Citizens’ evaluations of local democracy: 
Does the organization of local government make a difference?

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Abstract

Developments observed in many countries have served to place concerns about the quality of local democracy on the political and academic agendas of many observers and commentators in recent years. Declining electoral participation and party membership, difficulties in finding people who are willing to stand for elected political office, and indications of declining confidence and trust in political leaders are among the «symptoms» which have led many to raise critical questions about the health of local democracy and the undertaking of various efforts to find answers to how local democracy can be (re)vitalized. Norway is no exception in this regard. The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) has made local democracy one of several prioritized areas of work in recent years, and recently commissioned a research project entitled “The secret of success – What characterizes municipalities with good democratic governance” with the intent of identifying conditions associated with positive citizen evaluations of local democratic governance. This paper is a spin-off of the project. Data from citizen surveys, a data base regarding characteristics of municipal service delivery and political organization, and official statistics are combined in an investigation of how citizen evaluations of conditions pertaining to the character of local democracy in the municipalities in which they live may vary due to differences in the local political-administrative context. Special emphasis is placed on municipal size, the demographic composition of the population, local system capacity and selected organizational initiatives at the local level and how these factors may be related to the aggregate evaluations of citizens living in the municipality in question.

Results suggest that municipal size appears to have a statistically significant direct effect on citizen evaluations for two of the four dimensions of local democracy investigated (reliable and citizen-oriented or responsive governance) even after controlling for other factors, and a similar direct effect which approaches statistical significance for the two other dimensions (accountable and effective governance). The relationship is negative for all four dimensions: positive evaluations decline with increasing municipal size. A countervailing positive indirect effect of size is found however. This effect occurs insofar as larger municipalities exhibit a stronger tendency to adopt various information initiatives directed at their inhabitants and adoption of these initiatives have a systematically positive effect on citizens’ evaluations on all four dimensions. Municipal population size is also strongly related to measures of the demographic composition of the population and system capacity. But there is no evidence to suggest that demographic composition has an impact on citizens’ evaluations, and the effect of system capacity (as measured by a fiscal indicator) is mixed, being negative with respect to citizens’ evaluation of responsive governance and positive with respect to evaluations of effective governance. While not guaranteeing success for local authorities looking to improve their standing in the eyes of their residents, externally oriented information initiatives would seem to be worth considering.
Citizens’ evaluations of local democracy:
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Introduction

If positive citizen evaluations of the quality of local democracy are the goal, then how should local government be organized and operated? Is direct democracy of Athenian vintage most appropriate or is some form of indirect, representative democracy a better alternative, not only for practical reasons highlighted by John Stuart Mill (1861) and others, but for normative reasons as well (see, for example, Manin 1997)? Or perhaps the two alternatives can be combined in a beneficial fashion? Who, furthermore, should be eligible to participate in democratic local government, and what rules of decision making should apply under either alternative? Should a simple majority suffice or should a conditional majority of a larger proportion be required to carry the day? What about the size of local government units, and with what authority should they be vested in order to enhance perceptions of the quality of local democracy?

The list of questions can be extended ad infinitum. These are questions, moreover, which – as Dahl and Tufte (1973) appropriately note in their seminal work Size and Democracy – have exercised the minds of scholars and public sector reformers since antiquity. But in recent years a confluence of various factors has served to heighten interest in these questions. Straining public budgets and a desire to achieve administrative efficiency, declining voter turnout (cf. CoR 2001; Franklin 2004; Pinter & Gratschew 2004; Wattenberg 2002) combined with a drop in political party membership (cf. van Biezen et al. 2012) and difficulties reported in recruiting candidates willing to stand for local office, as well an apparent decline in public confidence in political actors and institutions in many countries (cf. Norris 1999; Putnam & Pharr 2000), have led many – laymen, political pundits, public authorities and scholars alike – to look more closely at government organization. The size of political-administrative units, and the related issues of how public responsibilities are to be assigned and financed have in particular attracted attention, often without much heed being given to the consequences reforms may have for the quality of local democracy. Approaches to these matters are many, and not all of the answers offered on the basis of academic

1 An earlier version of this paper, with a slightly different emphasis, was presented at the 1st International Conference on Public Policy, Grenoble, France, 26 - 28 June 2013. The authors wish to thanks participants in the panel “The Relationship between Size and Local Democracy?” as well as Jo Saglie for helpful comments regarding the earlier version.
research or practical policy processes coincide (see e.g. Baldersheim & Rose 2010b; Swianiewicz 2010a, 2010b).

Several considerations contribute to making more definitive answers to the fundamental question elusive. One consideration, for example, has to do with the meaning and measurement of size, a matter which on the surface seems quite simple, but given further thought is anything but straightforward. Another consideration has to do with the meaning and measurement of local democracy, an even more convoluted issue. Further complicating the matter are uncertainties about the interrelationships that may exist among important variables and the lack of reliable data, particularly of a comparative cross-national character, that permit more systematic investigations of the relationships involved.

The present paper does not resolve these issues once and for all. It does not untie the proverbial Gordian knot regarding an optimal size for local authorities in order to maximize citizen effectiveness and system capacity – two central dimensions of democracy identified by Dahl and Tufte. Nor does it offer a recipe for assuring that citizens are satisfied with the way in which local democracy functions in their own local municipality. Rather the paper seeks to explore what implications, if any, the ways in which municipalities in Norway have opted to organize and operate local government may have for citizen evaluations of local democracy. In doing so the paper draws upon several types of data pertaining to Norwegian municipalities. These data are described in greater detail subsequently, but before this we undertake a short discussion of our analytical perspective and the theoretical arguments upon which it is based. Then the data and our empirical results are presented before the paper concludes with a brief summary statement.

