

Training Local Elected Officials: Professionalization Amid Tensions Between Democracy and Expertise

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ABSTRACT Over the last few decades, several administrations in Canada have organized programs for training local elected officials (LEOs). While improving LEOs' competences is beneficial, this trend is developing amidst a persisting tension between democratic and technocratic approaches to governance. Indeed, training - and the professionalization it entails - disrupts the enduring principle holding that everyone is equally authorized to govern following the democratic election. Despite the significance of these transformations, training activities for LEOs have received limited scholarly attention until now. In this paper, we detail our conceptualization of the professionalization process and the role of training programs within it. We then review the existing Canadian training programs for LEOs. We also examine one case study: the main introductory training program for LEOs in Québec (Canada) since 2011. Accordingly, we advance our understanding of training's effects on elected officials by emphasizing how they contribute to a long-term process of professionalization.

KEYWORDS: • municipal politics • local elected officials • professional training • professionalization • local democracy • Canada

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1 Introduction

Many studies have recently observed the forms and functions of training programs dedicated to federal and provincial/state parliamentarians (e.g. Steinack, 2012; Kinyondo and Pelizzo, 2013). While these programs can take several forms, including introductory, skills, mandatory, voluntary training, they all contribute in developing the competences of elected officials. However, the exact changes that such training promotes remain rather ambiguous since, as Simpamba (2012) reminds us, there is generally no formal job description for elected positions.

In this paper, we propose that the growing presence of training programs for local elected officials (LEOs) implicitly confirms the increasing expectations being placed on them in terms of professional competences and roles. For that matter, we consider these training programs as indications and mechanisms of a long-term professionalization process, which originates from the increasing perception that democratic legitimacy is insufficient for exercising local political mandates. While the issues associated with training for LEOs are only emerging in practice and in the literature, associated programs should accordingly help us identifying the professional competences that are increasingly deemed necessary for exercising political mandates at the local level.

According to this perspective, we advance two conceptual proposals on the process of LEOs' professionalization in this paper. First, we propose to revisit professionalization as an ideal-typical concept that illustrates significant, long-term transformations in the field of local and, more largely, political governance. Several definitions of the concept of professionalization have been suggested since the publication of Weber's (1963) seminal work. Here, we particularly retain the definition proposed by Gaxie (2001) because it effectively synthesizes what we see as the two main dimensions of political professionalization: (i) the full-time exercise of political activity as the main source of remuneration for the elected official; and (ii) the recognition of a 'profession,' including specific competences, and/or regulating organizations associated with the practice. We propose that training is one circumstance where we can examine how these competences are codified and translated into specific learning content and outcomes.

This first proposal originates from a fundamental concern regarding the professionalization of LEOs. Modern democracy has long been established on (among other things) the principle that all citizens can equally access elected positions. This conception broke with previous political systems where decision makers were chosen according to criteria such as lineage or wealth. Now, professionalization generates a new transformation of political practices. Indeed, the idea that exercising elective mandates requires specific competences – for instance due to local governance increasing technicality (Fontaine and Le Bart, 1994) – sets elected officials apart from their constituents (Garrigou 1992).

Accordingly, the professionalization of elected officials raises concerns since it highlights a deep tension with democratic principles.

In line with this first argument, we also propose that training programs are one significant indication of the professionalization process taking place at the level of local governments. Indeed, training programs make explicit the specific competences recognized as essential to insure local representatives' effectiveness (Greenwood and Wilson 1995; Thomson 2010). Moreover, the mere organization of formal training suggests that these competences cannot simply be acquired through experience. In fact, we consider that training epitomizes *and* supports professionalization in the field of local governance since associated activities help codifying and developing the competences that remain largely implicit at the level of local governments. In that sense, training like remuneration contributes to an ongoing process of professionalization rather than automatically professionalizing LEOs. Now, while professionalization is largely incomplete at the level of Canadian local governance, examining training programs in this context should help us clarify the current and future issues associated with this process.

These proposals also enable us to contribute to the literature on the professionalization of LEOs. While scholars have recently studied the professionalization of parliamentarians (Best and Cotta, 2000), and while several scholars studying municipal politics have documented the profiles, trajectories and daily responsibilities of LEOs (e.g. Steyvers and Verhelst, 2012; Reynaert et al., 2009), questions associated with training programs for LEOs have largely remained outside of the scholarly purview. Accordingly, beyond the work of Greenwood and Wilson (1995) on councillor effectiveness and training in England, and the one of Guérin-Lavignotte and Kerrouche (2006), who devote some attention to this topic, this paper develops a perspective that has yet to be the object of systematic attention by scholars of local democracy and governance.

