the network coordinators began driving the momentum more vigorously than before. For example, they started involving different experts from SALAR who contributed with presentations during network events - including legal, e-business and other categories of current and relevant knowledge. One of the hottest topics included the organisational and legal implications of the EU law *Directive on services in the internal market,* which became the focus of several network meetings due to its sometimes complex implications on the organising of procurement in Swedish municipalities and local businesses alike.

Since the network is open for all municipalities the number of people in events needs be limited in order to enable dialogue and efficiency. Most of the time the amount of people is limited to 35-40 persons, but, depending on the topic and and type of meeting, sometimes as many as 70 persons participate. The meetings are typically organised as "lunch-to-lunch" events, with participants covering their own board and accommodation. The cost is for some municipalities a reason for not prioritising the network events, yet due to the current topics of the events, the majority of municipalties seem to regard the event benefits outplaying the costs.

In order to keep the network reality-based the part-time network staff at SALAR need to understand what the municipalities consider the most pressing and important issues for local business development. Thus, the most important factor contributing to the success of the network is maintaining the dialogue with and between members. Also, logistics management must be considered another key to maintaining success. People need to be able to travel to the events easily and to enjoy the atmosphere of the meeting venues in order to absorb the collective knowledge provided by peers and contributing experts.

Network for Environment and Public Health

An network which drives dialogue on new responsibilities, new legislation and guidelines that affect the local level

<u>Basic facts</u>: 1) The purpose/mission of the network: sounding board for SALAR/a forum for discussion and sharing for its members/dialogue with authorities with regard to environment responsibilities at the local level. 2) Number of members: SALAR (5-7) and 25 Municipal heads of environment and public health. 3) Membership criteria: head of municipal environment department; good knowledge/expertise and willing to share; belonging to a municipality that adds to the dynamic composition of the network as a whole.

<u>Description of network</u>*:* The idea for the network came about due to SALAR:s needs to understand what kind of support was needed in terms of solutions and remedies to challenges at the municipal level. Issues such as the environmental code, food matters, but also strategic decisions with regard to the environment needed a forum for peer to peer exchange. SALAR chose to select a number of members for inclusion in the network among those municipalities that had a proven track record of being active in finding solutions to environment challenges. Also, and in order to form a network representative of the entire country, SALAR selected a mixture of large and small municipalities, including most of the 21 counties, from North to South, East to West, from coastline to inland, thereby enabling valuable inputs from a variety of municipal realities.

Belonging to the network has grown to be regarded as a qualification and members from small municipalities often "advance" to bigger municipalities, partly due to displaying an active membership within the network. Four two-day meetings are organised annually, where three are held in Stockholm and one in one of the member municipalities. When a network meeting is held in a member municipality this typically includes a study visit, often displaying a smart solution, be it technical and/or organisational, that enables a better solution to environmental challenges.

Typically a meeting begins with the members accounting for current challenges and/or solutions related to new legislation or organisational challenges, such as recruitment issues, or financial restrictions such as budget cutbacks. Usually other members provide suggestions and/or solutions to the challenges expressed by the member colleague.

The benefits from the network are mainly manifested in three ways;

- SALAR gains a good understanding of their members and can thereby lobby better on their members behalf and provide better support services to its members.

- The network members gain practical insights by engaging with each other and discussing challenges and solutions, emphasising good practices from the network members.

- By inviting and discussing draft policies with invited experts from the EU, state and state authorities, in order to bring in the local perspective to, for example, the introduction of new regulations and/or local responsibilities with regard to environmental protection, there is a better understanding of the local perspective. The direct effects of such interaction with invited authorities often result in better guidelines for the municipalities, more local perspective in policies. The benefit of interaction is mutual, thus the state also receive valuable inputs by consulting with the network.

Further to the immediate network members all municipalities (290) receive a newsletter following a network event. That way all municipalities are kept up to date with what is going. Also, should a municipality that does not take part in the network meeting require more guidance or information on a specific topic, it can contact the county network representative.

The part-time network coordinator (who works together with a core team of 3-4 colleagues) stresses the importance of achieving a dynamic mix of network members, with complementary expertise profiles, representing different contexts and challenges, thus bringing lots of useful inputs to the solutions of other members' challenges.

Network for Municipal Information

Peer to pee network for information management solutions and shortcuts to good practices with regard to information technology

Basic facts: 1) The purpose/mission of the network 2) Number of members: More than 5 from SALAR and 30 from municipalities. 3) Membership criteria:

Description of network: This network was created in 2006 based on simultaneous initiatives from SALAR and the Swedish municipalities – lots of responsibility is bestowed upon information managers, not least due to a growing demand on quick and reliable information. The network includes representatives from all counties – with one "node" for each county – and with an additional compensating for the counties with largest amount of municipalities. The members are appointed by SALAR.

