

# Cooperation with Local Authorities: The Case of Citizen Services

**Partner** City of Jyväskylä

**City** City of Jyväskylä

**Region** Central Finland

**Country** Finland

**Further Information**

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## Challenge

The “One Stop Shop” of Citizen Services is a way of offering both public and other services at one single service point, The aim is to make public services more accessible to citizens. Citizen Services provide a wide range of information, advice and services across administrative boundaries both in densely populated and remote areas of the City

Citizen Services were first launched in the early 1990s, when the Citizen Services Act came into force in Finland and the first inter-administrative Citizen Services project was set up by the Ministry of Finance, which is in charge of Citizen Services in collaboration with other authorities and interested parties, especially the municipalities. There are approximately 200 Citizen Service Offices currently operating in Finland. In the city of Jyväskylä, there are five of them.

This case study examines the cooperation of Citizen Services Offices with other service providers, especially non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

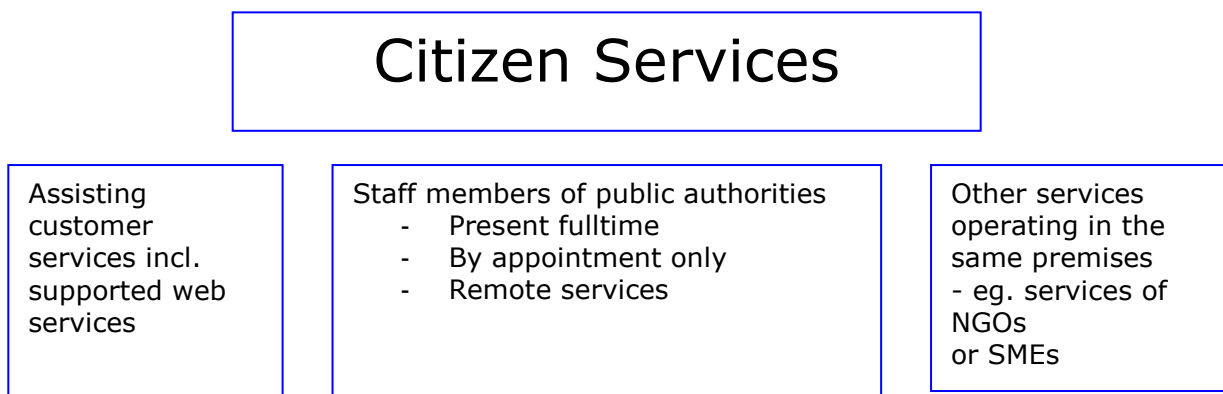
## Stakeholders involved

The main public sector actors in Citizen Services are local authorities, the Social Insurance Institution, police licensing authorities in central government, local registry offices, employment and economic development authorities and the tax administration. Other service providers can also operate in Citizen Service Offices, such as NGOs and local SMEs – based on local needs. In Jyväskylä the operation of Citizen Service Offices is run by the City authority.

To improve the role of NGOs or SMEs in Service Offices and to enable creation of new and innovative service patterns, the Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health<sup>1</sup> launched a project **YPP – development of Citizen Service Offices 2007-2010**<sup>2</sup> that aims to integrate both NGOs and public sector services of Citizen Service Offices, especially in the social and health sector. From the point of view of citizens, being able to access information on social and health services – provided both by the municipality and by NGOs – from one central service point is important.

The aim of the project in City of Jyväskylä is to test what kind of non-governmental services fit together with Citizen Services and on which preconditions. The project tries to improve the visibility of voluntary work and peer support services, so that cooperation between NGOs and the public sector will form permanent action patterns, which could also be adapted nationally.

However, only public authorities are entitled to provide public sector customer services: this means that NGOs can provide only their own services in the Citizen Service Office. In every case, the collaboration of different service providers creates lots of possibilities in the service offer of a Citizen Service Office.



## Process

<sup>1</sup> The Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health (STKL) is a national organization for collaboration in social and health policy, with the aim of developing welfare, especially basic social security and health services, preventing marginalization and increasing social responsibility and awareness of all citizens. The Federation acts and develops at local, national and international level.

<sup>2</sup> The project currently runs in a pilot stage in the areas of Joensuu, Jyväskylä, Kouvola and Oulu. The Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health has the overall responsibility for the project.

Citizen Services provided by public authorities are governed by legal provisions. The Citizen Services Act (223/2007) allows central and local government authorities and affiliated supportive customer services of the Social Insurance Institution to be organized and provided collectively. Supportive customer services involves receiving and handing over documents, giving advice on how to initiate and handle various proceedings and offering assistance on how to use eServices.

Citizen Services, as stipulated in the legal provisions, means that one administrative authority can offer supportive customer services on behalf of other authorities. Staff members of public authorities often operate in the Citizen Service Offices. This is the case especially when legislation requires that interaction should take place directly with the public authorities. This type of service is generally available on a part-time basis and by appointment.

