



## **Research summary: Citizen Participation Potential in the Decision-making at the Governmental and Municipality Level**

Various forms and areas of citizen participation have been affirmed by legislations of the Republic of Lithuania. In all cases, opinion and suggestions of citizens are only advisory. When tackling certain issues (changing boundaries of municipalities and residential localities, naming of residential localities, territorial planning and pricing of energy resources), citizens-consultation procedure is compulsory. In two of the above mentioned cases (namely, changing boundaries of municipalities and residential localities as well as naming of residential localities), citizens-right of initiative is recognised as well. When tackling these issues, forms of both collective participation (surveys of local residents) and expression of individual opinions (public hearings) are used.

Direct citizen participation in dealing with public issues could and should be a way of controlling local government. It is especially relevant in the case of Lithuania, where only politically strong groups can make an impact and expect their views to be taken into account when making important decisions. It would be right to say that the poor interaction between citizens and municipalities is determined by lack of experience with regards to local government, civil society and democracy in general.

Citizens-right to participate in the management of public affairs is one of the principles of the functioning of local government, as affirmed in the local government law. Its implementation is regulated by quite a few legislations. However, they could barely be seen as a system ensuring direct involvement of citizens in the management of public affairs.

It is important to improve and systemise the appropriate legislations. We would advise to analyse in detail the practises of interaction between citizens and municipalities, trends of their development, evaluate the suggestions from citizens and municipalities with regards to this issue and try to forecast social efficiency of legal regulations.

Legal regulations regulating consultations often exist independently of one another. Decisions of local government are made without taking into account the views of citizens. Therefore, they do not meet the interests of citizens and causes discontent. As a result, there is an increasing gap between citizens and local government, and social tensions grow as well. On the other hand, it is also municipalities that should be more concerned about consultation with citizens and by doing so ensure the legitimacy of their decisions. Using practises of the private sector, municipalities should 'advertise' their products (public services) more widely and constantly check whether users are satisfied with them.



## PILIĒTINĒS VISUOMENĒS INSTITUTAS

Lack of awareness among citizens is one of the main problems of the interaction between citizens and local government. Citizens are prepared for positive changes. However, lack of knowledge and information does not allow them to take advantage of potential opportunities to represent themselves and public interests. Therefore, it is essential to provide citizens with information regarding their rights, opportunities and duties when representing their interests. The first step in doing so could be a free publication informing citizens about their rights, opportunities and duties, explaining the system of the central, territorial and local government as well as the other basics of public activities, which are often misunderstood by citizens.

At the moment, slightly more active citizens' involvement in the administrative decision-making process is only local or regional. Suggestions of citizens reach the state structures usually indirectly only. Therefore, their opportunities to participate in decision-making are directly related to the decentralisation of decision-making process.

One of the main problems that government institutions face when trying to get closer to citizens, is the issue of the division of mutual competencies. Even though it is said that decentralisation process is taking place, apparently a reverse process of de-concentration is happening as well.