**Local government and local democracy – a policy perspective**

As Aars has noted (2012:401) just what responsibility municipal governments have for promoting local democracy is a question in its own right. Most, if not all, of the provisions under which local government is established and operates are based on decisions made at the national level. As a policy issue the structure of local government, and hence municipal size, is an obvious example in this respect. Local authorities in Norway do not have the option of redrawing the political-administrative map on their own. To be sure, they are able to initiate processes by which political-administrative units are amalgamated or perhaps split up, but the procedures by which this occurs and the final decisions on restructuring are taken by national policy makers. Thus, current policy provisions permit municipalities and counties to submit a proposal for changes in the political-administrative map. Before a proposal can be sent to central authorities for consideration, however, it has to be endorsed by the local council and residents of the effected units must be given an opportunity to voice their opinion – something that has most typically been done by means of popular referenda. Since this “voluntary amalgamation policy” was adopted (quite spontaneously!) by the Norwegian parliament in 1995 (cf. Baldersheim & Rose 2010a:87-90), these procedures have been led to a number of proposals, but most have been defeated in local referenda (cf. Klausen &
The net result has been only a marginal reduction in the number of municipalities, from 435 in 1995 to 428 at present.

Municipal size, in short, is not readily manipulated by policy decisions at the local level. The same applies to many other considerations that have consequences for how municipalities are organized and operate as arenas of local democracy. In Norway, for instance, provisions for holding local elections – the dates of elections as well as stipulations relating to candidacy and voter eligibility – are all determined at the national level. Local authorities have some discretion in determining the number of representatives to be elected and what kind of local government is to be practised – either an alderman or a parliamentary form of government for example – but rules governing the options are adopted at the national level. The same is true with respect to dispensations from the general rules and regulations that apply to local elections – for example trials with directly elected mayors (cf. Buck et al. 2005), a lowered 16-year old age limit for voting rights in municipal elections (cf. Ødegård et al. 2013), use of internet voting (cf. Karlsen et al. 2005; Segaard et al. 2013a, 2013b) or holding municipal elections on a separate day (cf. Skålnes 2005). All of these practices have been tried, but only under conditions approved at the national level.

This is not to say that municipalities are without any discretionary room to manoeuvre and implement policy decisions regarding how they are organized and operate. One of the primary changes occurring in connection with revision of the law on local government in 1992 was in fact a move away from a relatively rigid system of national stipulations regarding standardized organizational solutions. Emphasis at the national level has rather been placed on determining the specific responsibilities and objectives of local government activity while at the same time granting municipalities greater freedom to decide upon how these responsibilities and objectives can be realized and what internal organizational alternatives may be best suited for the purpose (cf. Larsen & Offerdal 2000). Thus, local governments are obliged to provide a variety of social and technical services to their residents, but they now have greater choice in deciding how this will be accomplished. This discretionary authority extends well beyond decisions relating to service provision in a narrow sense. It includes a wide spectrum of issues that serve to shape the “organizational interface” which citizens confront in dealing with municipal authorities – both political and administrative. Although Norwegian municipalities do not enjoy unrestrained autonomy, in other words, they do possess substantial freedom to adopt organizational measures that may influence how citizens evaluate local government from both a service provision and democratic perspective.

The central question addressed in this article, therefore, is how Norwegian municipalities have utilized this freedom and whether or not there is reason to believe that the organizational choices made by local governments have an impact on how citizens evaluate the quality of local democracy in their own municipality? There are good reasons for focusing on this question. One such reason highlighted by Aars (2012:389-90) is that municipalities have an
important role as potential pathfinders and initiators of renewal with respect to service delivery and organizational solutions in the public sector. This role as policy reformers serves to broaden the playing field, increasing the arena of innovation and spreading the risk of trying new approaches. Identifying the consequences of alternative organizational practices – whether they be economic, democratic or otherwise – is an obvious implication of this situation. Positive consequences may be worthy of emulation, whereas negative consequences should presumably be avoided. At a practical level this perspective has been adopted by the KS (Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities in a program whereby they have commissioned a research project entitled “The secret of success – What characterizes municipalities with good democratic governance” (cf. Winsvold 2013). The purpose of this project is to investigate conditions associated with positive citizen evaluations of local democratic governance. At the international level, the Council of Europe has undertaken a related effort designed to assess and promote good local governance (cf. Council of Europe 2007; Rose 2012). That such efforts have broader implications, moreover, has been argued by Vetter (2002, 2007) who notes that municipalities may be an important source of public legitimacy, a source that can be beneficial for national as well as local levels of government.

**An analytical model**

The question, in short, is what policy options do Norwegian local governments have that may contribute to positive assessments of local democratic governance in the minds of their own residents. As already noted, there is little reason to consider municipal size as a local policy instrument. Any effect of municipal or county size for citizen perceptions of local democracy must be sought in conditions that are subject to some degree of manipulation at the local level or, alternatively, are a function of size in their own right. In either case it is important that the (theoretical) grounds for expecting an effect of size should, to the extent possible, be specified (a priori) and then subject to empirical analysis. The same is true with respect to other contextual factors – various organizational measures being among them. Merely being able to point to the existence of a *bivariate empirical relationship* is only half the story. More critical is an understanding of why there may be a relationship: what are the mechanisms by which municipal size or other organizational characteristics may have some effect on how local democracy operates and is experienced by local residents.

The challenge here can be readily illustrated with respect to municipal size. As a point of departure it can be argued that for many aspects of local democracy there is no significance

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2 This paper is a spin-off of the project.
4 The exception here may be the creation of neighborhood councils or other bodies of local self-determination below the municipal level, but these merely shift the focal point of the analysis, not of the gist of the issue, particularly if the primary concern is with forms of local government having a relatively broad spectrum of responsibilities.
of size in its own right. It is only due to the consequences of size for some set of intervening factors that size may be relevant for citizen evaluations of local democracy. An example of this is found in Figure 1. As is evident in this figure, size per se is not the direct cause of (citizen perceptions of the) responsiveness of local leaders; size is rather only indirectly the cause of such perceptions. If any indication of an empirical effect of size remains after controlling for these or other intervening factors, the relationship is presumably most likely to be a result of the effects of size transmitted indirectly by way of other factors. In this sense it may be most accurate to speak of an unspecified residual or perhaps spurious effect.

