

Direct democracy in local politics in Norway¹

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Introduction

As of 2006 Norway was divided into 431 local municipalities and 19 county municipalities. The 431 local municipalities vary significantly in size, population and topography. Twelve municipalities have more than 50,000 inhabitants, while more than half of them have less than 5000. The capital and biggest city, Oslo, with about half a million people, is both a county municipality and a local municipality. All the (county) municipalities have the same administrative status, but it is the central government which has the overriding authority and supervision of their administration. The framework for the activities of the municipalities is laid down by the Storting (Parliament) through legislation and decisions on local government financing. It is also the parliament that determines the division of functions between the different levels of government. Government can only assign new functions to local government by means of legislation or decisions made by the Storting, but the municipalities can, on their own initiative, take on tasks that are not given to another level by law (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development 2000).

Procedures of direct democracy

National level

There are no formal provisions in the Norwegian Constitution for initiative and referendum procedures, but they can be used if triggered by a majority in the Storting. The decision is non-binding and advisory, as only the parliament is regarded sovereign. Norway had six referendums between 1905 and 1994.

Regional and local level

The „Kommuneloven“ (the ‚law‘ for the municipal level) does not mention if or when local referendums can or must be held (NOU 1990:13:100f). At the municipal level (the school district level) Norway has an issue-specific popular initiative for language issues. According to the Education Law (Opplæringsloven), an advisory local referendum must be held in the event of a change in the main language in a school, or if at least one quarter of the electorate or a majority in the local council demand it. There has to be at least five years between an old and a new resolution on language, but if school districts with different languages merge, a local referendum is to be held (Adamiak 2001:35, NOU 2006:7:91, Ot.prp.nr 44, 2004-2005:13).

¹ Special thanks to Edwin McRae and Tor Bjørklund for useful comments.

From 2003 an agenda initiative² at local (and regional) levels was introduced where:

The local council or the regional council has to decide on a proposal which is under its authority within 6 months if at least 2% or 300 of the inhabitants at local municipality (kommune) level or 500 at county municipality/regional (fylke) level support the initiative. A proposal with the same content cannot be put forward again within the same electoral period, or before 4 years have passed.

Historical perspective and comparison

Norway is not among the group of countries where there is a significant element of direct democracy in politics or the presence of various kinds of referendums and initiatives. On the other hand, the tradition of popular consultation and the Norwegian municipalities' experience with local referendums is not insignificant in a comparative perspective. Norway had „special laws“ for local referendums at a time when very few other countries had introduced such laws. The trend is rather the opposite today. When other countries – especially during the 1990s – were passing laws for more direct democracy, Norway went the other way and actually reduced the possibility for local referendums by revising some of the older special laws (Adamiak 2001:121; 2002).

The use of the referendum as a political instrument is not an integral part of Norway's daily politics. When the instrument was mentioned in academic literature prior to 2000, it was normally only national referendums that were being referred to. If local referendums were explicitly mentioned, they were often described as few in number. However, the historical evidence shows that it is a decision-making process that has been much used in the past and that Norway has a long tradition of local referendums on issues such as the licensing of alcohol and the choice of language in school. In 1894 the establishment or the closing of a licensed alcohol-cooperative outlet was made dependent on local referendums. From 1898 women got the right to vote on the same basis as men, and participation in general was high. Over the years the laws allowed both binding local referendums and popular initiatives. Bjørklund (2004) shows that until the 1920s the institution of the referendum was an effective instrument for reducing the sale of alcohol while after the 1920s it was an instrument that „helped open the taps“. Over the past 100 years these licensing laws have been changed several times and in 1989 Norway got a new „alcohol law“, in which the possibility of arranging or holding *binding* referendums was abolished (Adamiak 2001:5, 27-8, Hauge 1998, NOU 1995: 24:6).

