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Passive, Indifferent, Engaged? The Faces of Local Civic Activity in Finland¹

Introduction

In the 20th century, political representation became one of the leading institutions of the state, without which majority of citizens cannot imagine modern governing process. It seems that a significant share in this had the marriage of democracy and representation, as a result of which more and more countries decided to introduce democratic, based on repetitive elections governments.²

Nowadays, on the one hand representative democracy and its core idea – representation – have many staunch supporters that perceive them as non-alternative decision-making mechanism.³ In this context,

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2 A. Antoszewski, *Współczesne teorie demokracji*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 2016.

3 J.R. Hibbing, E. Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs About How Government Should Work*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; G. Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*:

it is emphasized for instance that representation gives the opportunity to influence people who do not want to engage into decisions in person, as well as that it improves the promptness and technical efficiency of the decision-making process. On the other hand, the operation of political representation has been increasingly criticized. Many see its 'deficiencies', paradoxes and limitations.⁴ Some researchers point out that representation contributes to unequal participation in governance process, including exclusion of weaker groups from the decision-making. According to others, the so-called 'standard account' of representation is increasingly inadequate, mainly the assumption that representatives should act in behalf of people who live in a specific area (constituency)⁵. Finally, presently it is problematic that political representation operates in 'new ecology'. On the one hand, we can observe the increasing activity of international actors and institutions, while on the other more and more actions are undertaken locally to directly articulate and implement own interests and needs.⁶

The countries in which representative democracy seems to enjoy still unflagging support are Nordic states. Additionally, in other European countries, especially those that have undergone political transformation, Nordic states have been pictured as an example of countries with high standard of living and equally high social capital in which citizens willingly engage in decision-making processes. In this context, Andrzej Kubka notes that:

Individualism and Democratic Culture, New York: Cornell University Press, 1992; J.A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, New York: Routledge, 2010; I.M Young, 'Deferring group representation' in: W. Kymlicka, I. Shapiro (eds.), *Nomos: Group Rights*. New York: New York University Press, 1986.

- 4 H. Arendt, *On Revolution*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965; B. Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; A. Waśkiewicz, *Paradoksy idei reprezentacji politycznej*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar 2012; T. Żyro (ed.), *Reprezentacja polityczna*, Warszawa: Wydział Dziennikarstwa i Nauk Politycznych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2013.
- 5 N. Urbinati, E.M Warren, 'The Concept of Representation in Contemporary Democratic Theory', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2008, vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 387–412.
- 6 M. Saward, 'The Wider Canvas: Representation and Democracy in State and Society', in: S. Alonso, J. Keane, W. Merkel (eds.), *The Future of Representative Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011; K. Radzik-Maruszak, *Rada gminy jako uczestnik lokalnego współzrządzenia. Przykład Anglii, Finlandii, Polski i Słowenii*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar 2019.

[...] there is also a widespread belief that democracy in Scandinavian countries is authentic and alive, that its mechanisms function efficiently and that the source of these attributes has always been the involvement and active participation of citizens in public life. Indeed, Scandinavian democracies have long been described as active, participative, and egalitarian.⁷

At the same time, many researchers have started to notice the deficits of the Scandinavian model of democracy, including the gradual erosion of relations between elected politicians and citizens. Although the level of general confidence in politicians, as well as voter turnout, are still high, citizens are less and less willing to truly engage into decision-making process. Against this background we can observe the deepening gap between the universal membership of citizens to various types of organizations, including political parties, trade unions and other interest organizations, and the lowering level of their genuine participation into its work. All these allows for formulating – as Jørgen Goul Anderson and Jens Hoff indicate – the thesis about the transformation of living, authentic Nordic democracies, which are based on mass participation and involvement of citizens into ‘spectator democracies.’⁸

It seems that aforementioned situation we can also observe in Finland. This country although is not directly included into Scandinavian countries group, inevitably shares the Northern model of governance, including its values, constructions and institutions.⁹ The aim of the article is to show diverse social attitudes towards local engagement among Finish citizens. Importantly, the attitudes are analyzed throughout the prism of the statements of municipal councillors, who not only represent local community but also should mobilize it for participation and involvement. The article is based both on qualitative and quantitative data. On the one hand it refers to official statistics on citizens’ involvement, and on the other, to interviews conducted with local councillors from ten Finnish municipalities located in the Pirkanmaa region.

