

Citizen participation

IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING



Contents

General Introduction	3
Participatory Democracy at the Level of Local Self-Governance in Kosovo ..	5
The concept of accountability sofa	7
Methodology	9
Zvečan/Zveqan	11
Leposavić/Leposaviq	14
Novo Brdo/Novo Bërdë	17
Parteš/Partesh	20
Štrpce/Shtërpçë	22
Zubin Potok	26
North Mitrovica	29
Gračanica/Graçanicë	32
Conclusion	35
Recommendations	37

General Introduction

In modern democracies, the principles of participation are considered to be essential hallmarks of a healthy and functional system that is structurally capable of taking into consideration the needs and views of its citizenry.¹ As with many concepts that are perhaps intangible in that they involve an opaque set of ideals that are difficult to measure empirically, there are competing notions as to what constitutes a 'participatory' democratic arrangement. Summing up a broad spectrum of definitions, participatory democracy is a governing ideal that seeks to take into consideration citizens' central role when determining how and in which manner they wish to be governed by creating mechanisms that facilitates their inclusion in various decision-making processes.² This goes beyond more traditional or conservative democratic archetypes, that simply provide for the population to vote for their decision-makers rather than establishing channels for them to have a more direct role in the formulation of public policy. Participatory democracy can be seen as a close relative of direct democracy, but is distinct in the sense that direct democracy, forms of which can be found in locations as varied as California (United States) and Switzerland, makes heavy use of the referendum as a tool for measuring and ensuring public support for various socio-political initiatives while participatory democracy generally envisages the involvement of citizens as political actors when determining the design and direction of local and national policies.³ The most common incarnation of participatory democracy tends to be found at the level of local administration, where it is easiest to provide legal and institutional means for local residents to undertake a role in decision-making processes by allowing for them to communicate their needs and demands in a structuralised manner. Although how and in what manner this should be implemented in practice can vary, a number

¹Bevir, Mark., *Participatory Democracy* in Key Concepts in Governance, London, SAGE Publications LTD, 2009, pg. 95.

²IBID

³Marie Bolton, *The Promises and Dangers of Direct Democracy: A Historical Comparison*, Marie Bolton, Siècles [Online], 37 | 2013

of general principles can be employed when examining the depth and scope of participatory democracy at the local level⁴:

- The extent to which citizens can observe various decision-making processes (such as budgeting);
- Mechanisms that allow citizens to take part in processes of setting budgetary/financial priorities;
- The inclusion of vulnerable/marginalised groups in the decision-making process;
- The inclusion of civil society/and or informal groups of citizens;
- Public availability of relevant information (particularly when it comes to municipal budgets);
- The promotion of direct exchanges of views between citizens and relevant decision-makers and institutional representatives

Although the principles outlined above are broad, they have been incorporated into legislation in a number of different countries. What this paper will seek to assess is the extent to which a certain number of basic principles of participatory democracy are practiced in eight (8) municipal administrations in Kosovo, using a set methodology and research that will be further elaborated throughout this course of this analysis.

⁴<https://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/democratic-governance/dg-publications-for-website/a-users-guide-to-measuring-local-governance-/LG%20Guide.pdf>

Participatory Democracy at the Level of Local Self-Governance in Kosovo

The core piece of legislation in Kosovo that stipulates for the existence of participatory and direct democracy at the local level is the *Law on Local Self-Governance* that was passed in June of 2008 by the Kosovo Assembly, which contains broad and wide-ranging guarantees for the inclusion of citizens in the decision-making process.⁵ The Law in question also obligates local municipal administrations to engage in practices that encourage a significant amount of transparency in government work. Section XI (*Direct Democracy and Citizen Participation Mechanisms*) of the Law outline a number of steps that municipal governments are obligated to undertake in order to provide for the inclusion of citizens in an array of processes that take place at the local level. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- The holding of (at least) two (2) open meetings at which any member of the public may participate, the time of date of which must be published (at least) two weeks in advance of the event itself. During said meetings, municipal officials must inform those present of 'activities' to take place and participants must be able to ask questions and make proposals⁶;
- The municipal government must take steps to inform the public of important programmes/events⁷
- Transparency at the municipal level must be ensured by enhancing public participation in legislative and other mechanisms, guaranteeing public access to documents through the issuing of administrative instructions⁸;
- The right for persons and/or organisations to submit petitions and initiatives to the municipality (within the scope of existing municipal legislations)⁹;
- The establishment of so-called 'Consultative Committees' that will facilitate/enable participation in the decision-making process and

⁵<https://mapl.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Law-On-Local-Self-Government.pdf>

⁶Chapter IX, Article 68 (Direct Democracy and Citizen Participation Mechanisms), Law Nr. 03/L-040 *On Local Self-Government*

⁷IBID

⁸IBID

⁹Chapter IX, Article 70 (Citizens' Initiatives), Law Nr. 03/L-040 *On Local Self-Government*

that will include 'citizens and representatives of non-governmental organisations'¹⁰

The *Law on Local Self-Governance* was drafted taking into consideration the European Charter on Local Self-Government and its protocols, with the aim of employing European and international best practices in order to improve the work and efficiency of municipalities in Kosovo.¹¹

Taking into consideration the legal provisions that obligate municipal self-governments to facilitate the participation of local residents in governance, this report will seek to analyse and assess the quality and depth of citizen participation in various local political processes in eight (8) municipalities:

- Mitrovica/Mitrovicë Veriore;
- Zvečan/Zveqan;
- Zubin Potok/Zubin Potok;
- Leposavić/Leposaviq;
- Novo Brdo/Novo Bërdë;
- Gračanica/Graçanicë;
- Parteš/Partesh;
- Štrpce/Shtërpçë

As has been already mentioned, there exists differing criteria for measuring the quality and health of participatory democracy and this paper will tackle the issue by examining the extent to which there are mechanisms in place that foster citizen participation and the inclusion of both formal (non-governmental organisations) and non-formal groups in the decision-making process locally. This includes access to information, the ability to take part in and observe procedural elements of local governance, as well as the extent to which representatives of institutions/governing bodies are prepared to interact with residents and whether or not there are structuralised mechanisms for citizens to communicate with their representatives.

¹⁰Chapter IX, Article 73 (Consultative Committees), Law Nr. 03/L-040 *On Local Self-Government*

¹¹Law Nr. 03/L-040 *On Local Self-Government*

The concept of accountability sofa

Considering all the above legally defined principles, Aktiv created a new informal principle for assessing the accountability of local institutions - the accountability sofa. "Accountability sofa" is an Aktiv brand and concept whose essence is to bring together interested citizens and representatives of local self-government in one place, in an informal atmosphere, in order to hold a constructive debate on various topics of importance to the local population. Ever since the formation of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, our organization's goal has been to assist local institutions in law enforcement and institutional capacity building. In the challenging conditions of building new (local) institutions and integrating into the Kosovo system, Aktiv assisted local institutions in northern Kosovo in their efforts to align their operations and adjust legal obligations and effective functionality to the new system.

