

# Revista de Administración Pública

The logo for the Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública (INAP) is displayed in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letters are stylized, with the 'I' and 'N' being particularly prominent.

**Gregg G. Van Ryzin and Eloísa del Pino. How to Listen, how to learn and how to respond: civic surveys as a tool for reinventing government, Madrid, Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas y la Calidad de los Servicios, 2009, (Papeles de Evaluación y Calidad 9/2009) 26 pp.**

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The purpose of the text is to present in an analytic and descriptive way, the different perspectives on how governments have searched to focus their work on the needs of citizens as customers of the different services they offer. The text is divided into three sections: The first one, called "Citizens as Government customers"; the second, "The way of listening: data recollection methods"; and the third one, "How to learn: Satisfaction data analysis".

During the development of the first chapter, the different points of view regarding the idea of considering citizens as customers and their relationship with the concept of improving service, as a strategy for transforming bureaucracy are explained. On the other hand, it is mentioned that the relationship between government and citizens cannot be conceived in the same way as the one between private service suppliers and their customers. From this reflection, it is described how in some countries they have developed actions for handling customer service and citizen satisfaction under a government perspective.

In the case of the U.K., they continuously make standardized citizen surveys with a comparative evaluation, and they demand local authorities their mandatory application every three years. In this case we must mention that customer letters receive special attention, and they establish quality standards and the mandatory recollection of information as feedback.

The Institute for Citizen-Centred in Canada makes a survey at national level called "Citizens First", every two or three years. They have also developed the Common Measure Tool which is a questionnaire which can be used by local organizations and authorities. They have also identified the key or driving factors (Key Drivers) related with citizen satisfaction and they have certified a private survey company by Internet, so they can obtain data and information through the web.

It is mentioned, as a case apart, that in the United States the Federal Government has had little participation in the management practices of the local governments, although the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), has been one of the main promoters of this issue, with few resources. The International City Managers Association (ICMA), and the National Investigation Center have developed a National Citizen Survey which allows to make a comparative evaluation of the results obtained with respect of the citizens satisfaction in the different town halls.

A special case is that of the American Customer Satisfaction Index, ACSI, which although it was designed for the private sector, has been recently used for measuring some public services of the American Federal Government.

In the case of the European Union, they have developed what is called the Euro barometer, which focuses in issues related to the European integration process, providing data about the public perception of the institutions as well as the performance of the different national and local governments. They also have what is called the Urban Audit which collects data about life conditions in 258 cities, and the instant Euro barometer which approaches issues such as satisfaction with urban services.

Although Spain is included in the scope of European surveys, great efforts have been made within this country by different organizations, among them the Sociological Investigation Center (CIS), which has the purpose of studying the Spanish society, through surveys which have originated 65 administration and public services studies. In recent years the Public Politic and Public Service Quality Evaluation State Agency, through the "Service Quality Observatory", has developed different perception studies with the purpose of learning the citizens opinion (whether they use the services or not) as well as satisfaction studies which are applied to the direct users of the services.

In the second chapter, “The way of Listening: data recollection methods”, emphasis is made on the importance of the methodology used for recollecting data from the citizen experience and their satisfaction in regard of the rendered services. It also describes the different techniques for data recollection which can be used. The methods described are personal, telephone and mail interviews, web questionnaires and more specific, *Internet Access Panels*.

In the last chapter of the text –“How to learn: satisfaction data analysis”– it is mentioned that, although data recollection is essential, data analysis is much more important and vital. The main tools are comparison evaluation, analysis of key drivers and analysis of importance-appraisal. Different examples in different countries are described.

The authors question the following: Can citizens accurately judge quality service? To answer this question they examine different points of view, from the one which mentions that indicators simply reflect the stereotype image of the administration, the one which says the results only reflect social-economical characteristics of the people surveyed and their attitude towards government, and the one which supports citizen evaluations because they can be valuable at least in the sense that they correspond to evaluation made by an external and neutral observer. The conclusion is that more investigation is needed to determine which public services can be judged more accurately by the citizens.

In the same way they ask themselves: How to respond to the challenge of satisfying the citizens` demands without weakening public authority condition? Their conclusion is that a government which is oriented to the citizens does not weaken democracy nor the government role in society. On the contrary, it improves trust in government institutions and reinforces democratic trend.

That is why it is necessary to develop a common method which can be applied both at national and local levels for recollecting data more efficiently and constantly. In the near future the way the government perceives citizens and measures their satisfaction will have to be enhanced, with the finality of improving public services which increase trust in the institutions without withdrawing from the traditional values of democracy and public service.