In order to empirically illustrate our proposals, we focus in this paper on one particularly interesting case in the Canadian context—namely, the recently revamped Training Program for Newly Elected Officials (translated) provided by the *Union des municipalités du Québec* (UMQ), the main association of LEOs in the province of Québec. In 2010, the government of Québec adopted the *Municipal Ethics and Good Conduct Act* (translated). This bill's article 15 indicates that all members of a municipal council must, within the six first months of their mandate, participate in such a training program (MAMROT, 2013a).¹ The UMQ has the responsibility to provide this ethical training to its members. Importantly, the UMQ began to integrate this mandatory ethics-based content into a broader competence-based introductory training program in November 2013, a strategic move that makes, in practice, the UMQ's introductory training mandatory for all new LEOs in UMQ member municipalities.

We suggest that the posture adopted by the UMQ reflects the previous understanding of professionalization. Indeed, beyond the institutionalization of mandatory training, the decisions made by the UMQ and the government of Québec have normalized the idea of formal training for LEOs; what is more, these decisions have helped to codify the competences deemed necessary for LEOs to exercise their mandates. Accordingly, this case appears particularly significant for analyzing how training programs illustrate and contribute to the process of LEOs' professionalization in Québec, Canada, and beyond. To examine this case study, we have conducted a document analysis, a press review and non-participant observation of a two-day training session offered in February 2014.² Importantly, this last method enables us to analyze various components of the training—namely, the discourses, practices and tools that were used during that training session, as well as the reactions of participants towards the training.

In the first part of this paper, we underline the theoretical and political background necessary to understand the link between training and LEOs' professionalization in the Canadian context. In the second part, we then examine the case of the UMQ's introductory training program and more precisely the most recent series of mandatory introductory training sessions for LEOs elected in the November 2013 Québec municipal elections. For this examination, we primarily compare this case study with other training programs offered to LEOs in all Canadian provinces and territories,³ We also analyze the objectives advanced in the documentary sources associated with the UMQ's introductory training programs and what form of professional abilities and knowledge they emphasize. Finally, we discuss our observation of the UMQ's training and the illustrations it provides regarding the tensions and issues raised by the process of professionalization. Accordingly, our analysis lends important illustrative value to support our theoretical proposals regarding the process of professionalization of LEOs and the relation between training and professionalization in Québec, Canada, and beyond.

2 Theoretical proposals and the Canadian context for training LEOs

Training programs for LEOs can be understood by referring to a persistent yet implicit tension between two opposing approaches to governance—the democratic approach and the technocratic approach—that exist in current democratic societies. The development of mandatory training for LEOs can be understood as reflecting a technocratic approach since it emphasizes the role of expert knowledge in the local governance context. Justified by the increasing complexity and requirements associated with LEOs' mandates, training programs for LEOs further a process of professionalization. As such, training activities disrupt the principle embodied in the democratic approach, which suggests that everyone is equally authorized to govern as follows the democratic selection process.

This principled tension is also visible in the selection process of LEOs in which two additional principles—namely, that of expert and democratic legitimacy—

come into opposition. Kristof Steyvers and Tom Verhelst (2012) illustrate these conflicting principles of legitimacy by categorizing LEOs into two ideal types: the professional and the layman. According to these authors, these ideal types represent the two extreme positions on a continuum illustrating the differing ways by which LEOs are recruited, authorized, and develop their careers. In this model, the professional type of LEO is related with notions like expertise, responsiveness and exclusiveness, all of which support an expert form of legitimacy. These notions also tend to represent LEO's role as a professional occupation that requires expert competences and hence to advance the professionalization process (in line with Gaxie's definition [2001]). Within this conceptualization, training programs further a professional type of LEOs since they (at least implicitly) favour the acquisition of expert knowledge and a principle of expert legitimacy.

At the other end of Steyvers and Verhelst's ideal-typical continuum, democratic legitimacy is illustrated by the layman type of LEO and notions like equality, representation and inclusiveness. According to this model, democratic legitimacy implies doubts about the neutrality of expert knowledge rather than readiness to see LEOs acquire or being influenced by it. Similarly, a layman type of LEO suggests that, 'notwithstanding some formal criteria of eligibility, any fellow-citizen should be able to come forward as a candidate for political office' (Steyvers and Verhelst 2012: 4). Accordingly, a layman type of LEO contradicts the tendency towards professionalization since democratic legitimacy results from the elective process by which they are selected rather than the possession of any kind of specialized (professional) training and competences. Noticeably, elective mandates are generally conceived following this layman model in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, which underlies many municipal governments across Canada and the Western world (Tindal and Nobes-Tindal, 2008).