The former „school laws“ (e.g. Grunnskoleloven) allowed for two different kinds of local referendums on the issues of school districts and language.³ In 1892 the Storting had decided that it was the school board that could choose the language to be used in school after canvassing the opinion of the local residents. These first referendums were only advi-

² In Norwegian this initiative is called „citizen's initiative“

³ Norway has two official languages (bokmål and nynorsk), and in each referendum voters had to choose between the two linguistic alternatives in order to decide which language should constitute the primary language in the school district. About 15% of Norwegian school children use nynorsk as their primary language (Søberg and Tangerås). The difference between the languages is mostly symbolic, but closely tied to the identity and culture of the local community. People with the two different languages have no difficulty understanding each other when talking or reading written texts.

sory, but from 1915 the results were binding and a popular initiative was also possible. There have been many changes during the years, especially in relation to who was entitled to vote in the language referendums – only the parents of school children, or all the adults living in the school district. This has influenced the number of referendums and thus the outcome as to which language was chosen. Today the eligible electorate comprises all the adults in the district. Where the language referendums have been only advisory, the school board has in some cases overlooked the winning alternative and continued with the language the school had prior to the referendum, due to low turnout and/or a marginal majority in favour of change (Adamiak 2001:31-35, Bjørklund 2004).

According to the old school law, the school board could decide that questions about changes in the school district boundaries or the building of a new school could be put to the electorate in a local referendum (Adamiak 2001:70).

Concrete practice with direct-democratic instruments at the local, regional and national levels in Norway

National level

There have been six countrywide referendums. In 1905 two referendums were held on ending the union with Sweden and the foundation of a „new“ kingdom. In 1919 and 1926 the issue was about the prohibition of alcohol, while the last two – in 1972 and 1994 – asked the people of Norway to give their opinion on EU membership.

Regional level

No referendums held or (agenda) initiatives initiated.

Local level – 1970-2000

I will here divide the presentation into two: before and after 2000. For the period 1970-2000 the statistics and material included are almost comprehensive⁴, while for the period from 2001 some details of some referendums have not yet been included in the material since this information has not been confirmed by the municipalities concerned⁵. No official nation-wide statistics about the use of local referendums exist at the present time.⁶

How many?

In the period 1970-2000 at least 514⁷ local referendums were organised in Norway. Fig. 1 shows their distribution over the 31 years. The annual rate varies from 5 referendums in 1982 to 41 in 1985. On average there were 16.6 referendums per annum in this period, with a median figure of 15 (Adamiak 2001, 2002).

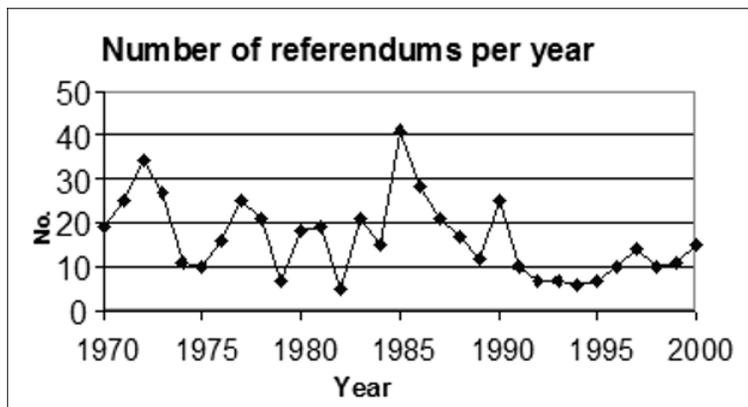
⁴ I have recently found another three referendums in the period 1970-2000 that are not included in the material, two of these being about language in 2000. These referendums have been included in my second survey: 2000-2007.

⁵ My e-mail/phone survey among the 431 municipalities was completed in October 2007, but some information has to be confirmed by the municipalities, or is missing e.g. on voter turnout.

⁶ From 2009 the task of making a nation-wide statistics is given to Statistics Norway

⁷ There were complaints about three referendums and in these cases new referendums were held. Cf. also footnote above.

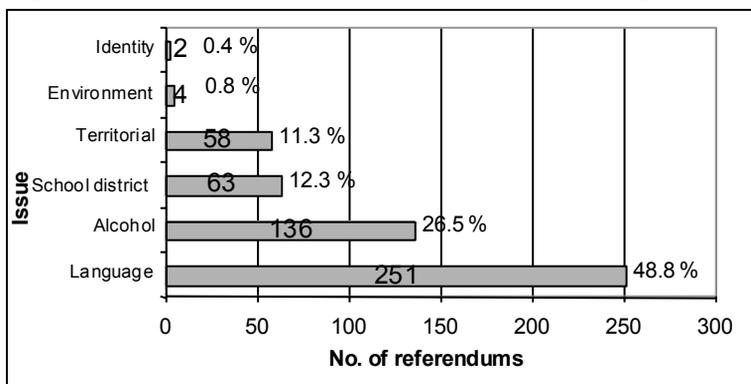
Figure 1: Local referendums in Norway between 1970 and 2000



What issues?

