

Societal Safety Coordinator As Remedy To Mitigate The Negative Effects Of Silos In Municipalities

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Societal safety is defined as “all activities and arrangements that contribute to the society’s critical functions protections to ensure citizens’ lives, health and basic needs” (Njå et al., 2020, p. 14). This is at the core of municipalities’ responsibilities, providing services for their citizens. It is a holistic situation in which the municipality are involved in all phases of the human lives, from birth to death. The systems distributed over the entire geographical area of a municipality could be described as complex systems in the way that Nancy Leveson describe “organizational complexity” (2011). Some of the systems are depicted in figure 1, and they are intertwined in a way that dependencies must be assessed to understand the system’s performances. The scientific literature encompasses many analytical approaches developed to analyze performance of critical infrastructures, see e.g. (Line et al., 2009). We acknowledge the need for better tools, but we also think that these tools are not recognized in most local governments and administrations as relevant for their purposes. In general, societal safety is not represented as departments or neither not as an area for specific competence and authority in the operation of a city or the associated municipality (Njå and Vastveit, 2016). The current situation in municipalities is characterized by specialized departments and services that implies suboptimizations and system designs that does not include societal safety concerns.



Fig. 1. The municipality – a system of complex systems

In this paper we analyze governing documents and the organizational and operational structure of a municipality in one of Norway's most urban areas, with respect to factors that increase uncertainties regarding the performance of the municipality's societal safety work. Past events are numerous with respect to societal systems malfunctioning, for example the so called "Glassjenta", the Ålesund rockslide, and the risk of snow avalanches in Northern Norway.

The "Glassjenta"-case comprised a girl that were given poor welfare that worsen her situation (2014-2016). It included the child welfare systems across municipalities, public order and rescue services which did not cooperate and conduct their services to secure the child's situation. The Ålesund rockslide killed five persons in 2008, and it contained poor collaborations from many services, such as building administration, energy supply and rescue systems. To secure the societal safety with respect to snow avalanches proper systems for monitoring the hazards are necessary and alarming tourists including their guides are of major importance. In most events, such as those mentioned above, the system's ability to maintain societal safety are not questioned at all. During the coronavirus pandemic there also was a strong need for analyzing and coordinating measures related to societal infrastructures outside the health systems.

Thus, in this paper we explore the function of a societal safety coordinator to remedy negative features or silos seen in the conduct of municipal services and systems. A societal safety coordinator will be responsible for assessing the municipality departments and services from a systems safety thinking approach and provide analyses and recommended arrangements/measures across the departments. The case study is an initial work to address weaknesses in the local administrations. The case municipality is one of the largest municipalities in Norway, but in a European context it is an average urban municipality. The analysis will be used for further developments to address needs for more tailor-made approaches to societal safety performance assessments.

A parallel will be drawn towards the science and practice of public health, which in Norway, as in several other countries, can trace its modern history back to the hygienic movement in the mid-1800s. Then the societal safety concerns concentrated upon contagious diseases, often due to substandard wastewater management in local communities. The societal safety concerns today are to be regarded as much more complex. Public health efforts locally and internationally are part of the systematic response to these challenges but cannot stand alone in meeting and managing them. This contribution will analyze the need for a new coordinating function at local public administration level and suggest tasks for this role based upon recent experiences and compared to the traditional role of the public health officer.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements and Reference heading should be left justified, bold, with the first letter capitalized but have no numbers. Text below continues as normal.

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