Figure 1. An example of claims regarding the significance of size as a result of two complementary (and consistent) indirect effects *

Legend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Effect</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predicted positive effect</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicted negative effect</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


With this point of departure, in the work reported here we seek to identify and explore the significance of several contextual factors at the local level in Norway for which empirical evidence is available. The basic analytical model employed is found in Figure 2. As the model suggests, our investigation is limited to factors measured at the aggregate (municipal) level. This is not to imply that individual factors such as gender, age, education, and so forth do not play a role in how citizens may evaluate local democracy in their own local authority. On the contrary, extant research is rich with findings relating to the relevance of various individual factors. At this point, however, our primary interest is to elaborate the significance

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5 One possible exception to this assertion has to do with local authorities that are very small, in which case the impact of any single person’s behavior or attitudes may be more noteworthy. But as the debate over the rationality of voting makes clear, the likelihood of any one individual’s vote being determinant drops rapidly as the size of the electoral district (or local authority) increases (cf. Riker & Ordeshook 1968 for a classic statement of the logic involved here).

6 Figure 1 draws upon work in progress reported in Denters et al. (2012).
of contextual factors, some of which local authorities may be able to manipulate through local policy decisions.

Figure 2. A general analytical model for exploring the significance of size for citizen evaluations of local democracy

Two additional remarks are in order with respect to the model found in Figure 2. First, although the relationship between size and demographic characteristics is depicted with a straight line, the intent is not to suggest that this is a causal relationship. The intention is merely to indicate the possible existence of empirical relationships which are of a non-causal character, but which are nonetheless appropriate to identify and consider in the analysis inasmuch as they may contribute to some form of compositional effect.\(^7\) For instance the age distribution of the population living in municipalities of different sizes may vary in a more or less systematic fashion without it being possible to argue for a direct causal relationship. Young people may cluster in certain locations in connection with secondary and higher education, but whether this varies from one municipality to another is likely to be more dependent upon where educational institutions are located than municipal size per se. Likewise the proportion of immigrants living in different municipalities may be more a function of the availability of alternative housing options than of municipal size per se.

Second, the arrows in Figure 2 are shown without an indication of sign relating to the direction of the expected relationships. The reason for this is that the components shown in the model are of a more generic character for which a number of different empirical indicators may be used for analytical purposes, not all of which may have an impact of the same directional character. With respect to system capacity, for example, at least two

\(^7\) One example of the significance of compositional effects and the (mis)interpretations to which they may contribute is found in discussions around findings regarding the relationship between community size and subjective political competence initially reported by Almond and Verba (1963) and subsequent re-analyses reported by Nie et al. (1969), Finifter (1970) and Finifter and Abramson (1975).
indicators are self-evident: gross municipal income per capita on the one hand and the number of full-time employee equivalents per capita on the other. Both presumably reflect relative municipal capacity, but their impact may differ. Likewise there is a plethora of indicators relating to organizational measures which can be used, not all of which can be argued to have the same impact on citizen evaluations of local democracy. Given this situation, the sign of the relationships in the model is contingent upon the specific indicators in question and the theoretical arguments that can be made with respect to them. To designate a sign without taking this into consideration would be misleading and counterproductive. The model presented in Figure 2, in short, is intended to provide a general framework for organizing our inquiry and should be taken as a heuristic device for charting the factors that may explain citizen evaluations of local democracy. More specific theoretical expectations are briefly explicated after the following section.

Analysis strategy, data sources and variables selected

As suggested by the discussion above, our analyses focus on municipalities as the unit of analysis. The principal question is what, if anything, municipalities can do that may have some impact on how citizens evaluate the quality of local democracy. A subsidiary albeit important question is whether there is any indication that what municipalities have done (or can do) is contingent upon municipal size.

In pursuing these questions data are drawn from three different data sources. The first is the Regional Database established and maintained by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD – see http://www.nsd.uib.no/nsd/english/regionaldata.html). This database contains a wealth of data containing at present more than 300,000 variables, mostly regarding municipalities, covering multiple years, and it continues to grow. Demographic data, education and employment data, fiscal data, and political data are just some of the broad categories for which more detailed data are available.

A second source is the Organizational Database, a database regarding municipal organization created by the Norwegian Institute of Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) at the behest of the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Affairs (KRD – Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet in Norwegian). The data base was originally established in 1995 by means of a survey carried out among all Norwegian municipalities. Since 2000 similar surveys have been conducted every four years, most recently in 2012. The purpose of the surveys has been to gather data pertaining to political and administrative organization and management at the municipal and county levels. The database is also available via the Norwegian Social Science Data Services. Whereas the Regional Database mentioned above draws upon official statistical registries and contains complete information on all municipal and county units existing at any given time, the Organizational Database is less complete inasmuch as it depends upon voluntary cooperation from the political-administrative units.

8 See http://www.nsd.uib.no/nsddata/serier/kommunalorganisering.html
involved. In the present paper we draw upon data from the 2008 survey in which there is data for 334 municipalities.

The third source of data is a Local Democracy Database created by KS with financial support from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Affairs. This database is the result of an extended effort by KS focusing on conditions of local democracy and a desire to establish a means for municipalities to gain greater insight into how citizens and politicians view the quality of local democracy in their own municipalities.\(^9\) The database consists of survey responses from over 25,000 residents in 91 municipalities to a short set of questions asked in telephone interviews in 2010 and 2011.\(^{10}\) For the present paper citizen evaluations of local democracy have been measured by using the mean values of all respondents living within each municipality.