The aim of assisting local institutions during this process was to strengthen citizens' participation mechanisms in local decision-making. Since citizen participation in decision-making and good governance is one of the most important principles of democracy at the local level, Aktiv has focused its activities on informing and empowering local people in the decision-making process. Forming informal groups and coordination mechanisms through which citizens could more easily and effectively articulate their demands (and present them to local institutions) provided initial assistance to citizens in their decision-making involvement. It was after directing the interests of citizens in this format that the idea was created to create a concept that, along with already existing forms of citizen participation in decision-making, would develop additional channels of communication between the local population and representatives of institutions. By naming this concept the accountability sofa, Aktiv wanted to provide citizens and institutions with another form of informal gathering for better and communication. Not only did citizens have the opportunity to present their requests to representatives of local institutions through the sofas, but also the space for assessing decision makers' responsibilities was provided.

In the absence of citizen participation in local democratic decision-making, mediation between citizens and service providers has been the focus of Aktiv's engagement in this format, starting from 2016. In addition to moderation and facilitation, the presence of local media was also provided within the organized accountability sofas in order for the

problems of citizens and the responsibility of institutions to gain visibility and importance. The media reports from the meetings resulted in increased citizens' interest in participating in the decision-making process within legally defined formats, i.e. public discussions and sessions organized by local institutions.¹² Moreover, the increased presence of citizens in public sessions of local municipal assemblies proved to be a positive signal to the institutions, which showed additional efforts in order to inform the population more adequately about their work, and above all about the announcements of upcoming sessions (open to the public). The productive and constructive dialogue achieved through the informal gathering during the implementation of the project, supported by the Olof Palme Center, produced practical consequences that were visible in the work and responsibilities of local institutions.

¹² An example of a media report can be found at the following link:
<http://www.radiokontaktplus.org/grad/problem-napustenh-pasa-resiv-ako-se-na-njemu-radi-zajednicki/13763>

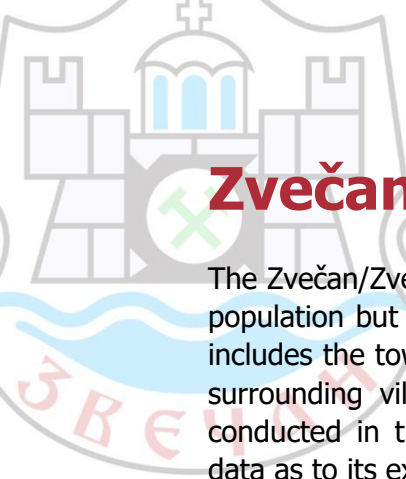
Methodology

Prior to evaluating the performance of municipal institutions and their accountability to citizens, Aktiv created objective criteria, indicators and benchmarks for the purpose of adequate monitoring of local governments. The methodology was designed to translate the quantitative and qualitative parameters of measurability of municipal institutions' work (in response to citizens' demands and needs) within the existing legal framework into a measurable framework for evaluating their performance. To this end, a consultant was hired to create indicators of good governance aimed at objectively assessing citizen participation in the decision-making process at the local level, as well as assessing the degree of transparency of the work of local institutions. A particular focus of this methodological approach was on the participation of informal citizen groups, non-governmental organizations, non-majority communities and representatives of vulnerable groups. On the other hand, accessibility and accountability of local institutions to citizens' demands and needs, as well as their active participation in decision-making, are the main parameters for assessing their effectiveness.

Following the establishment of the methodological principles of the survey, Aktiv's research team conducted a series of activities aimed at gathering information that would help in understanding citizens' perceptions of the work of their local institutions. In addition to meetings with citizens and representatives of local institutions, accountability sofas were held, the format of which was explained in the previous chapter. Local experts, with the help of the research team, conducted a series of interviews with representatives of institutions in eight targeted municipalities (with a Serb majority): North Mitrovica, Gračanica/Gračanicë, Leposavić/q, Štrpce/Shtërpçë, Zubin Potok, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Zvečan/Zveçan and Parteš/Parteshi. The joint engagement of experts and researchers evaluated the work of local institutions based on previously identified good governance parameters at the local level. In the evaluation process, due to the specific situation in the four northern municipalities, alternative municipal sites were used as relevant sources for assessing good governance. In addition, the team also monitored the 2019 assembly sessions in the eight municipalities covered by this survey.

By collecting data and feedback from local governments and citizens, based on a methodological scale prepared in advance, the research team developed and evaluated adherence to the principles of good governance in eight targeted municipalities. On a scale with the lowest score of 0 and the highest of 15, the final quantitative assessment of good governance among municipalities was given, based on established methodological principles used during project implementation.

A comprehensive approach to information gathering compiled a set of qualitative and quantitative criteria that subsequently served to assess the good governance of each of the eight municipalities. By analyzing citizen participation in decision-making and access to information in the work of local institutions, a general insight into the functioning of democratic principles and good governance at the local level was obtained.



Zvečan/Zveqan

The Zvečan/Zveqan Municipality, one of four in north Kosovo, is small in population but covers a fairly large geographical area of 122 km². This includes the town of Zvečan/Zveqan as well as a total of thirty-five (35) surrounding villages. Due to the fact that the 2011 census was not conducted in the northern municipalities, there is currently no official data as to its exact population, but it is estimated at 16,650.¹³

The current Mayor of the Zvečan/Zveqan Municipality is Vučina Janković (Srpska Lista), who was re-elected in 2017 with 70.59% of the vote, after already having served a term. Aside from the Mayor, there is also a Deputy Mayor and a Deputy Mayor for Communities that serve the Municipality.¹⁴

Citizen Participation and Good Governance

The local administration in the Municipality of Zvečan/Zveqan have made efforts to improve participatory elements in local administration and to facilitate the establishment and functioning of mechanisms that allow for both the direct involvement of citizens in the decision-making process, as well as to heighten the scope and quality of information that citizens have access to.

The current municipal website (<http://www.ezvecan.com/>) is regularly updated with information, as envisaged in the Kosovo Law on Local-Self Governance. That having been said, it is technically not under the umbrella of official websites used by the government of Kosovo. Despite this, there are a number of publicly available online instruments for the filing of complaints, initiatives, as well as a section of the website that is dedicated to questions for the Mayor (*Ask the Mayor/Pitajte gradonačelnika*).¹⁵ These complaints, requests, questions and suggestions are filed and archived by municipal employees.

