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Navigating the Digitization of the Workplace: A Content Analysis on Münster's Capacity Through Local Media Perspectives During the Pandemic

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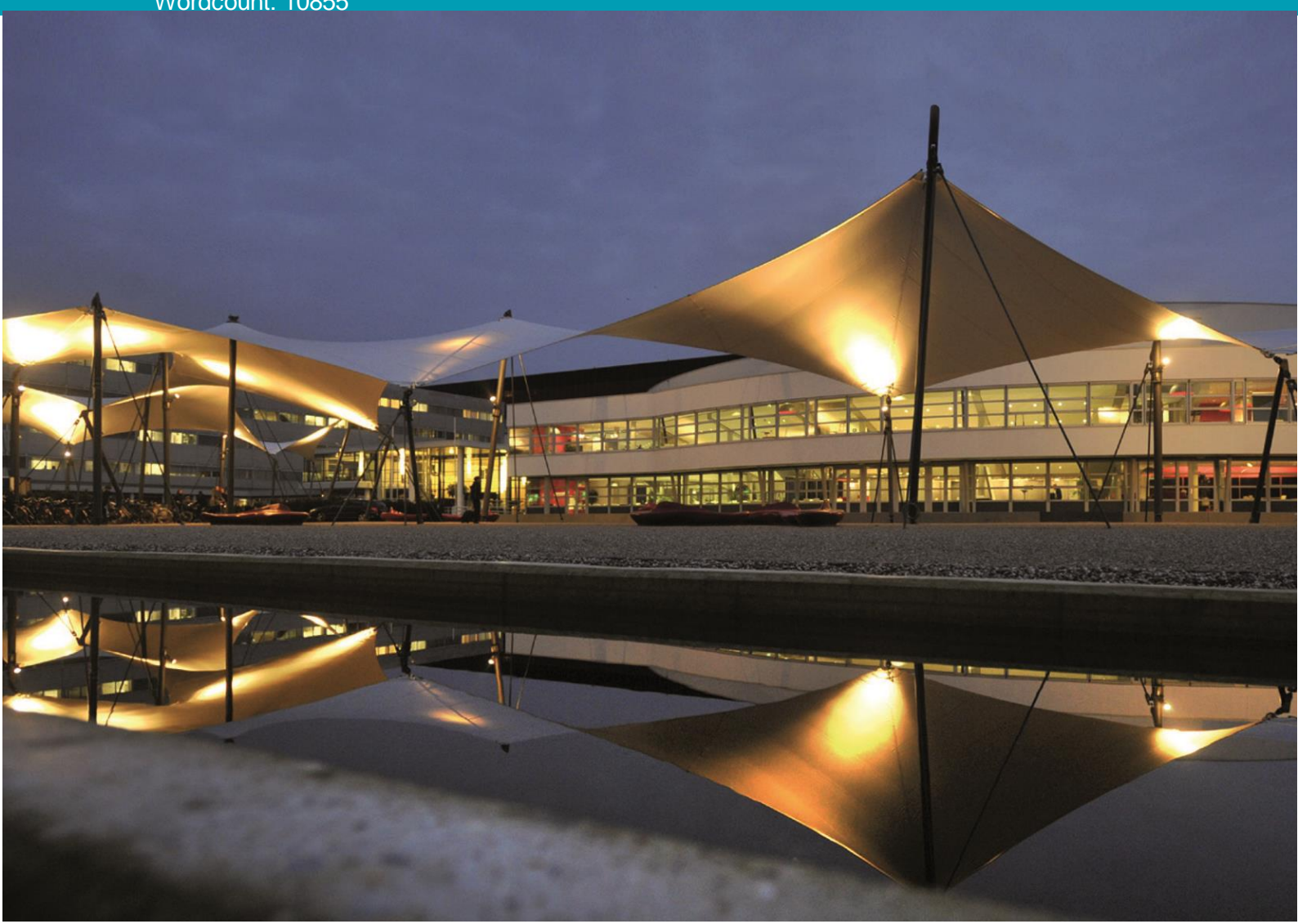
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1. Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted Germany. Many different regulations, guidelines, and temporary laws were put into place to ensure the safety of citizens. In January 2021, employees were obliged to offer remote work arrangements for their employees if their work permitted it. As a result, local public organizations had to transform their workplace, and policymakers needed to strengthen digitization efforts. In this research, the main research question, *“In what ways do local media portray the capacities of the city of Münster as a facilitator for digitization, specifically for work-from-home office workers during the COVID-19 pandemic?”* will be answered by conducting a qualitative content analysis. Data will be collected from local online news articles dealing with the topic of working from home and published between the years 2021 and 2023. Theories that will guide the analysis include capacity building and frameworks from Mergel, Edelman, and Hau that discuss the digitization of the public sector. This research will add to previous research on local administrative capacity and digitization efforts while also considering local news sources as an essential tool for assessing the performance of public administrations.

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2. Introduction

2.1 Context

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted not only the private lives of many people across the globe but also drastically changed many office workers' work lives. One area among many that this pandemic has impacted is public administration. Governments worldwide had to deal with rapid changes, manage public services, and secure the well-being of their citizens. Like many other countries, Germany implemented strict measures to curb the spread of the virus. Lockdowns and social distancing affected our private lives, but eventually, the work-life of many office workers was affected as well. In January 2021, the German government implemented a regulation that made it mandatory to offer remote work opportunities whenever possible (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, 2021). The aim of this research is to explore and interpret how local news media describe the capacity of local governments to facilitate the necessary resources to provide remote work opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The transition to remote work because of the pandemic created new challenges for local administrators. According to the global connectivity index of 2020, Germany was ranked number 15 out of 79 countries and therefore had a more advanced technological infrastructure than many of the other countries that were part of the index. Arguably, Germany is, therefore, better equipped with the necessary technological resources to adapt to this sudden change during the pandemic (Porter et al., 2002). Despite that, local governments still had the challenge of quickly gathering these necessary technological resources to enable remote work and offering the same services as before while ensuring the safety of their employees. Moreover, administrators also had to address remote work issues, such as unstable internet connections, data breaches, and communication problems due to employees' lack of knowledge of online meeting platforms (Fischer et al., 2022). While previous research has focused on remote work, it is often in the context of whether remote work increases productivity for the company (Gibbs et al., 2021). Overall, the transition to remote work highlighted the capacity of Germany's government to facilitate the sudden change, and the digital infrastructure and technological resources were also heavily examined by many experts, newspapers, and citizens (Fischer et al., 2022).

Previous research about what resources are needed to provide adequate remote work opportunities for employees already exists (Miele & Tirabeni, 2019); however, especially on a local level, there is still a knowledge gap regarding specific challenges local governments face. Especially on a local level, administrators had to quickly invest resources and money to update their resources and platforms to facilitate remote work effectively. Whereas national governments had to implement

policies and regulations to facilitate remote work on a broader scale, local administrators faced the unique challenge of adapting to these new regulations.

De Vries categorizes the challenges faced by local governments into four dimensions. The first dimension is called *contextual conditions* and entails socio-economic conditions, the historical context, and current social trends. Next, he regards the *structural conditions*, namely the degree of decentralization and how the local government is delegated certain tasks. Thirdly, De Vries mentions *institutional conditions* that regard the size of the local government, its internal organization, the infrastructure, and financial autonomy. The fourth and last dimension discussed are *human resource conditions*, concerning the quality of leadership, the skill level to create and implement policies, and personal management (De Vries, 2016). De Vries's frameworks discuss that certain constraints may arise depending on the budget, size, infrastructure, or internal organization, which are unique to a local government. His research offers an important insight into challenges that might arise on a local level and are relevant to consider in this research.