For purposes of the analyses reported here data from all three sources have been merged into a single data file. Inasmuch as municipalities constitute our unit of analysis and the Local Democracy Database is limited to 91 of the 430 municipalities existing at the time of data collection, our analyses must necessarily focus on the subset of 91 rather than the entire population of municipalities. Table 1 contains distribution statistics for both the universe of 430 and the subset of 91 municipalities. A comparison of these statistics indicates that the subset of 91 is on average somewhat larger than the entire population of municipalities. This is due to the fact that the smallest municipalities in Norway are numerically underrepresented; those with a population of less than 5000 residents comprise nearly 55 per cent of all municipalities, but only 46 per cent of the subset of 91.\(^{11}\) The smaller municipalities are nonetheless well represented in the subset and geographically dispersed. In light of this and a comparison of other measures found in Table 1 we have grounds to believe that results from the analyses presented in this paper offer a reasonably valid picture of conditions existing in Norway at the time of data collection.

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\(^9\) For a more detailed account relating to the work of KS and creation of the Local Democracy Database see Rose (2012).

\(^{10}\) The number of residents interviewed in each municipality depended on the population size of the municipality. In the smallest municipalities 150 were interviewed while in the largest municipalities 400 were interviewed. For most municipalities, however, the number was either 250 or 300.

\(^{11}\) For an indication of the distribution of municipalities in Norway by population size, see Table 12.2 in Baldersheim and Rose (2011:286). The largest municipality – Oslo, the country’s capital – is not in the subset of 91, but Bergen, the second largest municipality is.
Table 1.  A comparison of distribution statistics for a “sample” of 91 municipalities and the total population of 430 using selected variables, 2009-10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Population size</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>586860</td>
<td>11298</td>
<td>34092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>256600</td>
<td>16265</td>
<td>33126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• % non-western immigrants</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• % elementary education</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• % young and elderly</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unemployment rate</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No. of full-time government employees per 100 residents</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Net income per capita (NOK)</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>210.9</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>210.9</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The choice of variables employed in our analyses has to a large extent been determined by the data available. As for our dependent variable, the citizen surveys contained a set of 11 statements which were designed to tap four central dimensions of good democratic governance: (1) reliable governance, (2) accountable governance, (3) responsive governance, and (4) effective governance respectively. These dimensions are found in much of the relevant literature as well as in various international (local) democracy assessment schemes (see, for example, Beetham 2004; Beetham, et al. 2002, 2008; Council of Europe 2007; Kaufman et al. 2008; UNDP 2007). Table 2 (found on the next page) contains the list of the eight items chosen to operationalize these dimensions in our analyses. For dimensions with several items composite indices were created based on the mean scores of the items in question.

The choice of variables regarding organizational measures, or what might be considered strategic organizational initiatives adopted by local authorities, was much more open. The surveys on which the organizational data base rest were designed to tap a broad spectrum of organizational reform efforts and activities, and did so using questions and categories which

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12 For an account relating to the development of these indicators and identification of the dimensions they represent, see Baldersheim and Rose (2009) and Rose (2012). How these dimensions are understood and viewed by politicians interviewed in case study municipalities as well as the validity and adequacy of the indicators chosen to operationalize the dimensions is discussed in greater detail in chapter 5 of Winsvold 2013.

13 Based on an assessment of content validity only eight of the original eleven items asked in the citizen surveys are used here.

14 As measured by Cronbach’s alpha the internal reliability of the indices is 0. 52 for reliable governance, 0.61 for accountable governance, and 0.72 for responsive governance.
could be interpreted in different fashions. The items ultimately selected can be grouped under the following five headings: (1) goal- and performance oriented management initiatives, (2) external information initiatives, (3) internet-based initiatives, (4) user-oriented initiatives, and (5) direct democracy initiatives. These are all areas of reform initiatives for which it is possible to find similar efforts in many European countries (see, for example, Baldersheim & Øgård 2011; Denters & Rose 2005; Kersting & Vetter 2003). The items chosen and combined to create composite indices for each category are found in the methodological appendix to this paper.

Table 2. Questions used as indicators of four dimensions of local democracy.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability governance:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In this municipality elected officials do not misuse their power for personal advantage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a rule, elected officials in this municipality can be trusted to keep their promises.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accountable governance:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This municipality does a good job in informing citizens about issues on the local political agenda.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This municipality does a good job in informing citizens about what taxpayers get for their money.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsive governance:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In this municipality elected officials take the opinions of residents into account.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this municipality elected officials are good at explaining their decisions to residents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to influence municipal decisions which are of interest to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective governance:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the whole, I am quite satisfied with the services offered by the municipality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* There were five response categories for each item. The alternatives – which ranged from “applies very well” to “applies very poorly” as well as a “no opinion” category – indicated how well the respondent felt the statement in question applied to conditions existing in their own municipality.

Finally, variables found in the Regional Database bank which could be used as indicators relating to the demographic composition and system capacity of municipalities were also plentiful. Inasmuch as the number of municipalities used in the analysis limited statistical degrees of freedom, however, it was appropriate to use a restricted set of measures which offered a reasonable degree of content validity and relevance for our research questions. The choice was most obvious for system capacity where central indicators of municipal resources – both human and fiscal – were selected. With respect to demographic factors, on the other

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15 Aars (2012) uses a somewhat similar, albeit more restricted, set of indicators in his investigation.
hand, a decision was made to emphasize characteristics that could be interpreted as giving rise to significant municipal challenges and which therefore could, depending on how the municipality handled these challenges, arguably have some impact on citizen evaluations of local democracy. The indicators chosen are also described in greater detail in the methodological appendix.