Due to the tensions between the democratic and expert approaches to governance, training programs raise significant issues regarding the current and future role of LEOs. In particular, these training programs' effects on LEOs' career paths is a growing topic of interest. In Europe, changes to the opportunity structure associated with local politics have been shown to favour the professionalization of LEOs (Steyvers and Verhelst, 2012). Our inquiry contributes to this conversation by analyzing the ways in which training programs illustrate and contribute to the professionalization of LEOs in Québec and Canada. In the following section, we contextualize the abovementioned theoretical proposals in the context of local governance in Canada.

3 The professionalization of LEOs in the Canadian municipal context

Few scholars have studied the professionalization of LEOs in Canada. In fact, very little political science research has focused on municipal politics in Canada (Eidelman and Taylor, 2010). Those few scholars who have contributed to this

subfield have tended to focus on the metropolises of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, and have looked at questions such as access (Siegel et al., 2001) or gendered and ethnocultural representation at the local level (e.g. Gavan-Koop and Smith, 2008; Andrew et al., 2008). Following studies that look at the professionalization of LEOs in Europe (e.g. Bäck et al., 2006) this paper identifies factors that similarly encourage the professionalization of LEOs in Canadian municipalities. To do so, we concentrate on two contextual elements that illustrate the historical context and the process of professionalization affecting local governance in Canada and particularly in the province of Québec: (i) the political role afforded to municipalities; and (ii) the politico-administrative relations present in Canadian municipalities.

The first contextual element relates to the traditional form that municipalities have taken. Being creations of provincial governments, Canadian municipalities have historically been considered local administrations that purvey a relatively small range of services for landowners (Tindal and Nobes-Tindal, 2008) rather than autonomous governing bodies. Guided by budgetary conservatism, and in conformity with the Anglo-Saxon tradition, municipal actions have traditionally been limited to the purview explicitly laid out in provincial laws. In this context, professionalization among LEOs has not generally been encouraged.

Since the 1980s, however, we have witnessed the increasing decentralization of power from the provinces to municipalities (Sancton and Young, 2009). Importantly, this transformation is increasing the political roles afforded to municipalities in Canada and, concurrently, the role of LEOs in strategic political decision-making in areas such as economic development, transportation and urban planning. This transformation encourages the professionalization of LEOs. In the province of Québec, increasing demands have been voiced by the UMQ for recognition of their political roles. For instance, the UMQ published a white paper in 2012 that makes two main demands: first, that formal recognition be paid to the importance of actors associated with local governance in Québec; and second, that this recognition be embedded within a Charter of Municipalities and a new fiscal pact with the provincial government (UMQ, 2012). The heightened recognition is having significant implications on LEOs, as it necessitates that they increasingly assume the responsibilities of professional politicians rather than layman administrators—an approach that is fuelled by professional training.

A second contextual element is the politico-administrative model of Canadian municipalities. One common model is the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) system, which involves a hired professional CAO and lowly professionalized LEOs, who often hold part-time positions. The CAO model implicitly privileges layman-type LEOs by depoliticizing municipal management and entrusting main responsibilities to the CAO (Dagenais, 2000). Yet, the recent trend towards increasing remuneration for LEOs enables more local elected officials to exercise their mandates on a full-time basis. This is particularly the case in Québec where

remuneration criteria are based on municipal population. Despite this principle, elected representatives can nevertheless increase their salaries beyond the legislated minimum. This model of remuneration improves the potential that LEOs, especially mayors, will live of their political mandates and, hence, become more professionalized. Thus, we propose that the layman-type of privilege wanes as favour shifts towards professional-type of LEOs.

The two previous elements constitute important factors at play in the current transformations affecting the conditions under which Canadian LEOs exercise their mandates. They are influential in transforming municipalities from mere hubs of local service administration to significant nuclei for autonomous local governance within the provinces and territories. The professionalization of LEOs is thus supported in the process. What we propose is that training programs contribute in this process of professionalization by codifying and transmitting more professional competences to LEOs. The following section illustrates this process and clarifies the role of training programs by analyzing the case study of the introductory training program offered to new member LEOs by the UMQ.

4 Case study: The UMQ's introductory training program for new LEOs

In December 2010, and among increasing allegations of corruption and collusion against several actors associated with municipal affairs, the government of Québec began to impose mandatory ethics and deontology training on all LEOs in that province. Since then, mandatory ethics training has been implemented to Québec LEOs in partnership with, among others, the UMQ. The mandatory nature of this ethics training is particularly important to our analysis, as it formally introduces new qualifications (beyond the electoral process) for LEOs to exercise their political mandates.⁴

This case study focuses on the role played by the UMQ in regards to such training. From 2011 until the Québec municipal elections of November 2013, the UMQ provided training to LEOs that was focused exclusively on the ethics and deontology content mandated by the Québec government. This first incarnation of the mandated ethics training was met with both passive and active resistance by Québec LEOs. Illustrating the aforementioned tension between the democratic and expert principles of political legitimacy, some saw this mandatory training as the province's attempt to encroach upon the democratic legitimacy of LEOs while others saw it as a way to call local politicians' personal codes of ethics into question (e.g. Radio-Canada 2013).