Another challenge for local governments is ensuring equal access to remote work opportunities for all employees. In some cases, workers may not have access to essential technological equipment or reliable Internet access at home, especially in rural areas (Czernich, 2014). Local governments must find ways to address these gaps and provide the necessary support to enable all employees to work remotely, ensuring fairness and inclusion. In addition, local governments often have unique communication and administrative needs because of their close relationships with local communities. They should engage with residents, businesses, and community organizations to meet local needs, provide support and networking.

Local media are essential in exploring local administrative capacity in the public sector. Their unique location and proximity to the communities they serve give them certain advantages and capabilities that make them especially well-prepared for this job. First and foremost, local news deeply understands their communities' specific challenges and needs. They know the local context, including social, economic, and political developments that affect public administration. This local knowledge allows them to assess local governments' capacity better and provide the context-specific analysis (Nicodemus, 2010). In addition, local news sources have established relationships with key stakeholders in the community, including local businesses, community leaders, and residents. These relationships enable valuable insights and access to information by the public. Developing these networks allows local news organizations to gain a broader understanding of local governments' challenges, achievements, and shortcomings (Nicodemus, 2010). Local news media also have the advantage of being more in tune with the local government's day-to-day operations and developments. The performance of local authorities, the implementation of policies, and the provision

of public services can be effectively monitored and reported. This real-time data allows local governments' capabilities to be constantly assessed and analyzed promptly (Nicodemus, 2010).

The knowledge gap this research aims to explore is if and how local news media are a valuable tool to assess and evaluate the public performance of policymakers and their policies during times of rapid social change. Especially in times of social change, local news media may offer valuable insights for policymakers in how their decisions are evaluated.

2.2 Research Question

This research will focus on how local media portray the capacity of local municipalities to facilitate change regarding the digitization of the public sector. Specifically, local news articles from the city of Münster, Germany, will be analyzed to answer the following research question: *“In what ways do local media portray the capacities of the city of Münster as a facilitator for digitization, specifically for work-from-home office workers during the period of mandatory remote work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?”*. This descriptive, exploratory question aims to investigate the capacity of the city of Münster to facilitate work-from-home opportunities by examining and interpreting how local newspapers view the efforts made by the public sector to improve the digitization regarding work-from-home during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research question emphasizes the importance of analyzing the public performance of local municipalities and their capacity to adapt to rapid transformations during times of change. The aim of this research is further conceptualized using two sub-questions:

- 1) *In what ways have local policymakers facilitated work-from-home opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic in the city of Münster?*
- 2) *In what manner has local news portrayed the capacity of the city of Münster to provide office workers with work-from-home opportunities?*

Local media are an essential tool to assess and evaluate plans made by local municipalities and cities, as they often include interviews with employees of the public sector, the general public's opinion, and offer an overview of the strategies used to implement policies. As the name suggests, local news can put more resources into investigating and examining topics important for one specific region. Especially during times of change, local news is an important tool for readers to keep up with current developments. Therefore, it is essential to consider how the media describes the capacity of local municipalities to facilitate necessary change. Their view on the capacity of a city or municipality is an important tool for analyzing public performance. This study will be structured as follows: First, social and scientific relevance will be discussed. Next, the theoretical frameworks for the analysis will

be explored. Then, the findings of the content analysis will be investigated, and finally, the research question will be answered in the conclusion and discussion.

2.3 Social and Scientific Relevance

Local news media often have a closer look at local politics, decision-making processes, and changes that affect the public in one way or another. The portrayal by the media might affect citizens' attitudes towards their government depending on how the administrative capacity of the local government is described or how strongly the digitalization of a certain sector is impacted by policymakers. Especially during events that change societies, such as elections and, recently, the COVID pandemic, news articles often shape the opinions of their readers (Ogbodo et al., 2020). As Kim et al. state: "Negative publicity [...] may have effects on various forms of public support that would significantly affect an organization." (Kim et al., 2007). Thus, not only do media have an impact on the perception of their government, but it changes their behavior towards the government. Jong et al. in 2016 argue that media can ground public evaluation of government activity, which can help policymakers to evaluate their performance. Therefore, it is important to consider how the media describes the capacity of local municipalities to facilitate necessary change.

3. Theory

The aim of this research is to examine the role of Münster as a facilitator for digitization. In this section, the theoretical framework for the analysis will be discussed. Firstly, the term remote work will be defined and discussed. Following that, the concepts and framework of the digitization of the public sector will be explored. Finally, there will be a discussion about the public administration theories regarding capacity and capability.

3.1 Defining Remote Work

There was a significant shift towards remote work arrangements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, many terms describe different forms of working remotely (Brenke, 2016). One of the most general terms, "remote work," encompasses any work outside the traditional office. In Germany, the term "home office" is more prevalent (Brenke, 2016). Its meaning differs slightly from remote work. It implies that employees have a dedicated workspace in their homes, and the company

typically owns any necessary technologies or programs rather than individuals. The term "home office" also expects the employee to be present during work hours at home and no other location (Fischer et al., 2022). This study uses the terms "Home office" and remote work interchangeably. They both refer to working outside of a traditional office setting. "Home office" or "work from home" is more commonly used in Germany, while "remote work" is dominant worldwide.

3.2 Digital Transformation of the Public Sector

The concept of digital transformation has implications for many different fields of study, including public administration. In the field of public administration, digital transformation entails the usage of modern digital technologies to enhance services provided by the government, increase citizen engagement, and improve government efficiency (Bousdekis & Kardaras, 2020). Modern technologies can help automate processes and make services provided by the government more accessible. Online portals and mobile applications are often used to provide services such as tax payments, and important information for citizens can be easily accessed (Bousdekis & Kardaras, 2020).

The article "Defining digital transformation" by Mergel, Edelmann, and Haug in 2019 examines the various definitions of digital transformation within the field of public administration. They identify multiple main components of digital transformation. Firstly, they state that public administrations change how they provide service delivery by digitizing processes and objects. Next, according to the authors, digital transformation also happens on an organizational level. The bureaucratic and organizational culture changes and employees' and leaders' mindset toward their objective is also part of that change. The article also states that to achieve lasting change within an organization and bureaucracy, a change in mindset is crucial (Mergel et al., 2019). Their findings suggest that change within the administration happens due to its external environment. As a result, in times of rapid social change, administrations are heavily influenced towards adapting and offering the necessary technologies to continue to provide services and public goods (Mergel et al., 2019). One of the main takeaways of this article is that digital transformation is a continuous process that requires ongoing investment in technology, skills of public administrations, and organizational change. In this research, the theoretical framework of Mergel et al. and their arguments for the digitization of the public sector will be used to answer the main research question.

Local governments are closer to citizens and, therefore, one of the main drivers in public service delivery (Gasco-Hernandez et al., 2022). Despite little research on digital transformation in local governments, specific challenges are unique for local municipalities and cities. According to Bousdekis and Kardaras in 2020, there are four obstacles when it comes to digital transformation in local

municipalities: The lack of a citizen-centered approach, the lack of timeless digital transformation with a clear vision, a limited technological infrastructure, and lastly, low levels of employees' digital skills. Thus, it is crucial to consider the implication of possible limitations regarding the facilitation of digital transformation, especially on a local level, which will also be discussed in the research.

