

# 'I would like to change politics, that's why I'm here'

An interview with Sóley Tómasdóttir, who is a councilor in the local government of Reykjavík. Sóley is a political member of the Icelandic Left Green Party.



By Jóhanna and Linda

## What is the role of local governments? What are some of its major assignments?

The roles and assignments of local governments have changed a lot. Originally municipalities were formed to fulfill two roles: to round up the sheep in the fall and to take care of the homeless (find them housing etc.). Nowadays municipalities have to manage all basic services that concern the people.

## What role do young people have within the local government?

Community centers and The Youth Culture House run youth-councils. They meet and sit in on one City Council meetings in the spring. They support the sports-clubs and elementary schools.

## Is there anything you'd like to do to get more young people into local government?

Strengthen the youth-councils. I think we don't listen enough to young people, but they are also not outspoken enough about their ideas and opinions.

## Has the economic crisis had any effect on how the municipalities are run?

Yes, a huge effect. Tax revenues have decreased significantly. Funding e.g. for preschools, is being cut back way too much. I don't agree with the decisions that have been made on where to cut back on funding.

### **Where do gender equality issues stand within the local government?**

The gender ratio of elected candidates is almost equal. But the roles that women vs. men are put in are still very divided; men are chosen for leadership roles and get higher salaries. Women do not get the same opportunities as men, neither are they elected nor are they put in the positions with the most power. More men than women show an interest in a career in politics as it is a very male-centered job; the hours are inconvenient, sometimes around the clock. My family can't always depend on me as a mother. It's a harsh environment and politicians need to be ready to take terrible criticism. Women are criticized particularly harshly as they tend to be more sensitive in that area.

### **Which of the local government's assignments relate to young people the most?**

They all relate to young people. For example we are building a hotel in the Kvosin area of the city centre that is going to be there until our grandchildren die, so that definitely relates to young people. All decisions are about something that concerns all of us. But of course there are youth-activities that concern young people directly, such as the Municipal Work-Schools.

### **What are your personal goals within the local government?**

I would like to change politics, that's why I'm here. A career in politics should be desirable for anyone who wants to change something within their community. But when politics are so ruthless and full of conflict people think twice before diving into them. This might be causing us to lose our best potential politicians; most people don't put up with such difficult hours and work procedures. The reason why I became involved in politics is that I can't accept how women and men are unequal in our society and that has to be changed.

I've often been asked "So you hate men?" - No, I've never said that. "But you've written it." - No, I've never written it either. "But you wouldn't want to have a son." - Yes, I would, actually. All of this is because a very small part of something I've said was taken out of context and reinterpreted. And people do this with determination to decrease my power. But getting to me just isn't that easy.