Amid such criticisms, the UMQ revamped its mandatory ethics training to combine it with training in other competences such as management, administration and finance. Starting with the cohort of new LEOs elected in

November 2013, the result was a somewhat hybridized ethics- and competence-based introductory training program. At first sight, this can appear like a means to equip LEOs with the competences required to successfully fulfil their mandate – but also as a strategic move by the UMQ to advance its conception that municipal politicians in Québec ought to be given more autonomy over the governance of their municipalities. While the objectives underlying this move needs to be ascertained, we can underline that this combination is consistent with the previously mentioned demands by the UMQ for greater recognition of municipalities' political roles.

Amid the transformations brought about by Bill 109, two key changes—namely, (i) the government of Québec's decision to impose mandatory ethics training on all LEOs, and (ii) the UMQ's strategy to embed this training within a more general competence-based introductory training program—are informative of how training is becoming the entry point for professionalizing municipal politics practices. More precisely, these changes indicate how training programs, in the context of the UMQ, contributed to codify the specific professional competences expected from LEOs and hence to redefine their political role(s). More broadly, this case study highlights how a municipal actor like the UMQ can implicitly identify and advance the (professional) competences that are expected from LEOs. As this conceptualization underscores, we focus in our analysis on the role of the general mandatory training program that has been developed by the UMQ - despite the fact that the ethics dimension has been the basis for implementing this more general training – because it provides more comprehensive insights on the professionalization process of LEOs.

5 Comparing the UMQ's introductory training program with other LEO training programs

In this subsection, we offer a generic comparison between the UMQ training for LEOs and relatively similar programs in other Canadian provinces and territories. By comparing these training programs for LEOs, we can underline their distinct and shared features and the measure in which these are conducive to professionalizing LEOs.

As indicated in Annex 1, the training activities offered by the UMQ share several features with the programs delivered in other Canadian provinces and territories. Yet, the mandatory nature of the UMQ's introductory training program is an exception in Canada. In fact, the government of Québec is the only province or territory to impose any kind of mandatory training on LEOs. We propose that the mandatory nature of the UMQ's introductory training program furthers a professionalization process among LEOs in at least two ways. At the individual level, this feature primarily attests of the importance attributed to the formal accreditation of competences by LEOs since it indicates that their achievement should be formally recognized. Beside the case of the UMQ's introductory

training program, the importance of formal accreditation of competences is also illustrated by other cases where various mechanisms have been developed - even if training is not mandatory - to recognize and validate the acquisition of specific competences and credentials. For example, after going through the (non-mandatory) training programs in Alberta LEOs are conferred a certificate of achievement (EOEP, 2014). Accordingly, mandatory training (and other training with accreditation mechanisms) certifies that LEOs effectively acquire specialized knowledge⁵ and, hence, that they are better equipped for professionally exercising their mandate.

More generically, the mandatory character of the UMQ's introductory training program also underscores that LEOs *should* acquire expert knowledge beyond the electoral process (whether they individually complete the training program or not). We propose that training (mandatory or not) make sense beyond the actual acquisition of knowledge since it epitomizes their professionalization process, or, in other words, training signals which knowledge is necessary for successfully exercising LEOs' mandates. Accordingly, the mandatory UMQ's introductory training programs, but also other forms of training programs, have an important role in the professionalization process since they codify specialized knowledge, diffuse it among participants, and construct this understanding of political mandates exercise as legitimate.

Another important comparative feature between the training activities provided by the UMQ and in other Canadian provinces and territories pertains to the main types of programs being offered to LEOs. Indeed, our analysis indicates that the two main municipal associations in Québec, the UMQ and the FQM, offer three main types of training to LEOs namely the 'basic', introductory or orientation training, the training in ethics and deontology, and other more technical and specialized programs (see Annex 1).⁶ As we previously underlined, the two first types of training have been combined by the UMQ since 2013 in a somewhat hybrid introductory course.⁷ Accordingly, the UMQ training activities represent a full range offer in comparison with the training offer in other Canadian provinces and territories namely with two remaining types of training programs offered by this organization, i.e. the basic and technical. However, these two types of training programs are also recurring across the several other Canadian provinces and territories.

