

Summary

A survey of the competence and capacity of the Norwegian municipalities in local planning

The purpose of this study is to investigate the institutional capacity of Norwegian municipalities to handle their responsibilities as authorities of local planning. The report gives an up to date status of the capacity in terms of the municipalities' use of labour in municipal planning under the National Planning and Building Act (Plan- og bygningsloven). It also describes the competences accessible for the municipalities to handle their responsibilities. Competences are the measurable or observable knowledge, skills, abilities, and formal educational background critical to achieve and meet objectives and requirements in municipal planning. Finally, the study contains proposals to strengthen the municipalities' institutional capacity to carry out their various responsibilities in local planning.

Methodically the study both consists of a web-survey covering all Norwegian municipalities and in-depth interviews with a selection of municipal planners. It also contains a smaller survey covering the views of the county municipalities. The county municipalities are assigned a role in guiding and supporting the municipalities in their planning activities.

NIVI Analyse has conducted the study in cooperation with Urbanet Analyse and Asplan Viak. The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) initiated and funded the study.

A majority of the municipalities lack required capacity

The figures show that 61 percent of the municipalities have 0,5 man-year or less than 0,5 man-year accessible to handle societal planning (including the drawing and the follow up of the social element of the municipal master plan, the municipal planning strategy and other social plans). When it comes to land-use planning 32 percent of the municipalities say they have 0,5 man-year or less than 0,5 man-year accessible.

Two-thirds of the municipalities say that they to *a little* or *very little* degree experience that they have access to the capacity required to meet the demands of the National Planning and Building Act in social planning. As for land-use planning, 54 percent say that they experience a capacity gap between existing capacities and those required. There is a strong correlation between the municipalities' size and their assessments. Small municipalities experience greater capacity challenges than bigger ones.

One consequence of the capacity situation is a heavy reliance on external consultants. Nine out of ten municipalities use external expertise to take care of various planning tasks.

However, the municipalities' assessments of their staffs' competences are quite good. Eighty-two percent of the municipalities say that the competences of their staffs are adequate as concerns land-use planning, while 68 percent judge the competences adequate as concerns social planning.

Recruitment challenges

A great majority (75%) of the municipalities report of challenges in recruiting municipal planners. Ninety percent are in need of recruiting within the next five years. This is partly due to the current lack of planning capacity and partly due to the fact that a large segment of Norwegian municipal planners will reach the age of retirement the following years.

Other findings

Further findings of the study indicate that:

- the county municipalities need to examine and develop their supporting role towards the municipalities
- the municipalities prefer inter-municipal cooperation as the primary strategy of developing institutional capacity

The study concludes that national policies and laws assign ever more important roles to municipal planning which enhance the opportunity for municipalities to respond to local needs and priorities. On the other hand, this context puts great pressure on often limited municipal government capacities. Thus, building institutional capacity in municipal planning has become a matter of urgency. The final section of the report, therefore, put forward proposals targeted at strengthening the municipalities' capacities and competences. The proposals are addressed to actors and decision makers at both central, regional and local level.