7 A. Kubka, *Modele demokracji w Skandynawii*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Libron – Filip Lohner, 2016, p. 7; See also: H.M. Hernes, ‘Scandinavian Citizenship’, *Acta Sociologica*, 1988, vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 199–215.

8 A. Kubka, *Modele...*, p. 41. See also: J. Anderson, J. Hoff, *Democracy and Citizenship in Scandinavia*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, pp. 46, 251.

9 A. Kubka, *Modele...*, p. 20.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section elaborates on Nordic model of local government. The second focuses on participative framework available in Finnish municipalities. The next shortly presents research design. The fifth section displays the empirical results of the research, while the final one discusses the conclusions and avenues for future research.

The Nordic model of local government

The so-called Nordic model that is applied in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland – both at the national and local levels – is often described as a success story¹⁰. This seems to result of several issues. First of all, for many years these countries have been the leaders in the rankings of democracy and equality.¹¹ Secondly, they have consistently offered their citizens freedom, high quality life and security. Finally, all of them enjoy low level of corruption and, at the same time their citizens' have high level of trust into public institutions.

One of the cornerstones of Nordic model constitutes local government. Scandinavian local governments share many common features. This can be seen both at the level of abstract ideas as well as at specific legal and institutional solutions. Referring to Lundquist's concept of levels of abstraction in democracy models, it can be pointed out that Nordic local governments share common *values*, *constructions*, and as well as decided to implement similar democratic *institutions*.¹² Therefore, referring to *values*, important are equality, freedom, transparency, justice and consensus. Taking into account *constructions* the emphasis is put on representative democracy and its mechanisms, rather than on direct and deliberative deciding. Finally, considering the *institutions*, important are clear procedures of deciding and the outcome of the decision-making

10 A. Haveri, 'Nordic Local Government: A Success Story, But Will It Last?', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 2015, vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 136–149.

11 Democracy Index 2019, <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index> (accessed: March 2020).

12 L. Lundquist, *Medborgardemokratin och eliterna*, Lund: Studentlitteratur AB, 2001, cited in: A. Kubka, *Modele...*, p. 20.

process.¹³ Similarities between Nordic local governments are, however, equally visible at the level of specific arrangements.

Firstly, a number of parallels can be observed in the construction of local governments, both in its structure and organisation. *Raison d'être* of Nordic local government is seen in the service provision and continuous improvement of the effectiveness of the functioning of local bodies as well as all entities cooperating with them. Local authorities are responsible, among others for health protection, education, elderly care, spatial planning, environmental protection and waste segregation.¹⁴ In all Scandinavian countries, as the main and principal local unit is treated municipality. Additionally, in recent years we can observe a strong tendency to municipal mergers what is undoubtedly connected with the fact that these units are responsible for majority of local services, particularly important from the perspective of the effective welfare state.¹⁵

Many similarities can also be also witnessed in the organization of Nordic local authorities. Nevertheless, local government in the North enjoys relatively high degree of organisational autonomy what is connected with freedom to create new bodies, vast majority of local authorities base governing process on elected collegial organs – council and different kinds of boards (e.g. executive board). The hesitancy to strong, monocratic leadership, *inter alia* the idea of strong, powerful mayors seems to be rooted in the faith in the power of community and joint decision-making.

Secondly, Nordic local governments share a common fascination with such trends as New Public Management (further as: NPM) or New Public Governance (further as: NPG). The first concept was implemented in the North in the 1970s, with Finland interested in it the most. The

13 Thus, the emphasis is put here on the output legitimacy of the decision-making process. See more in W.F. Scharpf, 'Economic Integration, Democracy and the Welfare State', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 1997, vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 18–36; *idem*, *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999; A. Haveri, 'Nordic Local...'

