

# THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL INITIATIVES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Iliriana Bajrami \*, Taulant Bajrami \*\*

\* Corresponding author, Faculty of Public Administration, AAB College, Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo

Contact details: AAB College, St. Elez Berisha, No. 56 Fushë Kosovë Industrial Zone 10000, Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo

\*\* Faculty of Law, University of Prishtina, Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo; Alma Mater Europaea Campus College (AMECC) "Rezonanca", Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo



## Abstract

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Local governance is closely related to democracy and provides a central position to the participation of citizens in decision-making, where the perspectives of different authors such as political scientist Robert Dahl emphasized that democracy must offer equal and proper opportunities for citizens' participation in decision-making (Forrester & Sunar, 2011). The purpose of this paper is to create a fair overview of the real condition of citizens' involvement in local government decision-making processes, by highlighting the necessity to adapt local government to the real needs of citizens, which facilitates their lives within the municipalities. The review of literature and development of qualitative research was the methodology applied within this study. During the development of this study, surveys were also conducted with citizens and other institutional stakeholders with a key role in local governance. The findings of this paper indicated that municipal bodies have made minimal efforts to inform citizens about their opportunities and raise awareness regarding the importance of activism in decision-making, as substantiated by the questionnaire outcomes. On this occasion, it was also observed that there is a low level of citizens' inclination to participate in public gatherings aimed at influencing municipal governance activities.

**Keywords:** Public Consultation, Citizens, Municipalities, Governance, Decision Making, Democracy

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Given that the local administration was created with the mission of serving the citizens, fulfilling and providing vital services, and helping the citizens achieve their rights and duties, it is also inevitable to study how many local government bodies have created spaces, mechanisms, and environment to include citizens and civil society in decision-making in the exercise of its function.

The purpose of the study is to determine how much the Republic of Kosovo met international standards in the field of local self-government, including the process of aligning Kosovo's legislation with that of the "*acquis communautaire*"

of the European Union (EU), as a process required for the integration of Kosovo into euro-Atlantic countries, especially with the direct initiatives of citizens in determining local policies observed by local government bodies.

The paper will not only deal with the study of approximation, respectively meeting international legislative standards in this field, but also with the practical implementation of these criteria by the local government institutions in Kosovo. In this regard, in quite a few cases, Kosovo has managed to meet the criteria foreseen in the approximation of legislation and international standards, but there are major delays in their practical implementation.

This study aims to answer some of the specific questions related to the topic addressed based on the relevant arguments:

*RQ1: What is the level of citizen participation in determining the public policies of local governance bodies?*

*RQ2: How are the legislation and legal requirements for citizen participation in local administration decision-making implemented?*

The most widespread form of debating with citizens, both at the central and local levels, is public consultations. This is because it is a legal obligation of public administration and state bodies in power that all public policies, strategies, laws, and by-laws be consulted with the public.

Another form that has commenced implementation in Kosovo is the digital platform of municipalities, known as the e-municipality digital platform, which aims to create space for the process of accountability and transparency, increasing citizen participation in decision-making processes and improving and increasing the efficiency of services at the local level. However, Kosovo should be careful that this platform is not only just a channel of communication or information for the citizens but functions as a means for the inclusion of citizens in the decision-making process. In this context, Kosovo should analyze the challenges faced by Portugal, where electronic systems primarily focus on information transmission rather than establishing the implementation of channels for e-governance-based citizen participation (Tejedo-Romero et al., 2022).

In this regard, an achievement of the state of Kosovo is that it has already joined the international partnership organization for open governance, which aims to promote transparent, inclusive, and accountable governance. Within the commitments included in the Open Governance Partnership action plan in Kosovo, of particular importance is commitment number 1 of the participation of citizens. "Improving existing platforms for citizen participation in decision-making processes by providing technical assistance and capacity building for public officials" (Ministry of Local Government Administration, 2022).

Kosovo, as one of the youngest democracies in the world, has regulated quite well the issue of challenging decisions issued by local public administration bodies for which they have not taken into account the recommendations of citizens and which practically violate the rights of citizens, regulating in this way new mechanisms through the so-called administrative justice. According to Batalli and Pepaj (2022), "Administration justice represents the main pillar of the supervision of administrative acts through which citizens have their expectations for the objective and impartial oversight over the legality of administrative acts" (p. 88).

However, it is more than necessary that the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo should adopt a new law as soon as possible because there is currently a large gap in the legislative aspect such as the lack of the Law on Referendum, which would determine the rules of initiation, organization, and conduct of the referendum at the central and local level. Of course, such an undertaking should not

violate in any way the constitutional limitations that exist in relation to the legislation of vital interest.

Also, to fully reform the legislation, it is necessary to adopt a special law that would determine the standards of transparency for all institutions of the Public Administration. This law should be put in the function of facilitating the procedures of access to documents and acts of public institutions to facilitate the procedures of information for decision-making. This would transform the mechanisms of transparency, into mandatory legal mechanisms, foreseen by a special law, increasing the volume of legal requirements.

This research serves as assistance to future studies, as it provides information on the importance of citizen involvement in decision-making for the public interest, especially when the author of the research is one of the officials of the Ministry of Local Administration responsible at the country level for the supervision of decision-making and their legality in local bodies.

In particular, this paper can serve the needs of public officials, local bodies, NGOs, citizens, and other parties who wish to identify and study the gaps in the process of involving citizens in decision-making, as we have mentioned, in Kosovo is done only formally to cover the formal legal criteria for their implementation.

