# Training Local Elected Officials: Improving Public Governance Between Democracy and Expertise

Félix Grenier, University of Ottawa

Anne Mévellec, University of Ottawa

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## Introduction

Politics’ professionals and democratic principles

Several scholars have recently studied the process of parliamentary officials’ professionalization (Best et Cotta 2000, Offerlé 1990). Several definitions have been suggested for explaining this process since the seminal work of Max Weber (1963). Here, we particularly retain the definition proposed by Daniel Gaxie (2001) because it synthetically presents what we see as the two main dimension of political professionalization. Indeed, Gaxie defines this process as (i) full-time exercise of political activity which is the main source of remuneration for the elected official, and (ii) the recognition, in diverse forms, of a ‘profession’ including specific competences, a deontology, or regulating organizations. By recognizing specific competences for a group of professionals, regulating organizations have also the effect of codifying these competences. Yet, we suggest that this codification, and hence an important dimension of the professionalization process, is not always an explicit process. Indeed, it mostly remains an *implicit* understanding; a dimension that reflects the contested character of the professionalization processes at the level of local government. This paper studies the professionalization process of politics’ professionals at the local level since it appears to be the most recent and counter-intuitive of this kind given the proximate character of Canadian local governance. We henceforth propose that the rise of local governments since the 1980s has resulted in the increasing professionalization of elected officials at the local level.

As a social process, professionalization of local elected officials (LEOs) is particularly interesting. Indeed, modern democracy has since long been established, among other things, upon the principle that any citizen can equally access elective charges. This conception broke with previous political systems where decision-makers were chosen according to specific criteria such as lineage or wealth. Now, the professionalization of political elites establishes more or less explicitly a new transformation of the field of local political representation. Indeed, the idea according to which political mandates require specific forms of competences, which results from the increasing technicality of local governance (Fontaine and LeBart 1994), partakes in the professionalization of this field. It makes it more difficult to access elected positions and simultaneously establishes distance between citizens and LEOs. Other factors contribute in the increasing distance with citizens such as the remuneration enabling LEOs to live from their political occupation (Garrigou 1992). Professionalization of LEOs raises concerns since it establishes a tension between the principles that guide political organization in democratic societies. Accordingly, this process needs to be questioned.

Training as an instrumental element of professionalization

We propose that training programs are one of the main indications of the professionalization process in the field of local governance. More precisely, these programs participate in the second dimension of professionalization as defined by Gaxie (2001), that which relates to the development and recognition of specific competences. Indeed, training programs for LEOs can be associated to the more or less explicit recognition of specific competences associated with the exercise of the political mandate at the local level. Moreover, the organization of formal training programs suggests that these competences cannot simply be acquired during electoral campaigns or other previous experiences. Many studies have recently observed the forms and functions of such training programs in parliamentary contexts (e.g. see Simpamba 2012, Steinack 2012). These findings underline that such training programs can take several forms like induction or training, mandatory and voluntary, etc. yet they all aim at developing the abilities and competences of elected officials. Besides, Simpamba (2012) reminds us that there is generally no “formal job description” for elected positions. Nevertheless, we observe that there are increasing yet often implicit expectations towards LEOs in terms of abilities and competences to carry out their work.

In this paper, we propose that the multiplication of training programs for LEOs implicitly confirms the increasing insufficiency of democratic legitimacy for exercising local political mandates. Since there are few if no formal description of elective positions, the content of these training programs informs us on the competences that are increasingly expected from LEOs. More precisely, these training programs codify, or define in more explicit terms, the competences that are deemed necessary for exercising elective political mandate at the local level and hence entrench the professionalization of LEOs. These proposals enable us to contribute to the recent literature on the professionalization of LEOs. While this literature has recently documented LEOs’ profiles, trajectories, and daily responsibilities (e.g. see Steyvers and Verhelst 2012, Reynaert *et al.* 2009), questions associated with training programs have mostly remained outside of its purview, even for large European studies on LEOs. Beyond the work of Guérin-Lavignotte and Kerrouche (2006), who devote some pages to this topic, this paper develops a perspective that has not been the object of systematic attention by academic work on local democracy and governance.

Case study: Training of Québec’s LEOs

In order to empirically illustrate this analysis, we propose to study a particularly interesting case namely the recently revised “training program for newly elected officials” (translated) of the *Union des municipalités du Québec* (UMQ), the main association of LEOs in the province of Québec.[[1]](#footnote-1) In 2010, the government of Québec adopted the “Municipal Ethics and Good Conduct Act” (Loi sur l’Éthique et la déontologie en matière municipale). This bill imposes to all cities and municipalities in the province of Québec to adopt a code of ethics. It also indicates, in article 15, that “all members of a municipal council that have not participated in the training program on ethics and deontology in municipal matters must, within the six first months of his mandate, participate in such a training program” ([translated] MAMROT 2013).[[2]](#footnote-2) The UMQ has the responsibility to provide such training in ethics and deontology to its members. Noticeably, this association decided to integrate the training in ethics and deontology in its more general introductory program (previously not mandatory) for newly elected officials. We suggest that the posture adopted by the UMQ, and the government of Québec, reflects Gaxie’s definition of professionalization. Indeed, beyond the institutionalization of mandatory training, these organizations’ decisions have generated an implicit codification of the competences deemed necessary for exercising LEOs’ mandate.

In this context, we suggest that by being used as a means to extend training to all newly elected officials, the ethics and deontology dimension has acted as a “Trojan horse” in the process of professionalization of LEOs. Moreover, by making the training for newly elected officials mandatory, the UMQ defines in more explicit terms the competences (related to ethics and deontology but also others) that are expected from LEOs. It also normalizes the idea according to which training is necessary for one to acquire such competences. Hence, this case appears particularly significant to analyze how training programs participate in the professionalization of LEOs in Québec, Canada, and beyond. This case is also significant since it is embedded within a context of Anglo-Saxon tradition in which local elective mandates are conventionally associated with a ‘layman’ model (Tindal and Tindal, 2008).