Also available on the unofficial municipal website are minutes from municipal meetings, municipal assembly sessions as well as the

¹³ According to information published on Zvečan's so-called 'e-opština' website: <http://www.ezvecan.com/pages/o-zvecanu>

¹⁴ <http://www.ezvecan.com/pages/zamenik-gradonacelnika>

¹⁵ http://www.ezvecan.com/ask_majors/new and <http://www.ezvecan.com/requests/new>

municipal budget.¹⁶ That having been said, workplans for the Office of the Mayor and the Municipal Assembly are currently not publicly available. The Municipality has also not published information regarding the real estate holdings of the Municipality, although a representative of the local government did claim that this process was underway as of November 2019.¹⁷ Furthermore, the local government also did not publish information on fiscal debts, although it was claimed that as of 2019, the Municipality had none.¹⁸ Although names and photos of the members of the Municipal Assembly are available online,¹⁹ theirs and the contact details of other municipal representatives have not been made available to the general public. Another potential issue is the fact that the Municipality does not have a website in the Albanian language, nor are any public documents available in any language aside from Serbian.

During an 'accountability sofa' held in the Zvečan/Zveqan Municipality with local residents and municipal officials, participants expressed their desire to see an intensification of projects geared at improving local infrastructure, particularly when it comes to water and sewage facilities.²⁰ Those present also highlighted the need for a regional safe house for victims of domestic violence. This event also presented itself as an opportunity for those participating to acquaint themselves with existent mechanisms for citizens to file complaints and submit request via Zvečan/Zveqan's website.

According to research conducted in the Zvečan/Zveqan Municipality, Assembly and other meetings are generally open to the public, and local civil society organisations and citizens' groups regularly participate.²¹ Furthermore, it was noted by a number of participants and interviewees that the Municipality, including the Office of the Mayor, are generally accessible and relatively responsive to citizens' requests and needs (providing that they are within reason.)²² Aside from this, many local residents as well as representatives of local non-government organisations assessed highly the level of cooperation they enjoyed with

¹⁶<http://www.ezvecan.com/documents>

¹⁷Based on a questionnaire received from a representative of Zvečan Municipality in November of 2019.

¹⁸IBID

¹⁹<http://www.ezvecan.com/pages/odbornici>

²⁰<http://gracanicaonline.info/2019/11/28/zvecan-prioritet-izgradnja-infrastrukturnih-objekata-i-sigurne-kuce-za-zrtve-porodicnog-nasilja/>

²¹Based on results from questionnaire and interviews conducted on the territory of the Zvečan Municipality in November of 2019.

²²IBID

municipal institutions, particularly the Office of the Mayor and the Municipal Assembly.

1. Are public meetings open to the public and have citizens been informed of the same in advance?	1
2. Are municipal assembly sessions open to the public and have citizens been informed of them within the legal deadline?	1
3. Did representatives of the non-governmental sector, informal citizen groups and vulnerable and non-majority groups participate in the public meetings and sessions of the assemblies?	1
4. Have all regular municipal assembly meetings provided for by law been held?	1
5. Is the work plan of the Municipal Assembly and the Mayor for 2019 publicly available?	0
6. Were the decisions of the Mayor and the decisions and minutes of the Municipal Assembly meetings and the results of the voting published? Was the news regarding these items published on the municipality's website and was there a recording of the assembly session?	0.75
7. Are municipal public documents available in all official languages?	0
8. Do municipalities have official websites provided by law and do they publish information relevant to citizens?	0.5
9. Has the municipality website published information on the mayor and assembly members and their contact information?	0.5
10. Is there information on the municipality's own revenues and public budget?	1
11. Have the citizens participated in the sessions dedicated to proposing municipal budgets and did they submit their proposals (which were adopted)?	1
12. Is there a mechanism at the municipal level available to citizens to submit formal proposals, requests or complaints?	1
13. Assessment of good governance based on the defined methodology used during the survey.	2

Total: 10.75



Leposavić/Leposaviq

Leposavić/Leposaviq is the geographically largest municipality in the north of Kosovo and includes Leposavić/Leposaviq proper as well as seventy-two (72) villages on its territory. As is the case with other northern municipalities, there is currently no up-to-date census data due to the fact that it was not carried out there in 2011. That having been said, according to the municipal website, the current population stands at approximately 18,600²³, of which 644 are members of non-majority communities (Bosniaks, Albanians and RAE community.)²⁴

The current Mayor of the Leposavić/Leposaviq is Zoran Todić (Srpska Lista), who won the 2017 local elections with 63.20% of votes. The nineteen (19) seats in municipal assembly are split between three political parties.

Citizen Participation and Good Governance

Similarly to other northern municipalities in the north of Kosovo that were constituted under Kosovo's legal and constitutional framework within the past 5-6 years, Leposavić/Leposaviq has faced challenges in ensuring full citizen participation, direct democracy and access to information as envisaged by the Kosovo Law on Local Self-Government. That having been said, the municipality has made some progress in ensuring that certain elements of the Law are implemented in practice, and, over the past several years, undertaken measures to establish mechanisms that are conducive to the facilitation of the inclusion of citizens in decision-making processes.

In terms of citizen participation in localised decision-making processes and procedures, research and interviews conducted in the Leposavić/Leposaviq municipality revealed that Assembly sessions are open to the general public and are often attended by representatives of local civil society organisations.²⁵ Leposavić/Leposaviq, like other municipalities in the north, does not currently have an operational website that is part of the official Kosovo government network. It does, however, run a website (<https://www.eleposavic.com/>) on which it

²³ <https://www.eleposavic.com/pages/o-leposavicu>

²⁴ <https://www.eleposavic.com/pages/o-leposavicu>

²⁵ According to information collected through interview and questionnaire with municipal representatives in Leposavić/Leposaviq in late November and early December of 2019.

regularly publishes material and information that is accessible to members of the general public. It also has an online platform (pitajte gradonačnika and sistem 48) that allows users to submit questions to the Mayor, as well as complaints, requests and suggestions.²⁶ Also available on its website are news stories and other information about Municipal Assembly Meetings and other activities and projects support and/or financed by the local government. Unlike other municipalities, has not made annual budgets available on its unofficial website. It should be noted here that Leposavić/Leposaviq's unofficial website is currently available only in the Serbian language.

During conversations with both local residents as well as with representatives of the local government, the level and the quality of communication between citizens, citizens' groups (including civil society organisations) and the municipality were rated fairly positively. The overall impression is that local institutions can be relatively open to cooperation, with information sharing and coordination occurring. While there is room for improvement in a number of areas, it was also noted that (positive) changes have occurred over the past several years, with the forms of contact described above increasing in regularity. Furthermore, members of local groups tended to feel that their concerns and input was taken into consideration in the course of conducting municipal affairs.