**Theoretical expectations**

As suggested in connection with our discussion of Figure 2 above, we do not consider it plausible to suggest a direct causal relation between municipal size and citizens’ evaluations of local democracy. The effect of size, if any, should occur due to relationships between size and various intervening variables that may be influenced by size – examples of which are demographic composition, system capacity and organizational measures adopted by municipalities depicted in our model. It is reasonable to expect, for instance, that larger municipalities are places where there will be a higher concentration of immigrant groups from non-western countries and that these individuals, for a variety of reasons, may have different expectations and perceptions regarding local democracy than native citizens and others with a background that provides greater familiarity with local democratic self-government. A concentration of immigrant groups in a municipality may also affect the evaluations of native born citizens. Some people may, for instance, react positively or negatively to the local government’s handling of the changing demographic composition of the municipality. Hence, any effect of municipal size on citizen evaluations of local democracy would in this regard be an indirect effect due to the composition of the population in larger municipalities and tendencies among certain groups to have different views.

Other indirect paths by which municipal size may have some impact on citizen evaluations can also be suggested. Insofar as larger municipalities are places in which many institutions of higher education are located and offer a wider range of employment opportunities than smaller municipalities, for example, one can expect a clustering of people who have completed higher education and who are of working age. At the same time these municipalities may also be those subject to higher levels of unemployment inasmuch as they constitute significant business, industrial and commercial centers that may be more subject to macro-economic fluctuations. If individuals in these groups have any pronounced views of local democracy which deviate from the rest of the population, then again it may be possible to trace an indirect effect of municipal size, an effect that can be attributed to the demographic composition of residents in municipalities of different sizes.

Similar arguments can be suggested with respect to considerations regarding the system capacity of municipalities of different size. In absolute terms larger municipalities will virtually always have more employees and larger budgets than smaller municipalities, yet once the population base and the effects of national policies of fiscal redistribution are taken into account, the relationship between these measures and municipal population size are likely to be the inverse; capacity as measured by full-time employees and fiscal resources per
capita are likely to decline as a function of increased population size. Whatever the case, if system capacity has an impact on citizen evaluations of local democracy, then the effect of municipal size will again be *indirect*, not direct. And there is good reason to expect that system capacity can in fact have some impact on citizen evaluations due to the quality of municipal services provided and/or to other local organizational measures adopted and implemented, both of which may be a function of municipal resources.\(^{16}\) Just what impact such organizational reforms may have is difficult to predict with any certainty. They may be viewed favourably, unfavourably or perhaps indifferently depending on what they entail. The main point, however, is again the same: municipal size may be relevant for citizen evaluations of local democracy, but the effect is indirect in character, not direct.

Even if considerations of system capacity are set aside, municipal size may be of some consequence for the adoption of organizational reforms. According to precepts of different strands within organizational theory (contingency theory in particular – cf. Donaldson 2001; Mintzberg 1979; Morgen 1986; Pfeffer 1982), organizations often confront a need to adjust and adapt to their environment. Municipal size constitutes an important factor in this regard; larger municipalities may be forced – or at least more readily find it appropriate – to introduce new organizational measures as a means of coping with specific needs and challenges, those associated with the demographic composition of the population being only one example.

Regardless of what may be the basis for their adoption and implementation, there is relatively little research with respect to organizational reforms and their possible significance for citizen evaluations of local democracy.\(^{17}\) Most of the research which has investigated the impact of organizational reforms has looked at other consequences, not how they may have influenced citizen attitudes regarding local democracy per se (see, for example, Baldersheim et al. 2011, chapter 8; Painter & Goodwin 2000; Stoker 1999). Not all reforms have been met with unconditional enthusiasm. Municipal employees and their employee organizations have in particular been sceptical – if not outright hostile – to some of the organizational reforms which are perceived to be inappropriate adaptions to market mechanisms and thinking. For residents more generally some initiatives are likewise perceived (correctly or incorrectly) to be primarily motivated by desires to reduce costs and centralize service production, not a desire to improve conditions for local democracy. Moreover, not all such initiatives are widely known and understood among the public. On the aggregate level, therefore, the consequences of such organizational reform measures for citizen evaluations may be mixed, or perhaps entirely lacking.

\(^{16}\) The underlying argument is that reform activity is likely to be a function of organizational “slack” or resources – a proposition that is central to much of the organizational theory literature. See Cyert & March (1963) for a classic statement in this regard.

\(^{17}\) In his work Aars (2012) concentrates on investigating differences in municipal reform activity using data from the same Organizational Database survey as is used here as well as data from NSD’s Regional Database.
This being said, we would nonetheless suggest that some organizational reforms may logically be expected to have a positive impact on how citizens evaluate certain aspects of local democracy in their own municipalities. Initiatives in direct democracy, to the extent citizens are aware of them and they are perceived favourably, for example, should presumably give rise to more positive responses with respect to measures of responsive governance. The same is true with respect to external information initiatives and citizen evaluation of accountable governance in their own municipality. Likewise regarding internet initiatives (again with a caveat concerning public awareness and satisfaction). Similarly the adoption of goal- and performance management initiatives, if they indeed contribute to improved local government service delivery, should provide the basis for higher aggregate effective governance ratings.

As sketched out here, these expectations are clearly conditioned by several potentially limiting provisos, but they serve to illustrate a general line of reasoning and basis for investigating the potential impact of contextual factors on citizen evaluations of local democracy – not only municipal size, but also other municipal conditions as well. And as argued at the outset, it is these other factors which from a local policy perspective are most interesting in light of what local authorities may do in their own “back yard”. With this we can turn to our empirical analyses and findings.