Methodology and contribution to academic literature

To explore the aforementioned case and the links between professionalization of LEOs and training, this paper mobilizes two complementary methodologies. We primarily make a systematic assessment of the training programs offered in Canadian provinces through documentary analysis. [[3]](#footnote-3) We have analyzed the whole set of training practices for LEOs in Canada as well as several activities, practices, and programs in the United States and Europe. This account enables us to empirically contextualize our case study. It also enables us to define the tendencies among training programs formats and content in these contexts which contributes to establish the main questions associated with this research agenda.

We also conducted a case study on the last series of introductory and mandatory training sessions offered from November 2013 to April 2014 by the UMQ to its newly elected members (elected on November 4th 2013). This case study is found upon a documentary analysis, a press review and especially the non-participant observation of one two-day training session in February 2014. With the agreement of the UMQ, we observed all the activities closely related to this training session. More precisely, we observed the presentations of the trainers and UMQ training committee representatives, the exchanges between the trainers and the 25 participating LEOs, and the formal and some informal exchanges between LEOs themselves shortly before, during and shortly after the training session. This method first enables us to analyze the training as it was delivered namely through the discourses, tools, texts, and practices that were used during that training session. It also enables us to study *in situ* the feedbacks and reactions (verbal and non-verbal) of participants towards the training format and content of the training program. This case study has an important illustrative value for the processes of professionalization of LEOs. It also makes it possible to identify, as Andrew Bennett argues, “new or omitted variables and hypotheses” (2004, 19) regarding these training programs’ roles in the reproduction and transformation of the culture of local governance in Québec and beyond.

Accordingly, this paper’s contribution is both analytic and programmatic. In programmatic terms, the account of training programs in Canada and the case study enable us to empirically illustrate this understudied dimension of LEOs’ work and to delineate the main issues associated with this research agenda. In analytical terms, our case study enables us to study the specific dimensions of the training program provided by the UMQ and to position such programs in the larger process of professionalization. These two dimensions also highlight the way LEOs’ mandate is exercised and, especially, conceived. Indeed, we can consider the more or less explicit representations of LEOs’ work as advanced by the UMQ at a strategic moment of their mandate.

Plan of article

In the following paper, we first underline the theoretical and political contexts in which the link between training and the professionalization of LEOs’ mandate can be understood. Second, we present a synthetic account of training activities, practices, and programs in each Canadian province and territory. From this account, we underscore the main tendencies characterizing these activities, practices, and programs in Canada with some references to other cases from the United States and Europe. Third, we build on this contextualization to analyze the specific case of the UMQ training program. More precisely, we analyze how this mandatory training program for newly elected local officials illustrates our theoretical proposals, the issues associated with the professionalization process, and the expectations towards LEOs in such context.

## Theoretical proposals and Canadian context of training for LEOs

In this part of the paper, we first provide our main theoretical proposals regarding the links between LEOs’ training and professionalization. On the one side, training, and consequently the recognition of some necessary competences for the exercise of LEOs’ mandate, questions the conventional egalitarian principle underlying local democratic elections. On the other side, the acquisition of specific competences is related to the modernization of municipalities, which are increasingly seen as a distinct and significant level of governance. Second, these theoretical tensions are integrated into the context of municipal institutions’ development, organization, and transformations in Canada.

### Local elected officials training: Between democratic and technocratic governance

Training programs dedicated to LEOs can be conceived by referring to a persisting yet implicit tension between two principles of governance in current democratic societies. The justification of these programs is embedded in the historical opposition between democratic and technocratic approaches to governance. Providing mandatory, executive or professional types of training to LEOs can be understood as a mechanism that increases the importance and role of expert knowledge, or expertise, in LEOs’ decisional environment. Justified by the increasing complexity and requirements associated with LEOs’ mandates, these professionalizing mechanisms are nevertheless disrupting the principle which suggests that everyone is equally authorized to govern following the democratic selection process. Accordingly, two selection and decisional models are implicitly opposing within the context of training programs dedicated to LEOs.

First, these types of training programs can be related to the process of political decision-makers’ selection. Two principles of legitimacy are opposing with regards to this process namely that of democratic versus expert legitimacy. Kristof Steyvers and Tom Verhelst (2012) illustrate these principles by categorizing LEOs among the ‘professional’ and ‘layman’ ideal-types. According to these authors, these categories constitute the two extreme positions in a continuum that enables us to understand how LEOs are recruited, authorized, and develop their career. Training programs implicitly favor professionalization of LEOs. They are also supported by principles of expertise, responsiveness, and exclusiveness (*Ibid*, 2). These principles tend to more or less explicitly represent the mandates of LEOs as a professional occupation, which necessitates expert competences; the complexity of the decisional environment being the main constraint associated with political decision-makers functions.

On the opposite, democratic authorization contradicts the tendency towards professionalization of LEOs. Illustrated by the “layman” ideal-type, this conception of political decision-makers functions is supported by the principles of equality, representation, and inclusiveness. This conception of political authorization 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). Moreover, the democratic principle of legitimacy generates doubts with the arguable neutrality of experts’ knowledge. Hence, LEOs’ legitimacy does not result from specialized (or professional) training but from the democratic process which has selected her/him as decision-maker.

Second, LEOs training programs are related to the way political decision-making is conceived. Accordingly, the relevance of such training programs depends on one’s understanding of appropriate decision-making processes in the political realm. As for the case of selection, decision-making is subjected to an underlying tension between the role afforded to expert forms of knowledge and political judgment. Different models have been proposed to understand this relation. Jürgen Habermas (1971) has defined three models of relations between expertise and politics in terms of authority distribution namely Technocracy, Decisionism, and Pragmatism. These models alternatively represent relations in which expertise dominates politics, politics dominates expertise, and expertise and politics maintain critical interactions. [[4]](#footnote-4) Accordingly, training LEOs appears like a technocratic solution to political decision-making problems since the technocratic argument suggests that experts need to assist political decision-makers for them to take more efficient and strategic decisions. This instrumental conception of political decision-making is advanced, from the end of the 19th century, by the notion of administrative specialization which suggests that people “wielding regulatory power [need] particularized experience in order to carry out their delegated responsibilities” (Jasanoff 1990, 9). Such a perspective would also be supported by those who believe it necessary to impose institutional safeguards to protect the democratic system from elected officials’ abuses (e.g. see Boisvert 2011, 8-9; as well as Walzer 1997). Accordingly, training programs are more or less explicitly tied with a technocratic conception since they seek to provide LEOs with cognitive and technical tools for taking more strategic and competent decisions (e.g. see Vogelsang-Coombs and Miller 1999).