1. Are public meetings open to the public and have citizens been informed of the same in advance?	0.5
2. Are municipal assembly sessions open to the public and have citizens been informed of them within the legal deadline?	1
3. Did representatives of the non-governmental sector, informal citizen groups and vulnerable and non-majority groups participate in the public meetings and sessions of the assemblies?	1
4. Have all regular municipal assembly meetings provided for by law been held?	1
5. Is the work plan of the Municipal Assembly and the Mayor for 2019 publicly available?	0
6. Were the decisions of the Mayor and the decisions and	1

²⁶https://www.eleposavic.com/ask_majors/new and <https://www.eleposavic.com/requests/new>

minutes of the Municipal Assembly meetings and the results of the voting published? Was the news regarding these items published on the municipality's website and was there a recording of the assembly session?	
7. Are municipal public documents available in all official languages?	0
8. Do municipalities have official websites provided by law and do they publish information relevant to citizens?	0.5
9. Has the municipality website published information on the mayor and assembly members and their contact information?	0.5
10. Is there information on the municipality's own revenues and public budget?	0.5
11. Have the citizens participated in the sessions dedicated to proposing municipal budgets and did they submit their proposals (which were adopted)?	1
12. Is there a mechanism at the municipal level available to citizens to submit formal proposals, requests or complaints?	1
13. Assessment of good governance based on the defined methodology used during the survey.	1.75

Total: 9.75



Novo Brdo/Novo Bërdë

Novo Brdo/Novo Bërdë is a municipality in central Kosovo that covers an area of around 204 m² and with a population totalling 6,279 (according to estimates made by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.)²⁷ The local population is very nearly evenly divided between Serbs and Albanians, with 3,524 Albanians and 3,122 Serbs.²⁸ This territory covers the town of Novo Brdo/Novo Bërdë itself as well as twenty-four (24) surrounding villages.²⁹

The current Mayor is Svetislav Ivanović, who was elected to that position in 2017. Aside from the Mayor, there is a Municipal Assembly consisting of fifteen (15) elected members as well as a Deputy Mayor.

Citizen Participation and Good Governance

Due partly to the fact that Novo Brdo/Novo Bërdë has a relatively small population, the level of interaction between local administrative institutions and the citizenry that they govern is reasonably high.³⁰ Local residents credit local authorities for their investments and efforts when it comes to improving local infrastructure, but also believe that there are continued problems when it comes to the security of their private property.³¹

As far as citizen participation in local decision-making processes is concerned, municipal organs such as the Assembly and the Office of the Mayor have shown signs in the past that they are open for cooperation.³² That having been said, there are a number of gaps in terms of the information that is made publicly available on Novo Brdo/Novo Bërdë's official website (<https://kk.rks-gov.net/novoberde/sr/>.) For example, (official) decisions made by the Mayor are available from the year 2018, but not for the year 2019. At the same time, the section of the website dedicated to the Assembly contains a very extensive list (along with downloadable files) of decisions made by

²⁷<https://www.osce.org/kosovo/13122?download=true>

²⁸IBID

²⁹IBID

³⁰Based on research conducted in November conducted in 2019.

³¹<http://gracanicaonline.info/2019/11/22/ugrozenost-privatne-imovine-gradjana-novog-brda-veliki-problem/>

³²Based on research conducted in November conducted in 2019.

that body. Contact details and a short biography of the Mayor are online, but no contact details or biographical data on Assembly members have been posted. There is also a list of Departments as well as contact information for a select number of Department Heads, including a description of their various functions. However, a number of Departments lack such information entirely.

When it comes to municipal finances, budgets and financial reports are all accessible through Novo Brdo/Novo Bërdë's website. It is also worth noting here that, unlike many northern municipalities, they have a specific section on the website for public procurement where they have published contracts as well as calls for tenders for local infrastructure and other similar projects. At the same time, and unlike the northern municipalities, there is currently no existent mechanism for submitting complaints, suggestions or requests via the municipality's online portal. The website is available in three languages (Serbian, Albanian, and English)³³

Despite the dearth of certain forms of information available on the internet, conversations with local residents conducted during the course of this research painted a picture of relative openness when it comes to municipal work. This can be at least partly boiled down to the fact that Novo Brdo/Novo Bërdë is a smaller, more rural municipality where pre-existing networks can be easily employed when coming into contact with municipal officials. At the same time, citizens are able to interact with and receive certain information from those officials with relative ease. Although local residents do face numerous problems, they do not necessarily attribute them solely to deficiencies in the quality of local governance but rather to larger social, economic and political phenomena. Despite some positive elements, there was also criticism that the municipal government was not particularly responsive to specific complaints or requests that they received from local residents.

1. Are public meetings open to the public and have citizens been informed of the same in advance?	0.5
2. Are municipal assembly sessions open to the public and have citizens been informed of them within the legal deadline?	0.5
3. Did representatives of the non-governmental sector, informal citizen groups and vulnerable and non-majority	1

³³Although there is an option for Turkish, the page does not seem to be available in that language

groups participate in the public meetings and sessions of the assemblies?	
4. Have all regular municipal assembly meetings provided for by law been held?	1
5. Is the work plan of the Municipal Assembly and the Mayor for 2019 publicly available?	0
6. Were the decisions of the Mayor and the decisions and minutes of the Municipal Assembly meetings and the results of the voting published? Was the news regarding these items published on the municipality's website and was there a recording of the assembly session?	0.5
7. Are municipal public documents available in all official languages?	1
8. Do municipalities have official websites provided by law and do they publish information relevant to citizens?	1
9. Has the municipality website published information on the mayor and assembly members and their contact information?	0.5
10. Is there information on the municipality's own revenues and public budget?	1
11. Have the citizens participated in the sessions dedicated to proposing municipal budgets and did they submit their proposals (which were adopted)?	1
12. Is there a mechanism at the municipal level available to citizens to submit formal proposals, requests or complaints?	0.5
13. Assessment of good governance based on the defined methodology used during the survey.	1

Total: 9.5

Parteš/Partesh

The smallest of Kosovo's municipalities in terms of population, approximately 1,787 people live in Parteš/Partesh and its two (2) surrounding villages.³⁴ The ethnic breakdown is almost entirely of Serb nationality, with only two residents being members of other groups.³⁵ Territorially, the municipal covers an area of 18.3 km².³⁶

The current Mayor is Dragan Petković, who was elected to the position in 2017 with 61.94% of votes counted. Aside from the Mayor, there is a Municipal Assembly that is made up of fifteen (15) members along with six (6) municipal departments.

Citizen Participation and Good Governance

As with other municipalities south of the river Ibar, Parteš/Partesh is largely or almost entirely rural in its composition and lacks a history of local administration on its own. Taking this factor into consideration, it only has a very short history of running its own local governing structures. This may offer partial explanation for its fairly underdeveloped online presence and lack of mechanisms that would allow for citizens to directly interact with their local representatives. That having been said, the nature of the municipality itself (i.e. its small and homogenous population and geographic coverage) mean that contact between municipal officials and the general population is frequent.³⁷ The result of this is a Mayor, Cabinet and Assembly who are generally 'in tune' with the needs of residents and the problems that they face.

The Municipality of Parteš/Partesh does have an official online presence (<https://kk.rks-gov.net/partesh/sr/partesh-5/>) and appears to be updated regularly. While a number and e-mail address were given for the Mayor, it lacks contact information and biographical information for Assembly members.