**Empirical findings**

We begin with a simple bivariate analysis based on the intercorrelation of our various measures, the results of which are presented in Table 3. In reporting our results we provide two levels of statistical significance, one being the normal 0.05 level, the other being a more lenient 0.10 level. The latter more generous level is warranted inasmuch as we operate with a relatively small N, but an N which nevertheless represents over 20 per cent of the population. However we are not inclined to place great emphasis on statistical significance alone since our primary interest is whether or not there is any indication of a empirical relationship which can be interpreted as a causal effect of the contextual factors in question. It should also be noted that in keeping with the argument of Taagepera (1999) we have used a logarithmic transformation of municipal population size in order to limit the leverage that would otherwise be exerted by a few large municipalities in our data.

Looking first at the top row of Table 3, we observe statistically significant relationships between municipal population size and only one of the four dimensions of local democracy – responsive governance – and the relationship is negative: as municipal size increases citizen perceptions of the local government responsiveness decline. Although not statistically significant under the criteria employed, it is interesting to note that the same tendencies are evident with respect to the other three dimensions. On the aggregate, citizen evaluations of the quality of local democracy in their own municipalities appear to decline with increasing size and vice versa or stated in a different fashion, residents in smaller municipalities in
Norway tend to give higher ratings to their local governments than do their fellow citizens living in larger municipalities.\footnote{This is consistent with other findings with respect to municipal size (see, for example, Denters et al. 2012).}

Table 3. Correlations between municipal size, indicators of local democracy, and a selection of possible intervening variables. Pearson’s r

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipal population size (log10)</th>
<th>Reliable governance</th>
<th>Accountable governance</th>
<th>Responsive governance</th>
<th>Effective governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per cent non-western immigrants</td>
<td>0.65**</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent with elementary education only</td>
<td>-0.44**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of young (0-24 years) and elderly (60 years or more) in the population</td>
<td>-0.63**</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.18*</td>
<td>-0.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of full-time government employees per 100 residents</td>
<td>-0.71**</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.18*</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross income per capita</td>
<td>-0.68**</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal- and performance management initiatives</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External information initiatives</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet-initiatives</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-oriented initiatives</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiatives in direct democracy</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the 10%-level
** Significant at the 5%-level

Before turning to results from our multivariate analyses, it is also worth noting the other relationships reported in Table 3. In the first column we observe that there are significant correlations between municipal population size and all of the other contextual variables – demographic and capacity related variables as well as all of the organization reform indices. However the signs of the relationships vary. As anticipated, both the proportion of the population that is of a non-western immigrant background as well as unemployment rates are positively correlated with population size, whereas the proportion of the population with...
limited education and those who tend to be in the dependent (non-working) segment of the population are negatively related to the size of the population.

The two measures of municipal system capacity are also negatively related to population size – indeed quite strongly so. That the number of full-time local government employees declines with increasing population is not particularly surprising. It is consistent with the idea that there may be some efficiencies of scale to be realized with increasing municipal size, particularly in administrative services (see Monkerud & Sørensen 2010). That there should be a nearly equally strong negative relationship between population size and gross municipal income per capital, on the other hand, is perhaps not quite so obvious. In the Norwegian case, however, the explanation is relatively straightforward. The financing of local government is subject to substantial central government control and an elaborate system of redistribution of resources is used in which a number of criteria, including population size, are taken into consideration (see Baldersheim & Rose 2011:290). Smaller municipalities, many of which receive a special “small municipal grant” benefit from this system.

All of the bivariate relationships between municipal population size and the adoption of strategic organizational reforms, by comparison, are positive. As of 2008 larger municipalities were more likely to report having adopted and implemented different reforms than were their smaller counterparts.19 This cannot, it would seem, be attributed to better relative fiscal well-being of larger municipalities.20 We can only speculate that it is rather due either to the fact that such reforms are need-driven or, alternatively, because larger municipalities are more centrally located within networks where such strategic reforms are generated and spread by various diffusion processes. Previous work by Haug (2009) and Aars (2012) support the latter interpretation in particular.

When we otherwise look down the columns in Table 3 and consider the relationships found between the respective contextual variables and the four dimensions of local governance, the picture is more mixed. The only indicator relating to local population characteristics that is significant with respect to citizen evaluations across several dimensions is the local unemployment rate. The relationship is negative in each case: citizen evaluations of the quality of local democracy declines with increased unemployment, and the relationships are statistically significant for all but the reliable governance dimension. That the relationship is negative is perhaps not surprising; higher unemployment rates quite commonly give rise to general sense of disgruntlement, especially among those either directly or indirectly affected. This interpretation, however, is speculative, and one can in any event ask if it is reasonable for citizens to hold local authorities accountable for conditions which tend to be the result of a more macro-economic character. Other than the local unemployment rate, the only other

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19 This is consistent with findings reported by Aars (2012:397) in a multivariate analysis using a composite index based on 20 different indicators of what he considers democratic organizational measures.

20 In the same analyses, Aars (2012) finds no significant effect of another measure of municipal economic capacity, a measure which is referred to as “free income” which reflects municipal revenue that is not earmarked for use according to nationally determined policy decisions.
indicator of local demographic characteristics of any significance is that pertaining to the percent of the population with low education. This indicator, however, is only negatively associated with evaluations of effective governance. In no other instance is a significant relationship to be observed.

By comparison, the two indicators of system capacity show a broader relevance, but are more contingent upon the dimensions of local governance in question. Thus, although they do not achieve statistical significance in all cases, the measures of system capacity are negatively related to citizen evaluations of how well their municipalities rate in terms of reliable and accountable governance, and positively related in terms of responsive and effective governance. That the impact of system capacity appears to differ across the dimensions was not entirely expected. Arguably better capacity should provide not only the basis for better service provision (effective governance) and be conducive to a general sense of citizen satisfaction (responsive governance), but also generally favorable conditions relating to reliable and accountable governance as well. But in the eyes of residents in the municipalities represented in our data, the latter was not the case. The situation was rather the opposite. A more complete understanding of this relationship requires further investigation.