Those issues on which Norway has a long tradition (language in school and alcohol) constitute the majority (75%) of the local referendums arranged in the period. There have been several referendums of a territorial character, either on the merging of municipalities or on a change of municipality/county municipality for some districts. There have also been several referendums about school district boundaries. The last two of the six categories are entitled environment and identity. See Fig. 2 for the number and percentage distribution of each category (Adamiak 2001, 2002).

Figure 2: The 514 local referendums distributed according to issue



Referendums about alcohol

There are 136 referendums that fall into the category of referendums on alcohol. Except for 1975 there were between one and 17 referendums each year between 1970 and 1990. Some of the referendums contained more than one question, making 167 separate questions to be voted on. Of these 105 were approved and 60 rejected. The reasons why there were no

referendums in the period 1991-99 are rather obvious. Firstly, the popular initiative law was not included in the new alcohol law in 1989, and secondly, as a result of liberalization, the great majority of Norwegian municipalities already permitted the retailing of alcohol. These referendums have played an important role in the political mobilization process in Norway. They were important for both men and women, but especially for women's participation (Adamiak 2002, Nilson 1972:46).

Referendums about language in school⁸

There have been 251 referendums about language, one or more each year in the period 1970-2000, with 19 referendums in 1971 alone. The majority of the referendums were held at schools with „nynorsk“. Prior to 1985 the result of the referendums was binding if at least 40% of the electorate voted for the winning alternative. Since not all the referendums have been binding it has not always been the winning alternative that was decided upon by the school board. The results of the 251 referendums show a majority for „nynorsk“ 105 times (41.8%) and for „bokmål“ 143 times (56.9%). The results of the votes by the school boards show that for the 248 referendums about which I have more detailed information „nynorsk“ was the choice 119 times (48%), while „bokmål“ was decided upon in 129 cases (52%). On fourteen occasions when „bokmål“ was voted for by the majority of the electorate, the language actually chosen was „nynorsk“ (Adamiak 2002:202ff).

One might expect the turnout to be significantly higher in the (semi-)binding than in the advisory referendums. Søberg and Tangerås⁹ found that semi-binding referendums display a higher turnout, but that the statistical significance of the observed difference vanishes once they control for changes in voting rights. Hence, the empirical evidence does not corroborate the prediction that turnout increases with the decisiveness of the referendum, but instead suggests that voters act as if the advisory referendums are like the binding referendums. When suffrage has been constrained to parents with children of school age, the participation rate is significantly higher.

School district boundaries

There have been 63 referendums (12% of the total) about school district boundaries. It is possible that several of these referendums were held simply because the old school law included this opportunity. But the local school and where it is situated is an important issue for the inhabitants. In many smaller communities the school is not only central for the families with children, but the building itself can function as a meeting-place for the whole community (Adamiak 2002: 204).

Territorial referendums

There have been 58 local referendums (11%) held on territorial questions. In some years we have seen more referendums than in others as a result of different proposals coming from government committees that had the task of looking into the number and division of municipalities in Norway. Thus in 1990, 17 local referendums were arranged, and in 1999 six, about the merging of municipalities. Several municipalities were merged prior to 1970 and

⁸ All pupils have to learn both written Norwegian languages, „bokmål“ and „nynorsk“. The referendums decide which of the two will be the „primary language“.

⁹ Søberg and Tangerås have studied „the effects of referendum type on voter turnout, i.e. the extent to which voter participation is affected by whether a referendum is binding, semi-binding or merely advisory“.