On the contrary, the decisionist model underlines the necessity to preserve political decision-making of potential ‘capture’ from specific expert groups and knowledge. Two risks are particularly important. First, this model underlines the potential for managerial expertise to replace democratic choices in political decision-making processes (which can be associated to ‘scientization’ of politics, e.g. see Weingart 1999, Hoppe 1999). Second, this model warns that political decision can be ‘instrumentalized’ by specific interest groups being represented by experts. According to such critique, political decision-makers are often too prompt to accept experts’ recommendations in decision-making processes. Instead, the decisionist argument suggests, at least implicitly, that any elected citizens have the capacities to autonomously make appropriate political decisions for the collectivity. According to this model, training programs contradict the authority afforded to LEOs in political decision-making processes to the benefit of experts and the interests they represent.

Accordingly, the tensions associated with the selection of political decision-makers and the decision-making processes raise two significant questions, which underlie our analysis of training programs for LEOs. A first question is associated with the effects of these training programs on the selection and career paths of LEOs. Steyvers and Verhelst have already indicated that in Europe, changes in the opportunity structure associated with the field of local politics favor the professionalization of LEOs (2012, 6). Our inquiry contributes to such a perspective by analyzing the ways by which training programs partake in such a professionalization process.

A second question relates to the technocratic tendencies of training programs dedicated to LEOs. Our study enables us to evaluate the possibilities associated with a hybrid model avoiding risks associated with these tendencies (and inspired by Habermas’ pragmatic model or what Jasanoff names ‘strategic science’ [1990]). Such a model could help to move this debate beyond the strict opposition between technocracy and decisionism. It could also help to conceive these training programs as occasions for political decision-makers to gain tools enabling them to autonomously mobilize expertise adapted to their executive challenges. In the following section, we contextualize these theoretical proposals in the context of the Canadian field of local governance.

### Professionalization of LEO in the Canadian municipal context

Few scholars have studied the professionalization of LEOs in Canada. In fact, little work in political science focuses on municipal politics in Canada (Eidelman and Taylor 2011). Moreover, scholars having contributed to this subfield have privileged the main metropolitan areas (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver) and question of gendered and ethno-cultural representation at the local level (e.g. see Gavan-Koop and Smith 2008, Andrew and Biles 2008). Accordingly, while there is some work on access to elective mandates (Siegel *et al.* 2001), few scholars have studied the diverse dimensions associated with the professionalization of LEOs. We can nevertheless refer to the work of Sancton and Woolner (1990) which studies this topic from the perspective of full-time councillors or Mévellec (2009) and Koop (2014) on the exercise of such mandates. [[5]](#footnote-5) By referring to the major tendencies that have furthered LEOs’ professionalization in Europe (Bäck, Heilnet and Magnier 2006), [[6]](#footnote-6) we can identify some factors which encourage a similar process in Canadian municipalities. We can particularly present three contextual elements that illustrate the historical context and the process of professionalization affecting the local level of governance in Canada.

The first contextual element is the traditional form municipalities have taken. Being creations of provincial governments, Canadian municipalities have not historically been considered as a formal and autonomous level of governance but rather as a local administration. Accordingly, they have more or less explicitly been conceived as purveyors of a relatively small range of goods and services for land owners (Tindal, Tindal, 2008). Guided by budgetary conservatism and in conformity with the Anglo-Saxon tradition (and the *ultra vires* principle), actions of municipalities have traditionally been limited to what was explicitly mentioned in laws and accordingly to a restricted purview. This context did not encourage professionalization among LEOs for example in terms of recognized and specialized competences. Yet, this situation is not immutable and we are increasingly witnessing diverse forms of decentralization of power from the provinces to municipalities. Such redistribution of competences results from governmental initiatives like in Ontario where several social services have been transferred to municipalities in 2003. We can also observe actions initiated from the local level where municipalities demand more financial and legal means of action. The reform conducted in Alberta illustrates such dynamic (LeSage and McMillan 2010, 55). The claims from the UMQ in Québec, advanced through its “White Paper” and proposal for a “Charter of municipalities” (2013), represent a similar logic. Whatever the origin of these current reforms, the range of municipalities’ responsibilities is broadening and increasingly involving arbitrating issues, i.e. political choices between structuring orientations relating to economic development, transportation, and urban planning for example. Consequently, the political roles afforded to municipalities are being developed in Canada which also increases LEOs’ responsibilities and the tendency towards their professionalization.

A second contextual element is the politico-administrative model of Canadian municipalities. Diverse organizational models characterize Canadian municipalities and more particularly relations between LEOs and municipal employees (e.g. council-manager systems vs mayor-council systems, see Tindal and Tindal 2008 [chapter 8]). Beyond these differences, a broadly shared model is that of a Chief Administrative officer (CAO) system which involves a low level of professionalization for LEOs. Reinforced by the reformist movement of the beginning of the 20th century (as in cities in the United States), this model has the implicit effects of privileging layman-type of LEOs, leaving the CAO with the necessary expertise to manage the municipalities’ responsibilities, and depoliticizing municipal management (Dagenais 2000). Against the CAO, municipal councils have traditionally exercised their mandates on a part-time basis and while largely depending on the expertise of municipal administrators. Yet, the increase in LEOs’ remuneration enables more of them to exercise their mandate on a full-time basis. [[7]](#footnote-7) By being more present, as Sancton and Woolner (1990) have illustrated, they are also more involved in the daily management of the municipalities’ responsibilities. Accordingly, LEOs are not only professionalizing as a result of their remuneration and of the time invested in their mandate but also as they acquire technical competences enabling them to work more closely with the cities’ administrators.