Beside Québec, basic, introductory, or orientation training programs are offered to LEOs in at least two other Canadian provinces (i.e. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia). Moreover, the School of Community Government (North West Territories) offers diverse basic courses to LEOs. While these programs diverge on several dimensions, they share a commitment to providing LEOs - and especially new ones - with basic but crucial background knowledge to conduct their mandate (e.g. on the administrative, financial, and legal contexts of their municipalities - what

Paddock (1996) calls ‘general survival training’). This is an interesting commonality that helps understanding what might be a more professional type of LEO since it indicates the particular competences that are explicitly expected of LEOs in these provinces, and potentially more broadly. More practically, these basic or introductory training programs can also be understood as prime mechanisms for transmitting expert knowledge to LEOs and for influencing their practices and understanding of their role early in their mandate. In the next subsection, we detail these effects using our documentary analysis and observation of the UMQ introductory training program.

Technical training programs for LEOs have also been developed in several Canadian provinces and territories. Beside Québec, seven Canadian provinces (out of 11 provinces and territories) offer technical training to LEOs (e.g. Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan). While the training activities associated with these programs are very diverse and hence diverge on several dimensions, they all share a commitment to transmit more specialized knowledge to LEOs (and, in several cases, employees or even other individual interested in running for Municipal Council [in Alberta]) during their mandate. These programs can accordingly help us understand what are valuable (but not necessary) competences for LEOs in these provinces. They can also be understood as mechanisms that may promote the process of professionalization in the course of LEOs’ mandate by helping them to acquire more specialized competences in local governance and signalling their increasing expertise.

This comparative analysis confirms that the UMQ introductory training program is relatively specific to Québec in the Canadian context given its inclusion of the ethics mandatory dimension. However, a basic and introductory program is also offered in several other Canadian provinces and territories, just like more technical types of training activities. To clarify the role of the UMQ introductory training program for LEOs in their process of professionalization, the following section provides a more detailed examination of its content and objectives. In doing so, we take a closer look at how professional competences are communicated through the documents and the lived activities associated with this introductory training program.

6 The objectives of the UMQ’s introductory training program

The UMQ’s introductory training program spans over two days of mainly in-class seminar-like training and are complemented by written documentation. Training is to be delivered within the first six months of a new LEO beginning his mandate, which makes these training sessions into potentially important means of influencing how LEOs see their roles for the duration of their mandates. While the mandatory ethics content is spread throughout the two days, the first day is primarily dedicated to the legal dimensions of local governance and the second

day to its managerial dimensions. The content is delivered by representatives from the UMQ as well as legal authorities, experts on municipal financial management and accounting, and representatives from Québec's association of municipal CAOs. These primary features can help us delineate the general types of knowledge that are transmitted to LEOs (e.g. ethical, legal, managerial, relations with the administration) and expected from them in order to exercise professionally their mandate.

To provide a clearer understanding of the main content advanced in the UMQ introductory training activities, we have copied and categorized the explicit objectives associated with this program in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Official objectives of the UMQ introductory training program

	(1) Practical tools	(2) Comprehensive understanding
(a) Basic training for newly elect local officials	<p>To know the main operating rules of a municipality</p> <p>To identify the competences, obligations, and responsibilities of the LEO</p> <p>To define and understand the basic principles of local governance and its associated 'best' practices</p> <p>To initiate LEOs to the budgetary process cycle and to available tools for financial planning</p> <p>To understand the process for attributing contracts and competitive bids</p> <p>To initiate LEOs to risk management in the field of municipal affairs</p>	<p>To describe the main municipal jurisdictions</p> <p>To understand the municipal challenges, context, and issues</p> <p>To understand the roles of leader and administrator assumed by the LEO</p> <p>To know the financial and fiscal environment of municipalities</p> <p>To discuss on the importance of the LEOs-CAO relationship</p>
(b) Training on ethics and deontology	<p>To present the laws, rules, and mechanisms framing municipal ethics and deontology</p> <p>To present 'best practices', references, and tools with regards to ethics and deontology in municipal matters</p> <p>To apply acquired notions through a practical exercise aiming at the appropriation of the Ethical code of one's municipality</p>	<p>To distinguish between the ethical and legal spheres</p> <p>To discuss the content of Codes of ethics and deontology</p> <p>To consolidate LEOs' reflection with regards to ethical behaviors</p> <p>To promote the collective adherence to the values underlined in the codes</p>

Source : UMQ (2014)

