A WOMEN' S PERSPECTIVE IN PUBLIC PLANNING - HOW TO PROMOTE THIS GOAL AT MUNICIPAL LEVEL - A NORWEGIAN PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

Although there are more women than men in Norway, they are much less visible in local politics and local planning processes. An important goal therefore is to get more women involved in public planning. This in turn will lead to greater participation of women in the political process.

Planning can be complicated, and is often made more complicated than necessary for the express purpose of hindering broad participation. Those in power arenot always interested in letting others take over their authority. But if we are to improve society women must be allowed more control over the shaping of our society.

The planning process in six rural communes (municipalities) in Norway which participated in a National Project "Commune Planning on Women' s Conditions", is therefore an attampt to make local planning less frightening and more commonplace. Participative methods were used to engage inhabitants, especially women, in strategic planning for local development. The experience was that high political and administrative involvement and engagement, as well as high mobilisation of women, was needed to implement changes and tasks introduced and developed during the planning process

WHY COMMUNE PLANNING ON WOMEN' S CONDITIONS?

Most of the production of public goods (except defence, police, universities etc.) are delegated to communes (municipalities) and county communes under combined national and local democratic control in Norway. This give inhabitants, through the local democratic system and local planning, a high influence on public spending and welfare production.

Norway (population 4,3 mill.) has today a system of two sub-national levels of political-administrative territories responsible for welfare production and local development - counties (19) and communes (439), and each level has direct election of politicians. Norwegian communes have an average size of 9000 inhabitants and since our cities also are communes, over 80% have less then 8000 inhabitants. This give a closeness between local politicians, administrators and inhabitants, which is important for obtaining support for local development planning.

Higher influence from women in local planning is believed to increase the importance of "meek values". It is a common but problematic assumption that women share values related to social care and the care for "underdogs" in our community; children, old and sick people, people with social or physical disability etc. These values also include preservation of nature and life, and development and preservation of social network and partnership.

Communes and county communes in Norway are also increasingly given more responsibility for public welfare production, and in the 1990-ies:

1. Controls/spends approximately 15 billion £ each year or 20% of our GDP, 60% of these means spent by communes.
2. Engage over 14700 elected representatives to County Councils (1099) and Commune Councils (13648) or 0,3 % of our population (1991), but only 32,6 % of elected

representatives are women on commune level (1995).
3. Controls a local provider system to satisfy local needs related to health, education, social care, local development etc. with over 350.000 civil servants (35.000 in administration) or 18% of our work-force. Over 2/3 of civil servants are women, but few of them are top-leaders.
Low participation of women in planning and politics is also problematic related to democratic rights. In the Norwegian Equal Status Act of 1978 it is stated: "**The public authorities shall facilitate equality of status between the sexes in all sectors of society**". As more welfare tasks are decentralised to the commune, the need for women's involvement becomes obvious.

THE PROJECT

The experiment "A Women's Perspective in Public Planning -Commune Planning on Women's Terms", involving six communes spread all over Norway, must be understood related to this complex background. The national objectives of the project were:
-to acquire knowledge about how to integrate women's values into the commune plans, and to develop appropriate planning models and methods.
-to prepare commune plans with a stronger women's perspective on the residential environment, the economic and employment politics, and the health and social welfare policy.
-to spread the knowledge acquired from the project to other communes.
This meant that the experiment tried to influence directly the local planning process and system, and local plans which in Norway consists of:
-Strategic planning with at least a 12-year perspective and a strategic plan which the commune council decides every 4th year (four year loop).
-The 4-year action programme including a 4-year budget which is decided every year and mostly is an economic plan for the commune's activities but also other activities for local economic and welfare development.
Included and coordinated with this system, it is possible to have special programmes for functions like schools, territorial parts of the commune and for areas of special effort like support for new firms and small businesses and of course women's interests.

THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The initiative to this project did come from the Ministry of Environment, which are responsible for local and regional planning. This ministry also employed the national project leader and it was responsible for the experiment with economic support from other ministries. The ministries of Agriculture, Fisheries, Local Government and Labour, and Industry, as well as the Norwegian Association of Local Authorities participated and financed this experiment. The participating partners formed a steering committee with responsibilities illustrated on figure 1.
The reason for this experiment is complex. Each ministry shall yearly produce a **national action plan for equality between genders** within their domain. The experiment was an important activity related to this planning for involved ministries and also an example of cooperation between them.
Another goal for our planning department is **vitalization of local planning.** A lot of

experiments and national projects have been started by the department for this reason and this experiment was one of them.
The planning department also tries to **democratize local planning,** through experiments, by producing material about democratic planning and by support to milieus which tries to develop methods for a more democratic local planning.

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF INVOLVED COMMUNES

The national project group selected six communes which were invited to join the project, see figure 1. Except Bremanger and Sunndal, each commune had a woman as mayor or manager (top administrator). The communes had between 2000 and 7000 inhabitants, mostly located in rural and peripheral parts of Norway. Their labour marked were mostly dominated by industries of interest to the involved ministries.
Each commune should employ a woman as project leader. The national project group gave each commune an annual support equal to her salary. Each commune should elect a local project group dominated by women and lead by the mayor or manager. Engagement and representation from political organizations, women' s organizations and the commune administration were seen as important, as well as representation from local communities.

ORGANISATION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

The national project group decided that they themselves did not have capacity or competence to guide the communes. A group of three researchers with competence in commune planning was selected to educate and guide local project groups and to evaluate this process - the OVE-team (OVE is combined of the first letter in the Norwegian words translatable to education, guidance and evaluation - the EGE-team), see Figure 1.
The strategy for coordination between the local project and the commune planning process was the production of a separate commune programme built on women' s conditions and interests, with long time visions and strategies and a four-year action programme. Strategies and actions should then be integrated with the strategic part of the communeplan and the commune' s action programme. The commune programme built on women' s perspective, should have formal status as a part plan, equal to the commune' s sector plans as for education, social care etc
During the training period in autumn 1989 all project groups developed a good cooperation and coordination with the responsible commune planner. This lead to an integration of the commune planning process and the project process in all communes mostly due to the new planning and participation methods introduced by the OVE-team.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process was organised in stages as shown in Figure 2, which corresponds with the basic stages of the strategic planning and management model. All six communes followed this process which started with education and training in planning methods and processes in autumn 1989 both at national level (project leaders and project groups) and at local level (local leaders: administrators, politicians, local organisations, etc.). The support and training on local level were deemed to be significant for the planning process by approximately 50% of respondents who completed an evaluation questionnaire.

MOBILISATION - SPRING 1990.

This training was followed by a broad mobilisation of inhabitants where visions and strategies were formulated and selected (spring 1990), lead by the local project leader and group. The goal for this period was to develop the strategic part of the commune programme built on women' s perspective. Each commune arranged a "mass meeting" with between 75 and 150 participants, over 50% women. Before the mass meeting a list of persons was set up. Leading politicians and administrators and leaders of local organizations were asked to join the mass meeting together with women which the project group know were or could be opinion leaders among women or in their local communities.

The mass meeting concentrated on the situation in the commune in general and for women more specific. During group work strengths and faults were analysed together with threats and opportunities in the future. At the end of the mass meeting each commune formulated four to seven areas of importance for further studies and planning to change the situation for women.

Work groups were elected on commune level (at least 50% women in each group) and on community level (mostly women) where actions were developed using creative methods. Some of these groups worked with strategies specific for the commune programme built on women' s perspective. The project leader or other project group members were secretaries for these groups. This functioned well and the tight time scale were followed.

A seminar was held in each commune where each group presented its proposals. Built on this and other material, each project group developed during spring and summer 1990 a commune programme built on women' s perspective with this content:

a. The situation for women and perspective for further development.
b. A vision for further development
c. Strategies for change

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT.

Coordinated with this activity the commune planner and the commune plan group in each commune developed the strategic part of the commune plan during summer and autumn 1990. Perspectives, visions, strategies and actions from the women' s commune programme were integrated into the commune plan. An example of a vision is from the commune plan in Leksvik, see frame.

