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Political citizenship for all?

Local political participation by disabled people

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What do we know?

- Political behaviour among disabled people has received little attention
- Lower political participation due to
 - Problems with access
 - Impairments create limits
 - Services are not adapted for participation in public life



Varying political participation among disabled people

- Men participate more than women
- Younger persons participate more than older people
- Higher education, higher participation
- Persons who are active in other areas are also more active in politics
- Persons with more extensive networks are more active than persons with smaller networks
- Persons with severe impairments participate less than people with less severe impairments
- Participation increase if disabled people experience that politicians are concerned with relevant topics



Our empirical study

- A survey in 74 municipalities in 4 counties in Norway
- Answers from 767 (58%) representatives in the local councils and 50 (72%) secretaries of the executive boards



Under-representation

- 14% state that they have one or more impairments
- 10% define themselves as disabled
- In public statistics 17% of the population declare themselves as disabled



What kind of impairments?

- Hard of hearing: 7 persons
- Mobility problems: 6 persons
- Learning difficulties; problems with reading and writing: 7 persons
- Mental health problems: 5 persons
- Asthmatic and allergic problems: 17 persons
- Other disabilities/chronical diseases: 13 persons
- A combination of disabilities: 21 persons



Participation in different political committees, per cent

	All	Non-disabled	Disabled
Executive board	35	35	28
Standing committee	58	58	61
Standing committee on health and social care	18	17	23
Committee on disability	6	6	9
**Committee on elderly people	5	4	9
Other local political committees	43	44	35

N = 757



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Expectations to the disabled representatives' work performance, per cent

	Lower than other representatives	Same as other representatives	Higher than other representatives	Don't know
Other representatives	17	79	0	4
Other in one own's party	8	64	27	1
"Most people"	5	64	28	3

N=75



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Expectations to the disabled representatives' interest in topics of relevance for disabled people, per cent

	The same interest as other repr.	More interested	Much more interested	Unsure
Other representatives	57	27	7	9
Other repr. in one own's party	61	20	11	8



Expectations to the disabled representatives' work performance and interest in topics of relevance for disabled people, per cent

	Lower	As other representatives	Higher
Disabled	18	82	0
Non-disabled	5	93	2
	Less interested	The same interest	More interested
Disabled	0	63	37
Non-disabled	4	49	47

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How important is it for the representatives to put the interests of disabled people on the agenda?

	Not important	Neither/nor	Important
When one joined politics	15	44	45
Today N=75	12	20	68

Accessibility

- Physical access: Disabled representatives reported access problems to parking, elevators, ramps, toilets, localities, etc, varying between 50 – 70%
- Organising of meetings: Disabled representatives reported insufficient adaptations concerning accessibility to meeting rooms, transport, breaks, assistance, etc, varying between 40 - 90%
- The secretaries of executive boards gave much more positive answers than the representatives



Conclusions

- Disabled people are underrepresented in local political assemblies
- The disabled representatives are, like non-disabled politicians, motivated through their engagement in local affairs and general political interest
- The disabled representatives appear to be more concerned with issues concerning disability politics
- Poor accessibility is a main problem for stronger political participation
- More qualitative research is needed to gain further knowledge about hindrances and opportunities for disabled men and women when entering the political arena