10 out of 21 previously merged municipalities again became separate municipalities after referendums in the 1970s. The inhabitants of the municipalities involved were clearly not very happy about the mergers, but there are some examples where referendums have been arranged and municipalities have merged voluntarily. Two municipalities chose to merge after local referendums¹⁰ in 1999, and a new municipality was born in 2002. Since 2000 the number of municipalities in Norway has decreased from 435 to 431. Questions about the division of municipalities have been a typical issue in local referendums in neighbouring countries as well, as this issue is mentioned in several European constitutions (Adamiak 2002, NOU 1974:14:94, NOU 1986:7, NOU 1992:15:75).

Referendums about environmental issues as a broad concept

The four referendums in this environmental category are very different, but what they have in common is that they can all be classified within a broad environment vs economy perspective or a development vs protection challenge. The first was held in 1977 and the question was ‚yes‘ or ‚no‘ to the erection of broadcasting antennae. In the second, in 1980, the electorate voted on the establishment of a petrochemical industry. In 1982 the issue was the development of a watercourse/river. The fourth environmental referendum was in 1996 and the inhabitants gave their opinion on whether the local airport should be developed into the new main airport for small planes in the area. The turnout for these referendums varied: 66.6%, 64.3%, 48.6% and 36.6% respectively. In the last one, the level of participation and the number of ‚no‘-votes were naturally higher in the parts of the municipality that were closest or most affected. Three out of the four referendum results were complied with by the local council and the results for three of them were building/development rather than protection of the environment or the local area. Seen in the context of the political developments of the 1970s it is not surprising that such questions have arisen as issues in local referendums. Some have been more surprised that there have not been several more such referendums, but several appeals for environmental referendums were turned down by the respective local councils in the period 1970-2000 (Adamiak 2002:206f).

Identity

Two of the referendums have been classified as falling into a category called ‚identity‘. Both were held in 1997. The first was about city status for a parish. It was voted down by the inhabitants (57.6% not in favour) and the voter turnout was 61.8%. The second was about changing the name of the municipality. The turnout was very low (29.2%), but a majority of 54.1% voted in favour of change. However, the outcome was not implemented by the local council (Adamiak 2002:207).

The use of referendums during the survey period

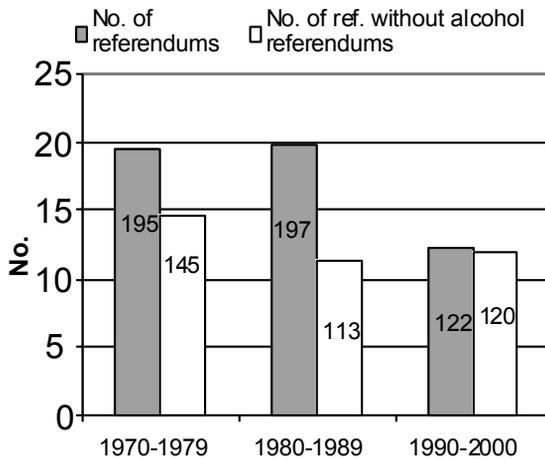
Are there any patterns in the period 1970-2000? Fig. 3 below shows the number of referendums in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.¹¹ If we compare the 1970s and the 1980s, the data

¹⁰ In Ramnes 79.3% voted in favour of merging and the participation was 52.5%, while in Våle the turnout was 57.2% and 50.4% of the electorate was in favour.

¹¹ The first two categories each cover a 10-year period, while the last covers 11 years since the year 2000 is also included in the data.

show that the number was very stable; there was then a considerable drop in numbers in the 1990s. Since there have been major changes in the alcohol laws and a liberalisation of people's attitudes, the chart also shows the number of referendums with the alcohol referendums excluded.

Figure 3: Local referendums distributed by decade



The trend does show change and we see that the most referendums were in the 1970s, followed by a significant decrease in the 1980s and then a slight increase in the 1990s (Adamiak 2002:208).

Participation and number of municipalities involved

During the period in question almost half (211 out of 435 = 49%) of the municipalities had experience of local referendums in the whole or part(s) of the municipality. 109 out of the 211 municipalities have had one referendum. Six municipalities have each had between 10 and 19 referendums during these 31 years. About 200 out of the 514 total referendums have been arranged in the municipalities as a whole, while the rest of the referendums were held in larger or smaller districts of the municipalities (Adamiak 2002:209).