Among the objectives advanced by the UMQ for the introductory training program, we propose that two main ideal-typical categories can be distinguished: (1) objectives that provide ‘practical tools’; and (2) objectives that promote a more comprehensive understanding of the role of LEOs. These categories are much more intertwined in practice than is suggested by this categorization. Nevertheless, we propose that these two categories of objectives provide useful thinking tools by indicating *two prevalent forms of competences that are increasingly being associated with the exercise of local elective mandates, that are codified in training programs for LEOs, and that reflect significant aspects of their process of professionalization.*

More precisely, the first category of objectives aims at preparing LEOs for efficiently exercising their responsibilities - presumably from the very beginning of their mandates - by eliminating a steep learning curve that often confronts new LEOs. This objective is advanced by providing LEOs with relatively more concrete and applicable knowledge and training on a broad set of instrumental and technical competences relevant to municipal management and administration. In the description of the UMQ basic training, these practical tools are exemplified by objectives like knowing the key operating rules for municipalities, the main municipal jurisdictions, and the guidelines for awarding contracts and preparing budgets. While these are less encompassing, these practical tools are also translated in the ethics and deontology dimension in objectives like the presentation of ‘best practices’, references, and tools with regards to ethics and deontology and the application of acquired notions through a practical exercise. As the Table 1 indicates, this first category of objectives provides a rather explicit codification of the technical competences that are expected from LEOs, especially by emphasizing notions associated with the legal frameworks and budgetary processes of local governance. Accordingly, we propose that these objectives represent a standardization of the basic knowledge, skills and competences deemed necessary for professionally exercising local elective mandates today.

The second category of objectives aims at helping new LEOs acquiring new LEOs acquire a more comprehensive understanding of their mandates, at least according to the terms of representatives from the UMQ. This is done through objectives that direct LEOs towards reflections on the broader contexts and stakes associated with their political roles. In the basic training offered by the UMQ, this more comprehensive understanding is translated by objectives like that of discussing and understanding the municipal challenges, contexts, and issues, the roles of leader and administrator assumed by the LEO, and the importance of the LEOs-CAO relationship. In the ethics and deontology dimension of the UMQ training, a more comprehensive understanding of LEOs’ role is furthered by objectives like that of distinguishing between the ethical and legal sphere and consolidating LEOs’ reflection with regards to ethical behaviors. This category of objectives is more closely related with the increasingly politicized role of LEOs, namely in regards to their function as decision makers responsible for making choices that

impact the municipality's long-term development and direction. Indeed, advancing a more comprehensive understanding of LEOs' role effectively extends their mandates beyond purely administrative and technical tasks and towards more political roles. From this perspective, the effectiveness of LEOs is not only seen as resulting from the acquisition of technical skills but also as the result of an increasing awareness and ability to understanding the broader context, challenges and issues that are associated with local governance today, a dimension also underlined by Thomson (2010).

While the previous documentary analysis is informative of the process of professionalization associated with the UMQ introductory training program, it nevertheless remains relatively fixed or disembodied from the actual practices of LEOs. To increase the 'texture' of our analysis, we conducted a non-participant observation during one of the UMQ's two- day training sessions delivered in February 2014. The following section discussed how the previous categories of objectives were carried over into the delivery of these specific training activities.

7 Professionalization during the UMQ's introductory training program

Our observation primarily suggests that the previous objectives are not equally translated during the UMQ introductory program since a more comprehensive understanding of LEOs' role is not emphasized throughout the associated activities. In fact, our observation suggests that this relative imbalance is in part the result of a resistance towards the process of professionalization, which illustrates the previously discussed oppositions between the layman and professional types of LEOs and between the democratic and expert principles of legitimacy in the context of local governance.

During the training session we observed, objectives associated with a comprehensive understanding of LEOs' role are made explicit during an introductory broadcasted speech from the UMQ president. Since it largely reflects the UMQ's 2012 white paper, this speech discusses the relations maintained between LEOs and the UMQ with other levels of government and hence presents the broader and current context and challenges of local governance in Québec. Specifically, in this speech, the emphasis on securing (new) necessary resources and assuming new responsibilities entails major impacts in terms of local governance and political professionalization of LEOs in Québec. However, and beyond this introduction, we observed that the objectives associated with a more comprehensive understanding of LEOs' role were largely absent from the remaining two days of training. This absence is particularly surprising since such a training program could present a particularly strategic moment for advancing the political objectives, roles and responsibilities of LEOs set out in the UMQ's white paper. Nevertheless, we observed that the other activities associated with the

UMQ introductory training program largely concentrate on objectives associated with the aforementioned practical tools and technical knowledge listed in Table 1. While these objectives partake in a process of basic professionalization, it is noticeable that they do not reflect the more political role associated with a more professionalized exercise of LEOs' mandate.