14 *The Nordic Model – Local Government, Global Competitiveness in Denmark, Finland and Sweden*, Jernholmen, Denmark: KLS Grafisk Hus, 2012, p. 27.

15 In some Nordic countries, regions constitute an additional territorial unit, however they have always limited competences and are treated as a supplement to municipalities.

second one, applied in the 1990s, was a response to the shortcomings of NPM, including, above all, the lack of sufficient citizens' engagement into decision-making process.

Thirdly, what is probably the most significant from the perspective of this article, Nordic local governments share also a similar attitude and institutional solutions in regard to citizens' participation. In this context numerous issues are important. On the one hand, the cornerstone of decision-making process constitutes representative democracy. Local elections, often organized together with national voting, attracts the interests of many citizens' what demonstrates high electoral turnout (Table 1). Other forms of residents' engagement such as local referenda and consultations have mainly non-binding character and supplement representative democracy. On the other hand, Nordic local governments use many instruments aimed at surveying the satisfaction of citizens-clients, which is undoubtedly one of the outcomes of the popularity of the NPM idea. Recently, also solutions involving the inclusion of marginalized groups into decision-making process, e.g. seniors, people with disabilities have gained in importance. At the same time, it should be underlined that Nordic local governments are rather careful with participatory experiments and democratic innovations such as participatory budgeting or citizens' juries. These more pioneering forms of engagement are used mainly in large cities.

Table 1. Electoral turnout in local elections in Nordic countries 2017–2019 (in per cent)

| Year | Denmark | Iceland | Finland | Norway | Sweden |
|------|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|
| 2017 | 70.8 | 71.2 | 58.9 | – | – |
| 2018 | – | – | – | – | 84.1 |
| 2019 | – | – | – | 64.7 | – |

Source: Own preparation based on: Danish Local Elections 2017, <https://oidp.net/en/content.php?id=1331>; Statistics Iceland: <https://www.statice.is/publications/publication/elections/local-government-elections-26-may-2018>; Statistics Finland: http://www.stat.fi/til/kvaa/index_en.html; Statistics Norway: <https://www.ssb.no/en/valg/statistikker/valgdeltakelse>; Swedish Local Elections 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_Swedish_local_elections (accessed: March 2020).

Finnish local government shares vast majority of the features discussed above. Local government has one-tier structure and consists of 310 municipalities.¹⁶ The great importance is attached to efficient service provision. The fascination with NPM paradigm led to the division of power between the elected bodies (the council and the board) and local administration headed by a manager.¹⁷ The decision-making process has consensual character.¹⁸

Compared to other Nordic countries Finnish local government has however also some unique features. First, moderate dynamic of change is visible here. All reforms are carefully planned and introduced in a rather slow manner. Second, municipalities are very diverse, both in terms of area, population, adopted ways of providing services, as well as in regard to the problems they face. The differences between the units are particularly visible on the north-south dimension and between large, urban and small rural areas. The antidote to these problems is often seen in forced cooperation and mergers. Finally, Finnish local government is unique due to widely implemented idea of network governance¹⁹. The term 'network municipality' is quite often used in this country²⁰. Its core constitutes the assumption that local authorities should cooperate in the process of production and delivery of services with many public and private entities. In theory, the idea is aimed to improve the efficiency of local services, in practice however it involves many challenges.²¹

16 Finland is also divided into 19 regions. See more at: Finnish municipalities and regions, <https://www.localfinland.fi/finnish-municipalities-and-regions> (accessed: March 2020).

17 A. Haveri, 'Nordic Local...,' p. 143; M. Temmes, 'Finland and New Public Management,' *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 1998, vol. 64, No. 3, pp. 441–456.

18 K. Radzik-Maruszak, *Rada gminy...*, p. 97.

19 See J. Torfing, B.G. Peters, J. Pierre, E. Sørensen, *Interactive Governance. Advancing the Paradigm*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

20 A. Haveri, 'Complexity in Local Government Change: Limits to Rational Reforming,' *Public Management Review*, 2006, vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 31–46; A. Haveri, E. Laamanen, K. Majoinen, *Kuntarakenne muutoksessa? Tutkimus kuntajaon muutostarpeista tulevaisuudessa*, Helsinki: Suomen Kuntaliitto, 2003, Acta No. 155; I. Nyholm, 'Developing Local Democracy: The State and Challenges of Finnish Local Democracy in the Postmodern Era,' *Kunnallistieteellinen aikakauskirja*, 2006, vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 340–353.