Participation

How many electors have potentially been involved in the local referendums in these 31 years? One problem is that some electors have participated or have had the opportunity to participate in several referendums, while the electors in 224 municipalities have not had this possibility. The average participation rate in the 492¹² referendums, as seen in Table 1 below, is 52.4%. For this calculation every possible elector and every participant was given

¹² Census data for 22 out of 514 referendums are missing.

equal weight. If, on the other hand, we treat each referendum as equal, irrespective of the number of electors, average participation comes out at 58.3%¹³ (Adamiak 2002:209ff).

Table 1: Participation in local referendums distributed according to issue

	E lec. even*	R. even**	Lowest part.	Highest part.	Part. Abs.	Electorate	Part. in %
Alcohol	57.8 %	56.4 %	23.2 %	83.2 %	377077	652011	-
Language	44.3 %	63.9 %	5.8 %	100.0 %	40058	90523	-
Territorial	46.9 %	59.6 %	11.9 %	96.9 %	122317	261033	-
School district	32.9 %	38.7 %	1.2 %	95.6 %	13958	42456	-
Environment	39.6 %	54.0 %	36.6 %	66.6 %	10856	27402	-
Identity	41.5 %	45.5 %	29.2 %	61.8 %	6335	15282	-
Total					570601	1088707	28684 %
Average						52.4 %	58.3 %
*Electorate as unit						(of 492)	(of 492)
**Referendums as unit							

I have further looked at turnout and the question to be voted on. When the electors are the unit, average participation varies between 32.9% and 57.8%, while the variation is between 38.7% and 63.9% when the referendums are the unit. Otherwise the participation varies between 1.2% and 100%. Five referendums on language had a 100% turnout, but in all of these only the parents could vote. Thus there are some referendums with a very high or very low turnout which may influence considerably the average participation level. I have therefore also looked at the average turnout in those referendums where the number of electors are the same as if it had been a local election. This calculation has been done for both electors as a unit and referendums as a unit. There has also been some variation as to who has participated in the territorial referendums. As opposed to the language referendums, there have never been any restrictions on the possibility of participating *within* a district, but some referendums have only been arranged in one or more of the most affected districts. Thus one calculation is with and one without the territorial referendums (Adamiak 2002:211f).

Table 2: Participation at local referendums – selected issues

	Electorate as unit	Referendums as unit
A+E+I	56.8%	56.2%
A+E+I+T	54.1%	57.2%
A=Alcohol E=Environment I=Identity T=Territorial		

Table 2 shows that the exclusion of language and school district referendums does not produce a very different outcome. The average participation without these referendums varies within the same range (52.4%-58.3%) as when all referendums are included (Adamiak 2002:212).

¹³ The percentage participation is added for each referendum and divided by the number of referendums.

Characteristics of the municipalities and the occurrence of referendums

Have the small, medium-sized or large municipalities used the referendum instrument the most? In Table 3 below, the 435 municipalities have been divided into six categories according to the number of inhabitants.

Table 3: The 435 Norwegian municipalities distributed according to the number of inhabitants in 1997 and their experience with local referendums¹⁴

Category	Size of municipality (municipality as unit)						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999	10,000-19,999	20,000-59,999	60,000+	
No. of municipality 1997	122	122	93	58	33	7	435
% share	28.0 %	28.0 %	21.4 %	13.3 %	7.6 %	1.6 %	99.9 %
Municipality with experience	50	61	56	25	17	2	211
% share	23.7 %	28.9 %	26.5 %	11.8 %	8.1 %	0.9 %	99.9 %
Municipality with experience - T*	45	53	50	23	11	1	183
% share	24.6 %	29.0 %	27.3 %	12.6 %	6.0 %	0.5 %	100 %
* T = Territorial referendum							

Reference: Population statistics – Statistisk Sentralbyrå 1997 (Statistics Norway)

Table 3 shows that in 1997 more than half of Norway's municipalities had less than 5000 inhabitants (categories 1 and 2), while municipalities with over 60,000 inhabitants accounted for only 1.6% of the total. The municipalities with the lowest number of inhabitants constitute a smaller share of those with referendum experience, while municipalities with 5000-9999 inhabitants (category 3) account for a higher proportion of referendums than their percentage share of the total number of municipalities. Otherwise, the two comparisons are very similar. In table 4 below I have looked at the distribution of the municipalities when the referendums are the unit.¹⁵ The outcome is now generally larger, but for categories 2-4 the deviation is not significant. The first category gets a lower percentage of referendums than the proportion these municipalities represent of the total number Norwegian municipalities. In contrast, categories 5 and 6 get a higher percentage of the number of referendums than the proportion they constitute of the 435 municipalities. Overall, however, we can conclude that local referendums have been very evenly distributed in comparison to the number of inhabitants (Adamiak 2002: 14f).