A third contextual element is associated with the ‘metropolization’ of Canada which results in big cities’ mayors being increasingly significant interlocutors for other levels of government and professionalized political actors. For that matter, we could reuse in the Canadian context the formulation of Patrick le Galès for whom “urban mayors are back in town,” which illustrate how the increasing effectiveness of metropolitan mayors in claiming additional resources from other levels of governments for gaining more resources. In part because of their political resources, metropolitan mayors are able to initiate or activate collective strategies for all cities and municipalities (Le Galès 2003, 337). In Canada, mayors of metropolitan cities are effectively imposing themselves as autonomous, significant, and professional political figures. We can think of Rob Ford in Toronto, Denis Coderre in Montreal, or Naheed Nenshi in Calgary. Even if the three levels of government (federal, provincial, and municipal) are not formally integrated in the Canadian system, professionals of parliamentary politics engage in municipal careers and hence bring with them in more or less explicit ways their professional conceptions and practices of political mandates. [[8]](#footnote-8)

These three tendencies are important illustrations, among other possible factors, the current transformations affecting the conditions of exercise of LEOs’ mandates. The increasing complexity of the municipalities’ context and roles, the way relations between LEOs and municipal employees and administrations are organized, and the increasing political leadership of LEOs and especially of metropolitan mayors are influential in transforming municipalities from local administration to significant and autonomous levels of governance. Concomitantly, LEO’s selection and practices are increasingly professionalized. Moreover, we can find in each Canadian province and territory training programs with the objectives of preparing LEOs to face these challenges and transformations.

## Assessment of Training Programs for Local Elected Officials in Canada

There is a large range of training activities, practices, and programs at the local level in Canada and beyond. Our assessment enables us to present an exhaustive account of the training programs offered in all the Canadian provinces and territories. Yet in this presentation, we particularly focus on the array of training programs offered at the beginning of LEOs’ mandates. We advance this particular account because it provides a more effective comparison with our main case study (in this paper’s third part). Moreover, we suggest that introductory training programs have particularly significant socializing and professionalizing effects because they aim at familiarizing newly elected officials to their future professional challenges, context, and roles. To conduct our assessment, we have produced a synthetic table which present the main training programs in each Canadian provinces and territories along four features namely (i) the main content, (ii) the mandatory character (yes/no), (iii) the targeted audience (all LEOs, newly [elected] LEOS, municipal employees, First Nations governments, others), and (iv) the training organization (s).

#### Table 1: Training programs offered to LEOs in each Canadian provinces and territories (2014)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Province | Main content | Mandatory | Audience | Training organization(s) |
| Alberta | Technical and specialized training | No | LEOs  Individual interested in running for Municipal Council | Alberta Elected Officials Education Program Corporation[[9]](#footnote-9) |
| British Columbia | Technical and specialized training | No | LEOs | Local Government Leadership Academy[[10]](#footnote-10) |
|  | Technical and specialized training | No | LEOs | Manitoba Municipal Administrators Association |
| Manitoba | Technical and specialized training | No | LEOs | Association of Manitoba Municipalities |
| Newfoundland | Technical and specialized training | No | LEOs and  employees | Government of Newfoundland and Labrador |
| New Brunswick | Basics of Local Government /orientation | No | Newly LEOs and employees | Municipalities |
| North West Territories | Diverse courses, such as ‘Governance’ which covers the basics: responsibilities, roles, conflicts of interests, bylaws etc. | No | LEOs | North West Territories Municipal and Community Affairs, School of Community Government |
| Nova Scotia | Basics of Local Government /orientation | No | Newly LEOs | Department of Municipal Affairs, in partnership with the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities and the Association of Municipal Administrators |
| Nunavut | Municipal Government Certificate Program/orientation | No | Employees | Nunavut Municipal Training Organization in partnership with Nunavut Arctic College |
| Ontario | Technical and specialized training | No | LEOs | Association of Municipalities of Ontario,  Association Françaises des Municipalités de l'Ontario |
| Prince Edward Island | Technical and specialized training | No | LEOs and  employees | Federation of Prince Edward Island Municipalities |
| Québec | Ethics and deontology | Yes | Newly LEOs | Government of Quebec  UMQ and FQM |
| Basics of Local Government /orientation | No | Newly LEOs | UMQ and FQM |
| Technical and specialized training | No | LEOs | UMQ and FQM |
| Saskatchewan | Technical and specialized training | No | LEOs and employees | Municipal Leadership Development Program, with partnerships including the Saskatchewan Ministry of Government Relations |
| Yukon | A two-day workshop on place making starts today. Placemaking is an approach to community planning that uses a community’s existing benefits to attract residents, visitors and businesses. | No | LEOs  First Nation leaders, others | Community Services and Economic Development departments |

From this assessment, we can underline several major tendencies within training activities, practices, and programs for LEOs in Canada.

First, the **mandatory character** of training programs for LEOs is an exception rather than the rule in Canada. In fact, only the Government of Québec imposes training in ethics and deontology to all newly elected local officials. The mandatory character of training programs would indicate and further a higher level of professionalization among LEOs. In the United States, several states also impose mandatory training focused on ethics, yet these are not only restricted to LEOs. For example, there is a mandatory ethics training programs in California for all municipal employees who receive any type of compensation (CFPPC 2014). In New York, it is now the law that all zoning and planning board members need to receive a minimum of 4 hours per year of training (NY State 2014). In North Carolina, training in ethics is mandatory for all elected officials following any election (UoNC 2014). Accordingly, it appears that in the North American context, only the ethical dimension of LEOs’ mandate has been subjected to mandatory training.