This focus on more technical knowledge during the UMQ introductory training program is quite surprising since, as Greenwood and Wilson (1995) already mentioned, the vitality of local democracy can only be furthered through an increased role of LEOs, who must be capable of positioning themselves against CAO and other municipal employees. In the context of the UMQ, this focus also contradicts the organization's own political objectives (e.g. recognition of local governance's greater role) as per indicated in the organization last white paper and a significant portion of the objectives explicitly associated with this training program. Indeed, the UMQ introductory training program is not only a means to increase more technical knowledge of LEOs but also to actively develop their political competences and role(s). Following these objectives, we expected the training program to advance a more comprehensive and 'political' form of professionalization among LEOs by empowering them as competent and influential figures (beyond technical questions) able to take responsibilities associated with their municipalities' daily management and to claim more jurisdictions from other levels of government.

To explain the observed imbalance between more comprehensive and technical knowledge during the UMQ introductory training, we propose that this program and the broader process of professionalization among LEOs needs to be informed by the aforementioned opposition between the democratic and expert forms of legitimacy in the context of local governance. Indeed, this conceptualization can help us explain why a more comprehensive understanding of LEOs' role remains largely implicit during the UMQ introductory training (even though it is codified in the explicit objectives associated with this program) by pointing to the contested nature of the political form of professionalization it entails. In other words, while the UMQ introductory training program (and other similar program) might help advance a more political role for LEOs, this objectives largely remains implicit (and is impeded) because of the tension underlying this process of professionalization. Our observations of one of the training session are necessarily limited; nevertheless, they help illustrating the tension suggested by the previous conceptualization of the process of professionalization.

Indeed, our non-participant observation shows several indications of the contested nature of the process of professionalizing among LEOs and in the UMQ. Most explicitly, resistance against the training program and the process of professionalization it entails was illustrated by several critical comments made by a number of LEOs during group discussions with the trainers. While a significant proportion of these comments were particularly directed towards the ethics portion

of the program, others concerned the mandatory character of the training as when participants asked if their competence was put in doubt or if previous LEOs had been so ill-equipped to exercise effectively their mandate. Several expressions of discomfort were also voiced during sideline conversations before, during and after the training, this time directed towards the burden of undertaking training despite LEOs' already proven democratic legitimacy. The ethics dimension appeared to have particularly inflected on the perception of the whole training program since much cynicism was directed towards the perceived inequality between the LEOs and Québec's parliamentarians who had imposed on them—but not on themselves—mandatory ethics training. Noticeably, this discomfort was also translated by a UMQ representative who explicitly apologized for the mandatory nature of the training, which seemed to devalue LEOs in comparison to other types of elected officials (e.g. parliamentarians).

These observations would necessarily need to be broadened to confirm the effects of the tension between diverse principles of legitimacy which underlie the process of professionalization among LEOs. Yet, we propose that this conceptualization constitutes an important tool, at this introductory stage of research on training programs for LEOs, for understanding what might possibly influence municipal organizations like the UMQ to lessen the importance, and LEOs to contest the value, of mandatory training and of objectives associated with the comprehensive understanding of LEOs' role. In reference to the UMQ introductory training program, this conceptualization can also explain why the organization largely concentrates on practical tools and more technical knowledge during associated activities since these appear related to a more basic and less political process of professionalization, and hence more consensual among LEOs and other organization's representatives. At a broader level, resistance against a more professional (and political) role for LEOs could also be related with the very diverse personal and professional background and sociocultural profiles of LEOs participating in the UMQ's introductory training program. What is more, while some LEOs are involved in municipal affairs on a full-time basis and make their livelihoods from their political engagement (reflecting the professional model), a significant proportion of LEOs have a less intensive involvement that identifies them as dilettantes (reflecting the layman model) (Mévellec, 2011). Therefore, the idea of professionalizing municipal politics seems to run against the interest of a large number of LEOs (especially associated with a layman-type LEOs). Accordingly, the process of professionalization appears like a powerful thinking tool to explain the form that has taken the UMQ introductory training program, the attitudes of LEOs towards this program, and the types of knowledge and objectives that are particularly advanced throughout related activities.

8 Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored an understudied measure in the sphere of municipal governance namely training programs dedicated to newly elected local officials. While there is increasing literature on training for parliamentarians, similar activities at the local level have received only limited attention until now. Our analysis, which has focused on training in Canada (and in Québec in particular), enables us to draw two series of conclusions regarding (i) the general role of training programs for LEOs, and (ii) the UMQ's training program for LEOs in Québec.