This vision was ambitious and difficult to introduce especially in the commune' s action programme which traditionally is dominated by sector activities and formal processes. The project groups tried to influence the sectoral planning through direct negotiation and communication and with some success. The project group in Leksvik concluded in its end report that: *"Women's perspectives have been of importance through women's participation in the planning process and by focus on themes and actions on which women are preoccupied. This lead to that the commune planning process more strongly focused on everyday problems and opportunities.<D>*"

The project leaders and project groups generally felt that this activity was successful and that their activity had high influence on the strategic part of the commune planning process.

An important goal in this period was to get participance from inhabitants, to inform them

about the process and to activate them to propose actions and projects. During a short period, spring 1990, commune planning and women' s perspective was tried put on the agenda of the community through mass meetings, group works and more general information using local press etc. This is easier to do in small communes then in big ones. In Nesna (1800 inhabitants) and Leksvik (3600 inhabitants) over 1/2 of our informants were of the opinion that most of the communes inhabitants have been reached, compared to only 27% in Sunndal (7000 inhabitants), the biggest commune.

4-YEAR ACTION PROGRAMME.

The goals for this period were to:

-Develop a 4-year action programme built on women' s perspective and

-Integrate this action programme with sector programmes and

-Through this process to influence the commune' s 4-year action programme and budget.

Each project group developed their own draft action programme during autumn 1990. This programme contained specific actions according to their own visions and strategies and how they defined women' s perspective. But the project groups lacked means to implement these actions.

Some actions could be done by local action groups themselves. Most of such actions were implemented shortly after the mass meeting or the group work where the idea was formulated and agreed on, if they had local "owners" and/or could be done by "dugnad" ("barn building").

Other actions needed cooperation between the commune and a local group, ie. economic support from the commune or other public agencies or a cooperation where the commune were responsible of some activities and a local action group or organization responsible for other. Some actions could only be done by the commune organization themselves or by other public agencies.

Some of these actions needed further planning, which were easily understood by local actors. Some others needed little planning and could be done by existing resources. The difference in time-scale and thinking between local action groups and organizations and public organizations created a lot of problems in this phase. Small actions which local groups felt could be easily done, had to go through administrative and political decision processes which were time-consuming and which easily developed territorial or sectoral defence. The project group should have had some small means for actions at least as symbols for the importance of participation.

IMPLEMENTATION.

In general the proposals from the project groups had little influence on the commune' s action programme for the period 1991 to 1994 and on the 1991-budget. During 1991 the project leaders and project groups tried to build stronger political and administrative relationship and networks, with variable success.

Related to their own strategic plan and action programme the project leaders and project groups started further planning and implementation of specific actions during 1991. Most of these actions were activities which needed cooperation between public sectors.

Actions as change of when kindergarten opens and close so that parents could deliver and receive their children outside their work period etc. were implemented through dialogue. Planning of new kindergartens, separation of cars from pedestrians, renovation of public

areas etc. were started and some of them implemented during 1991.

MOBILISATION METHODS USED

An important part of the project activity was to introduce new methods for local planning. Mass meetings and group work using work books were one part of this strategy to increase participation. Other methods as creative problem solving, analyses of expectations through dialogue in small groups and brainstorms were used.The methods used were mostly built on creative thinking where idea generation and idea discussion are divided into separate stages as in brainstorming sessions. We have developed general work books to help local project groups in their self-governed SP and M efforts (Amdam 1990, 1995) and these were used by all six communes.

The work book for formulation of visions as an example is built on the SOFT or SWOT method and is used to formulate visions, goals, strategies - alternative development paths and preferred choice of strategy, see Figure 3.. Through a process of brainstorms in groups of 6 to 8 persons and plenary presentation of their conclusions, the participants themselves analyse and conclude on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to their own community. This work book was used at mass meetings at local level (local communities; 200 - 1000 inhabitants) to which all inhabitants were invited (approximately 20% participated with highest participation in small communes). This work book was also used at meetings at commune level to which over 100 formal and informal leaders of local communities, organisations, businesses, all members of the commune council and leading administrators were invited. Through this process a basic understanding and acceptance of the local situation were reached and five to seven basic strategies for local development were selected in each commune with almost no opposition.

