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Citizen participation for increased sustainability and quality of life in cities in Nordland County

54th ISOCARP Congress 2018

## **Citizen participation for increased sustainability and quality of life in cities in Nordland County**

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### **1. Background**

About half of the world's population lives in cities today and by 2050 the figure is expected to rise to 70 percent. Seventy per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions and 60 per cent of all energy consumption takes place in cities. Cities also produce 70 per cent of all waste. Cities are thus both the problem and the solution to many of the major environmental and societal challenges, and this fact is reflected in the UN's sustainability development goals (SDG).

Urbanization and centralization are ongoing social processes in Nordland county in Northern Norway, affecting the population and their quality of life. The ten largest cities in Nordland county account for 68 percent of the region's population. They also provide 72 percent of the employment in the region. However, population growth in the county has been modest compared to the national average. Emigration to the capital (and other cities), aging population, and unemployment are continuous challenges for the region. To address these challenges, Nordland County's regional plan for city and regional development aims to develop compact, sustainable and innovative cities. A key element is to strengthen attractiveness of the city as a place to visit and to live in.

#### ***1.1 Description of study site: Svolvær***

The municipality of Vågan, located in the Lofoten archipelago in Nordland county, has a population of about 10 000 people. Its administrative center is the city of Svolvær, the largest city in the Lofoten region with a population of about 5000 people. Key business sectors are tourism, fisheries and aquaculture, fish processing- and mechanical industry in addition to typical urban sectors like finance, insurance and other services (SSB, 2018). About one fourth

of the jobs in the municipality are in the public sector (Hjelseth et al., 2016:21). Traditionally being a center for the renowned Lofoten winter fishing, the relative importance of the fisheries sector measured in number of jobs has been reduced in the later years, while the importance of the tourism sector has been growing rapidly. After a dip during the early 2000s, the population has been growing since 2008, caused by net positive immigration (Hjelseth et al., 2016:18).

The growth in the tourism and service sectors have contributed to increased optimism and helped create an urban atmosphere in Svolvær. This, on top of the spectacular nature in the region, attracts not only tourists but also people that wish to establish a new life in Vågan and enjoy the mix of urban and natural qualities. The growth in population, and particularly in tourism has also led to local debates on the sustainability of the development with new challenges like increased housing prices and pressure on land use. During the peak tourism season the local population face challenges with inadequate waste management, pressure on natural resources and overcrowding.

Despite the growth in tourism, Vågan, as is the case for many municipalities in rural Norway, has experienced a steady outflux of Norwegian citizens towards the larger cities. This is particularly the case for young people. Vågan also scores lower than the Norwegian average on indicators for health and quality of life, a common trait for most of Northern-Norway (Vågan municipality, 2017:11). To counter this tendency, Vågan established a project aiming to produce new knowledge on how children and young people can live “the good life” in Vågan. Despite some positive effects, significant results have not been achieved partly because of lack of sufficient dialogue and mobilization of young people in the project (Vågan municipality, 2017:11).

The municipality is currently in a process of revising its community plan for the period 2018-2030, and wish to base this plan on holistic and updated knowledge, including through new and innovative methods for citizen involvement. The key question to be answered are related to how to secure a sustainable development for the citizens. This relates to what type of growth the municipality should promote through its policies, including what type of tourism is sustainable in the long run. Another question is related to cultural heritage and traditional fisheries: what is the significance of this heritage both in terms of local culture and attractiveness as a tourism destination, and how can this sector be protected and developed. Through citizen dialogue, the municipality wants to learn more about key positive and negative aspects of the recent development and the key premises for quality of life in Vågan.

## **2. Method for citizen participation: Needs based workshops**

A sustainable urban development requires the active involvement of citizens and critical reflection on the paths of societal development. Participation of citizens in policy design also increases quality of life. This is because participation in itself is meaningful, builds trust, and not least, because it stimulates policy and planning that facilitates high quality of life. Citizen participation processes are, however, challenging in practice. Although the purpose of citizen participation is to facilitate dialogue between stakeholders with different interests and planning authorities, it has proven difficult for many citizens to understand and participate actively in complex and long-term planning processes. Many politicians and planners have challenges in creating commitment and involvement in more comprehensive decision-making processes. Furthermore, it is demanding to translate inputs that have come through these processes into policy decisions.

In this project, we will adopt Manfred Max-Neef's Human scale development (HSD) approach to involve citizens in identifying paths (and policy recommendations) that satisfy both human wellbeing/quality of life and environmental sustainability. Max-Neef differentiated between needs and satisfiers (Max-Neef 1991). Human needs are essential for wellbeing and are universal across cultures and historical periods. The means to satisfy these needs (satisfiers) vary between cultures, traditions and historical periods. He organized human needs as a matrix with two categories: existential and axiological needs. There are nine axiological needs: (1) subsistence, (2) protection, (3) affection, (4) understanding, (5) participation, (6) leisure, (7) creation, (8) identity, and (9) freedom and four existential needs: (1) having (2) being (3) doing and (4) relating (Max-Neef 1991). 'The key idea here is that humans do not have primary needs for the products of the economy. The economy is only a means to an end. The end is the satisfaction of primary human needs. Food and shelter are ways of satisfying the need for subsistence. Insurance systems are ways to meet the need for protection. Religion is a way to meet the need for identity' (Costanza, Cumberland et al. 2014, p.158).

A community can come together and identify satisfiers that are relevant for their particular context and time. Max-Neef and colleagues designed workshops to assist this process and to identify key institutions, (individual and community) characteristics and actions that satisfy fundamental human needs and increase quality of life. A matrix that contains the nine axiological and four existential needs (see table below) is used in this process.

	Being (individual or collective qualities)	Having (resources, tools institutions, norms)	Doing (personal or collective actions )	Interacting (settings and environments)
Survival				
Protection				
Affection				
Understanding				
Participation				
Idleness				
Creation				
Identity				
Freedom				

*Table 1 Matrix of needs and satisfiers (template). Source: Max-Neef (1991)*

The workshops are organized in two steps by a group of 12-20 individuals representing their community. In the first step, the group is divided into two. One of the groups identifies hindrances for actualizing fundamental human needs and achieving a good quality life. The matrix they fill in this process is called a negative matrix. The other group identifies the ideal situation for actualizing fundamental human needs, the ideal scenario. The matrix the group produces in this process is called the positive matrix. In the second stage, the two groups come together to discuss how the community can move from the negative to the positive matrix. In this process, they identify the role individuals and communities play in moving towards the ideal situation. They also identify policy measures at the regional and national level that contribute in this process.

The workshops are flexible and effective at identifying challenges and solutions relevant to policy design. They illuminate processes and mechanisms that promote or hinder people's quality of life and the sustainability of the natural environment. Needs based workshops have been used in some regions, cities and communities in Europe, the United States and South America to identify community- and policy relevant measures that contribute both to human wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

### 3. Results

(Forthcoming)

Following the description given above, we will organize workshops with participation from selected segments of the population to explore the interlinkages between personal, local and global factors that determine current hindrances and opportunities for sustainability and wellbeing in Nordland county. The outcome of the structured workshops are proposals for

community/group, local and regional level-policy initiatives and a greater understanding of their interlinkages and trade-offs. The workshops will be implemented in early September and preliminary results from these workshops will be included in the updated paper we will submit 20th September. The results will also be presented at the ISOCARP congress in Bodø, 01- 05 October 2018.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

(Forthcoming)

#### **5. References**

Hjelseth, A., Groven, S. and Kallager, P. (2016). Vågan kommune. Fordeler og ulemper ved å fortsette som egen kommune. TF-notat nr. 11/2016.

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