During an 'accountability sofa' held there in November of 2019, participants expressed concern about a number of socio-political events

³⁴<https://www.osce.org/mission-in-kosovo/88761?download=true>

³⁵IBID

³⁶IBID

³⁷Based on research and conversation with local residents and institutional representatives in Parteš/Partesh

and trends that they feel negatively impact their immediate area, including its gradual de-population. They likewise pointed out that they do not feel this is something that their local government can address, as these kinds of phenomenon are outside of the scope of the work of local politicians. Other conversations pointed to relatively close interaction between local institutions and the population. Furthermore, while information is difficult to access online, it is often made available upon verbal or written request to the municipality.

1. Are public meetings open to the public and have citizens been informed of the same in advance?	1
2. Are municipal assembly sessions open to the public and have citizens been informed of them within the legal deadline?	0.5
3. Did representatives of the non-governmental sector, informal citizen groups and vulnerable and non-majority groups participate in the public meetings and sessions of the assemblies?	1
4. Have all regular municipal assembly meetings provided for by law been held?	1
5. Is the work plan of the Municipal Assembly and the Mayor for 2019 publicly available?	0.5
6. Were the decisions of the Mayor and the decisions and minutes of the Municipal Assembly meetings and the results of the voting published? Was the news regarding these items published on the municipality's website and was there a recording of the assembly session?	0.25
7. Are municipal public documents available in all official languages?	1
8. Do municipalities have official websites provided by law and do they publish information relevant to citizens?	1
9. Has the municipality website published information on the mayor and assembly members and their contact information?	0.5
10. Is there information on the municipality's own revenues and public budget?	1
11. Have the citizens participated in the sessions dedicated to proposing municipal budgets and did they submit their proposals (which were adopted)?	0.75
12. Is there a mechanism at the municipal level available to citizens to submit formal proposals, requests or complaints?	0.5
13. Assessment of good governance based on the defined methodology used during the survey.	1.50

Total: 10.5



Štrpce/Shtërpçë

Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë, by far the largest municipality with a Serb majority south of the Ibar River (247 km²), located in southern Kosovo, on the slopes of Šar Mountain. According to the estimates, 13630 inhabitants³⁸ live in the town of Štrpce/Shtërpçë and multi-ethnic villages within the municipality populated by Serbs and Albanians. A considerable number of internally displaced persons also live in this municipality.

The mayor of Štrpce/Shtërpçë is Bratislav Nikolić (Srpska Lista), who won 73.58% of the total number of votes cast in the 2017 local elections.³⁹ In addition to the mayor, the key leadership positions in the municipality in the south of Kosovo are also held by the Deputy Mayor, Deputy Mayor in charge of Communities and assembly members.

Citizen participation and good governance

In recent years, the municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë has made considerable efforts to increase the level of good governance by local institutions, and in particular to animate citizens with a view to their active participation in the decision-making process. In addition, increased participation was observed of informal and formal citizen groups taking part in public meetings and assembly sessions, in order to present to local government representatives their requests, proposals and needs.

Respecting the Law on Local Self-Government (especially in the field of transparency of the work of local institutions), the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë regularly informs citizens about its activities, public documents, decisions and plans on its official website (<https://kk.rks-gov.net/shterpce/>). Moreover, content that is publicly available to citizens of this municipality is published in Serbian and Albanian, thus contributing to the availability of information in the official languages, but also supporting the multi-ethnic character of this part of Kosovo. In addition to being able to contact citizens through their personal visit to local institutions, the official portal gives citizens the opportunity to formally address and receive a response by sending messages to the

³⁸<https://www.osce.org/kosovo/13130?download=true>

³⁹<https://kossev.info/konacni-rezultati-izbora-za-gradonacelnike-na-kosovu-polovina-opstina-u-drugi-krug-medju-njima-i-klokot/>

official email address. As established during the monitoring of the work of the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë, as well as in discussions with citizens during meetings and held accountability sofas, it was found that citizens regularly receive the answers they ask from local institutions within a reasonable time.

Documents regarding public meetings and sessions of the municipal assembly, as well as public documents, reports and plans are available in Albanian and Serbian and can be downloaded in both electronic and hard copy. Regarding the work plan, information on the work plan of the Municipal Assembly ⁴⁰for 2019 is available on the official website, while the Mayor's work plan is not available. Decisions of the Mayor and the Municipal Assembly are available in electronic form, and it is possible to download them in hard copy at the premises of local institutions.

Regarding the budgetary implications, the budget of the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë is available in both forms, with active participation from the locals in the drafting of the municipal budget⁴¹ and the Action Plan for Citizen Involvement in the Budget Planning and Adoption Process 2020-2022.⁴² Among other things, the survey found that citizens were motivated to participate in budgetary discussions, but that they see the problem in the limited budgetary resources available to the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë. On the other hand, citizens also actively participate in public hearings during public meetings, but also during assembly sessions, which are open to the public, which has resulted in constructive communication between citizens and the municipal administration.

With the availability of information provided to citizens in municipal premises, citizens can directly contact responsible persons in the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë electronically and by telephone, since their personal contacts are publicly available on the official website. The research showed that this type of communication facilitates the way the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë provides services to citizens, personalizing and facilitating bilateral communication, which is devoid of administrative obstacles.

⁴⁰<https://kk.rks-gov.net/shterpce/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2019/01/Plan-rada-SO-za-2019.-god.doc>

⁴¹<https://kk.rks-gov.net/shterpce/sr/finansije/budzet-link/>

⁴²<https://kk.rks-gov.net/shterpce/sr/news/o-b-a-v-e-s-t-e-nj-e-akcioni-plan-za-ucescje-gradjana-u-procesu-planiranja-i-usvajanja-opstinskog-budzeta-za-2020-2022-godinu/>

By monitoring the work of the municipal assembly, through discussions with representatives of local institutions and citizens, and based on the discussion held within the accountability sofa format in Štrpce/Shtërpçë, it was found that citizens are relatively satisfied with communication with local government representatives. Communication that takes place through the municipality's official website on the social network Facebook has been praised as the most efficient and fastest. Citizens, on the other hand, demand a greater level of good governance by local institutions, especially after the protests that followed the construction of mini hydroelectric power plants in this municipality.⁴³ In addition, it was stated that greater involvement of established local village councils is required, which are not always able to participate in the decision-making process for logistic reasons.