The first series of conclusions has been drawn from our analysis of the context within which these training programs have been developed. As our paper illustrates, there is a persisting tension between the expert and democratic principles with regards to LEOs' roles. In this context, we propose that training programs can be seen as contributing to the professionalization of LEOs—and to the advancement of an expert-type of legitimacy—for three reasons. First, they can contribute to legitimizing a professional conception of the role of LEOs by codifying formal competences that appear necessary to exercise local elective mandates. Second, they can participate in the transfer of these competences to LEOs, thereby enabling them to exercise their mandates more efficiently. Third, they can prepare LEOs for assuming the increasingly political decision-making functions associated with a more autonomous conception of local governance. While the first two tendencies are rather explicitly reflected in these training programs, we propose that the third tendency—an effect of political professionalization—remains largely implicit because it is still contested in the municipal sphere.

Our case study of the UMQ illustrates these three tendencies. As this paper underlined, the UMQ has strategically included the legal obligation to train Québec LEOs in ethics to its introductory training programs, hence making this whole competence-based program mandatory. In doing so, the UMQ has established a powerful mechanism to diffuse its conception of the increasingly political roles and to advance the process professionalization of LEOs. The UMQ's training is the opportunity to codify two categories of competences expected from LEOs. First, by providing a 'practical toolkit' (associated with the ethical, financial and managerial components) to newly elected local officials, the UMQ is helping them to efficiently and quickly assume their more technical responsibilities. Second, the UMQ's introductory training contributes to empowering LEOs as political actors and decision makers, namely in terms of making decisions regarding the long-term directions of their municipalities, as well as in their relations with other main players at the municipal level (for example, municipal employees and CAOs). However, as demonstrated earlier, this second dimension is less successful than foreseen.

Notably, our observation of the UMQ introductory training session has reflected the fact that significant tensions remain regarding the political dimension of the professionalization process. As a result, we propose that the UMQ has not fully embedded the professional conception of the LEOs' role in its introductory training program. Indeed, the idea that LEOs are now professional-type politicians remains largely implicit during the UMQ's introductory training program; this, we propose, is a result of the conceptual tensions between the principles of democratic versus expert political legitimacy, which apparently persist within the UMQ and in the sphere of municipal affairs more broadly.

Further research

While these are important conclusions, several questions emerge when seeking a better understanding of the role(s) of training programs dedicated to LEOs. For instance, what are the practical and long-term effects of these training programs on municipal politicians, particularly in terms of whether these activities effectively enable individual LEOs to assume more political leadership during their mandates? And do the training programs offered at the beginning of LEOs' mandates contribute in significant ways to their individual professional practices and to their understanding of their political roles? To this end, we should further analyze the effects that these training programs might have in terms of access to local political mandates as well as on individual LEO's trajectory while they exercise their mandates, as has been done for parliamentarians (e.g. Steinack 2012).

Furthermore, we should analyze the broader effects that these training programs have on the municipal political landscape and on LEOs' collective mandates. Accordingly, these training programs should be evaluated in terms of their effects on the general roles and responsibilities attributed to LEOs, as well as their effects on the autonomy granted to municipalities. Indeed, LEO training programs could be considered a means to reinforce local governance in much the same way that training dedicated to parliamentarians has been configured to enhance parliamentarians' power in governance; yet, as Kinyondo and Pelizzo (2013) indicate, it appears that these parliamentary training programs have not significantly affected legislative capacity building. Accordingly, these dimensions require more attention at the local level from scholars and practitioners interested in the transformations in local governance in Canada and beyond.

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Notes

¹ While the bill imposes the training program on all newly elected local officials, it does not sanction those who do not conform to this requirement. Yet, disregarding this legal obligation could be considered to be an aggravating factor if an LEO is convicted of unlawful behaviour. Notably, 87 per cent of local officials elected in 2009 have received this training (MAMROT, 2013: 12).

² With the agreement of the UMQ, we observed all training activities relevant to this research—namely, the presentation of the trainers and UMQ training committee; exchanges between the trainers and the 25 participating LEOs; and formal (and some informal) exchanges between LEOs shortly before, during and shortly after the training session.

³ We wish to thank Douglas Spencer for his work in collecting and organizing this data.

⁴ The mandatory character of this training also undermines the financial arguments that are often raised against training programs for elected officials (Greenwood and Wilson 1995).

⁵ On this topic, see Thomson's work (2010) on the evolving role of university in LEOs' training in US.

⁶ The main types of training have been delineated accordingly to the commonalities in the information and orientation of training activities and programs as indicated on the UMQ and other organizations' websites in the diverse Canadian provinces and territories.

⁷ Notably, the other municipal organization in Québec, the FQM, did not combine its basic training with the ethics and deontology mandatory dimension.

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