The NGOs may offer information about their services and operations in Citizen Service Offices by brochures and other material, by organizing briefings, or by giving advice or consultation. Consultation hours of NGOs may be organized by professionals, volunteers and / or peer support actors of organizations, each from their own area of expertise

In Jyväskylä, one of the main functions of Citizen Service Offices is to bring services closer to the customers and citizens. In this way public services are more easily reached also for those living outside the city center – for example one of our Citizen Service Offices is located about thirty kilometres from the city centre. Citizen Service Offices are also places of general information about the city, and therefore often the first place where citizens ask for advice on how to proceed with the matter in hand.

## Financial framework

In Citizen Service Offices staff members of the City of Jyväskylä can offer supportive customer services on behalf of other authorities. These authorities, in turn, compensate for the costs incurred to the supplier of the Citizen Services. The Citizen Service Offices of Jyväskylä also operate in the premises of the city, and the personnel is staff of City of Jyväskylä. There are 1 to 3 people working in each office. The operation of Citizen Service Offices is financed mainly by the city.

**YPP – development of Citizen Service Offices 2007-2010** project is run by The Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health. The project is funded by Finland's Slot Machine Association (RAY), which supports several social and health activities in Finland.

## Outcome

The Citizen Service Offices in the City of Jyväskylä are nowadays provided through collaboration of different authorities and non-governmental organizations. This collaboration is based on the needs of the local residents and may take different forms in different offices. For citizens the outcome is more accessible and versatile services:

- variety of public services is provided in one place.
- variety of information and services of the NGOs and associations for the citizens.

Citizen Service Offices are places where it is easy to go, especially when uncertain on how to proceed with a matter. The Citizen Service Office model brings a variety of services provided by a variety of actors in public sector and NGOs under one roof – and easy access to them for citizens. Citizens are the ones who gain most by receiving information and services at one desk.

## Critical Success Factors

One of the aspects that have an effect on the success of the Citizen Services in the long run is the collaboration between different authorities and actors whose services are provided in Offices. It would be most useful to maintain the variety of services for a period of time so that customers are aware of which services are provided. Therefore the long term commitment of different parties is crucial. This brings out the second critical success factor, the public awareness of Citizen Service Offices and their functions. It is very important that people know about Citizen Service Offices and about the services they offer.

The staff members of Citizen Service Offices must have a broad knowledge of both the city and of the services of the other authorities involved to be able to provide a wide range of information, advice and services across administrative boundaries.

The administration of Citizen Service Offices within the city of Jyväskylä is a factor to be taken into consideration. Collaboration with NGOs is now organized through a project, but the goal is to make it permanent. Collaboration of different actors brings benefits for each of them, but it is important to agree on the responsibilities of actors in the Citizen Service Offices already in the first stages of planning the collaboration.

## Difficulties encountered

The difficulties encountered are related to the critical success factors. At the moment, the administration of the Citizen Service Offices in the City of Jyväskylä is scattered into

different parts of the organization, which makes it difficult to coordinate service development. This also impacts on the services offered in each Citizen Service Office and how to inform the public about the offer.

There have been many structural changes in the administration of the City of Jyväskylä and in some of the other public authorities that operate in Citizen Services. When the service offer of Citizen Services consists of variety of actors, changes in one of them affects all of the others.

As the variety of services offered by the Offices relies on more or less "voluntary" agreements there is no fixed service offer and in fact some essential services may be missing. This could be improved by "mainstreaming" the services under one solid administration which the also would be responsible for the quality of the service.

For NGOs the question of costs of using the premises of Citizen Service Office is crucial – having to pay rent for them might prevent their ability to provide services.

## Impact

**The Citizen Service Offices are one example of developing connections between some of the Quadruple Helix (public authorities, education & research, business, and civil society) actors from the point of view of public authorities - such as a city. Due to the fact that many services provided by public authorities are governed by legal provisions, and due to the role of the Citizen Service Offices in general, the absence of all Quadruple Helix model actors in Citizen Services might not be such a problem. However, Citizen Services can tie local authorities, business and civil society (non-governmental service providers and citizens/customers) closer together.**

Citizens are offered flexible services in one place, in a Citizen Service Office. It is good to have in mind that for a customer it is not important, who offers a service as long as it is provided. In the Citizen Service Offices of Jyväskylä local residents are provided with number of services of public authorities and of NGOs. To be able to find services in one location nearby secures easy access for them.

When information on the services provided by different actors is brought together, it makes it easier for a customer to find a service she/he might need. The awareness of different actors providing services increases, for example the NGO and their services are made more visible. Easy access services and arenas of social interaction provided by organizations (eg. peer support and voluntary work) may also prevent social exclusion.

In Jyväskylä local businesses are not included in the Citizen Service process yet, but in the future, for example, private actors in social services could make their services more visible in the Citizen Service Offices.

As the collaborating actors know better about the services they each provide, their action becomes more effective. Collaboration between a variety of actors and especially local NGOs may lead to variety of service combinations and even in new service innovations.

Sources:

[http://www.yhteispalvelu.fi/intermin/hankkeet/yp/home.nsf/files/citizen\\_services\\_low/\\$file/citizen\\_services\\_low.pdf](http://www.yhteispalvelu.fi/intermin/hankkeet/yp/home.nsf/files/citizen_services_low/$file/citizen_services_low.pdf) (1.4.2010)