3.3 Administrative Capacity

One of the most used concepts in public administration and its literature is capacity and the process of building this capacity. Due to several public sector reforms over the last decades, countries worldwide had to (re)build state institutions, build economic capacity, and offer social services to their citizens (Junjan, 2020). Central and Eastern European states largely followed a particular direction to join the European Union. Thus, in many European countries, governments had to reform institutions and develop their economy and administration capacity to join the European Union (Junjan, 2020). According to Wu et al. in 2015, capacity results from different combinations of competency level and competency type. The competency type is divided into analytical, operational, and political, while the competency level then applies each type on an individual, organizational, or systematic level (Wu et al., 2015). Their findings conclude that analytical and operational competencies are needed for administrative capacity on both the individual and organizational levels (Wu et al., 2015). Administrative capacity is substantial on an organizational dimension and could also be investigated as a meso dimension (Junjan, 2020). Depending on the context used, various capacities are essential, each with unique characteristics. Organizational capacity, for example, refers to an organization's ability to achieve its goals effectively and efficiently. It relies on financial resources, infrastructure, and workforce to strengthen the company's productivity (El-Taliawi & Van Der Wal, 2019).

In this study, the concept of administrative capacity is utilized as a consideration to make while answering the research question. Administrative capacity refers to the government's ability to implement and enforce policies efficiently and effectively (Junjan, 2020). Various factors influence administrative capacity, including sufficient resources, government structures, and leadership quality. All of these can impact the success of building enough administrative capacity for a government. Not having the capacity to implement a specific plan would make creating them meaningless (El-Taliawi & Van der Wal, 2019). El-Taliawi and Van der Wal (2019) argue that without the capacity to provide public goods or services and implement policies, today's landmarks would not have been built. Especially in the everchanging and complex world, greater efforts are needed to enhance public organizations' capacity (El-Taliawi & Van der Wal, 2019).

In 2002 Nelissen defined administrative capacity as "the degree to which the new types of governance successfully handle societal and administrative problems for which they were created."

Nelissen also differentiates different types of administrative capacities. His research distinguishes between short- and long-term, planned and spontaneous, formal and informal, and local, regional, and national administrative capacities (Nelissen, 2002). Five main factors influence administrative capacity. Firstly, instrumental limits refer to the lack of resources or the ability to act. Secondly, acceptance and legitimacy issues arise when the policy does not influence the target group. Thirdly, demographic changes and different target group sizes also directly influence the administrative capacity. The fourth issue that may arise is that with a change of government, different political influences may also lead to consequences. Lastly, Nelissen views ecological factors, such as more or new demand for a product or service, as another factor influencing administrative capacity (Nelissen, 2002).

Building administrative capacity is crucial, as administrators need to analyze the current situation and then develop solutions to reach the wanted development goal (Junjan, 2020). It is a challenge that requires a particular support system that enhances the implementation and delivery capabilities (Painter & Pierre, 2005). El-Taliawi & Van der Wal adapted a framework from Honadle (1981) that offers a support system for building administrative capacity. The first stages include the anticipation of change and the development of programs. Afterward, resources are gathered and managed. Then, the process will be evaluated and used for future challenges (El-Taliawi & Van der Wal, 2019). Local capacity is an area in which little research has been published, but according to Terman and Feiock, local capacity is highly dependent on policy-specific expertise and analysis. The most significant consequence of a local administration needing more capacity to implement new policies will be policy failure because there is an inconsistency between the expectations of governments and the actual circumstances at the local level (Terman & Feiock, 2014). For this research, the theoretical framework of Nelissen will be used while also considering the attributions of other scholars mentioned in this discussion.

3.4 Capabilities

Another concept in public administration research is the theory of building capability. This idea is often found alongside research focusing on building capacity, so it is essential to consider how these ideas are similar and where they differ. According to March and Olsen in 1998, the governance field has four types of capabilities. Rights and authority are the first type and refer to capabilities that are part of the norms of institutions and protected by those with authority. The second type is resource capability, which means money, time, information, facility, and equipment are used to create capability. The next type is competencies and knowledge, which are applied on an individual, professional, and institutional level. For example, an individual can have competencies and knowledge acquired through training. The fourth and last type of capability is organizational capacity. The

relationship between capability and organizational capacity can be seen as a two-sided relationship, as capacity depends on existing capabilities, but having capacity is also a condition to use the capability (March & Olsen 1998).

Compared to capacity, the idea of building capability focuses more firmly on evaluating the individual's well-being, policies, and social arrangements. Robeyns states, "*The core characteristic of the capability approach is its focus on what people are effectively able to do and to be; that is, on their capabilities*" (Robeyns, p. 94, 2005). Generally, it is a theoretical framework within the field of politics, but it is also used outside of the study of politics and used interdisciplinary. Robyn also argues that the term capability is often used to answer questions related to the well-being of people and whether the conditions for a particular capability are met (Robeyns, 2005). It regards the individual circumstances in which a person develops their capabilities, and thus, this approach differentiates between what could be achieved and what is realistically possible, given the circumstances (Junjan, 2020). The terms capacity and capability are often used interchangeably, as they both describe analyzing the current circumstances and acting if necessary. However, capacity focuses on the problem diagnosis on an organizational level, whereas capability is more connected to acquiring the skills and competencies on an individual level (Junjan, 2020). While other interpretations are possible, this research will primarily examine the administrative capacity to provide technological equipment. Given the time for this project, this paper will focus on the theoretical framework regarding capacity.

4. Method

4.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

In order to answer the main research question of this paper, a content analysis will be conducted. Content analyses are a research method involving the systematic analysis of documents, speeches, or any other type of communication. A content analysis aims to gather valuable insights into the meaning of the text analyzed (Babbie, 2021). Certain assumptions are made when conducting any textual analysis, including a content analysis. Given's (2008) fundamental assumption is that the language used heavily influences reality. Therefore, textual analyses explore not only the content of a text but also its meaning and implications. In this research, a qualitative content analysis will be used to answer the main research question and examine local news articles to examine how they describe the capacity to facilitate remote work opportunities in the city of Münster during the pandemic. The qualitative approach allows for a focus on conceptualizing, describing, and interpreting language rather than numbers.

Because news articles are written texts, content analyses offer a deeper insight into the meaning, implications, and content. The explicit content can be examined, and the frequency of used words or how the text was written can also be analyzed. Thus, content analyses are a valuable method to help find meaning in the articles that will be analyzed.

4.2 Method of Data Collection

Because this research aims to look at the portrayal of the media concerning the city's capacity to offer remote work opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic in the city of Münster, the data is collected from online news articles published by local media sources between January 2021 and February 2023. According to the official website of the city of Münster, there are a total of 41 newspapers and online magazines that discuss various topics relevant to the city of Münster (web.münster.de). Many of those magazines are published on topics unrelated to this research, such as agriculture in Münster or the exploration of Münster's sightseeing spots. More specifically, data is collected from two different local newspapers in Münster and one online magazine. These three news sources were collected as the two newspapers publish daily or weekly articles and include topics that are relevant to this research. The online magazine was chosen as it publishes articles regularly and often includes interviews with public figures, which may offer new insights for this paper. The newspaper "Münstersche Zeitung" is the only local newspaper that publishes daily. The local news page of the newspaper "Westphälische Nachrichten" (WN) also publishes regularly. Therefore, articles from the WN are valuable for this analysis as well. While both newspapers share some of their articles with the other platform, there are still exclusive articles for either newspaper. Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that certain articles can be found in both the Münstersche Zeitung and the WN. In those cases, the articles were categorized to the newspaper in which it was first found. In addition, articles from an online news magazine called "Alles Münster" will also be collected for the content analysis.