21 I. Nyholm, 'Developing...,' p. 344.

To sum up it can be stated that Nordic model of local government has many advantages. These undoubtedly include firm system of value, emphasis put on effective services, as well as transparency of decision-making process. At the same time, the model faces many challenges. First of all, the tensions between central and local authorities are visible. Secondly, the focus on efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery does not favor social engagement and implementation of democratic innovations.

Forms and tools of civic involvement in Finland

In Finland, the idea of local involvement has always been taken seriously. Despite that, participatory instruments used in this country have had for many years a relatively narrow scope and only at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries began to be supplemented with new elements.

The basic form of local engagement constitutes in Finland elections. Finns show relatively high interest in local voting. Since 1956, turnout in municipal council elections has never dropped below 55 per cent, although elections to Eduskunta (Finnish parliament) enjoy even greater public attention (Table 2). The lowest turnout in local elections was recorded in 2000 (55.9 per cent). In subsequent voting held in 2004, 58.6 per cent of those entitled to vote went to the polls. In the 2008 the turnout was 61.2 per cent and 58.3 per cent in 2012. In the last, organized in 2017 municipal elections to the polls went almost 59 per cent of Finns (Table 2).

Another form of local engagement that is present in Finland is referendum. The basic regulations for organizing and conducting referenda at the local level are provided by the Local Government Act 410/2015 (further: LGA 410/215) and the Act on the Procedure for Holding Municipal Consultative Referenda 656/1990. Importantly local referenda have in Finland only advisory, non-binding character.²² Therefore, municipal council is not obliged to take into account the residents' preferences. Pursuant to the Sections 24 and 25 of the LGA

22 A. Rynnänen, 'Local Self-government in Finland – Changes through Structural Reforms in the Future', *Kunnallistieteellinen aikakauskirja*, 2006, vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 303–306.

410/2015, referendum may be held either at the request of local authorities or municipal residents. In a situation where the initiators are citizens, a request for a referendum must be supported by a minimum of 4 per cent of municipal inhabitants over 15 years of age. Referenda may be conducted in the cases concerning both the entire municipality and one of its auxiliary units. The right to participate in referendum have people entitled to vote in local elections.²³ Between 1991 and 2007, however only 29 local referenda took place. Their focus was primarily municipal mergers, reconstruction of municipal infrastructure or location of new factory/other institution in the municipal area.²⁴

Table 2. Turnout in parliamentary and local elections in Finland 1956–2019 (in per cent)

| Elections to the parliament | | Municipal elections | |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
| Year | Turnout | Year | Turnout |
| 1958 | 75.0 | 1956 | 66.2 |
| 1966 | 84.9 | 1968 | 76.7 |
| 1975 | 73.8 | 1976 | 78.5 |
| 1987 | 72.1 | 1988 | 70.5 |
| 1995 | 71.9 | 1996 | 61.3 |
| 1999 | 68.3 | 2000 | 55.9 |
| 2007 | 67.9 | 2008 | 61.2 |
| 2011 | 70.5 | 2012 | 58.3 |
| 2015 | 70.1 | 2017 | 58.9 |
| 2019 | 72.84 | – | – |

Source: K. Radzik-Maruszak, *Rada gminy...*, p. 235.