In Europe, the French case is also interesting with regards to the status of training. While in France no training program is mandatory, LEOs have instead been afforded a ‘right to training’ by the government. Hence, each LEO can, if s/he wishes, receive up to 18 days of training for each mandate (Gouvernement français 2014) a mechanism that can be a significant factor of professionalization. Again, among these examples, the case of Québec is particularly interesting to analyze the process of professionalization of LEOs since the mandatory character of the training results in the deliverance of an attestation of participation. This attestation enables LEOs in Québec to satisfy the requirements of article 15 of the LÉDMM. Even when training is not mandatory, similar mechanism reflect the concern for recognizing and validating specific competence and training by some form of credential. It is for example the case in Alberta where given that they satisfactorily complete at least 7 of the 21 days of training, LEOs are granted a “certificate of achievement” (EOEP 2014).

Second, our assessment informs us on the **content** and **audience** of the training programs. We can distinguish two main categories of activities and programs. First, we find several introductory or orientation programs. These are mainly dedicated to newly elected officials and are delivered at the beginning of the mandates (or shortly after the elections). While the content is specific to each province and territory, it nevertheless presents important similarities. For example, all these training programs are primarily organized for providing newly elected local officials with crucial references regarding the administrative, financial, and legal context of municipalities. This is an interesting dimension that indicates what kinds of competences are more or less explicitly expected from LEOs.

A second category of training is more specific and covers more technical topics. These training programs are offered at no specific times during mandates and are not exclusive to LEOs. Topics are diversified and can go from accountability and transparency, accounting and strategic planning (Ontario), conflict mediation, emergency management, Labour mediation (Alberta), and procedural bylaws. In Alberta for example, the Elected Official Education Program’s courses gather four official goals for LEOs: to be more strategic (designed to strengthen strategy and business acumen competencies,) more effective (designed to strengthen effective governance competencies), more collaborative (designed to strengthen community building competencies) and more influential (designed to strengthen communication and interpersonal competencies) (EOEP 2014).

These four competencies seem to have been identified by EOEP as four core skills to serve as a LEO. The previous table also indicates that the **audience** for the training activities, practices, and programs is relatively diverse. While the introductory type of training programs are more clearly dedicated to newly elected local officials, specific types of training are often open to all elected officials, municipal employees, and other actors such as First nations governments’ officials. Accordingly, we suggest that both types of training are means to codify and professionalize LEOs’ mandates but that specific training is generally meant to complement the process initiated through introductory programs.

The delivery of training, or **training organizations**, presents a fourth set of interesting tendencies. If provinces and territories set the framework for these training programs, they generally are not responsible for their delivery. In Canada, provinces and territories have generally partnered with municipal associations, which relay the directives of governments and organize the training programs. In doing so, these municipal associations play a key role in defining the kind of skills, abilities and knowledge LEOs should possess. Therefore, one can see their efforts in codifying the LEO “profession”.

On the ground, these associations are also partnering with diverse private organizations such as accounting or law firms to organize and deliver the training. Similar forms of partnership are found in France where private firms can propose training activities, which once recognized by the Ministry of the Interior, are formally offered to LEOs. Some Canadian provinces also partner with academic institutions. In British Columbia, as well as Alberta and Nova Scotia, academic institutions offer training that can lead to certificate in, for example, “Local Government Leadership,” “Advanced Local Government Leadership,” etc. The links between governments and academic institutions is even clearer in the United States. Indeed, several States partner with academic institutions to facilitate formal training of LEOs. For example, North Carolina partners with the University of North Carolina where the University’s School of Government is responsible for ethics training courses (UoNC 2014). Another case is Georgia which partners with the Harold F. Holtz municipal training institute to organize training for LEOs (on this, see also Thomson 2010).

A last category of organization is involved in the delivery of training namely political parties. This role is, for now, mainly embodied in Europe in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, and Sweden (Guérin-Lavignotte and Kerrouche 2006). How is this diversity of training organizations and partnerships influencing the content and professionalizing role of training for LEOs? While we can submit that partnership with academic institutions contributes to the professionalization of LEOs by providing greater means of competences certification and recognition, we cannot at this point elaborate a clear answer to this question. Yet, this appears to be an interesting question to inquire.

A fifth observation relates to the **format** of the training programs. A frequent format is associated with in-class seminars complemented by written documentations and « manuals ». For example, newly LEOs from Nova Scotia are invited to a three day orientation session and at the same time access to several guides on the Municipal Affairs department website. In Prince Edward Island, a manual produced in 2010 complements the training entitled “Building Municipal Capacity.” In Québec, the Ministry of municipal affairs (MAMROT) produces and diffuses on its website several publications which offer general and technical information to LEOs. During the training offered by the UMQ, participating LEOs also received several tools and publications that reproduced diverse aspects of the introductory programs’ content.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Moreover, new technologies are mobilized in several cases to offer on-line training in part or in full (e.g. in Québec, in Ontario, see also the case of Chicago [Boisvert 2011, 191]). Some organizations also underline the importance of the playful character of their training activities, which contributes in their adoption by LEOs. What is clear is that the organizations providing training seek to diversify the available formats and supports in order to reach LEOs. We have to keep in mind that the vast majority of LEOs are still exercising part-time mandates; training is hence a supplementary and most of the time not mandatory activity. Two main trends are observable: (i) traditional in-class seminars which both socialize and train newly elected local officials,[[12]](#footnote-12) (ii) flexible and accessible training formats[[13]](#footnote-13) that aim at transferring abilities, competences, and skills according to the needs of each LEO.

This synthetic assessment enables us to present the diversity of formats, contents, audiences, and organizations associated with training programs offered to LEOs in the Canadian context and beyond. While several of these dimensions are related to the process of professionalization at the local level, analyzing more systematically the introductory training program at the UMQ, in Québec, provides more precise illustrations of such process. Moreover, the previous assessment of such programs in Canada indicates that this case is particularly interesting for our analysis on the process of professionalization at the level of local governance.