While there are other local news media, these three were selected as they all offer the largest number of articles regarding the city of Münster. Smaller newspapers or other magazines may also offer new insights. However, for the time frame of this research, three different newspapers are adequate, as they all publish weekly or daily articles and thus offer a big enough sample size to gain meaningful insights. The data comes from German articles. Therefore, it is essential to mention that the researcher is a native speaker and is able to conduct the analysis in German and translate it into English. This might lead to possible mistranslations of concepts that are difficult to translate or have multiple translations. During the analysis, it is important to translate specific terms in a way that conveys the concept and idea rather than using word-for-word translation. In this research, there will

be no limitation in only using German articles, as the focus is on a German city and articles written by local news media in German. To be transparent, if a translation of a quote was used, there will be a [Transl.] number, which corresponds with a table in the Appendix in which the original quote in German can be found.

Specific keywords were established to find only relevant articles and reduce the number of articles not discussing this research's topics. As the articles are written in German, the keyword "Home office" can be a good term that translates to "work from home" or "remote work." Other keywords that can help narrow down the article selection are "COVID" or "Corona(virus)." Both keywords will lower the number of articles that are not relevant to the purpose of this research. Another criterion established is the time frame. Articles that include the keywords for the COVID pandemic might have been written recently and therefore are not relevant. Only articles published between January 1st, 2021, and February 28th, 2023, will be considered for this research. In January 2021, the first "SARS-CoV-2-Arbeitsschutzverordnung" was decided on, which includes regulations on how to curb the spread of COVID, specifically at work. It also entails the regulation that workers should be allowed to work remotely unless their presence at work is necessary (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, 2021). Although the regulation was instated in March of 2021, it was made public in January. Thus, many articles may have been written discussing this topic even before the regulation took effect. In February 2023, all regulations for the workplace were removed, including the obligation by employers to offer remote work opportunities when possible. Thus, February of 2023 will be the last month included in the selection of articles.

4.3 Method of Data Analysis

To properly conduct a qualitative content analysis, the program Atlas.ti will be utilized. Atlas.ti is a qualitative research tool that visualizes data, analyzes texts, and more. For this research, the first step is to create a coding scheme that can be applied to the data to identify and analyze essential concepts. There are different approaches to collecting data, categorizing, and sorting them. Qualitative research generally follows an inductive research approach which focuses on deriving theory from collected data (Williams & Moser, 2019). In this research, the theoretical framework by Williams and Moser (2019) on how to conduct the data collection and analysis will be used. According to the authors, the first step is called *open coding*, in which the researcher creates initial broad ideas about the themes used for categorizing the data. The second level of coding is called *axial coding*, which further refines and categorizes the themes. The broad themes can be broken down into more specific terms and create new core codes that include the broad themes established in the open coding process. The third and last step of the data collection is the *selective coding*. In this process, the researcher can integrate

the organized data from the axial coding into more cohesive expressions (Williams & Moser, 2019). This process can help to develop meaning in the codes and, in this research, can provide a basis for the analysis. In Atlas.ti, creating codes that look for specific code works of a given text is easy. Thus, analyzing many different articles will not be as time-consuming with the help of Atlas.ti. The program will also help to reduce the workload because all articles can be copied into the program. Thus, it is easier to explore the content than having to search for each article individually multiple times. Moreover, coding and categorizing the data becomes much more feasible when using Atlas.ti.

A consideration that needs to be made is the inherent subjectivity of a coding scheme. There is an inherent level of subjectivity to coding schemes because the researcher uses their understanding of certain concepts and will base them on only the theories that they deem essential to the research (Williams & Moser, 2019). Therefore, it is important to consider whether the coding scheme is objective or subjective. In the case of this research, the expectation of the coding scheme is to have a mix of objective and subjective concepts, as certain theoretical concepts are quite complex and require many theories to back them up. However, certain words will likely have only one objective meaning with little room for a subjective interpretation. Having a theory to back up certain concepts is essential to create a subjective scheme and having objective terms and concepts. Another consideration to make is the reliability of this research. Because of the limited time for this project, Inter and Intracoder reliability cannot be tested, but they should be discussed, nonetheless. Intercoder reliability is achieved by having two or more independent researchers code the same texts and afterward come together to discuss their findings (Van den Hoonaard, 2008). As coding requires a certain degree of subjective judgment, intercoder reliability is effective in getting an agreed-upon census for the codes in a research project. Intracoder reliability refers to the consistent process of a single researcher coding (Van den Hoonaard, 2008). It can be tested by finishing your coding and, in the end, going back to the first document and recoding from the beginning to look for consistent coding

5. Analysis

5.1 Introduction

To answer the main research question and two sub-questions of this research, three local newspaper articles will be categorized and analyzed. A total of 29 published texts were found to fit the search criteria and contain the appropriate search terms in their text. Twenty of those were informative articles, while seven contained an interview, and two of the published text were a comment. First, the articles from the newspaper *Münstersche Zeitung* will be examined, followed by

the online magazine *Alles Münster* and finally, the local part unique for Münster in the regional newspaper *Westfälische Nachrichten* will be explored.

5.2 Findings: Münstersche Zeitung

The newspaper *Münstersche Zeitung* published 14 articles, three interviews, and one comment within the time frame previously established and matched the selection criteria. The topics range from how specific institutions adapted to the pandemic to articles focusing on the general public's opinion regarding COVID-19. While there were articles that focused on facts and data gathered from surveys and experts, many articles also portrayed remote work in a particular way. One topic often discussed in the newspapers was the change in the work environment and how specifically COVID-19 affected it. Three articles, in particular, explore how different organizations responded to the lockdowns and regulations that affected their workers. Christiane Kuhlmann stated in an interview with the *Münstersche Zeitung* that “Two years of the covid pandemic have turned society upside down. Nationwide work from home has drastically changed the work process and decision-making structures in companies.” (Höller, 2022[Transl. 1]). As a result, she believes that many companies are putting more pressure on employees than before to stay economically viable, and thus, the work environment in many offices is considerably more tense (Höller, 2021). This article shows that even in cases where workers went to the office to work, the work environment was drastically changed by the pandemic.

As regulations lessened and more office workers wanted to go back to work in the office, the city administration plans to continuously offer more opportunities to work from home. The HR manager of Münster wants to offer more alternating workspaces, which are office spaces for one person that are shared among multiple employees throughout the week. This new system is possible by having the employees work from home in a cycle, and each employee can also work in that office space on a different day; thus, more employees use less office space (Baumeister, 2022).

The local newspaper published three articles considering how COVID-19 shaped public service provision. In April of 2022, one article mentioned that despite national looser regulations, the city of Münster still recommends wearing face masks even in spaces where it is no longer required. Since the city of Münster continued to have a high incidence value, many public institutions advised wearing masks for in-person appointments. They also praise the public for their compliance with the rules and recommendations (*Münstersche Zeitung*, 2022). In the article “Lack of personnel freezes more and more public services” (Baumeister et al., 2022 [Transl.2]), the reasons behind the lack of personnel in many areas of the public sector in Münster are examined. While reasons other than the pandemic are also discussed, the health sector, garbage disposal, and public transportation are deeply affected by

COVID-19. Many employees got infected with COVID-19 unknowingly and spread it to their coworkers, resulting in periods of time when many employees in the same area got sick simultaneously. The services were not as efficient and quick as before. Schools and Kindergartens had to close completely as part of measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, and thus, many employees were unable to work for the time being and looked for work in a different sector. In local hospitals, surgeries were delayed, waiting times got longer, and intensive care beds were often full, which led to employees feeling overworked. Another point mentioned in the article is that public transportation usage lessened during the pandemic, which resulted in many bus lines that were removed due to the lack of usage (Baumeister et al., 2022).