Finns have also right to participate in local consultations. However, LGA 410/2015 does not refer explicitly to this tool, consultations mainly

23 See more in K. Radzik-Maruszak, *Rada gminy...*

24 For more see R. Büchi, 'Local Popular Votes in Finland – Procedures and Experiences', in: T. Schiller (ed.), *Local Direct Democracy in Europe*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011.

concern the issue of spatial planning and service provision. In addition, in accordance with Section 22 of the LGA, residents and other users of municipal services have a right to participate and influence. Municipal council is therefore obliged to ensure the diversity and effectiveness of forms of participation. Participation and influence in particular can be supported by the following tools:

- 1) arranging opportunities for discussion and for views to be presented, and setting up local resident panels;
- 2) finding out residents' opinions before taking decisions;
- 3) electing representatives of service users to municipal decision-making bodies;
- 4) arranging opportunities to participate in the planning of the municipality's finances;
- 5) planning and developing services together with service users;
- 6) supporting independent planning and preparation of matters by residents, organizations and other corporate entities.²⁵

The next tool that can be effectively used by local residents in Finland is local initiative. The operation of the tool is regulated in Section 23, Chapter V of LGA 410/2015. The right to start the initiative belong to all municipal inhabitants, corporate entities operating on its territory and users of municipal services. At least once a year, municipal council must be informed of all initiatives and actions undertaken on the basis of local initiative.

Additionally, LGA 410/2015 provides foundation to create three types of mandatory social councils: youth (*nuorisovaltuusto*), seniors (*vanhusneuvosto*) and councils for disabled people (*vammaisneuvosto*). The councils are created by municipal executive to secure the opportunity for these particular groups to participate and exert an influence. One council can be shared by two or more municipalities. The council should have an impact on planning process, implementation and monitoring of municipal activities in matters related to the general well-being of residents, their health, education, living and housing, mobility, as well as on other issues that are important for particular council's members.²⁶

25 See Section 22, Chapter V, LGA 410/2015.

26 See Sections 26–28, Chapter V, LGA 410/2015.

Finally, can be observe in Finland rising interest in new forms of participation such participatory budgeting (further as PB). For the first time PB was used in 2012 by the Finnish innovation fund Sitra.²⁷ Since then PB was implemented in many municipalities, although it should be emphasised that on a relatively small scale, for example in selected auxiliary units, such as municipal districts. In 2017, Helsinki decided to implement PB in more widely manner.²⁸

Methodology of the research

The empirical research was conducted in 10 out of all 22 municipalities of the Pirkanmaa Region (Pirkanmaan maakunta) between 2015 and 2017. These were: Akaa, Hameenkyrö, Kangasala, Lempäälä, Mänttä-Vilpula, Orivesi, Parkano, Pirkkala, Sastamala and Tampere. Importantly, the surveyed municipalities had diverse participatory framework. In some (e.g. Tampere) democratic innovations were used, while in others (e.g. Orivesi) only statutory minimum was applied.

Altogether 20 interviews with municipal councillors were carried out. During the process of selecting informants, the following criteria were taken into account: their experience (number of terms served as a councillor), status in the council (councillor performing additional functions, eg. chairman vs. 'ordinary' councillor) and party affiliation. Of the listed variables – taking into account the article's topic – the most important turned out to be the first one. The longer experience of local representatives, especially their observations on the changes that have taken place at the local level, allowed to capture the more detailed picture. During all interviews, the same questions were asked, sometimes slightly modified due to the context of given municipality. The councillors were asked: (1) about their contacts with inhabitants (e.g. frequency, channels); (2) how they generally assess the degree of citizens' influence on decision-

27 First steps for participatory budgeting in Finland 2018, <http://community.openspending.org/blog/2012/09/17/participatory-budgeting-finland>, (accessed: November 2020).

28 See more at City of Helsinki. *Helsinki's New Participation Plan* 2018, <https://www.hel.fi/uutiset/en/kaupunginkanslia/participation-plan> (accessed: November 2020).

-making process; (3) and about their attitude towards non-electoral forms of residents' activity, including democratic innovations. At the same time, the interlocutors were allowed to freely present their personal views. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The next step was the content analysis of the interviews, including factual coding, which allowed labeling individual segments of data.