To sum up so far, the picture to emerge from Table 3 regarding the impact of contextual characteristics on citizen evaluations of local democracy in their municipality of residence is not clear-cut and well-defined. With the exception of unemployment rates, the demographic composition of the population is not of more overarching significance, and just why unemployment rates should have an impact at the aggregate level is not readily apparent. Measures of municipal capacity, on the other hand, appear to be of greater relevance for all evaluative dimensions, but the nature of the relationship differs in a somewhat unexpected fashion. The picture, in short, is without distinct contours, being characterized instead by findings in which a simple, well-defined message is lacking. But this is only a first impression, one that is incomplete and not entirely satisfactory given our supposition that there is no theoretical reason to expect such strong direct effects of municipal size on citizen perceptions. To clarify this and to provide a more satisfactory answer as to whether there is a more focused, uniform pattern with respect to the impact of contextual factors on citizen evaluations of local democracy requires multivariate analyses.

In undertaking and reporting our multivariate analyses three simplifying decisions were made in order to avoid the problem of having a small N and too many independent variables. First we decided to set aside two of the four demographic composition variables – per cent “dependent population” (those under 24 years and over 60 years) and per cent unemployed – and focus attention on the remaining two – per cent non-western immigrants and per cent with elementary education. Theoretically these latter two are the most relevant indicators. Second, due to the high intercorrelation between the two system capacity variables (Pearson’s r = 0.91), we also chose to set aside one variable and concentrate attention on gross municipal income per capita in order to avoid the problems of multicollinearity. Finally, rather than
including all five indicators of strategic organizational reforms, we likewise chose to concentrate attention on the indicator of external information reforms which, together with initiatives in direct democracy, are those which arguably are of most direct relevance to the dimensions of local democracy as they are measured in the citizen surveys.

Analyses have been carried out with respect to all four evaluative dimensions regarding local democracy. In each case the analyses have consisted of a set of structural, stepwise regression analyses, the results of which are presented below in four figures. The analyses are based on 91 municipalities only. Coefficients shown in the figures are standardized regression coefficients and again a more lenient two-level designation of statistical significance is used. Rather than commenting up each figure in detail, our discussion of these figures seeks emphasize general tendencies, highlighting more unique elements when this is appropriate.

Figure 3. Reliable governance – path analysis. Standardized regression coefficients (R² = .26)

First, and perhaps most noteworthy, contrary to what we have argued is theoretically plausible, in all four figures there is an indication of a direct relationship between municipal population size and citizen evaluations with respect to the respective dimensions of local democracy of their own municipality. For two dimensions (reliable and responsive government) the relationships are statistically significant whereas for the other two dimensions they are not, but the magnitude of the coefficients nonetheless suggests a
tendency. The relationships, moreover, are of the same character as noted in the bivariate results; they are negative for all four dimensions. As we have previously noted, these relationships should be seen as residual, theoretically unexplained effects of size on citizen evaluations of local democracy. We do not at this point interpret this to mean that size has a direct effect on the citizen evaluations, but rather that there are indirect paths that the effect can take that we have not successfully captured in our model.

Figure 4. Accountable governance – path analysis. Standardized regression coefficients ($R^2 = .17$)

Also common to the empirical results depicted in the figures are the relationships between municipal population size and the other intervening contextual variables – variables relating to demographic composition indicators, municipal system capacity and the indicator of organization reform. Given our specification of the structural equations and use of stepwise regression analysis, this is as expected. The only matter worth mentioning is the fact that the coefficient for the direct relationship between municipal size and municipal adoption of external information initiatives is larger and statistically significant when a more complete data set is used (N = 329).
This same difference is also observed (but not depicted in the figure) when we move to the next step and consider the impact of system capacity on municipal external information reforms: the coefficient between gross income per capita and adoption of these reforms is larger and statistically significant when a data set with 329 municipalities is used. With fewer units of analysis, however, this is not the case. The two measures concerning the demographic composition of the population, on the other hand, do not have a statistically significant impact on municipal adoption of external information reforms, and this is true independent of the number of municipalities which are used in the analyses.

Otherwise the most interesting findings in the figures are those relating to the relative effect of demographic composition variables, system capacity and organizational reform measures on citizen evaluations of the four dimensions of local democracy. Also in this connection the two demographic composition measures are insignificant. System capacity, on the other hand, is statistically significant with respect to two of the four dimensions (reliable and effective governance), albeit in a different fashion, much as was found in the bivariate analyses. In one case, reliable governance, the relationship is negative – something which suggests that the lower the per capita resources available in a municipality the more citizens are likely to have distrusting perceptions of their elected representatives. Can it be that relative municipal
poverty breeds behavior that engenders distrust? With respect to effective governance, however, the relationship is positive, which suggests that more resources provide a basis for more satisfied residents. This is a reasonable and more readily understood proposition. For citizen evaluations of accountable and responsive governance, by comparison, no significant effects of system capacity are to be observed.

Figure 6. Effective governance – path analysis. Standardized regression coefficients ($R^2 = .19$)

Finally we see adoption of external information initiatives have a significant positive effect on citizen evaluations of all four dimensions of local democracy once controls for municipal population size, population composition and system capacity as these are operationalized for our analyses are introduced. From a policy perspective this is a particularly noteworthy finding. For none of the other indices relating to various strategic organizational initiatives and reforms do we find similarly consistent and relatively strong positive effects.

Summary and concluding remarks

In concluding it is appropriate to return to the fundamental questions and arguments which provided the framework for this paper. First, does municipal size have any impact on how citizens evaluate the character of local democracy in the local authorities in which they live, and if so how? Second, are there other contextual factors that are significant with respect to
citizen evaluations and what, if anything, can municipalities do that might have some effect on these evaluations?

The answer to the first question is at best complex, in part because local democracy is itself a multi-faceted phenomenon, and our empirical findings suggest that municipal size may have some impact that varies depending upon the facet or dimension in question. Complicating the answer further is our supposition that any impact is not (logically) direct, but may rather be the result of indirect effects that size has on various intervening factors such as the demographic composition of the populations residing in different municipalities, differences in system capacity which are a function of municipal size, and of organizational measures adopted by municipalities. Empirical findings reported above gave only partial support to this supposition. What may be termed a residual (direct) effect of municipal size remained in the case of citizen evaluations of local government reliability and responsiveness even after controlling for these other intervening considerations – the effect being negative in both instances: increased size was associated with lower citizen evaluations. The strong negative direct effect of size in the case of citizens’ evaluations of reliable governance is particularly noteworthy in light of the existence of a strong positive indirect effect of size via the indicator of local system capacity. The only other statistically significant indirect effect to be observed in the figures presented is that between municipal size citizens’ evaluations of effective governance – a negative indirect effect which also goes by way of the indicator of local system capacity.

The fact that there are no other indirect effects of municipal size via system capacity or population characteristics despite the strong aggregate level empirical relationships found for these variables is worth emphasizing since the implication is that there are no readily evident compositional effects due to municipal context, and much the same with respect to considerations of system capacity. In contrast to this, there is an indication that municipal size may have an indirect effect on citizen evaluations of local democracy by way of the organizational measures municipalities may choose to adopt and implement. The adoption of external information initiatives is most evident in this regard. Not all of the links of such an indirect path are statistically significant, however, so the suggestion must be taken with a major caveat and also be investigated further. A data set encompassing a larger number of municipalities would in particular be helpful in this regard.

In all other respects the findings regarding the possible significance of municipal size for citizens’ evaluations of local democracy in the municipalities where they live tend to be weak and insignificant, providing a very ambiguous picture at best. More consistent and theoretically plausible findings emerged with respect to our second question: what, if anything, can municipalities do that might have some effect on these evaluations. Our findings indicate that the adoption and implementation of external information policy reforms have a significant positive effect on citizen evaluations of all four dimensions of local democracy for which we have empirical indicators once controls for municipal population
size, population composition and system capacity are introduced. It would be naive to suggest that adoption of external information reforms offers a guaranteed path to positive citizen evaluations, a simple solution for municipalities looking for ways to improve their local democratic reputation which is comparable to that offered by Christopher Columbus to the question of how an egg could be made to stand on its end. Based on findings reported here it would nonetheless appear that such organizational measures do merit close consideration for municipalities that are concerned with their democratic standing in the eyes of their residents. Yet it is at the same time necessary to stress the point made by Ringeling, Daemen and Schaap in summarizing their review of recent democratic reform efforts in a variety of European countries:

Very much like the quest for the Holy Grail, the positive value [of local democracy reform efforts] is not the result, the (impossible) finding the elusive Grail, but rather in the quest itself. There are no final solutions. … Part of the benefits of democratic reform is not related to its precise nature, but rather to the fact that efforts were made.

Ringeling at al. (2012:202-3)
References


Methodological appendix -- Operationalization of contextual variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Per cent of non-western immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Per cent of population over 16 years of age with only elementary school education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Per cent of population aged 0-24 and over 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Per cent of population between 16 and 66 that is unemployed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Number of municipal employees (full-time equivalents) per 100 residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gross municipal income per capita (in 1000 kroner)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five composite indices based on responses to questions relating to the following:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Goal- and performance management initiatives
   • Goal or result management implemented
   • Implementation of “balanced goal or result management” with user satisfaction and/or internal processes in addition to economic conditions evaluated
   • Systematic comparison of results with adopted goals in annual reports
   • Indicators of results or service levels specified along with expenditures in (economic) planning documents
   • Interim reports of result indicators to political representatives
   • Political adoption of quality standards for service delivery
   • Measurement of service delivery against quality standards
   • Formalized specification of quality requirements for internal service provision
   • Creation of a separate office for municipal orders

2. External information initiatives
   • Municipal information officer(s) for external information
   • Municipal information newspaper
   • Permanent information column or similar in the local newspaper
   • Broadcast of council meetings on local radio and/or TV stations
   • Regularly held open information meetings
   • Availability of information in multiple languages
   • Availability of information for the blind

3. Internet initiatives
   • Access to agendas for political bodies
   • Access to minutes from meetings of political bodies
   • Access to electronic mail journals
   • Access to electronic archives
   • E-mail access to the municipal administration
   • E-mail access to elected officials
   • News articles posted on the internet
   • Access to applications forms via the internet
   • Electronic information about the status of applications, etc.
   • Electronic debate forums for dialogues between citizens and representatives
   • Mayor’s and/or politicians’ blogg
   • Electronic hearings
   • Public internet access at libraries, schools, shopping centers, etc.
   • Measures to teach residents about internet use and ICT
   • Use of SMS messaging to communicate with residents
4. User-oriented initiatives
   Introduction of service declarations, user guarantees, user surveys and/or user meetings relating to the following municipal services:
   • Nursing and home care services
   • Health services
   • Social services
   • Child day care
   • Schools and youth-oriented services
   • Technical and building services

5. Initiatives in direct democracy
   • Open hearings or similar meetings in connection with municipal planning documents
   • Open hearings or similar meetings in connection with other matters
   • Mayor’s and/or politicians bench
   • Citizen question hours at council meetings and meetings of other municipal bodies
   • Citizen surveys
   • User surveys
   • User meetings
   • Brainstorming meetings with invited participants
   • Meetings with local businesses and/or organizations
   • Meetings with representatives for other local interest groups and organizations
   • Measures to strengthen participation of specific groups (e.g. elderly, young people, immigrants, women, etc.)