Remote work in Münster has often been discussed regarding its disadvantages during the COVID-19 pandemic. 11 articles discuss remote work's (possible) shortcomings. An article exploring the results of a local survey argues that most of Münster's citizens have the technological equipment to participate in online events facilitated by museums or other local cultural institutions. However, only a small percentage of people took part in these events, showing that there either was a lack of interest in these events or that people preferred to participate in in-person events (Völker, 2022). According to the article, remote work's main disadvantage is the lack of communication with other employees. The number of people who got psychological consultations increased by more than 40 percent, and many stress factors arose from working remotely. Parents often have the added stress of working and caring for their children (Völker, 2022). Other issues can arise when employees lack the necessary organizational skills and lose structure in their workday. Thus, stress can lead to less efficiency in work-from-home arrangements and decrease employees' well-being (Völker, 2022).

One consequence attributed to the pandemic is the effect it had on entry-level jobs and internships. Especially young people who graduated during the pandemic felt disoriented and struggled to apply to companies before the deadline (Höller, 2022). New employees could not meet their coworkers in person and had to fall back to online meetings, leaving them feeling unsatisfied (Biederstädt, 2021). In a comment called "The right to work from home is an unnecessary obligation" (Stilling, 2022[Transl. 3]), the author urged regulation to provide work-from-home opportunities if possible. The author has a strong view against this regulation and argues that it should be up to the companies to offer remote work opportunities and that a state- or nationwide mandate would restrict the freedom of companies (Stilling, 2022). One article focuses on the implication that remote work has on the infrastructure of Münster's offices. The article written by Klaus Baumeister summarizes the debate about a planned office building by the city administration. While some policymakers argue that large office buildings are still necessary and should be built to facilitate a large number of employees, others say that these buildings would soon become empty, as more and more employees are working from home or only coming into the office a few times a week (Baumeister, 2022). Münster employs

about 7000 people and has 3000 office workplaces, with 800 being alternate workplaces shared among employees who work from home and in the office, depending on the day. Many policymakers anticipate that this number will only rise. Thus, the final decision on whether the office should be built is postponed until 2024 (Baumeister, 2022), showing that the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in remote work also bring many uncertainties.

In the *Münstersche Newspaper*, no articles were found that discussed an aspect of the capacity of Münster to facilitate remote work. Rather they portrayed the general public's opinion regarding remote work and focused on how the workplace and environment were affected by the pandemic and the shift towards remote work. It is important to consider that 11 of the 18 articles found suitable for this research discussed remote work and its disadvantages. At the same time, only one article focused on the advantage of remote work (Gerke, 2023). A considerable number of articles delved into how the public institutions of Münster adapted to the pandemic and how the pandemic changed many public services. Seven of the 18 articles discussed this theme in more detail, and the overall portrayal of the newspaper is that the pandemic heavily impacted most public services, and many difficulties arose in delivering these public services and goods. While the health sector was impacted the most, the pandemic affected many other sectors, including schools, transportation, and others. When discussing public service provisions, the city administration and policymakers were not perceived as accountable in the articles. However, it is a consequence purely because of the pandemic or factors not blamed on policymakers (Baumeister et al., 2022). Overall, this newspaper seems to view the city of Münster as capable of adapting to change suddenly. The positive view on the city's digitization efforts could be because Münster has been a digitalized city even before the pandemic and thus was able to keep up with the sudden shift towards a more digital administration and workspace (Münstersche Zeitung, 2021).

5.3 Findings: Alles Münster

Only four articles were found with the established criteria in the local newspaper *Alles Münster*. Despite that, the articles are longer than those of the other newspaper articles that will be analyzed in this research, and they focus more in-depth on their topic. Thus, they are still important for this analysis. Two of these are interviews, while the other two are informative articles.

The first article that will be analyzed is called "Happy with the Office of the Future" (Alles Münster, 2021 [Transl. 4]). It is an interview with two professors at the University of Applied Sciences in Münster. They explained how COVID-19 was largely responsible for the sudden workplace digitization. They said that the workplace, in general, will shift towards more remote work, and large

offices will not be the norm in the future. Moreover, they mentioned that this work environment is realistically possible for 50 to 60 percent of Germany's workforce. They emphasized that working in an office will be a choice for many employees in the future, and employers should consider the feelings of their employees while the change from traditional offices to collaborative workspaces takes place. This article emphasizes the importance of adapting to new and emerging work models, and both interviewees are certain that there is no way to stop the change from happening. While the interviewees acknowledged that working from home is not suitable for everyone, they also believe that most employees will choose to work remotely for at least a few days throughout the week (Münstersche Zeitung, 2021).

The next article is another interview. The new police president of Münster is interviewed after his first 100 days at work. Throughout the interview, the topic of COVID and its impact on the police was discussed, as this article was published in 2021. During the pandemic, the police tried to facilitate work-from-home opportunities as much as possible to keep the virus from spreading and hindering police officers from working altogether. The police president stated that the state of North Rhine Westphalia was a big help in providing the necessary laptops and other equipment (Alles Münster, 2021). Mentioning the state's help in providing equipment is an important insight, as it highlights that the state plays a large role in facilitating necessary resources for work-from-home opportunities. Not only that, but it also is the first indication that the administrative capacity of the city of Münster is sufficient, as it was able to distribute these resources rather quickly and managed to work together with the state administration of North-Rhine-Westphalia.

The third article suitable for this research is an article entailing information about how the LWL (Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe/ Regional Association of Westphalia-Lippe) was able to offer digital events during times of COVID and how the number of visitors managed to rise after regulations loosened. The LWL offered digital exhibitions with 5000 visitors in the first four weeks, despite being unable to meet with the other employees. Online lectures had even more visitors, with about 62000 in total. The head of the culture department for the LWL states that "COVID has given our houses a boost in digitization, which we aim to use even after the pandemic." He is thankful for the employees as they were the ones who came up with the idea (Alles Münster, 2021 [Transl. 5]). After the museums opened, they continued to offer digital tours for their exhibitions and want to continue to do so in the future. The LWL argues that online viewers even joined from far away, showing that the interest was large, even outside Münster and its area. Despite the closure of museums because of COVID measures, the LWL still adapted to the shift toward offering more digital services ((Alles Münster, 2021).

The last article introduces a newly designed chair developed by a student at the University of Applied Sciences in Münster. It highlights the importance of having good equipment, ergonomically favorable chairs even when working from home, and the need to create new equipment when the

traditional workspace is disappearing more and more (Alles Münster, 2021). While this article does not focus on any aspect of remote work or the efforts made by the local administration, it still offers the opportunity to underline the importance of adapting to changes and creating new solutions or equipment that is a better fit for the given situation.

These articles all portray the city of Münster in a favorable light and showcase the city's strength during the pandemic. Local administrators managed to keep up with the societal change, offer more digital events for public institutions, and facilitate enough resources to provide the city-wide police with home office equipment for those who could work remotely. Moreover, the selection of articles also shows that local news focus on the future after COVID-19. The shift towards remote work was largely a result of COVID, but the city of Münster wants to keep some digital services and offer them even after measures against the virus are over.

5.4 Findings: Westfälische Nachrichten

In the local part of the *Westfälische Nachrichten* that publishes articles for the municipality of Münster, seven articles fit the search criteria for this research. Four are informative articles, two are interviews, and one is a comment.