The conferences are organised with different thematic contents. The network exists primarily for the exchange between the municipalities, but also as a sounding board for SALAR. A current campaign that is currently being discussed and developed with support from the network members, is employer branding, a concerted effort by SALAR and the municipalities to improve the image of municipalities, especially intended to get people interested in pursuing a municipal work career. SALAR provides a toolbox for this campaign and the discussions within the network evolve around, for example, how to apply a local perspective and specifics to the different components of the same toolbox.

The network also informs and prepares the heads of information with regard to the "Open comparisons", carried out by SALAR every year. The heads of information are also kept updated with the results of the comparison and receive the results before the media in order to prepare for interviews, press releases and interests by anyone interested in the outcome of the comparison. Such pre-notice is particularly important for those municipalities receiving high and low ratings, respectively.

The network mostly cater for the sharing of good practice examples and experiences, it is unusual that external experts provide inputs to the meetings. As for support requests from the members they concern e-services and the municipality branding process – graphical profile, intranet, procurement and service providers, cooperation with politicians, how to handle information management and communication internally within the municipality. Lots of "shortcuts" to technical solutions are achieved through such exchange. Another "hot topic" within the network is crisis management – how to handle crises that hit the municipality and how to manage the dialogue with the citizens. Lots of relevant experiences exist within the network and the members can learn from each other, for example with regard to big cutbacks in industry and how to prepare and manage the information and communication during such local traumatic events.

The network uses a project web platform for information, communication and filing of documents in between the network meetings. Mailing is also used as the use of the platform is not entirely mainstreamed among the members.

As for challenges for the network the coordinator mentioned the great interest among the heads of information departments, while at the same time this particular group of people often have difficulties to participate in meetings – often due to unexpected incidents in the municipality requiring the services of the head of information. As a measure to better reach those members who are prevented to attend a meeting the meetings are streamed live through the project web platform.

The Network for EU Coordinators

A SALAR network consisting of members within the main office

Basic facts: 1) The purpose/mission of the network: EU information sharing among SALAR staff and from SALAR to municipalities . 2) Number of members: 18 (all SALAR). 3) Membership criteria: key representative/EU knowledgeable from each division within SALAR.

Description of network: Previously SALAR used to have EU coordinators within the different divisions and departments of the main organisation in Stockholm. This proved difficult to coordinate and there were also challenges to achieving a collective understanding of the EU challenges, opportunities and updates within the often overlapping thematic areas. Since 2006 SALAR has instead organised EU coordination within the International Secretariat of the main organisation, which in turn coordinates the different divisions and departments. In order for this work, one early measure was to install meetings, which are now organised every third Friday within the SALAR premises. Presentations and discussions evolve around a number of preset agenda items (opening of meeting, focus topic and/or invited guest, current affairs as per request from members, focus topic for next meeting, other questions, closing of meeting). Chairman and secretary are ambulating tasks, and each member is prenoticed on their turn to assume these functions prior to the next upcoming meeting.

The network includes 9 members from the International Secretariat and another (approximately) 9 from other divisions and departments at the SALAR headquarters in Stockholm.

In parallel to the network for EU coordinators the network also organises EU seminars that are open for all SALAR staff members. Such events are presented through a series of short news items – in order to be concise and not take up to much time. Open to all SALAR staff members is also the opportunity to take part in an EU course, which includes training at SALAR headquarters and in Brussels.

The most important product produced by the network is the "På gång inom EU"-booklet ("EU current affairs"). This semi-annual booklet deals with current EU topics and is disseminated through the SALAR homepage, also a printed booklet can be ordered for delivery via post. Approximately 50-60 experts at SALAR headquarters author parts of the publication, thus also experts outside the network contribute to its development. The primary target group for the publication are the municipalities.

Although the network itself is for SALAR staff only, the municipalities have their own network arrangements, and have, for example, organised networks regionally to deal with EU topics.

The success factors for the network include the provision of guidance, internal guidelines (checklist, pre-set agenda, ambulating charman/secretary), efficiency achieved through the internet tool *Outlook* (invitations to meetings). Also, important to make the meetings comfortable and possible offer something to the members during the meetings, such as coffee and other refreshments.

The Gender Equality Network

A network interpreting research into practice through training and dialogue between members

Basic facts: 1) The purpose/mission of the network: exchange and training on gender equality . 2) Number of members: 200-300. 3) Membership criteria: none – apart from holding a position within a municipality and/or a county council.

