

# From science and policy to people and back: Processes of risk communication

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## Introduction

Risk communication has become increasingly important as access to information increases, with attendant increases in fears and concerns about a variety of issues. Risk communication is about a dialogue regarding risks in the future. The BARCOM project examined the relationships of Arctic local communities to their environment and the potential health risks caused by pollution from industry. In this context, we were interested in finding out more about the risk communication (RC) process in Norway and Russia – the information sources, role of “transmitters”, information flow, etc.

This poster presents a first selection of results, focussing on the following questions:

1. What information sources are important for knowledge on local pollution and its health consequences?
2. Is there a difference in the people’s trust in different levels of authorities and is their information taken seriously?
3. Are there any differences in the RC process between Russia and Norway?

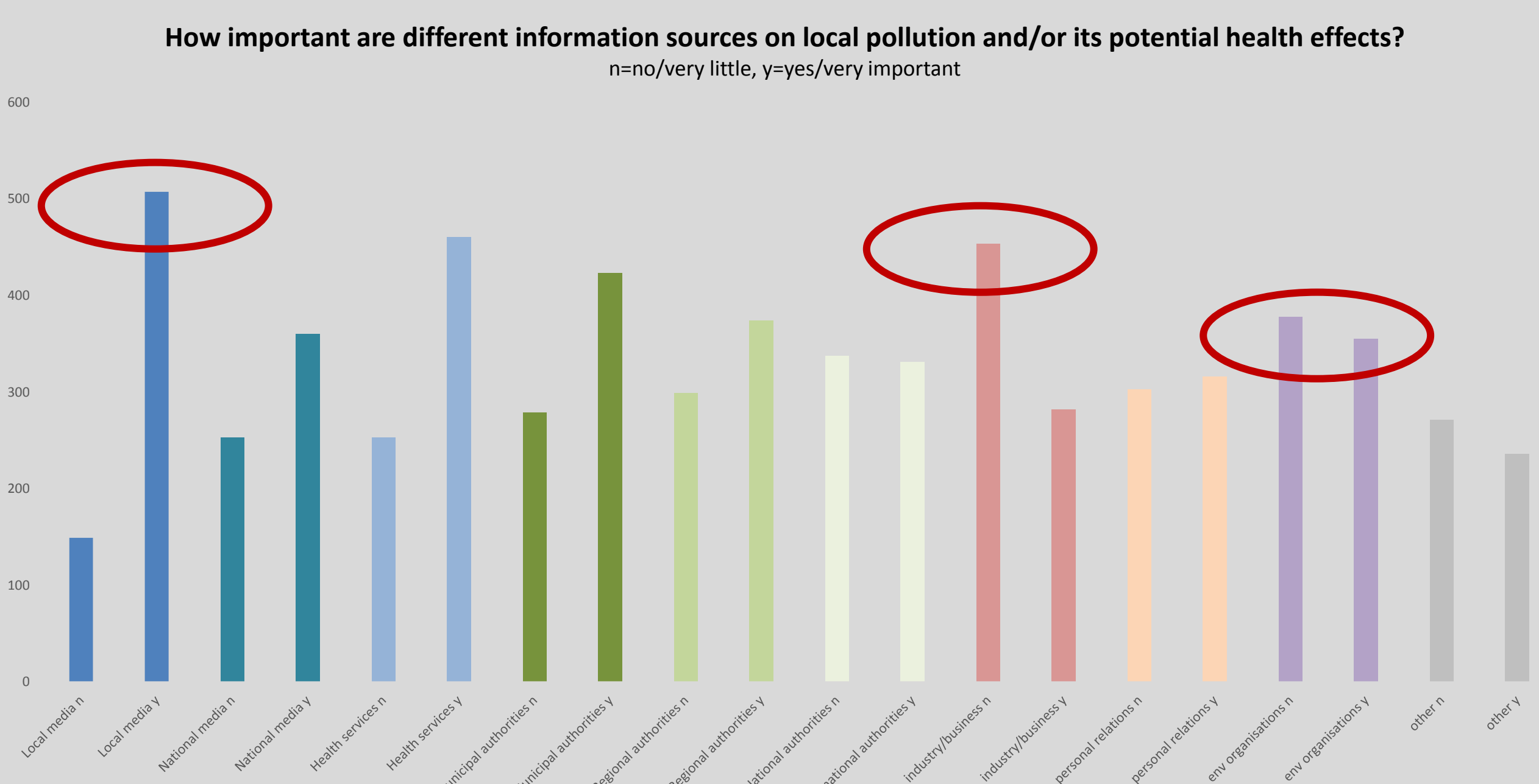
## Method and data

We gathered data from more than 2300 respondents from six different locations, both in Russia and Norway (see map). Qualitative interviews with representatives from industry, municipalities and health services have also been conducted in Russia and Norway.



