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Local self-government

A cornerstone of Swedish governance is local self-government (*kommunal självstyrelse*) which is distinctly stipulated in the opening article of the Instrument of Government (Ch. 1, Art. 1). Local government in Sweden is organized in two elected tiers comprising county councils (*regioner*) and municipal counties (*kommuner*). This relationship is not hierarchical: the municipalities are not answerable to the counties. Formally speaking, Swedish municipalities (290) and regions (21) have extensive freedom to manage their own affairs. The implementation of welfare policy is carried out by local authorities, and the local authorities account for a very large proportion of the public sector. The Instrument of Government specifically states that administrative functions may be delegated to local authorities. Most tasks of municipalities and county councils are regulated by central government in special legislation and are mandatory by law: e.g. elderly care and health care. Furthermore, administrative functions may also be delegated to other legal entities or to individuals. This latter option has made it possible for local authorities to contract out, for example, the production of many of its welfare services to private companies.

The Swedish Administrative Model – Central Government

In contrast to countries with ministerial rule, there is an organizational divide between the government ministries and central government agencies in Sweden. This executive dualism consists of two parts: Firstly, since the Swedish Constitution prohibits ministerial control, i.e., when individual ministers influence or instruct administrative agencies, the Cabinet of ministers acts and is accountable collectively. Thus, the major part of the Swedish national executive is organized in separate units outside the ministries, i.e. the executive is organized into small-sized government offices (ministries), on the one hand, and 340 semi-autonomous government agencies, on the other. Secondly, the Constitution guarantees the independence of the state administration (Instrument of Government Ch. 12, Art. 2). This means that it is not allowed for government to steer central government agencies in particular cases when exercising public authority, while steering these agencies in general, through legislation, regulations, appropriation directives, etc., is allowed.