A topic discussed in one article is the capacity of Münster's health department to keep up with the chain of infection and contact those who may be unaware that they were infected with COVID (Völker, 2022). The article was published in January 2022, when infection rates rose again. In an interview with public health department employees, the interviewees stated they needed more personnel. However, because of limited space and time to train new employees, insufficient employees were employed to manage the work in a timely and efficient manner. The interviewees stated that because employees were stressed at work, vacation days were not used except for two days. 2021 the department worked seven days a week (Völker, 2022). On a positive note, the interviewees also mentioned that they could use a public building for this work. Specifically one that is big enough to facilitate many workers to still come into the office, despite regulations that mandate enough space between individual workspaces. Moreover, one-fourth of the employees were provided the necessary equipment to work remotely, which will also help free office space for potential new employees (Völker, 2022). Other public institutions can also offer more opportunities to work from home, and general work conditions are adapted to meet the needs of employees.

Three out of the seven articles discussed the digitalization of the public sector. An article showcasing the results of a local study summarized that the city of Münster is ranked 18 out of German cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants on the "Smart City Index." Where Münster has gotten good

ratings for the energy sectors and its environmental policies, online public services are lacking (Biederstädt, 2022). According to the administration, more than 30 services are now online. These include the request of certain documents, as well as submitting applications online for certain services. However, for many services, an appointment is still required. Münster's administration responded that "The digitalization of services provided by the administration follow a strategy that is based on the relevance of a service for the citizens and companies" (Biederstädt, 2022 [Transl. 6]). Despite this strategy, the result of the study clearly shows that Münster ranks in the bottom third when it comes to providing public services digitally. Thus, the article emphasizes the need to create more digital services and removes the need to have an appointment for something that can be done online (Biederstädt, 2022). Another article shows the negative impact that the lack of online services has on Münster's citizens. A survey shows that a visit to a local administration takes around 148 minutes. With waiting times and travel times roughly taking up more than two hours, the actual process time at the office only takes 25 minutes (Biederstädt, 2022). The authors still believe that Münster is not at fault; rather, the lack of national or statewide digital policies is to blame. Despite these shortcomings, the article concludes that Münster should continue to prioritize which services to provide online.

A topic brought up in three articles in the *Westfälische Nachrichten* that were not mentioned before is the struggle that local policymakers face combining both the capacity of the state and the capacity of Münster. Due to Germany being a federal state, certain governmental functions are handled by local municipalities, the state, or the nation. In the case of COVID, many regulations were made on a state level without consideration for each municipality, and local policymakers had to adapt to implement these regulations (Buthe et al., 2020). One article examined the perspective of local policymakers who tried to seek looser regulations for long quarantine times (*Westfälische Nachrichten*, 2021). It is argued that parents who work remotely are stressed because of the regulation in which contact persons also had to quarantine for 14 days. The state government responded that only a limited amount of such cases actually occur. However, the government of Münster has a different opinion but is required to implement the regulations made on a state level (*Westfälische Nachrichten*, 2021). In a different article that deals with the lack of digitization in Münster's administration, Biederstädt states that "The rattling of fax machines in German offices is a result of sleeping on digital policies at a federal level" (Biederstädt, 2022 [Transl. 7]). The author believes that other European countries are an example. However, because of the lack of national policies, it is now up to each municipality to provide digital services and create policies that will help with the digitization of their administration (Biederstädt, 2022).

The *Westfälische Nachrichten* highlights the importance of efforts made by the city to digitalize the public sector. In their view, the pandemic often accelerated these efforts and created more challenges. One is the resource management for remote workers during COVID (Biederstädt, 2022).

Another important consideration the newspaper pays attention to is that because of COVID, certain public sectors struggled with a lack of employees, especially the health sector (Völker, 2022). Additional pressure is also put on local governments by the federal system of Germany, as they struggle to implement decisions made by the state or national government. On the other side, this system also means that local governments cannot make their efforts to digitalize their administration as effectively because certain funding, resources, or policies are lacking on a state level (Westfälische Nachrichten, 2021).

5.5 Answering Sub-Question 1

The first sub-question: *In what ways have local policymakers facilitated work-from-home opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic in the city of Münster*, can be answered by looking at the topics discussed in Münster's local newspaper. First, the city of Münster provided many of its employees with work-from-home equipment (Völker, 2022; Höller, 2022). In many public institutions, a large number of employees were able to work remotely with the necessary technologies. The public administration in Münster also plans to continue offering work-from-home opportunities, even after the pandemic (Baumeister, 2022). Another critical aspect of facilitating new work arrangements is to consider the efforts made by the local government to digitalize administrative processes. The city of Münster tried to increase its provision of online services during the pandemic based on the demand for certain services (Biederstädt, 2022). Moreover, employees were encouraged to create digital services for cultural events, such as museum exhibitions (Alles Münster, 2021) during lockdown times. By creating a more digitalized public sector and offering more services online in the city of Münster during the COVID pandemic, remote work has become one of many aspects that local policymakers had to gather the necessary resources rather than the sole focus.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a large reason why the change towards remote work occurred so quickly. With each wave of the pandemic, lockdowns, regulations, and policies brought forth by the national government, the state government had to be implemented by local administrations. Thus, switching to remote work was important during the pandemic, as it would drastically reduce contact with other employees and thus lower the risk of spreading the virus at work. Working from home has become the new norm for many office workers in the city of Münster (Baumeister, 2022). Because of the discrepancy between the national or state government and the local government in Münster, specific policies had to be implemented, despite them being damaging to Münster's public sector (Westfälische Nachrichten, 2021). In the same manner, Münster's government could not provide certain services, as the funding from the state or nation was lacking. Thus, challenges arose when trying

to combine the efforts made by the city of Münster with the regulations and provide funding from the state or national level. The first sub-question can be answered by considering many different factors that all affected to what degree the city of Münster was able to facilitate remote work opportunities. Overall, the city of Münster provided many employees with work-from-home arrangements and offered the necessary technological equipment.

4.6. Answering Sub-Question 2

The portrayal of Münster's capacity to provide remote work arrangements by local newspapers among all three newspapers examined in this research is mainly consistent. It highlights the importance of three considerations that need to be made when discussing Münster's administrative capacity.

First of all, most articles agree that the city of Münster has the capacity to provide work-from-home arrangements to a certain degree, as equipment for the home office was quickly distributed, and large parts of the workforce were working remotely during the pandemic (Völker, 2021). However, the three analyzed newspapers also offered multiple arguments showcasing a lack of administrative capacity in Münster. One apparent issue is the combination of working remotely and other factors influencing home life. Parents had to work from home while they had to take care of their children. The news portrayed the capacity to provide remote work arrangements to be sufficient. The combination of remote work with other factors that challenge the work arrangement leads to many challenges that the city of Münster struggled to solve (Pals, 2022; Höller, 2022). Thus, many articles dealt with the disadvantages of work-from-home arrangements because many factors influencing whether remote work works for people are highly dependent on individual circumstances, which the city of Münster failed to consider in many areas (Höller, 2022). Still, many articles found Münster not to be the reason why there was a limited capacity for providing remote work arrangements. Instead, the failure of state policies and the nation's lack of digitization efforts are seen as the reason why Münster cannot offer more digital services and provide even better remote work arrangements for its office workers (Biederstädt, 2022). Newspaper portrayed the COVID pandemic as another contributor to Münster's limited administrative capacity.