Description of network: The gender equality network started as a network for county councils and later (in 2006) also began incorporating municipalities as participants and members.

The need for a forum of gender discussion and recurrent information was jointly expressed by municipalities and SALAR. The network grew by attracting new members, who devoted some of their work time to participate in events, most typically training and seminars, and through exchange via the web forum.

The meetings within the network are organised by its members and arrangements are made by a range of 1-8 persons and between 1-5 organisations at any one event – who are responsible for planning, execution and follow up. Each meeting within the network includes training to some extent, most typically this means showcasing examples of work methods or a particular situation by a municipality. Often an external expert shares research on a particular topic with the network members. The theme for an event is usually expressed by the members themselves – sometimes this leads to a line-up of people and organisations, wishing to organise the upcoming meetings. Due to the different organisers, the events are held in different parts of the country, with most events being held in bigger town and cities, such as Stockholm, Örebro and Gothenburg.

Projectplace – the internet project tool used by the network - is the official coordination and communication forum on the internet, and as such provides the members with agendas, training materials and minutes.

The network currently has 200-300 active members (there is an inventory of active members of the web forum at present). The network is rather fluid since anyone can sign up for participation in an event and since depending on the theme of an event, different functions within the municipality or county council are fascinated to participate. Also, since the responsibility for gender equality is rather differently organised within most municipalities and county councils, the participation at events attracts different management functions.

The following themes and topics that have a recurrent focus within the network:

- How to enable gender equality research and new (academic) findings to become applicable practice at the local level.

- To increase the knowledge and skills among practititioners working in municipalities and county councils.

- Norm-critical equality work; looking at analysing several factors of power simultaneously. For example, analysing why some jobs only go to certain groups of people.

Since the network's inception, researchers have increasingly been involved in contributing and also evaluating the strategic gender equality work that is being carried out by SALAR in cooperation with municipalities and county councils.

Also, the network has been instrumental in identifying a number of persons who are experienced with working with gender equality. These individuals – in cooperation with key staff at SALAR - have supported the creation of training materials that later have been piloted in training courses with the network's members. The need for training was expressed by the network's members not least since the experiences and the educational background vary greatly among municipalities and county councils. The training is mainly built on using theory, cases/discussion, and subsequent work place practice followed by feedback. The training course and material have been accredited and will now be used in education at one of Sweden's universities.

Through the exchange between members and via means of the training, sub-networks have evolved over time, including:

- Network for current training programme.

- Alumni network for previous participants in the training programme.

- A group for advanced discussion on tactics for increased gender equality.

- A network for the development group – those involved in developing training materials and course curriculum.

In addition to – and due to - the meetings and interaction between members the municipalities and county councils have provided each other with solutions to organisational and operational challenges – thereby influencing written strategies at municipal and county level, including formulation of problems and action plans to counter inequality.

The administration of the network is shared between a number of staff members at SALAR:s Gender equality and public health section, which is part of the Health and social care division. The arrangement of events (as already described in part) is a joint effort of SALAR administrators and network members – but SALAR is responsible for invitations and marketing of events.

In general terms, the success of the gender equality network is depending on SALAR:s ability to listen closely to what is being indicated by different institutions, not least state authorities, and to convey this information to the members. As for the establishment phase of the network, the fact that SALAR as an organisation already had many contacts and different expert profiles among its members made initial formation fairly convenient. Also given the fact that SALAR uses and invests a lot in its web page, made information about the gender equality network easily attainable by SALAR members.

The network's future success is dependent on the members' sense of ownership in the activities and the development of the network. Further, it is important to keep abreast with new developments in the field of gender equality and not to be afraid of bringing up cutting edge research as well as to discuss challenges and solutions that may be controversial at first.

3 Web and Social Media – the Network's Best Friends

The use of web and social media can leverage networks, such as those described above, but also associations and individual municipalities.

Web and social media are nowadays default channels for public authority information, communication, and - albeit (still) to a lesser degree – dialogue with citizens. The limitation of the need for physical encounters and thereby saving money is also a benefit deriving from web and social media – if managed well.

With regard to providing an association example, SALAR uses its website for frequent and extensive publishing, announcements and information-sharing and, to some degree, dialogue with its member municipalities. However, a decision on the launch of a comprehensive social media platform has not been made to date.

When choosing the right web and social media tools there are a number of strategic considerations and decisions to be made – for example, does the organisation want to become an informer, an intermediary, a moderator or more?

- How should the web structure (for municipalities and other entities) look like? Should there be flexibility for some of the content, and a fixed structure for some?

- How do people act when they visit the website and what information do they request?

- How is or should the web content be managed? Who will do it?