Research results – different faces of civic activity

Before research results on local activity of citizens will be presented in detail, attention should be paid to few other issues regarding the relation between councillors and municipal residents in Finland. First, it is generally accepted that all elected local politicians put their contact data (phone number, e-mail address) on the municipal webpage. In addition to these rather formal possibility of communication, many councillors maintain less formal interactions with inhabitants, for example by deciding to talk to them during mass events (municipal celebrations, festivals, etc.), in electoral district or in one of the municipal auxiliary units. Second, some municipalities deliberately adopt strategy according to that councillors are divided into two groups – those working *for* residents and those working *with* residents. In the first group there are often so-called executive councillors (chairman, vice-chairman of the council, members of the board etc.). The second group consists of other councillors and their deputies. The latter have more frequent, genuine interactions with residents. Application of this solution depends on the size of the municipality as well as the strategy adopted by particular political party. Finally, many Finnish councillors are active on Facebook and Twitter, and use opportunities offered by both portals to inform residents about actions undertaken in the municipality (FI/2/C).

The analysis of the content of the interviews allows to identify several issues that regularly repeat in the councillors' statements.

Firstly, the vast majority of Finnish representatives, do not hide their disappointment with the relatively low number of messages coming from residents, as well as the negligible number of initiatives undertaken by them.

One of the newly elected councillors comments on this in the following way:

[...] I was very surprised that people did not contact me [...]. I am also surprised that they give me so little support (FI/5/E).

Another councillor added:

[...] residents contact me, but not as often as I would like (FI/14/ C).

Secondly, overwhelming majority of councillors believe that residents have moderate or little influence on the decision-making process. In the opinion of local representatives, this is both the result of insufficient activity of citizens, the approach adopted by local authorities (executive body, councillors themselves and municipal officials), as well as the perception and usage of existing participative framework by both aforementioned groups. Referring to the first matter, some councillors emphasized that residents intentionally distance themselves from deeper, non-electoral involvement as they believe that councillors should speak in their behalf. One of respondents, chairman of board, address to this issue in the following manner:

[...] when we have spatial planning in the municipality you can put your feedback though internet [...] but this is very frustrating as all people, my friends say – ‘we are not interested, we do not want to spend our time for that, it is very nice you are there, in politics, so you can do it, I will vote you to work for me [...] I do not know what is the solution to get people involve’ (FI/5/E).

Some councillors noted that it might be however also an outcome of other issues. On the one hand the fact that Finns have less time while politics get more and more complicated (FI/6/C). On the other hand, in line with the New Public Management philosophy, residents are treated in Finland still rather as local government’s clients, not as partners who can genuinely contribute to decision-making process. In this context some representatives pointed out that the culture of participation is not sufficiently developed in Finland (FI/7/C; FI/12/C) and that many citizens believe that professional knowledge is necessary to govern,

so rather expert politicians should made decisions in the behalf of the municipality (FI/11/C). Furthermore, some local representatives pointed out that changing or introducing new participative instruments requires additional work, which in turn causes the inconvenience for municipal leaders and administration. One of respondents commented on that in following manner:

[...] for me, the most important reason for the lack of new ways of residents' engagement is the party attitude of local leaders. I have heard many times (from them – KRM) 'we are chosen to make decisions, regardless of whether they are good or bad'. Thinking this way, we don't need citizens at all (FI/12/C).

Another one stated:

I think local administration is not very eager to introduce that because it is going to another obligation for them coming from central government, job to be done [...] for administrators it is an extra job (FI/2/C).

Finally, analysis of empirical data indicates councillors find problematic the quality and size of residents' involvement as well as the way participative framework operate. In this context few issues are crucial.

Firstly, according to councillors some inhabitants want to engage only to matters that are personally important to them. One of informants referred to this issue in following manner:

Many people want to be involved in ski-tracks but this one thing, and they are not interested in hundreds of decisions you have to decide about as council has to. I often see this that new people come to committees and they say 'I come here to affect this' but before they decide about that in a year, there are 200 hundred other decisions. I have seen that people get disappointed about it (FI/10/C).