1. Are public meetings open to the public and have citizens been informed of the same in advance?	1
2. Are municipal assembly sessions open to the public and have citizens been informed of them within the legal deadline?	0.5
3. Did representatives of the non-governmental sector, informal citizen groups and vulnerable and non-majority groups participate in the public meetings and sessions of the assemblies?	1
4. Have all regular municipal assembly meetings provided for by law been held?	1
5. Is the work plan of the Municipal Assembly and the Mayor for 2019 publicly available?	0.5
6. Were the decisions of the Mayor and the decisions and minutes of the Municipal Assembly meetings and the results of the voting published? Was the news regarding these items published on the municipality's website and was there a recording of the assembly session?	0.25
7. Are municipal public documents available in all official languages?	1
8. Do municipalities have official websites provided by law and do they publish information relevant to citizens?	1
9. Has the municipality website published information on the mayor and assembly members and their contact	1

⁴³<https://kossev.info/protesti-protiv-izgradnje-mhe-u-strpcu-desetine-povredjenih-ukljucujuci-i-decu/>

information?	
10. Is there information on the municipality's own revenues and public budget?	1
11. Have the citizens participated in the sessions dedicated to proposing municipal budgets and did they submit their proposals (which were adopted)?	1
12. Is there a mechanism at the municipal level available to citizens to submit formal proposals, requests or complaints?	1
13. Assessment of good governance based on the defined methodology used during the survey.	1.75

Total: 12



Zubin Potok

Zubin Potok Municipality is located in the north of Kosovo and is the second largest Serb-majority municipality in Kosovo (335km²). Due to the absence of relevant data from the 2011 census, based on OSCE estimates, some 15200 inhabitants⁴⁴ live in the town of Zubin Potok and in the villages belonging to this municipality.

Zubin Potok Mayor is Stevan Vulović (Srpska Lista), who won 94.6% of the votes cast in the 2019 local elections⁴⁵. In addition to the mayor, the key leadership positions in the municipality in the north of Kosovo are also held by the Deputy Mayor, as well as Deputy Mayor in charge of Communities.

Citizen participation and good governance

As part of its official activities, Zubin Potok municipality focused on more active participation of citizens in the decision-making process at the local level. Representatives of the local youth organization, farmers' associations and other informal citizen groups have shown interest in contributing to the work of this local government. The occasional presence of the media at the sessions of the Municipal Assembly has proven to be a good way of strengthening the visibility of the work of the institutions, as well as the increased accountability of representatives of local institutions (especially assembly members) to their citizens.

Despite the fact that the Municipality of Zubin Potok does not enter official institutional and other data on its Internet portal, as provided by the Law on Local Self-Governance, an alternative official online source of information has been formed (<https://www.ezubinpotok.com/>). Unlike the other three Serb-majority municipalities in northern Kosovo, in early 2019, there was a marked decline in updating information on the alternative portal, which changed during the last quarter after a complaint of citizens. However, the content is only available in Serbian, without information in Albanian, which should be addressed in the coming period. Also, official public documents, reports and regulations, as well as decisions of the Mayor and the Municipal Assembly are

⁴⁴<https://www.osce.org/kosovo/13135?download=true>

⁴⁵<http://kossev.info/cik-potvrديو-rezultate-vanrednih-izbora-srpska-osvojila-40-odsto-vise-glasova-nego-2017/>

available in electronic form, but only for the period covering 2018, while this year's information were not updated. Information regarding the contact details of employees of local institutions is available on the site and enables citizens to contact them directly without personally going to the premises of Zubin Potok Municipality. During the accountability sofa and meetings in this municipality, the citizens emphasized that the communication with the local self-government is solid and that they receive the feedback they formally ask for. The citizens gave a positive mark regarding the online *System 48* and *Ask the mayor* mechanism, which exists on the website of the Municipality of Zubin Potok, and whose function is to enable citizens to directly submit their requests, complaints or proposals to representatives of local self-government through electronic means of communication.

There is no work plan for the Municipal Assembly and the Mayor for 2019 on the available web portal, which should become a practice, since it is a legal obligation. The decisions and reports of the Mayor and the Municipal Assembly are available in hard copy, while electronic versions have not yet been uploaded to the Zubin Potok Municipality web portal. The same is true of budget documents, which can only be obtained by personal request at the premises of local institutions.

During the survey, and in conversation with representatives of local self-government and citizens of the municipality, it was found that citizens have good communication, that they can access public documents and present their requests and complaints directly. In this sense, it is necessary for the Municipality of Zubin Potok to increase its online visibility (and availability and up-to-date information in electronic form), in order for citizens to have an insight into the work of institutions, but also to improve the ways in which they can be contacted. Meetings with citizens and the accountability sofa held in this municipality showed that citizens participate in decision-making, but that there is still room for their greater engagement. In this regard, on several occasions, representatives of local self-government have emphasized that there is considerable room for more active participation of citizens in the decision-making process at the local level, and that in the future the Municipality will strive to achieve more in this field.⁴⁶ This is especially important for more remote villages, whose representatives are often unable to be part of the decision-making process, which can have the

⁴⁶<https://gracanicaonline.info/2019/11/28/zubin-potok-najvise-ulaganja-u-razvoju-turizma/>

counter-effect if they have not put their needs or demands before the institutions.

1. Are public meetings open to the public and have citizens been informed of the same in advance?	0.5
2. Are municipal assembly sessions open to the public and have citizens been informed of them within the legal deadline?	0.5
3. Did representatives of the non-governmental sector, informal citizen groups and vulnerable and non-majority groups participate in the public meetings and sessions of the assemblies?	1
4. Have all regular municipal assembly meetings provided for by law been held?	1
5. Is the work plan of the Municipal Assembly and the Mayor for 2019 publicly available?	0.5
6. Were the decisions of the Mayor and the decisions and minutes of the Municipal Assembly meetings and the results of the voting published? Was the news regarding these items published on the municipality's website and was there a recording of the assembly session?	0.25
7. Are municipal public documents available in all official languages?	0
8. Do municipalities have official websites provided by law and do they publish information relevant to citizens?	0.5
9. Has the municipality website published information on the mayor and assembly members and their contact information?	1
10. Is there information on the municipality's own revenues and public budget?	1
11. Have the citizens participated in the sessions dedicated to proposing municipal budgets and did they submit their proposals (which were adopted)?	1
12. Is there a mechanism at the municipal level available to citizens to submit formal proposals, requests or complaints?	1
13. Assessment of good governance based on the defined methodology used during the survey.	2

Total: 10.25



North Mitrovica

The municipality of North Mitrovica was formed in 2013 after the signing of the Brussels Agreement and is an important urban center of the Kosovo Serb community. This municipality is the most populous among Serb - majority municipalities in Kosovo (29460 inhabitants⁴⁷), but it is also the smallest in surface area - 11km². This city plays a key role in the political, cultural, educational and economic life of the Serbian community, but also carries some symbolic weight given its development in the post-conflict period.

The Mayor of the Municipality of North Mitrovica is Goran Rakić (Srpska Lista), who won 90.4% of the total number of votes cast in the 2019 local elections⁴⁸. In addition to the Mayor, the key leadership position of this municipality in northern Kosovo is held by Assembly members and the Deputy Mayor.