Some of these methods like work books and creativity methods were new to local planning, others like the mobilizing strategies were well known at local level ("dugnad" in Norwegian - barn building) but new to local planning. Our informants generally felt that these methods should be used in further local planning (80%, lowest in Nesna 45% and Sunndal 55%).

RESULTS

The evaluation is that all six projects functioned well as isolated projects. The project leaders and project groups did a tremendous effort. They worked well regarding all problems which they could solve themselves like production of a commune programme on women' s conditions, high participation of women in this activity and cooperation with commune planners.

The variation is higher regarding the integration of women' s perspectives in the commune planning and political and administrative acceptance of women' s perspective. Generally the experiment influenced the content of the strategic commune plan in the direction of less emphasis on material values and more concern for human values like:

-A holistic perspective
-Caring
-Protection of the environment and ecology
-People' s everyday lives
-Greater consideration for individuals and groups with poor resources

-New ideas and creativity

But to influence plans is often only symbolic, to have real influence a planning process must influence political and administrative decisions and actions. The evaluation of the experiment in 1993 shoved that:

Two communes had high success according to the goals of the national project. This lead to changes in the commune organization regarding themes like development of planning strategies, integration of women' s perspectives in politics, planning and administration and the use of new methods in planning. In these two communes we found the most engaged top leaders (mayor, manager and sector leaders) and we can see that the combination of the role as leader and ownership of this project have given results.

Two other communes had some success but needed more time then the three-year project period to reach their goals. Both communes had a difficult start and needed more time then planned to motivate their administration. Change of managers in both communes during the process lead to a more positive attitude in their administration. We are of the opinion that a longer project period would have given results equal to the top two.

Two communes had meagre success related to integration of women' s perspectives in politics and administration. Both mayors and managers were little engaged in this project.

If we relate these results to theories about coordination and mobilisation we can point to these arguments:

Strategic and mobilizing commune planning need commitment from both mayor and manager and other important actors in the local community. Very few informants in the two "bottom" communes are of the opinion that their mayor and manager have been active promoters. The experiment had few owners, especially in the administration. This will lead to a difficult situation when strategies and actions developed through the project shall be integrated into sectoral plans and when the commune administration shall implement actions. Domain defence and other resistance are a likely result as we have seen.

High participation is needed to create identity and ownership to strategies and actions. There is a strong correlation between participation in mass meetings, group work etc. and ownership to this project. Both "bottom" communes had problems when the project group and project leader tried to engage administrators and politicians in their activities during the project. One reason seams to be their attitude to the project; the project was not what they had expected.

Related to theories about neverending strategic and mobilizing planning, we have tried to show that most of the six communes succeeded in creating knowledge and acceptance in the commune organization and among inhabitants through mass meetings, group work, information activities etc. But commune planning is a neverending process and this project lasted only three years (actually the national project group at first decided that the project should last only two years, but this was changed through strong influence from the OVE-team). The project had much influence on commune planning in this period, but will this effect last? Only evaluation in the future can show. What we know is that planners, administrators and politicians in the commune can be "bearers" of new knowledge. Only if they use this knowledge in their own planning activity will this project have effects in the future.

A national evaluation of women' s participation in local and regional planning processes

in 1995 shows that this experiment and other initiatives have lead to new planning activities on women' s conditions in almost all counties in Norway. The experience is that this activity must be integrated with the political and administrative system on local level and that women themselves must decide how they shall participate and they must have strong influence on the design of planning processes and projects. Bottom-up strategies for development planned by women for women is very important, as well as mobilization, building of networks between women and learning built on experience. Creative stimulating methods and processes as used in this project is also very important. But we still have a lot to do before women' s perspectives is integrated as an "automatic" perspective in decisions and planning on local level, and some resistance is still active in some public and private organizations.

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