- Can some basic information be produced by, for example, an association? For example, should there be basic facts about a municipality's generic set-up, the relevant laws, the demography, economy, industry, geography?

- Accessibility and accountability vs. security – what is the appropriate balance?

The guidelines above have been used by municipalities, but also other public authorities, including state agencies.

Choosing the right strategy has the potential to result in great cost-saving for devoping and managing a network while at the same time providing great advantages in sharing and finding solutions to common challenges within the network. SALAR annually organises conferences on how to use social media. During these events different perspectives on social media are discussed among municipalities and SALAR. SALAR also presents the legal aspects of social media. SALAR occasionally also co-organises workshops in municipalities for exchange and discussion on the use of social media.

Some time ago a number of municipalities approached SALAR through the Network for Heads of Municipal Information, asking for a policy on the use of social media. Thereafter a sub-group was formed consisting of SALAR staff and a number of Heads of Information from a number of municipalities. The sub-group produced a number of guidelines entitled *Riktlinjer för närvaro i sociala medier* ("Guidelines for presence in social media"). The following are the draft guidelines that were proposed by SALAR on the choice of web and/or social media strategy:

1. There should be a mandate from the head of an employee to be able to use social media in the service. This decision makes clear that the person is using social media as an employee and not as an individual.

2. The municipality should assign certain persons to handle and update information in social media, in much the same way as the appointment of publishers on websites.

3. The municipality should have a list on its website informing on the social media platforms that the municipality is using.

4. If politicians in the municipality would like to link from the municipality's website, for example, to his/her private blog or his party's website that's fine. This decision lies with the person responsible for the municipal website. It should be made clear that the opinions expressed on a blog is not the municipality's own views, but that of the individual's.

5. The municipality must make decisions on how to respond to tweets, Facebook posts and other comments received on social media pages, as well as have a system for removal of some of the comments (especially threaths and/or criminal content). The same applies to the information that the municipality itself has created in a social medium.

6. In order to document the (social) media there should be a decision to save screenshots every six months.

7. Classified information should not be published in social media.

8. The municipality must remove criminal material, such as threats or incitement to racial hatred, etc.

9. Freedom of speech and freedom of information also applies to employees who use social media in private to write about municipal operations. (Read more in SALAR:s book *Lojalitet och yttrandefrihet* ("Loyalty and freedom of speech").

10. The municipality should set rules for how employees are alloed to use social media during working hours. Here it is up to each employer to determine which rules should apply.

The above (generic) guidelines were well received by the municipalities. Supported by the publication of these guidelines many municipalities started engaging in implementing their own social media strategy.

With regard to examples of good practice in the use of Facebook some municipalities are already very active and use it consistently, as in the case of Karlstad municipality (www.karlstad.se or www.facebook.com/karlstadskommun), they use facebook for maintaining a dialogue with its local citizens, but also with people who have moved to other parts of the Sweden. In the former case the dialogue evolves around municipal services and other location-specific news while in the latter case the dialogue evolves around how to promote the municipality and facilitate for people to move back to their city of origin.

Twitter is used for shorter messages and announcements, not least useful for emergencies or urgent issues facing the municipality. Further, Youtube is being used by the municipalities to emphasise messages on the municipality website and can, for example, show an interview with a municipality representative.

It may be appropriate to mention that there are alternative social media to Facebook and Twitter, for example the network forum www.ning.com is used by many networks. This has the advantage of sparing the user the need to share his/her personal data. Other (work) platforms include www.clearvale.com, which offers free registration for basic cooperation and coordination functions.

4 Conclusions

4.1 Review of Content

The case studies provided above are hereinunder analysed from two perspectives; what are the differences and similarities, respectively.

Differences:

- ✓ **Membership:** Different ways of organising the networks were identified in terms of membership criteria and amount of members. Some networks apply an "open" membership based on municipality role/function, whereas some (most) make a selection or have the counties nominate the member for the network, thereby limiting the network to a more manageable size.
- ✓ **Expertise:** Further, different ways of setting the agenda for the meetings were identified, with some networks choosing to hold the meetings without any substantial expertise input from outside the member network, whilst some networks frequently invite external experts.
- ✓ **Communication and dialogue:** Differences were identified with regard to methods and tools for organising the communication and dialogue via information technology; some use emails as the main tool for communication and dialogue, while others use a mix of tools, including project web platforms and, for example, live streaming of events.