## Case study on the UMQ introductory training program for LEOs

This third section concentrates on one specific training program in Canada namely the training program for newly elected local officials offered by the UMQ in Québec. We suggest this represents an exceptional case to understand the role of such training programs on LEOs’ process of professionalization. First, this introductory training program has been generalized to all newly elect local officials members of the UMQ by way of integrating training in ethics and deontology, which has recently been made mandatory by the government of Québec. Second, this training is exclusively directed (with minor exceptions) towards LEOs. Third, this case is implemented in a context of rapid change in the domain of local governance in Québec with, for example, the recent reorganization (merger/demerger) of municipalities in Québec (2000-2006) and the increasing demands of municipal actors for more means of financial and political actions. Accordingly, and while our analysis is still limited at this point, this case study complements the previous review of training programs for LEOs in the Canadian provinces and territories. Our analysis also illustrates the conceptual tools and issues previously outlined; it finally helps us underline important questions that need to be furthered in this research agenda.

### Context and implementation of the mandatory training in ethics and deontology

In the summer of 2009, and among increasing accusations of corruption and collusion against several actors associated with the sphere of municipal affairs in Québec, the government of Québec ordered a report on ethics and municipal democracy. The “Gagné Report” (2009) has had significant influence on Bill #109 on “Municipal Ethics and Good Conduct” which is submitted and then adopted by the National Assembly in 2010. If the content of the Bill is interesting (e.g. see Bégin 2011), our analysis is focused on the way this content is used as a Trojan horse to generalize the introductory training programs offered to newly elected municipal officials by the UMQ. Indeed, with the adoption of Bill #109 in December 2010, the government of Québec imposes a training program in ethics and deontology to all LEOs in Québec which is implemented in partnership with LEOs’ professional associations (the UMQ but also the *Fédération québécoise des municipalités*). This mandatory character is particularly important for our analysis since it formally introduces a qualification other than the democratic choice for exercising LEOs’ political mandate. However, the obligation of training imposed by the provincial government does not extend to introductory or more general training programs for newly elected local officials like that offered by the UMQ.

These transformations also take place in a context of increasing demands from the UMQ and other major municipal actors like Montréal and Québec mayors for recognition of their significant political responsibilities and roles. More precisely, the UMQ has recently published, after extensive consultation with its members, a “White paper” in which it makes two main demands. It first seeks a formal recognition of the importance of actors associated with local governance in Québec. Second, it seeks to embed this recognition within a ‘Charter of municipalities’ and a new fiscal pact with the provincial government. Accordingly, the increasing recognition that is sought by the UMQ and other municipal actors in Québec and the broader changes represented by these demands have significant implications on LEOs. More precisely, it involves a process by which they increasingly assume the responsibilities of professional politicians rather than part-time or ‘layman’ administrators.

The UMQ has delivered for the first time in 2011 the training program in ethics and deontology to acting LEOs. Illustrating the aforementioned dialectical tension between the democratic and expert principles of political legitimacy, several acting LEOs in Québec have offered passive as well as public resistance to such training. For example, some saw this training program has an encroachment on their democratic legitimacy from the provincial government and a way to question their professional deontology. Peter Trent, the emblematic mayor of Westmount, for example publicly opposed the mandatory training program in ethics and deontology as a mere cosmetic solution (Radio-Canada 2013a). With the municipal election of the end of 2013, the UMQ changed the way it implemented the mandatory training in ethics and deontology.

Indeed, the content of the mandatory ethics training was integrated in the introductory and broader program offered to newly elect local officials members after November 2013. Accordingly, the introductory training program is now offered to all newly elect local officials members of the professional association. The new cohort of LEOs elected in November 2013 is the first for which this strategy has been implemented by the UMQ. LEOs could not register exclusively to the (formally mandatory) training on ethics and deontology but had to attend to the whole introductory program in order to obtain their official accreditation (as required by the provincial government). While specific to the aforementioned context, we suggest that the combination of these two decisions, i.e. to impose a mandatory training in ethics and deontology to all newly elect local officials and to embed it in an introductory training program, is informative of the process by which LEOs’ functions are becoming increasingly professionalized. Indeed, this case highlights how ethics can be used to generalize training in broader abilities and competences which are increasingly expected from LEOs. To make explicit what kind of abilities and competences are furthered through such professionalization process, the following section assess the content and objectives of the introductory training program (and section on ethics and deontology) for LEOs offered by the UMQ.

### The content of the UMQ introductory training program

The content of the introductory program offered by the UMQ is the result of collaboration between the professional association and several accounting and law firms (UMQ 2014). These partake in the selection of the program’s content and in the production of associated documents. These firms are also involved in the training delivery since they provide the trainers for the program. The program spans over two days. Four speakers participate in the program namely a representative from the UMQ, a legal expert, an expert in municipal management and accounting, and one former municipal CAO. While the mandatory content on ethics and deontology is shared among the two days, the first day of training is focused on legal dimensions while the second days focuses on managerial dimensions of local governance. Noticeably, a representative of the “Québec Association of Municipal Chief Administrative Officers” (l’Association des Directeurs Généraux des Municipalités du Québec) comes to exchange on the relations between LEOs and municipal CAOs during the second day of the training. For the president of the UMQ Training Commission, this is a way to provide LEOs with “strong foundations of strategies for working with their administration” ([translated] Radio-Canada 2013b).

The UMQ website lists eighteen objectives for the training programs (UMQ 2014). In the following Table 2, we have first associated these objectives with either the (a) Basic training for newly elect local officials, or (b) Training on ethics and deontology. Second, we have categorized these objectives among those related with (1) ‘practical tools’ for LEOs and (2) the promotion of a better ‘understanding’ of LEOs’ role(s).

#### Table 2: Official objectives of the training program for newly elect local officials offered by the UMQ

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

The first category of objectives aims at preparing, quickly after their election, LEOs for exercising efficiently their responsibilities. This objective is advanced by providing LEOs with an access to a broad set of practical and technical knowledge on the organization of municipalities (i.e. on the main operating rules of a municipality, the process for attributing contracts, the budgetary process). The second category of objectives aims at helping LEOs to acquire a clearer understanding of the contours and context of their political and social mandate. This is done through activities that direct LEOs towards reflections on their leadership role, their relations with other (especially administrative) actors, the current context of municipal affairs, etc.

### Training and the uncertain professionalization process

From this assessment, we can first propose that these two categories of objectives codify relatively different forms of competences and hence of LEOs’ professionalization. The first category of objectives (i.e. practical tools) is mainly translated in training associated with the legal frameworks as well as budgetary processes characterizing municipal activities. These objectives represent a form of standardization of the competences and knowledge deemed necessary for exercising LEOs’ mandate. Accordingly, this category of objectives provides a first form of codification of the relatively ‘technical’ competences that are increasingly expected from professional LEOs. Notably, this category of objectives and competences is shared with other similar training programs in Canada. The second objective is more closely linked with the political role of LEOs, namely to their arbitrating function in terms of political choices between the different possible orientations to give to the municipality’s development. Such function extends beyond the codification of the legal and more restrictive understanding of the LEOs’ role(s) to build their professional and ‘political’ role. In that sense, this second category of objectives provides a codification of LEOs’ more specifically political role by the UMQ. According to our previous assessment, this second category of objectives is not equally explicit among training programs for LEOs throughout Canadian provinces and territories.

At diverse occasion during the introductory training program, the UMQ provides interpretations of these objectives and, more broadly, of the LEOs’ role(s). This is especially done in the introduction of the program when a representative of the Training Commission and the UMQ president, in a broadcasted speech, present the training programs and its links with the current demands of the association (as presented in the “White Paper”). Yet, beyond this introduction, we have noticed that this dimension was not underscored in other parts of the training programs, which were mostly provided by trainers from associated accounting and law firms. Given this situation, we make a second conceptual proposal namely that beyond the aforementioned formal objectives the professionalization of LEOs remains a *contested* and *implicit* process in the context of the UMQ training program. This second conclusion is explained by the professionalizing dimension of the training program, the contested character of this process, and the implicit character of the professionalization process in the context of the UMQ training program.

Beyond the aforementioned formal objectives, the case of the UMQ first illustrates how training programs can further LEOs’ professionalization process by increasing their competences and responsibilities. This increase is particularly significant regarding the legal and budgetary dimensions of municipal affairs. If referring to aforementioned concepts, we propose that the UMQ training programs ‘moves’ the main model of LEO in Québec towards the professional rather than the layman model. Second, this training program professionalizes LEOs by empowering them at the level of the municipalities themselves. More precisely, the training program enables LEOs to be more competent and to take more responsibilities associated with the daily management of their municipalities. Thirdly, we suggest that training program contributes to the professionalization process by making LEOs into more autonomous and significant political figures and hence improving their arbitration role. By making more explicit their political role, training programs help LEOs arbitrate in more effective ways the diverse possible directions for their municipalities and, especially, claim more competences and resources to other levels of governments.

Yet, the professionalization of LEO’s roles remains contested within the context of the UMQ training program itself. We observed several more or less explicit indications of this contested character during the introductory training program offered by the UMQ. At the most explicit level, this character was for example illustrated by several LEOs’ cynical comments regarding the mandatory dimension of the training program in group discussions with the trainers. Similarly, cynical comments were directed towards an obligation going beyond their democratic election in several ‘sideline’ conversations we have had shortly before, during, and shortly after the training sessions. [[14]](#footnote-14) Such cynicism was similarly observable during some of the trainers’ presentation and the introductory presentation of the UMQ representative who apologized several times for the training obligation that was imposed to the LEOs.

The contested character of the professionalization process was also observable at a more implicit level. For example, the contested character of the professionalization of LEO’s role was (implicitly) translated in the lack of integration of the main political project of the UMQ (as delineated in the “White Paper”) in the overall introductory training program (apart, as we underline, in the opening talk from the UMQ representative). Recently, the political agenda of the UMQ has particularly been directed towards gaining recognition of the major political role of local governance from the government of Québec. Yet, instead of being openly discussed and promoted during the introductory training program, this project appears to be evacuated from most of the training program. This treatment is particularly surprising since such a generalized training program could appear as a particularly strategic moment for advancing a shared understanding of LEOs’ objectives, roles, and responsibilities. Accordingly, we suggest that the professionalizing role of this training program is not explicitly assumed by the association in large part because the professionalization process (which is also implied by the UMQ political claims) is still contested by a significant proportion of LEOs. This situation makes it easier to advance professionalization at a more implicit level, within a generalized training program, through more functional and technical subjects and topics.

* 1. To explain at least partially the contested character of the professionalization process, we can underline the diversity of the UMQ audience. Indeed, we need to recall that newly elected officials participating in the UMQ introductory training program have a great variety of personal and professional backgrounds and sociocultural profiles. This diversity is also reinforced by the general absence of formal selection process in municipal political parties. Similarly, mandates are exercised in very diverse ways: if some LEOs are involved on a full-time basis and live from their political engagement (hence close to the professional model), a significant proportion of LEOs have more diverse and less intensive involvement, going to what can be identified as dilettante (hence closer to the layman model) (Mévellec 2011). As it stands, the UMQ training program (as other cases) is indistinctively provided to mayors and municipal councillors who have very different kinds of involvement, legitimacy, and practices. Accordingly, this training program can be conceived, in its current practice, as a uniform stage for LEOs whatever their background and level of professionalization.

We propose that these observations illustrate the significant resistance among LEOs themselves (and potentially within the UMQ itself) towards the professionalization process as embodied by mandatory training programs. This situation might be associated with the perceived changes this imposes on the type of LEOs that become authorized and legitimized, e.g. raising the value of expertise amongst LEOs against the democratic principle of legitimacy. Moreover, the UMQ did not seemed ready to unequivocally promote the political project associated such process in such contested context. As a result, the professionalization process of LEOs remains mostly implicit in the professional association’s introductory training program.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored an understudied measure in the sphere of local governance namely training programs dedicated to newly elected local officials. While there is an increasing literature on training for parliamentarians (e.g. see Kyniondo and Pelizzo 2013), similar activities and practices at the local level have received limited attention until now. Our analysis, which focused particularly on practices in Canada and Québec, enables us to draw two series of conclusions, namely regarding the general understanding of training programs for LEOs and the specific case of the training program offered by the UMQ.