Map of the case communities

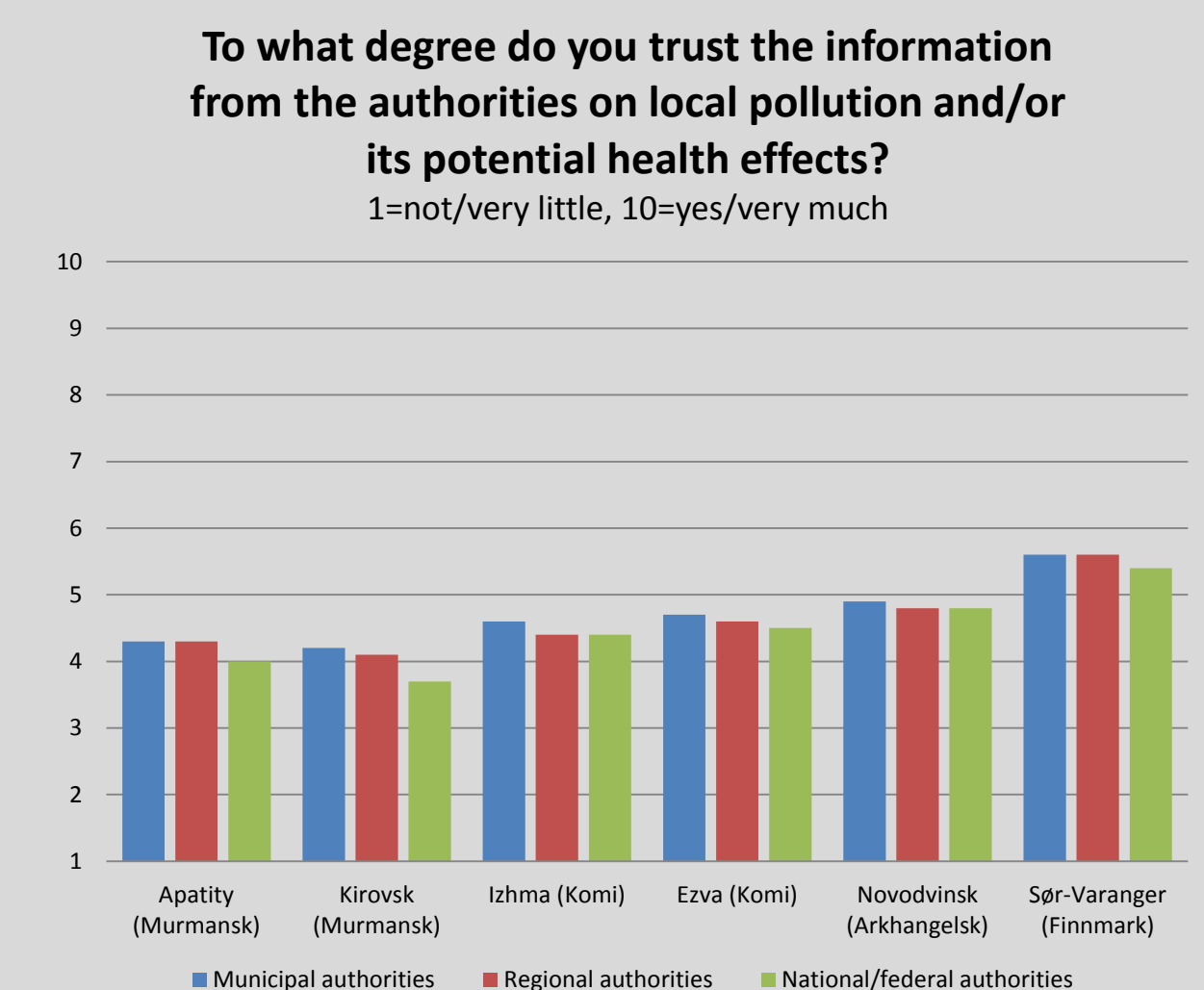
## Results



Local media and health services seem to be most important information sources, industry/business is an information source of low importance. The importance of environmental organisations as information source is interestingly quite balanced.

## Trust in information

Statistical analysis by both location and gender indicates **that people in general seem to consider information from the authorities (municipal, regional and national) as rather not important and neither trust these sources, nor take information from them very seriously.**



## Communicating risks

**Russia:** The interviews showed that in many “mono-towns” (“one company-towns”) industry is very dominant, also politically. In addition to the economic importance of the companies for the municipalities, many public representatives have personal economic ties to the companies. Industries and regional authorities produce reports about pollution and publish them, but information is not in a “language” suited for the general population. Municipalities are not obliged to provide any reports at all. There is no communication between different authorities (e.g., between the ones responsible for health and those responsible for environment), researchers and industry.

**Norway:** Communication processes are more bilateral than in Russia; even though industry representatives are not very active in communicating health risks to the public. Oftentimes there are national regulations that apply (esp. for industry). Information is disseminated through different media and meetings are held to discuss certain issues. However, public authorities do not always have up-to-date information on health risks caused by pollution.

## Concluding remarks

Risk communication is highly influenced by and dependent upon the levels of trust between actors - between industry and research, local and national politicians, their agendas and industry, and between local authorities and local populations. The level of trust says much about how effective risk communication can be. First results show that the level of trust in municipalities seems rather low, also in environmental organisations and industry/business. It became also visible that the RC process is different in Russia compared to Norway, with differences in including relevant stakeholders (municipalities, industry, science), including the public and with partially large margins for industry.

## About the Barcom project (2013-2016)

The project’s full title is *The impacts of hazardous substances on human health and communities in the Barents Region - Knowledge, communication and decision making*. It has three work packages.

**WP1 Contaminants and everyday life:** Inhabitants’ perceptions of how hazardous substances affect safe and healthy local food and their the effects on human health, and how it affects their everyday practices and well-being.

**WP2 Local environmental and industrial policies:** The role of local bureaucrats and politicians in the regulation of industrial activities that pose local environmental risks.

**WP3 Risk communication:** The production, understanding and communication of knowledge on the links between pollution, local industries and inhabitants’ everyday practices with health and well-being.

The project is lead by Eirik Mikkelsen from Norut ([www.norut.no](http://www.norut.no)). We acknowledge financing from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.