

Delivering Public Services in Sparsely Populated Areas

Reinhard Reynisson
Mayor of Húsavík
municipality



Public vs. private

- The private sector provides services when and where it is profitable – and its reasons are accepted!
- The public sector is supposed to provide services regardless of the ratio of cost and gain – and its reasons are not accepted!

The public sector's dilemma

- The sector is based on the idea of equal rights and equal opportunities.
- A Utopia that one can strive for but never achieve.
- The sector has limited financial resources and the political atmosphere is in favor of tax reduction.

The public sector's reaction?

- We have to think – be innovative – seek new answers to old questions.
- But we work in the public sector, not the private. The saying is that these traits are dominant in the private sector but almost non-existent in the public one.
- If it was ever true it is changing and we have to follow these changes closely.

Merging sectors

- Ideas and methods are and have to be used across sectors.
- The sectors, i.e. individual companies and institutions can cooperate in service provision, resulting in cost reduction, both fixed and variable.
- New technology in the computer and communication industry has opened new doors in every aspect of human life!

“Mobilize all”

- The idea is that the inhabitants of the area utilize the possibilities of the computer and information technology in order to make their living conditions easier or simpler.
- Utilization at work, business, public services, education, culture, leisure activities, etc.
- The focus is on the user, how he/she can strengthen what he/she is doing, the technology is a mean to an end.

Local conditions (1)

- Three municipalities working closely together and with seven other municipalities in the region Thingeyjarsýsla.
- The three municipalities cover a large geographical area, about 6,257 km², road distance 85 km from one end to the other.
- Population 3,378 (Dec.1st 2004), of which the town of Húsavík had 2,323 residents and the village Laugar had 105.

Local conditions (2)

- The Thingeyjarsýsla region is about 17,836 km² and road distance is 305 km end to end.
- Population 5,084 (Dec.1st 2004).
- Ten municipalities working closely together on social services, school development, building surveying, museums, archives etc.
- The residents will vote on merging them this fall (Oct.8th 2005), resulting in three municipalities.

Local conditions (3)

- If the outcome is positive we will have three municipalities, one with 530 inhabitants, one with 700 and one with 3,860.
- Larger and (in my opinion at least) stronger municipalities.
- Simpler administration structure.
- But no direct effect on the population dispersion!!

Present and future challenges

- Dispersed administration and services.
- Physical administration centers or offices parallel with virtual administration based on the newest available information technology.
- Cooperation between sectors.
- Move the services to the people vs. forcing them to “come and get” the service.
- “Cooperate and mobilize all”