Citizen participation and good governance

The municipality of North Mitrovica has shown considerable progress towards animating citizens in the local decision-making process. In addition to regularly informing the citizens of this city about the upcoming activities of local self-government, there is also an improvement in the subsequent reporting on its work. Regular reporting by local media on public meetings, assembly sessions, as well as the activities of municipal representatives, has resulted in increased citizens' interest in participating in decision-making and in monitoring the work of local self-government. During the second half of 2019, the number of representatives of non-governmental and international organizations present at the sessions as well as informal groups of citizens increased significantly.

Like the other Serb-majority municipalities in northern Kosovo, the Municipality of North Mitrovica also provides citizens with insights into official documents, news and information on the alternative web portal (<http://www.esevernamitrovica.com/>). However, during 2019, local government official documents were not updated on this portal, while their printed versions could be picked-up in municipal premises. The

⁴⁷<http://www.osce.org/kosovo/122119?download=true>

⁴⁸<https://kossev.info/cik-potvrdio-rezultate-vanrednih-izbora-srpska-osvojila-40-odsto-vise-glasova-nego-2017/>

contact information of the municipal officials is indicated on the website and is distributed according to the division of responsibilities to the municipal administration bodies. Serbian is the only language available on the portal, which is contrary to the principle of using official languages and prevents members of the Albanian community from accessing information in their native language. Online services that are part of the (non)official website of the Municipality of North Mitrovica (*System 48* and *Ask the mayor*) provide citizens with the opportunity to submit their requests and proposals to local institutions electronically. According to the survey, citizens use direct communication with municipal officials and, more importantly, public meetings and assembly sessions that are open to the public, in addition to the electronic form of communication with local institutions.

The Municipal Online Portal does not provide an opportunity to download the work plan of the Municipal Assembly and the Mayor for 2019. However, the plans and reports of the Mayor and the Municipal Assembly can be accessed in hard copy, which can be accessed by personal request (by picking them up in municipal premises). It is identical to budget documents that cannot be downloaded online but are available in hard copy.

In discussions with municipal officials and citizens of the Municipality of North Mitrovica, it was emphasized that there were mechanisms for communication between the two parties, but that it was necessary to improve the existing channels. Updating information on the municipal portal has been mentioned by citizens as a prerequisite for improving the availability of information. Citizens also stressed that municipal officials should improve the visibility of their work through better direct communication with citizens. During the accountability sofa held in North Mitrovica, one of the main conclusions reached by citizens was that citizen participation in decision-making is an indispensable factor in improving good governance at the local level. Notwithstanding the fact that a trend of increasing citizen engagement in the decision-making process has been observed, it is necessary to further encourage citizens to take some of the responsibility.

1. Are public meetings open to the public and have citizens been informed of the same in advance?	1
2. Are municipal assembly sessions open to the public and have citizens been informed of them within the legal deadline?	1

3. Did representatives of the non-governmental sector, informal citizen groups and vulnerable and non-majority groups participate in the public meetings and sessions of the assemblies?	1
4. Have all regular municipal assembly meetings provided for by law been held?	1
5. Is the work plan of the Municipal Assembly and the Mayor for 2019 publicly available?	0.5
6. Were the decisions of the Mayor and the decisions and minutes of the Municipal Assembly meetings and the results of the voting published? Was the news regarding these items published on the municipality's website and was there a recording of the assembly session?	0.25
7. Are municipal public documents available in all official languages?	0
8. Do municipalities have official websites provided by law and do they publish information relevant to citizens?	0.5
9. Has the municipality website published information on the mayor and assembly members and their contact information?	0.5
10. Is there information on the municipality's own revenues and public budget?	0.75
11. Have the citizens participated in the sessions dedicated to proposing municipal budgets and did they submit their proposals (which were adopted)?	1
12. Is there a mechanism at the municipal level available to citizens to submit formal proposals, requests or complaints?	1
13. Assessment of good governance based on the defined methodology used during the survey.	2

Total: 10.5



Gračanica / Graçanicë

Gračanica/Graçanicë Municipality is located near Priština, in central Kosovo, and is considered the regional urban center of the Serbian community south of the Ibar River. It covers an area of 131km², which is populated by an estimated 10,675⁴⁹ inhabitants.

1303. The Mayor of Gračanica/Graçanicë is Srđan Popović (Srpska Lista), who won the confidence of 87.53% of voters in the 2017 local elections⁵⁰. In addition to the Mayor, the key leadership position of this municipality in central Kosovo is held by the Assembly members and the Deputy Mayor.

Citizen participation and good governance

The municipality of Gračanica/Graçanicë has shown significant progress in the area of citizen inclusion in the decision-making process at the local level. Active participation of citizens of different ethnic backgrounds and professional backgrounds has proven to be productive in the institutional engagement of this central-Kosovo municipality. Media presence and regular reporting of activities and results achieved by municipal authorities contributed to more active participation and interest of citizens in the work for the common good at the local level.

Pursuant to the Law on Local Self-Governance, the Municipality of Gračanica/Graçanicë has an official website through which it regularly informs citizens about its activities and communicates with its citizens (<https://kk.rks-gov.net/gracanice/>). Citizens of this municipality can access available information, notices and documents in Serbian and Albanian, realizing the right to access information in their native language. This fact stems from the multi-ethnic character of the municipal structure, as well as the desire to transmit the already existing availability of information in the official languages within the municipal premises to the electronic space. The survey showed that citizens positively evaluate the provision of services and respond to citizens' requests from municipal authorities (both online and in person), emphasizing that such practices should be established in other municipalities in Kosovo.

⁴⁹ <https://www.osce.org/mission-in-kosovo/88762?download=true>

⁵⁰ Ibid

Reports and documents regarding public meetings and sessions of the Municipal Assembly, as well as public documents are available in Albanian and Serbian, with the possibility of downloading them in printed and electronic version. The work plan of the Assembly is also available in electronic form on the site, while the printed version can be picked up in municipal premises. The situation is similar with official budget documents, with the existence of an indicative budget spending plan for the period 2020-2022.⁵¹, which is the product consultation with citizens. During the survey, citizens indicated that they were motivated to participate in budgetary discussions, as the consequences of budgetary decisions affect their well-being and subsistence in Kosovo. Similarly, they expressed the need to actively participate in public hearings during public meetings and assembly sessions. This is illustrated by the example of organized public discussion regarding the pollution of the river Gračanka in this municipality⁵².

In addition to the accessibility of information available to citizens on municipal premises, they can directly contact responsible persons in the Municipality of Gračanica/Graçanicë electronically and by telephone, since their personal contacts are publicly available on the official website. During the research it was stated that this type of communication to citizens is appropriate, since the provision of municipal services and the presentation of proposals and complaints are done in several ways.

