



Methods and Experiences on Measuring Local Democracy *Survey on Local Democracy – by KS in Norway*

The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) is conducting a survey with the aim to measure the quality of local democracy in local governments in Norway. **60 municipalities have conducted the survey so far - more than 17 000 citizens and close to 1400 elected councillors.** The purpose is primarily for the municipalities to use the results from the survey in their efforts to increase the quality of the local democracy. In addition, summarized results give a picture of the status of the democracy at local level in Norway.

Local democracy is characterised along four dimensions on which the questionnaire is based:

- Reliability– have citizens trust in the council?
- Accountability – can the citizens keep a check on the council?
- Citizens involvement – are citizens heard by the council?
- Efficiency – what do citizens get back from the council – the standard of the services?

The survey is developed in close cooperation with experts at the University of Oslo, and linked to the Council of Europe's 12 principles for good governance. The citizens are asked 14 questions and the elected councillors receive the same questions. They are also asked additional questions about their work and experiences in the municipal council.

This is the third time KS offers the survey; comparable surveys were conducted in 2010 and in 2014 – that means once every election period. We will continue to offer the survey every fourth year ahead. We have some preliminary results from 54 municipalities. The methodology used is the following: the citizens are asked to consider an assertion along a scale - if they agree or disagree. Then we summarize and it shows if they have a positive or negative view.

Some of the main findings: there is a gap between the citizens and the councillors' view, the councillors are more content with the state of democracy than what the citizens are. And, as expected elder people are more happy than the younger. Regarding the four dimensions: the overall picture is that citizens have a positive view when it comes to the degree of *accountability* and *efficiency*. On the other hand, they have a more negative view about the degree of *reliability* and of *citizens involvement*. The last point is of special interest because there was also a negative response on this in earlier surveys.

That is the reason why KS and others have stressed the necessity and potential that lies in citizens participation, by publishing guides, tools and so on. This year's survey does not show any clear impact yet. It must however be taken into account that the citizens in each survey is a random sample, that means the survey is not following the same group of respondents. The idea is that the municipalities themselves go deeper into their own results. They are the best to explain the overall picture and to decide what to do next. For municipalities experiencing a merging process for instance, the survey can be a very useful tool when planning the future municipality.

KS has developed a useful framework for measuring the local democracy that can easily be adopted by others. Ukrainian municipalities have twice conducted a survey close to ours. Others might have other methods or ideas. **We wish we could share methods and experiences** among us - to bring the crucial work to increase and strengthen the quality of local government one step further.

By Lise Spikkeland, special adviser in KS