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### **Better services through co-operation? Municipal decision-makers' views about present and future service supply**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The study focuses on the perspectives of municipal decision-makers concerning the supply of services needed by municipal inhabitants, collection of data on the inhabitants' views, organisation of services, supply of electronic services, and further development of services in five Finnish municipalities representing different trends of development. The empirical data comprise 14 theme interviews of decision-makers in the municipalities of Hattula, Haukivuori, Oulu, Pieksämäki township and Pieksämäki rural municipality.

The interviewed decision-makers felt that the services for families with children and for ageing people were mainly well taken care of. Regional co-operation plays a major part in the supply of municipal services, and this is becoming increasingly important especially in the smallest municipalities, where it is often not possible to implement other measures towards efficiency in service activities.

Electronic services were considered to be of great importance in the municipal service supply. Their significance is expected to grow in the future, since the aim is to move all possible routines into the net to release more human resources for personal services. The benefits of the use of electronic services, from the municipalities' standpoint, include cost savings, more efficient service supply, possibility to develop new types of services, reduced need for personnel, and favourable effect on the municipality's image. The development of electronic services is mostly carried out subject to the traditional physical service process.

Municipalities play an important role as pioneers in the development of service supply. Their limited economic resources have greatly influenced service development, forcing the municipalities to seek new and more efficient means of producing services. The continuous development of services is further justified by the decreasing workforce and the aim of attracting new taxpayers into the municipality. Additionally, the higher requirements of the inhabitants concerning the availability and quality of services and better treatment pose major challenges for development.

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#### **Keywords**

Services, network services, municipalities, regional co-operation, regional development

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