By monitoring the work of the Municipal Assembly, discussions with representatives of local institutions and citizens, as well as on the basis of a discussion held within the accountability sofa format in Gračanica/Graçanicë, citizens explained their views on the management of Gračanica/Graçanicë Municipality, positively assessing the way local self-government functions and the way it takes into account the interests of the local population. On the other hand, citizens also referred to the fact that it is necessary for the central authorities to invest more effort and finances, and to help the budget of this municipality, because lack of investments (and also unemployment) is one of the key problems that are affecting citizens.

⁵¹<https://kk.rks-gov.net/gracanice/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2019/07/SOB-2020-2022.doc>

⁵²<https://www.radiokontaktplus.org/vesti/laplje-selo-hitno-resiti-problem-zagadenosti-gracanke-i-stvoriti-zdrave-uslove-za-zivot/22803>

1. Are public meetings open to the public and have citizens been informed of the same in advance?	1
2. Are municipal assembly sessions open to the public and have citizens been informed of them within the legal deadline?	1
3. Did representatives of the non-governmental sector, informal citizen groups and vulnerable and non-majority groups participate in the public meetings and sessions of the assemblies?	1
4. Have all regular municipal assembly meetings provided for by law been held?	1
5. Is the work plan of the Municipal Assembly and the Mayor for 2019 publicly available?	0.5
6. Were the decisions of the Mayor and the decisions and minutes of the Municipal Assembly meetings and the results of the voting published? Was the news regarding these items published on the municipality's website and was there a recording of the assembly session?	0.75
7. Are municipal public documents available in all official languages?	1
8. Do municipalities have official websites provided by law and do they publish information relevant to citizens?	1
9. Has the municipality website published information on the mayor and assembly members and their contact information?	1
10. Is there information on the municipality's own revenues and public budget?	1
11. Did citizens participate in the sessions dedicated to proposing municipal budgets and did they submit their proposals (which were adopted)?	1
12. Is there a mechanism at the municipal level available to citizens to submit formal proposals, requests or complaints?	1
13. Assessment of good governance based on the defined methodology used during the survey.	2.25

Total: 13.5

Conclusion

Fostering an atmosphere of healthy civic life and enabling citizens to participate directly in political and institutional processes is a task that demands a holistic and multi-layered approach. Although Kosovo Law lays out a broad framework for participatory democracy at the level of local self-government, as with other pieces of progressive legislation, its implementation in every day practice has proven to be, at times, unforthcoming. This systematic problem can be attributed to a range of factors that were not necessarily covered in the course of this paper (political culture and/or political will, lack of resources, lack of knowledge of relevant legislation, implementation gap) but that have nonetheless hampered or stalled the implementation of various legal stipulations. This problem is perhaps especially pronounced in Serb-majority municipalities, where the unusual institutional and political dynamics, along with the fact that many of them do not necessarily have a long history of Kosovo local administration within Kosovo's institutional and legal framework, has meant that the relationship between local institutions and the general population continues to undergo a process of gradual maturing and evolution. Institutional trust has not been easy to achieve and, on top of this, there is still a widespread perception that 'average' citizens are unable to directly and fruitfully participate in decision-making processes.

Although the eight (8) municipalities that were covered in this report have faced a number of challenges that are structural, political, social and economic in nature, it must be noted that progress has been made in terms of the extent to which citizens are able to participate and indeed have a voice in local decision-making processes. While there are points that are certainly worthy of criticism and should be tackled in an efficient and systematic matter, the fact remains that a number of mechanisms have been established that foster an environment that is conducive to good local governance. Municipalities have made efforts over the past several years to strengthen their online presence, thus easing access to information and opening new channels of communication, all of which make it possible for local residents to involve themselves in civic life.

That having been said, there still remain gaps not only between municipalities' legal obligations according to stipulations in existent legislation but also in the extent to which local officials are willing and

able to take into consideration the views of their constituents. A number of times throughout the course of this report it was noted that many local governments have online tools through which citizens can submit complaints, requests and pose questions directly to their Mayors. While there are some indications that they have been used and that responses have been received, there have been no widescale tests of that system and their success rate in addressing problems presented to them. Furthermore, access to information tends to vary widely from location to location, with some municipalities making a wide range of documentation available, to others having a very selective approach as to what they decide to publish. What is clear is that, despite very real advances, there remains work to be done in this area. This will demand efforts not only on the part of local administrations themselves, but also of civil society organisations and individuals to place positive pressure on decision-makers and to ensure that their voices and input will be heard.

Recommendations

Based on the survey findings, the existing legal framework, as well as the stated needs of citizens, the survey team considered it appropriate to present to the local (and central) institutions a number of recommendations that need to be taken into account in order to strengthen citizen participation in the decision-making process and improve quality of good governance in eight targeted municipalities:

- It is necessary for local institutions to put more effort into animating the local population towards their greater participation in the decision-making process, through the format of monthly meetings with citizens.
- Vulnerable groups, minority communities, as well as informal citizen groups should be further motivated and publicly invited to participate in the decision-making process at the local level, especially due to the lack of communication channels available to them.
- The central level of government should ensure that the budget policy towards local governments is adjusted to the real population numbers, taking into account the fact that the practice of extending financial assistance to municipalities (especially with four Serb majority municipalities in northern Kosovo) is based on the census in 2011, which was comprehensively boycotted by the Serb community in Kosovo.
- Information concerning the budgets of local governments (such as public municipal debts, public procurement and municipal property) should be made available to the public, both electronically and in print, as provided by applicable laws.
- Targeted municipalities that have not provided their official documents in one of the official languages should translate such documents so that members of all ethnic communities have equal access to information in their mother tongue.
- The content of the (alternative) websites currently in use by the four municipalities in northern Kosovo needs to be legalized, given their widespread use. In this regard, the Ministry of Local Government Administration should adopt administrative instructions that will be valid for a period of time until the respective local governments find a compromise solution, especially due to the fact that the digital form of communication (not only at the local level) facilitates participation of citizens in decision-making and control over the work of institutions.

- Six Serb-majority municipalities located south of the Ibar River should make additional efforts to develop adequate mechanisms for lodging complaints and proposals by local residents both online and administratively.
- Municipalities in which there are settlements that are far away from the municipal authorities should find more effective and accessible ways of contacting the local population, given the lack of information among them. Opening local communities or mobile offices in remote places would enhance communication and work with the local population.
- Some local governments should ensure that public documents and information in an online format are adequately updated.
- The civil sector and (local) media should monitor more closely the work of local self-governments, as, among other things, during the survey itself, it has been shown that increased levels of control by these entities result in greater responsibility of municipalities to their citizens.
- An indispensable part of strengthening good governance among the targeted municipalities should be year-round public information campaigns about the activities of local governments, which aim to raise awareness of existing mechanisms and rights of citizens in the decision-making process at the local level. This type of campaign should cover different methods of advertising through radio broadcasts, advertising on social networks and the Internet, as well as printing and distributing newsletters.

This publication is supported by the Olof Palme Center
and it in no way reflects the views of this institution.