Secondly, some councillors notice that nevertheless there are more and more democratic innovations, many of them have artificial character, meaning they do not provide citizens genuine impact on decision-making process. Certain local representatives, mainly the backbenchers, feel that frontbenchers cannot create truly involving participative framework. One of the councillors comments on this:

They [frontbenchers – KRM] try to establish something but it is more about serving coffee and pulla²⁹ [...]. Then somebody gives presentation for two hours and later there is no time for questions or we have time for one questions [...]. I would have done it differently because people feel they cannot speak [...] (FI/8/C).

Thirdly, what is probably the most important in the context of participation, councillors pointed out that participatory democracy unlike the representative one allows for coming out sectoral interests³⁰. This is mainly the case of democratic innovations. One of local representatives from the municipality that widely applied democratic innovations commented on that in following manner:

We analysed participatory tools we have and we know that people who participate in them are mainly older people and people who have a kind of background in some organisations, like NGOs [...] we cannot reach young people, families so it mixed up the message we got for that work, it is not balanced, we do not have representation of the whole city, we have representation of the minority [...]. I am afraid some of the decisions we make are the decisions set by the minority (FI/15/E).

Conclusions

Conducted analysis allows to formulate following observations. On the one hand, as indicated by the relatively high turnout in local elections, it can be stated that Finnish society is still alive and active. On the other hand, local representatives notice many limitations of participative framework that exists in Finland. According to them many citizens are passive and not interested in other forms of civic engagement that are based on more direct and participative solutions. This can result both from the Northern model of local government in which the emphasis is put on representation as well as NPM rhetoric that framed Finnish citizens primarily as local government's clients. Additionally, local representatives indicate that many Finns are indifferent to local issues. They either deliberately distance

29 Pulla is a type of dessert or pastry flavoured with cardamom.

30 K. Radzik-Maruszak, A. Pawłowska, 'Reprezentacja i partycypacja. Radni miejscy wobec idei i mechanizmów partycypacji obywatelskiej', *Przegląd Politologiczny*, 2017, No. 1, pp. 83–101; G. Jones, S. Ranson, 'Is There a Need for Participative Democracy? An Exchange', *Local Government Studies*, 1998, vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 1–10.

themselves from local matters or want councillors to make decisions in their behalf. Finally, even when residents involve themselves to local issues, councillors again observe the limits of this situation. In this context, local representatives indicate that citizens tend to engage only in matters that are personally important to them. Problematic is also the construction and operation of participative framework. Often, non-electoral forms of involvement, above all democratic innovation are perceived by both local politicians and administration as another 'task' to be done. Moreover, councillors, especially the backbenchers, note that citizens in many cases are not genuine beneficiaries of participative instruments. They also recognize that local participation is not free from manipulation.³¹

The example of Finland seems however also exemplify other problems related to participation. Firstly, it indicates how difficult is to reconcile representative and participative frameworks in firm and mature democracies. In this context it is visible that non-electoral participation has Janus face. Although in the theory that new forms of civic involvement strengthen the democratic ethos, the practice shows that is very difficult to design them in the way they can operate effectively. Secondly, on Finish example we can observe transformation of massive, collective democracy into individual one in which everyone is more and more focused on own needs and interests. Finally, what follows from above, an important question is whether in modern societies we can still have uniform, common interests or only selfish and contradictory ones. In other words, how we can deal with situation in which 'democracy of unity' is replaced by 'democracy of contradictions'.³² This undoubtedly needs further investigation.

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31 S.R. Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 1969, vol. 35(4), pp. 216–224.

32 A. Kubka, *Modele...*, p. 34.

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Passive, Indifferent, Engaged? The Faces of Local Civic Activity in Finland

Among European states Nordic countries, including Finland, are often set as examples of countries with high social capital, in which citizens willingly engage into decision-making process. The aim of the article is to verify this assumption and to present diverse attitudes of citizens towards local engagement. The article is based on quantitative data (statistics on civic involvement) as well as qualitative research (interviews with councillors from selected Finnish municipalities). The conclusion points at transformation of Finnish democracy and the fact that paradoxically developed institutions of representative democracy may have a negative influence on the wiliness to apply further, non-electoral mechanisms of civic involvement.

Keywords:

FINLAND, DEMOCRACY, CITIZENS, ENGAGEMENT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT.