

## **Collective Parental Involvement: Selective Institutional Accessibility**

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Using "social exchange theory", this study theorizes how "cultural homophily" enables institutional access while preserving municipal sovereignty over core policy. It introduces "selective institutional accessibility" to explain how decentralized regimes maintain authority over influential parent collectives.

**Keywords:** Collective Involvement, Governance, Homophily, Accessibility, Social Exchange.

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## **Collective Parental Involvement in Municipal Educational Governance: Selective Institutional Accessibility**

### **Purpose of the Research**

Amidst global shifts toward decentralized governance, this study examines how parent-municipal exchange relations shape institutional accessibility while creating an institutional blockage that delimits substantive influence. Moving from hierarchical government to decentralized networks, the state acts as a "steerer" within arenas of negotiation (Rhodes, 1996). This ensures municipal control even within participatory networks, where the authority seeks democratic legitimacy while parent leaders seek to convert expertise into tangible influence. The central question is how local authorities maintain steering capacity and policy sovereignty within these complex interdependencies (Pierre & Peters, 2000). Drawing on social exchange theory, power is conceptualized as a relational construct embedded in the control over non-substitutable resources (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962): exclusive municipal assets like regulatory authority, pedagogical policy making, and core budget allocation. The study investigates how cultural homophily (shared professional language and educational capital) facilitates institutional accessibility for parental collectives. It asks how such accessibility coexists with bounded authority, and why formal forums in decentralized systems often produce proximity without redistributing authoritative power (Hajer, 2003).

### **Research Methods**

A qualitative case study (Yin, 2018) was conducted in a high-socioeconomic municipality (Cluster 9). This capital-rich environment constitutes a strategic case (Flyvbjerg, 2006) for examining structural limits. By examining an information-rich

environment where parents' cultural capital is maximized, the study isolates structural institutional barriers from individual agentic limitations. This affluent context exposes the structural "ceiling" of influence, proving that barriers are systemic rather than based on actor incapacity. Data comprised 15 intensive semi-structured interviews with active parents and key informants: 12 high-ranking parent leaders and 3 municipal officials.

Findings were triangulated through the analysis of municipal protocols and internal policy documents to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the institutional environment. Analysis employed constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), using an iterative process of coding to identify the interplay between exchange resources and institutional blockages.

## **Results and Discussion**

Findings identify a four-component mechanism that stabilizes municipal governance while generating institutional blockage and reproducing power asymmetries:

1. **Institutional Accessibility through Cultural Homophily:** Expertise and shared cultural codes convert into primary access. Homophily reduces transaction costs and builds rapid trust, acting as a selective filter for institutional entry. As the Head of Education noted: "I gain the brain of the smart ones among them [the leading core]". However, because regulatory authority remains a non-substitutable asset, accessibility produces asymmetric dependence. Access is granted as a conditional resource, while strategic authority remains concentrated within the municipal bureaucracy.
2. **Ritualized Participation:** In statutory committees, parental presence is exchanged for democratic legitimacy. Visibility reinforces partnership narratives, yet pedagogical and budgetary policy remains institutionally insulated. The leading core "consults" on visible issues, while core allocative priorities remain behind closed doors. Participation thus provides accessibility without transparency or redistributing authoritative control.
3. **The Bypass Space and Bounded Agency:** An informal arena grants operative agency over logistical projects only to a leading core of four parents. In this exchange, the core gains prestige and direct access, constituting personal political power. This selective empowerment functions as a co-optation strategy, effectively de-collectivizing parental power by transforming a potential political threat into a manageable administrative partnership. This bypass space redirects agency toward operational logistics rather than strategic pedagogical shifts, preserving municipal sovereignty.

4. **Shock Absorbers and Collective Fragmentation:** Parent leaders mediate conflict for sustained accessibility. The Chair described: "If I give a quick answer to a school chair, then the problem is solved". All leading parents act as secondary gatekeepers who filter dissent and reinforce policy boundaries. While enhancing systemic stability, this generates internal hierarchy, prioritizing municipal stability over grassroots demands and fragmenting broader parental collectivity.

### **Policy Implications and Contribution**

Findings demonstrate that accessibility and institutional blockage are structurally interdependent. Decentralization expands participation without shifting the locus of policy sovereignty (Pierre & Peters, 2000). The study contributes to the "accessibility paradox": a state where institutional proximity serves as a system-stabilizing mechanism rather than political influence. This reveals a form of "institutional decoupling," where the rhetoric of partnership remains separated from the core of decision-making. The model challenges optimistic frameworks by showing how institutional proximity can entrench existing hierarchies through selective inclusion.

Accessibility functions as a "symbolic asset" preventing powerful actors from becoming external opposition. This maps a path for comparative research in lower-resource municipalities (Cluster 4).

**Keywords:** Collective Parental Involvement, Selective Institutional Accessibility, Institutional Blockage, Cultural Homophily, Social Exchange Theory.

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