¹⁴ The year 1997 is chosen for practical reasons (rather than attempting to identify the actual number of inhabitants in the year(s) the referendum took place). Every municipality with referendum experience is only counted once, irrespective of how many referendums it has actually had.

¹⁵ Every referendum in the table counts as one. A municipality in category 3 with 3 referendums counts as three.

Table 4: The 514 local referendums distributed after number of inhabitants in municipality

Size of municipality (referendum as unit)							
Category	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Inhabitants	-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999	10.000-19.999	20.000-59.999	60.000+	Total
No. referendums	96	149	122	65	61	21	514
% share	18.7%	29.0%	23.7%	12.6%	11.9%	4.1%	100 %

*Local level – 2000-2007*¹⁶

In this period there were at least 108 referendums.^{17,18} In 2002, only five local referendums were held, while in the following year, 2003, there were 26 referendums. The average is 13.5¹⁹ referendums per year. These referendums can all be assigned to the same six categories as were introduced above. Table 5 shows that language referendums still account for the majority of the referendums – 52 of the 108 referendums. There were 29 referendums of a territorial character, 13 about school districts, three about alcohol, nine about environment and, lastly, two about identity.

Table 5: The 108 local referendums distributed according to issue and year

Year	Issue						Total
	Language	Territorial	School district	Alcohol	Environment	Identity	
2000	15	0	1	1	0	0	17
2001	5	3	0	1	0	1	10
2002	1	1	1	0	2	0	5
2003	10	16	0	0	0	0	26
2004	6	6	10	0	0	0	22
2005	5	2	0	1	4	0	12
2006	5	1	1	0	2	1	10
2007	4	0	0	0	1	0	5
Total	51	29	13	3	9	2	107

Participation and number of municipalities involved

Since 2000, about 16% of the municipalities, 69 out of 435/431, have had experience with one or more local referendums in the whole or part(s) of the municipality. 53 out of the 69 municipalities have had one referendum. Nine municipalities have each had between 3 and 9 referendums during the past eight years. 38 referendums covered the municipality as a whole, while the rest of the referendums (69) were held in larger or smaller districts of the

¹⁶ Some referendums may have been arranged in the second part of 2007 that have not been included in this material.

¹⁷ I have carried out a complete e-mail and phone survey of *all* the 431 municipalities.

¹⁸ 15 referendums from 2000 are included in the data material above when the period 1970-2000 is discussed.

¹⁹ Based on the referendums between January 2000 and September 2007.

municipalities. The average participation level (when referendums are the unit) was 53.8%.^{20 21}

Some examples of the local referendums held from 2000-2007

One of the referendums about identity asked the voters to decide on the name of their municipality: whether they wanted to keep the existing name or adopt the name of the city in the municipality. The turnout was 68.9% and a small majority voted in favour of a change, which was followed up by the local council. 26 out of the 29 referendums in the territorial category were about the merging of municipalities. In one other, the electorate was asked whether they wanted to merge or cooperate with a neighbouring municipality. Two of the environmental referendums were about whether to give consent to the building of a wind-farm or not. In some municipalities, consent has been given by the local council without a referendum. One referendum was about the building of a new road and where it should be sited (the relevant department had already decided that a new road was to be built). The voters could choose between six alternative routes. Three of the alternatives got between 28% and 31% of the votes. The local council supported the one with the most votes, while the department decided upon one of the other ones. The turnout in the referendums was only 39.8%.

Conclusion on local referendums

Participation after 2000 seems to have decreased slightly, but the turnout data for the missing referendums might influence this to a certain degree. It seems that to a large extent the explanation for Norway's more than 600 local referendums over the past 37 years lies with the changes in legislation. Many of the territorial referendums were held because there was an existing tradition of holding such referendums. It will be interesting to see if the increase in the use of environmental referendums will continue.