The pandemic came suddenly and left the city of Münster with little time to properly plan and execute an effective strategy for as many employees as possible (Biederstädt, 2022). Furthermore, it left many public sectors scrambling to deal with the enormous task of keeping the public sector functioning despite employees getting infected and many regulations interfering with the usual order of business. Overall, the local news portrays the city of Münster's administrative capacity in two

significant ways. On the one hand, they portrayed Münster as a digitally advanced city with many remote work opportunities due to the pandemic (Baumeister, 2022; Höller, 2022). At the same time, newspapers also strongly criticized the lack of consideration for other factors that influence the well-being of its employee (Völker, 2021). The blame for the lack of administrative capacity in certain areas is not put on the city of Münster itself but on Germany's terrible record of digital policies and the lack of interest by the state administration to offer unique solutions for each municipality. To answer the second sub-question: *In what manner has local news portrayed the capacity of the city of Münster to provide office workers with work-from-home opportunities?* There is not one answer, as the newspaper analyzed in this research focuses on the issue's complexity and is aware of how the COVID-19 pandemic made the strive for administrative capacity even more complicated.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

6.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to answer the main research question *“In what ways do local media portray the capacities of the city of Münster as a facilitator for digitization, specifically for work-from-home office workers during the period of mandatory remote work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?”*. To answer this question, two sub-questions were formulated. The first one aimed to explore the current measures by the city of Münster to facilitate remote work during the pandemic. The second sub-questions regarded how local news portrays the capacity of the city of Münster to provide these remote work arrangements. The sub-questions were answered during the analysis. To summarize, the city of Münster has been able to provide enough technological resources to provide work-from-home arrangements for employees in the public sector. The administrative capacity of Münster was portrayed by the news in two central ways. Firstly, the local newspapers portrayed Münster as a technologically advanced city that has the necessary capacity to provide equipment and remote work opportunities. Secondly, many news articles also argued that there was a lack of consideration for personal well-being, and thus, the city of Münster needs to build more administrative capacity to account for disparities that were highlighted during the pandemic.

To answer the main research question, some considerations need to be made first. In the theory section, administrative capacity was explained. As Nelisson (2002) argues, administrative capacity refers to the amount of success new policies have in dealing with societal and administrative problems that they were aimed to solve. Different factors influence administrative capacity. In the case of the city of Münster, one factor that heavily influenced their administrative capacity was having sufficient

resources to provide their office workers with the equipment needed to work remotely. Another factor that influenced Münsters' capacity was the lack of government workers in certain areas. As the newspapers portrayed, especially the public health sector suffered from a lack of workers. Especially in times of the COVID pandemic, the provision of online public services became apparent. In this regard, the media portrayed Münster in a way that acknowledges services that are present but also shows that the city needs to provide even more services digitally in the future. The COVID pandemic meant that Münster needed to provide spontaneous administrative capacity to solve the most pressing issues (Nelson, 2002).

There was little time to prepare and gather the necessary resources that would build the administrative capacity of the city quickly. Still, the media describes Münster as a city that solved most of the pressing issues of the time because of its quick decision to largely switch to work-from-home arrangements. Additionally, the media offers awareness of the fact that the state of North-Rhine Westphalia also provided some of the technological resources and thus had an impact on the quick response to the pandemic. A challenge that Terman and Feiock 2014 argue is that the biggest consequence of local administrations lacking expertise is policy failure because of an inconsistency between the expectations of governments and the practical circumstances at the local level. This was not a threat to the city of Münster and its administrative capacity, as Münster was regarded as a city that was already familiar with the idea of remote work, and thus, the expertise was previously gained and could be used during the pandemic.

Another consideration that should be made is the way in which the media views the digitization of Münster's public sector, especially during the COVID pandemic. While digital services are provided, not all forms and documents can be submitted or requested online. Mergel et al. in 2019 argue that digitization also affects organizations and changes their culture and general mindset toward their objective. The change of mindset is portrayed in the media during a discussion about offering more public employees to work from home and their generally positive view on the provision of work from home during the pandemic. In the same article., the authors also discuss how a change in administration is a direct result of the external environment. Thus, in times of rapid social change, the public sectors have more incentives to offer digital services. In this case, the COVID-19 pandemic is clearly a time of rapid change, and in response, the public sector needs to provide the means to offer services online. As stated in the analysis, the city of Münster offers the most used services online but needs to provide even more services digitally in the future. This goes along with Mergel et al. argument that digital transformation is a continuous process that needs ongoing technology and skills of the public sector.

These are two considerations crucial to answer the main research question. Local media portray the capacity, specifically the administrative capacity, to be sufficient. Most articles that regard

work-from-home arrangements and opportunities during the pandemic describe Münsters' administration to be quick to adapt to the changes brought forward by the pandemic and able to provide the necessary technological resources. They also portray the health sector as suffering from a lack of employees and often report on the personal well-being of public employees. An area in that local news views to be lacking is the consideration for personal circumstances that make remote work more difficult. According to local news, digital services are present and effective. However, there need to be more services provided digitally. Noticeably, the analyzed newspapers do not view the local government of Münster at fault but rather argue that Germany's national lack of digitization policies is to blame. To conclude, local news media generally portray the city of Münster as a good facilitator for digitization and remote work opportunities, with some lack of administrative capacity that needs to be built in the future.

This research highlights the importance of assessing local administrative capacity with local news media as they provide a basis for policymakers to assess and evaluate their performance. Research on local administrative capacity or digitization process has been limited, and thus, this paper offers valuable insight regarding the challenges local administrations specifically face. One of those challenges that are crucial to Germany's political landscape is the fact that while local administrations must implement policies made on a national or state level, they are also in the position to receive resources from the state or national government. While this is not unique to Germany, especially in the COVID pandemic, it meant that local policymakers had enough resources and were able to successfully implement the policies. Another insight from this research is that local governments must constantly build (administrative) capacity to keep up with the digitization of the public sector. The city of Münster is a good example to highlight the importance of researching local administrations of moderately sized citizens. Capitals and so-called smart cities have previously been researched in many areas, as they commonly have advanced technologies and the resources to provide most services online (Vasilev & Ognjanski, 2020). While this is valuable research, it is also crucial to focus on smaller cities that are not commonly the focus of the researcher. By focusing on a moderately sized city, practical insights on how to facilitate digitization on a local level surfaced that may differ from smart cities or other already digitized cities.

There are three practical implications that can be drawn from this research. Firstly, local municipalities and cities need to provide more digital public services. Providing more online services can be done by getting the necessary resources from the state or national level. Creating national or statewide policies that support digitization at the local level can further aid local governments and their plan to expand digital services. Secondly, in order to provide more effective remote work arrangements, local public organizations need to be aware that different personal circumstances result in different experiences between remote workers. As a response, public organizations should offer different

resources for different employees, depending on their own unique situations. Lastly, policymakers need to start considering news coverage as a tool to evaluate their policy implementation and public performance. In this content analysis, it became clear that news outlets have the potential to offer new and complex insights regarding the capacity of local administrations as well as offer evaluations on current policies and digitization efforts. While news coverage should not be the only means to evaluate public performance, it can be a helpful tool among others.

6.2 Discussion

This research design has strengths and weaknesses. The first strength is that the data is derived from local newspapers directly, and theories are applied to the specific context and city of Münster. Therefore, this research has a higher chance of offering practical information about local governments. Another strength stems from the research method. Content analysis is a good tool when the aim is to describe and interpret written texts. In this case, the analysis brought more meaning to the articles as certain themes and theories were found without them being explicitly stated.