Similarities:

- ✓ **Continuous dialogue:** All interviewees expressed the importance of maintaining a continuous dialogue in order to achieve trust and interest from the members, and as a result also joint ownership of the network topics and the contents of meeting events.
- ✓ **Policies and/or guidelines:** Even though the interview responses made it clear that SALAR does not provide any specific policy or guidelines for how to organise networks, each network has its own operation manual, typically a checklist in order to establish, develop and manage the network, including responsibilies, roles and functions. How such checklists are focussed and the extent of details is entirely up to each network. As for social media (and social media networks), there are guidelines which are offered to municipalities (and other public entities), mainly to ensure a basic framework for social media involvement that different public authorities can use, and develop further for their specific context.

- ✓ **Geographic coverage:** All respondents stressed the importance of having network members from the entire country, and to have representation from a variety of local contexts – rural, urban, coast, inland and more.
- ✓ **Coordinators:** All networks operate with a number of part-time staff, who assume main responsilbility for planning, coordinating and managing the content and logistics. The network responsibility is embedded in these individuals' regular work, and they typically spend one to three days per month on network-related activities.
- ✓ **Logistics:** The importance of planning and executing the logistics well is essential for providing both a professional and relaxed athmosphere prior to and during the meetings.

4.2 Final Comments to the Study

The review of the case studies identified a number of common denominators, which can be labelled "good practice", with regard to the establishment, management and development of networks. For example, all network coordinators referred to the dialogue with members as a crucial element in keeping the network alive and relevant, while at the same time receiving useful feedback to what the network should focus on in terms of contents and topics.

Also, a number of differences were identified, which can be regarded as alternative modalities in how networks are established, managed and developed. Further, differences can depend upon which phase in the life cycle the network finds itself; newly formed networks may struggle to find the right coordination and cooperation methods, members and content, while older ones are more focussed on its core topics and exchange methods.

The study clarified that while the interest of the members must guide the profile of the network, someone has to keep up the momentum – thus, part-time coordinators and other support staff are essential in order to drive fruitful exchange between the network members.

The case studies provided above can be followed up with questions to the different coordinators and other network staff and communication officers, but also by engaging in a dialogue with those municipality representatives who make up the majority of members of the networks. The current Swedish-Turkish programme partners may also find ways in how to establish and maintain programme-specific networks via, for example, the introduction of social media communities.

Sources

Respondents at SALAR – thanks to the following:

Charlotta Hemberg, Group Manager, Communication Department/Coordinator for the Network of Municipal Information.

Eiler Engberg, Controller, CEO's Office/Coordinator for the Network of Municipal Executives.

Helena Spets, Officer, Health and Social Care Division, Public Health and Gender Equality Section

Ingeborg Löfgren, Web Editor, Communication Department.

Jan Torége, Officer, Department for Growth and Community Development/Coordinator for the Local and Regional Development Network.

Kajsa Tirén, Information Officer, Communication Department, Member Communications Project.

Karin Flordal, Officer/Coordinator, Administrative Deparment, International Division/Coordinator for the EU Network.

Nils Alesund, Officer, Department for Growth and Community Development/Coordinator for the Environment and Public Health Network.

Publications:

Öppna jämförelser. Annual booklet published by SALAR summarizing comparisons between municipalities and county councils. ("Open comparisons").

Link to the results of the Öppna Jämförelser ("Open Comparisons") of 2011 (Swedish): http://www.skl.se/om_skl/medlemsundersokningar_2/medlemsundersokning-2011

På gång inom EU. Semi-annual booklet produced by the EU Network. Spring 2012. ("Current EU affairs"). Swedish language. http://brs.skl.se/brsbibl/kata_documents/doc40176_1.pdf

Företagsklimat 2011. Insikt – en servicemätning av kommunernas myndighetsutövning. (Part of "Open Comparisons"). ("Business climate 2011. Insight – a service rating of municipal governance". Booklet (Swedish) published by SALAR every second year.

Links to general information, guidelines and networks:

Link (English) to description of municipalities, county councils and regions in Sweden: page:http://english.skl.se/municipalities_county_councils_and_regions

Link to the members of the EU coordinators network (Swedish): http://www.skl.se/vi_arbetar_med/eu/kontakt_3/eu-samordnare

Link to SALAR intro page on social media (guidelines, legal framework, how municipalities and SALAR use social media: http://www.skl.se/press/socialamedier

Link to SALAR draft guidelines for presence in social media (Swedish):
http://www.skl.se/press/socialamedier/riktlinjer-for-narvaro-i-sociala-medier

Link to information on municipalities', county councils' and regions' activities in social media (the information provides information on a) does exist in social media, b) link to website forum with links to social media, c) policy for presence in social media, d) other guidelines for use of social media) :
http://www.skl.se/press/socialamedier/kommuner_och_landsting_i_sociala_medier