Agenda Initiative and E-Initiative

As of 2006 there have been at least 100 agenda initiatives. 27 of these have been in Oslo, the capital, and nine in Bergen²², the second largest city. The last proposal up to the end of 2006 was for a local referendum on building a city tram network in Bergen, but it was rejected by the city council. Of the 27 initiatives in Oslo between 2004 and 2005, nine were rejected, eleven were not fully processed (as of December 2005), and seven were accepted to be discussed in the local council. Of these, four proposals were voted down, two required further investigation and one initiative has been followed up by the local council. A survey

²⁰ Based on 90 of the local referendums. The information for 17 of the referendums is insufficient when it comes to voter turnout.

²¹ Voter turnout data for all 52 referendums on languages are included, but turnout figures for 10 out of the 29 territorial referendums, for example, is missing. Turnout in language referendums is often lower in the period after 2000 due to the extension of the electorate from only parents with children at the school to all adults in the school district. These facts might have a smaller or greater impact on the average participation, since the total number of referendums in this 8-year period is naturally much lower than for the period 1970-2000.

²² Seven initiatives were proposed in 2004, and one initiative in 2005. Five of these were rejected on formal grounds. The last three were accepted to be discussed in the local council, but all three proposals were subsequently voted down.

of the municipalities and the agenda initiatives shows that most of the initiatives are about very concrete and local issues. Issues about roads, tunnels, buildings and green areas are the most common (Adamiak 2005, NOU 2006:7:194).

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is supporting a three-year project called the „E-Initiative“. Agenda initiatives in three municipalities may be proposed on the Internet and the signatures collected electronically. The project started on 1st November 2005. In November 2006 the project was extended to eleven further municipalities, all of them in the same county municipality. In these agenda initiatives there is no 18-year old age limit for proposing an issue or for online signature. The purpose of the e-initiative is to make the agenda initiative more available to people and make it easier for those who are putting proposals forward to reach out to a larger part of the municipality. There is greater opportunity for debate during the process of signature-gathering and the local council can inform the inhabitants online about the progress of a proposal. Several proposals have been put forward and the first ones have been handled with different outcomes in their respective local councils. The project was evaluated in December 2006 (Adamiak 2005, www.e-initiative.no).

Evaluations and developments

Agenda initiatives

The agenda initiative is not well known. There is not enough information given about the new democratic instrument. Another challenge is that there is a question of interpretation about whether an issue has been put forward in the past four years or not. It is up to the local council to decide on that. Many initiatives have been rejected on the grounds that the council has voted on the issue within the last four years, though not necessarily as a result of an initiative. Voters could become discouraged if too many initiatives are rejected before they reach the council or the council votes all of them down. On the other hand, there are examples of where the inhabitants have won. Some initiatives have led to further deliberation by the local government. The instrument is used in municipalities with both small and large numbers of citizens, although most initiatives have been in the three largest municipalities. It seems as if the initiative instrument can be more easily accepted by the politicians and inhabitants than a referendum. The politicians are still in ‚power‘. More focus is on the issue of the initiative and not on the rules or how to interpret the result of e.g. an advisory referendum (Adamiak 2005, NOU 2006:7).

Statistics on the use of direct-democratic instruments

The political leadership has expressed a wish to compile statistics for local referendums, but the relevant department has not yet made any decisions about when and how. Most likely it will be the responsibility of Statistics Norway since it already has the responsibility for election statistics. Statistics Norway will probably be given the responsibility from January 2009 and onward and perhaps also try to publish material prior to 2009.

Local governance in change?

The committee on local democracy published their second report: „Change in local governance? On participation and engagement in local politics“ (2006). Their task was to analyse

and judge the conditions for local democracy. Despite the fact that participation in local politics (measured by turnout in local elections) is decreasing, participation is at the same time more varied. Municipalities have taken a range of initiatives to develop a better dialogue between the inhabitants and the local representative democracy. Examples of this are 'open hearings', the direct election of the chairman of the local council, participation in budgeting, and e-initiatives (NOU 2006:7). It will be interesting to see if and how the agenda initiative, the e-initiative and other initiatives will affect participation in the municipalities both when there are elections and between elections.

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