One weakness that stemmed from time constraints is the fact that only three different online news sources were used. However, there are more local online news sources, some only accessible with a membership or subscription. If these articles were included in this analysis, the results from this analysis could change, depending on the content of the articles. Moreover, by including more articles in the analysis, a more in depths and accurate analysis of the city of Münster as a facilitator for digitization could be given. Furthermore, it could have also resulted in slightly different outcomes of the analysis. Additionally, the newspapers were selected because of their large number of public articles, but articles that need to be accessed via membership or subscription may also offer the same amount, if not more, insight into the topic, as the public availability does not speak for the quality of the articles nor the information they contain.

In many articles, the role of the state or national government, as well as their policies, were mentioned and used to explain the lack of Münsters' online services. Yet, these policies were not included in the analysis, and thus the only context given was in the articles by the local newspapers included in the analysis. This could weaken the results of the analysis, as the overall context was not considered. One weakness that comes up when conducting a content analysis is whether the interpretation is accurate and a reflection of what the author truly meant when writing their text. The online articles were all interpreted to varying degrees and proven with translated quotes and general references, yet it cannot be certain that this interpretation is in line with the authors of those analyses.

For future research, there are many aspects of this research that could be focused on. One

idea for future research is the comparison of different mid-sized cities and their administrative role in facilitating digitization within and outside of Germany. This could lead to valuable outcomes for local policymakers. Another area that could be studied in more depth is the potential discrepancy or harmony between local media outlets and the visions made by local policymakers. This could be done by looking for documents or plans to digitize a certain city and comparing that with the way local news portrays this. A comparison of these two could offer interesting outcomes and examine the relationship between local policymakers and local media outlets more closely.

To conclude, this research aimed to describe how the local online newspaper of Münster viewed the public sector of the city and its ability to facilitate digitization, specifically remote work opportunities between 2021 and 2023, and offer some interpretation of the analyzed articles. Thus, a social and scientific contribution was made to close the knowledge gap of how local news evaluates and assesses the performance of policymakers and their policies during the COVID pandemic.

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Appendix

1.1 List of Analyzed Articles

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- Gewerkschaften wollen Homeoffice-Kontrollen.* (21. 01 2021). Retrived from Münstersche Zeitung: <https://www.muensterschezeitung.de/nachrichten/wirtschaft/gewerkschaften-wollen-homeoffice-kontrollen-1084309?pid=true> abgerufen
- Hohe Corona-Zahlen: Stadtwerke bleiben vorsichtig.* (13. 04 2022). Retrived from Münstersche Zeitung: <https://www.muensterschezeitung.de/lokales/staedte/muenster/hohe-corona-zahlen-stadtwerke-bleiben-vorsichtig-2557517> abgerufen
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1.2 Coding Scheme

Themes	Code example	Theoretical Framework
<i>Digitization</i>	“The city of Münster already offers a few services online, but by far not all. It is understandable that big cities like Hamburg have more personnel and resources in the IT-department and that they are more advanced than Münster. Still, there are cities comparable to Münster, like Bonn, that show more speed in the digitization of their public administration services.” (Biederstädt, 2021 [Transl. 8])	Mergel et al. Digitization of the public sector
<i>Capacity</i>	“We try as best as we can to enable work from home. The state supported us well with laptops and other things. In addition, we support colleagues in the security services from the city’s district in monitoring the compliance with the COVID protection Ordinance.” (Bührke, 2021 [Transl. 9])	Administrative capacity according to Nellison and El-Taliawi et al.
<i>Remote Work</i>	“Many employees from Münster have experienced work from home during the COVID pandemic. Many are happy, but something was missing for most.” (Völler, 2022 [Transl. 10])	Not applicable
<i>COVID Context</i>	“In the hospitals, 588 employees are currently not able to work because of COVID” (Anger, 2022 [Transl. 11])	Not applicable

1.3 List of Translated Quotes

Translation Number	Translation	Original
1	"Two years of the covid pandemic have turned society upside down. Nationwide work from home has drastically changed the work process and decision-making structures in companies."	Zwei Jahre Corona-Pandemie haben die Gesellschaft auf den Kopf gestellt. Flächendeckendes Homeoffice hat in Betrieben Arbeits- und Entscheidungsstrukturen verändert (Höller, 2022)
2	"Lack of personnel freezes more and more public services"	Personalmangel legt immer mehr Bereiche lahm (Baumeister et al., 2022)
3	"The right to work from home is an unnecessary obligation"	Das Recht auf Homeoffice ist ein unnötiger Zwang (Stilling, 2022)
4	"Happy with the Office of the Future"	Zufrieden im Büro der Zukunft (Alles Münster, 2021)
5	"COVID has given our houses a boost in digitization, which we aim to use even after the pandemic."	Corona hat unseren Häusern einen Digitalisierungsschub verpasst, den wir auch nach der Pandemie nutzen wollen (Alles Münster, 2021)
6	"The digitalization of services provided by the administration follow a strategy that is based on the relevance of a service for the citizens and companies"	Die Digitalisierung der Verwaltungsleistungen folgt in Münster der Strategie, dass sich die Umsetzungsreihenfolge der Dienstleistungen an der Relevanz einer Leistung für die Bürgerinnen und Bürger und Unternehmen orientiert (Biederstädt, 2022)
7	"The rattling of fax machines in German offices is a result of sleeping on digital policies at a federal level"	Das Rattern der Faxgeräte in deutschen Amtsstuben ist Ausdruck jahrelang verschlafener Digitalpolitik auf Bundesebene (Biederstädt, 2022)
8	"The city of Münster already offers a few services online, but by far not all. It is understandable that big cities like Hamburg have more personnel and resources in the IT-department and that they are more advanced than Münster. Still, there are cities comparable to Münster, like Bonn, that show more speed in the digitization of their public administration services."	Die Stadt Münster bietet bereits einige Services online an, aber längst nicht alle. Dass Großstädte wie Hamburg mit viel mehr Personalressourcen in der IT-Abteilung Münster voraus sind, ist nachvollziehbar. Doch es gibt auch vergleichbare Städte wie etwa Bonn, die zeigen, dass mehr Tempo bei der Digitalisierung von Verwaltungsleistungen möglich ist. (Biederstädt, 2022)

9	<p>“We try as best as we can to enable work from home. The state supported us well with laptops and other things. In addition, we support colleagues in the security services from the city’s district in monitoring the compliance with the COVID protection Ordinance.”</p>	<p>Außerdem versuchen wir so gut es geht, Homeoffice zu ermöglichen. Dabei hat uns das Land gut mit Laptops und anderen Dingen unterstützt. Darüber hinaus unterstützen wir die Kollegen im Wach- und Wechseldienst oder auch vom Bezirksdienst der Stadt bei der Überwachung der Einhaltung der Cornaschutzverordnung (Bührke, 2021)</p>
10	<p>“Many employees from Münster have experienced Work from home during the COVID pandemic. Many are happy, but something was missing for most.”</p>	<p>Viele Erwerbstätige aus Münster haben in der Zeit der Corona-Pandemie Erfahrungen im Homeoffice gemacht. Viele sind zufrieden, aber etwas hat doch den meisten gefehlt. Das geht aus dem aktuellen Münster-Barometer hervor. (Völker, 2022)</p>
11	<p>“In the hospitals, 588 employees are currently not able to work because of COVID”</p>	<p>In den Krankenhäusern sind zurzeit 588 Mitarbeiter coronabedingt nicht im Dienst (Anger, 2022)</p>