At the broadest level, we can advance a first series of conclusions regarding the context and role of training programs for local elected officials. Indeed, our analysis has illustrated that there is a persisting tension between the expert and democratic as well as technocratic and decisionist principles with regards to the select of LEOs and modes of decision-making at the local level of governance. In this context, we propose that training programs play a significant role in LEOs’ professionalization process. Indeed, they participate in legitimizing a professional conception of LEOs’ role by defining abilities, competences, and knowledge that appear necessary to exercise local political functions. They also partake in the transfer of these abilities, competences, and knowledge to LEOs, enabling these to exercise their mandate more efficiently. Third, by being more competent, LEOs are more prepared to assume their main mandates.

At the more specific level, the case of the introductory training program offered by the UMQ illustrates the two previous arguments. Indeed, the UMQ used in a strategic way (what we called the Trojan horse) the legal obligation for training in ethics and deontology to generalize its introductory training to newly elected local officials (which are members of the professional association). In doing so, the association has established a powerful device to diffuse its conception of LEOs’ role(s) and advance the professionalization process. This process enabled the UMQ to codify two categories of competences expected from LEOs. By providing a toolkit to newly elected local officials (ethical, but also legal and managerial), the UMQ first help LEOs to efficiently and quickly assume their relatively more technical responsibilities. Beyond this first category of technical tools, the UMQ introductory training also contributes in empowering LEOs as political actors, namely in their relations with their main interlocutors (i.e. CAOs, municipal employess, other LEOs). Yet, we have also noticed during the most recent series of training that significant tensions remain regarding this professionalization process. As a result, we propose that the UMQ has not fully assumed the professional conception of LEOs’ role(s), which was only advanced explicitly during the introduction of the training program. This, we propose, is a result of the persisting conceptual tensions, between the democratic and expert principles of political legitimacy, within the UMQ.

### Further researches

While these are important conclusions, several questions emerge to develop a better understanding of the role(s) of training programs dedicated to LEOs. Notably, it appears necessary to analyze the practical effects of these training programs, i.e. whether these activities effectively enable LEOs to assume political leadership during their mandates. To further this research agenda, we suggest using two level of analysis. First we should ask what the effects of these training programs are on individual LEOs’ trajectories and on their access to the exercise of local political mandates. Indeed, we should ask if the delivery of “certificates of achievement,” as in Alberta (EOEP 2014), could be used as arguments in electoral campaigns or in political parties? [[15]](#footnote-15) Training programs could hence have direct effects on the selection of candidates at the local level.

More broadly, we should ask what the effects of these training programs are during LEOs’ mandates and on their careers. Are training programs offered at the beginning of LEOs’ mandates contributing in significant ways to their regular practices and to their understanding of their political and social roles? Accordingly, the efficiency of these training programs should be evaluated on the basis of some LEOs’ main categories (i.e. types of mandates and responsibilities) and trajectories (i.e. associative, political, and professional), as it was done for parliamentarians (e.g. see Steinak 2012). Second, we should ask what the effects of these training activities and programs are on municipal organizations themselves. Indeed, as for training dedicated to parliamentarians, which have been configured to enhance parliamentarian’s power vis-à-vis the government, training programs dedicated to LEOs can be considered as means to reinforce local governance. Yet, as Kyniondo and Pelizzo (2013) indicate, it appears that these training programs have not resulted in significant effects in terms of legislative capacity-building. Accordingly, these dimensions require more attention from scholars and practitioners concerned by the current changes affecting local governance in Canada and beyond.

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1. Founded in 1919, the UMQ represents more than 300 municipalities of all types in Québec which amount to a population of over six millions (on a total of approximately eight millions in Québec). UMQ members also cover a territory equivalent to 80% of the municipalized territory in the province of Québec. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. While the bill imposes the training program to all newly elected local officials, it does not sanction those that do not conform to this disposition. Yet, disregarding this legal obligation could be considered as an aggravating factor if a LEO is convicted of unlawful behaviors. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. We wish to thank Douglas Spencer for his work in collecting and organizing data in that matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This section focuses on Habermas’ two first models since they represent the two main ‘extremes’ in the continuum of authorization principles associated with political decision-making processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. There is also other more or less academic monographic works on mayors, for example Urbaniak (2009) on the emblematic Mississauga mayor (Hazel McCallion), and Lemelin (2011) on the current mayor of Québec Régis Labeaume. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the European context, Bäck, Heilnet and Magnier (2006, 8-9) have particularly identified four tendencies promoting professionalization at the local level namely decentralization, the new public management, politicization of local political organizations and the reinforcement of executive positions. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Remuneration of LEOs is generally calculated according to the municipalities’ population. The recent movement of ‘merging’ among municipalities in Québec and Ontario consequently enabled several mayors and councillors of newly merged cities to be granted sufficient remuneration to make a living out of their political occupation. As a mere illustration, a city councillor in Ottawa receives an annual remuneration of approximately 80 000$. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. As mere examples, Jim Watson (currently Ottawa mayor) was previously a provincial Member of Parliament (in Ontario), and Denis Coderre (current Montreal mayor) and Caroline St-Hilaire (mayor of Longueuil) were both Member of the federal parliament. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This corporation is a jointly owned subsidiary of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and the Alberta Urban Municipal Association. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This academy is an independent organization jointly created by the Union of British Columbia Municipalities and the provincial government of British Columbia. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. A similar diversity of tools is offered by the city of Atlanta’s *Ethics office* (e.g. see Boisvert 2011, 181-182). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For example, this is an explicit dimension of the program in Nova Scotia which is described as providing “newly [Elected Officials] with the opportunity to network with their counterparts from across the province” (Nova Scotia 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Accessibility here is also noticeable for in-class seminars which are often moving to diverse locations across provinces and territories. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Noticeably, this cynicism was particularly directed at what was perceived as an inequality between LEOs and other parliamentarians (especially of the Québec National Assembly) who had imposed them, but not to themselves, a training program in ethics and deontology. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For other such certifications dedicated to parliamentarians, see for example the activities of the UBC’s Summer Institute for Future Legislator. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)