For more detailed elaboration, the following parts of the paper are organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 analyzes the methodology that has been used and that has followed the comparative, analytical, and empirical study methodology (research, survey, and as the main part of the methodology determined are also interviews and contacts with municipal officials of different profiles of the field of public consultations where through interviews we have aimed to conduct qualitative research on the challenges and progress of municipalities in implementing local democracy policies). Section 4 includes the empirical study focused on the local level of governance with a full inclusion of respondents from the majority of municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo, which highlights the results and Section 5 includes the consistent conclusions because of the comprehensive and multidimensional research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Crystal (2000), historically democracy has its origins in some city-states of ancient Greece, where all citizens formed the legislature. In the Greek language, *demos* means "people" and *kratia* means "power", i.e., "rule by the people".

The word "democracy" has become part of everyday communication between people, not only in political communication but also in everyday life. This does not mean that those who use and communicate using it know and fully understand the true meaning and significance of the word "democracy". Democracy is often used and misused, both by non-democratic regimes and by dictators, who in the worst possible way violate the principles and postulates of the basis of democracy. In an organized social life, democracy represents one of the oldest political institutions. It has been talked about since the existence of an organized society,

whereas it became the object of scientific study since the appearance of the state. According to Bajrami (2002), democracy is what authorizes the people to exercise political control over their trusted ones as well as to be able to take their mandate, when they do not fulfill their promises and do not remain faithful to them and are alienated from their political will.

In a speech held at Gettysburg, in 1863, Abraham Lincoln characterized democracy with an aphorism that seemed to convey the spirit of democratic government better than any other expression: "government of the people, by the people, for the people" (Sartori, 1998).

According to Krieger (2001), democracy is an "expression that literally means rule by the people (from the Greek demos, "people", and kratos, "rule") but has different meanings in contemporary usage:

(1) a form of government in which the right to make political decisions is exercised directly by all citizens, usually called direct democracy;

(2) a form of government in which citizens exercise equal rights, not as individuals but through representative elections by them and accountable to them, known as representative democracy;

(3) a form of government, usually a representative democracy, in which the power of the majority is exercised within a structure of constitutional control designed to guarantee certain individual or collective rights to minorities, such as freedoms of speech and religion, known as liberal or constitutional democracy;

(4) a certain political or social system that tends to minimize social and economic differences, especially those that increase the common distribution of private property. The latter is known as social or economic democracy, even when the political system is not democratic in any of the three senses" (p. 196).

Representative democracy as a dominant form of government is based on the principles of electing people's representatives, who form the highest representative and legislative body known in parliamentary practice by different names: Parliament, Assembly, Congress, People's Council, etc. These elected representatives are granted the legitimacy to protect and represent the interests of their voters.

According to Bajrami (2010), in contemporary political theory, many authors have made efforts to analyze the essence and content of the notion of democracy. The classic definition of democracy, synonymous with the sovereignty of the people and the system that ensures and guarantees the government of the people, today, has almost been abandoned by most scholars, and now the phrase "sovereignty of the people" is being replaced by "citizen sovereignty" since the conditions in the democratic environment are enabling citizens to freely make political decisions through the majority rule and thus leads to the institutional synthesis and articulation of citizens' interests in a legitimate interest of the majority. Such a political process of governance must be based on democratic rules and procedures in compliance with the rule of law in society (Bajrami, 2010).

The concept of citizen sovereignty favors citizen democracy, which implies the personal

declaration of citizens as the most democratic form of their expression of will, as an essential element of the democratization of governance and good governance practices. Today, the modalities of citizen democracy are not only features of good governance but are standards and legal obligations.

According to Forrester and Sunar (2011), participation enables citizens to define policy goals and priorities, monitor the actions of politicians and government officials and hold them accountable for their actions, express viewpoints, share information and disclose their problems and needs, get involved in decision-making processes, identify additional resources, monitor and assess the results of policy implementation and numerous other actions.

From the perspective of Robert Dahl, a political scientist, democracy must provide equal and appropriate opportunities for citizen participation. Citizens should see these opportunities: a) putting issues on the agenda; b) expressing their views on those issues, and c) exercising any other form (through a vote or other means). These rights enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty of the European Union, and that for both the EU as a whole as well as its member states, present important challenges that must be supported and which stand as useful standards for states seeking EU membership. The Treaty aims to support a more democratic and transparent Europe, with a strengthened role for the European Parliament and national parliaments, a clearer sense of who does what at European and national levels, and more opportunities for citizens to hear their voices. One of the new instruments of particular importance to encourage citizens' participation in EU decision-making processes is the "CSOs and Citizens Participation" (Forrester & Sunar, 2011).

Also, according to Forrester and Sunar (2011), even the United Nations (UN) emphasizes the importance of citizens' participation in decision-making. The UN report "Citizen Engagement in Public Governance" argues that citizen engagement is an important norm of governance, which can strengthen the state's decision-making arrangements and produce outcomes that favor the poor and disadvantaged. The UN report goes on to outline a number of areas in which UN Resolutions and Declarations have promoted the importance of citizen engagement in participatory processes for achieving "rights" and "development management" (Forrester & Sunar, 2011).

According to Hartay (2011), the participation of citizens, NGOs, as well as other parties interested in being involved and influencing the drafting of policies and legislation that also affects them, represents an expansion of opportunities for these parties, and as such these components are an integral part of participatory democracy. These components have reflected the democratization of political relations after the crises of representative governments and after the collapse of authoritarian regimes in countries such as Spain, Portugal, and Greece (Hartay, 2011).

Public participation can be any process that directly engages the public in how decisions are made and takes into account how the public contributes to making that decision. Public participation is a process that consists of a series of activities and this in turn improves the relationship

and trust between decision makers and the public. Public participation allows stakeholders (those who have an interest or stake in an issue, such as individuals, interest groups, and communities) to influence how decisions that affect their lives and communities are made. Public participation plays a key role in ensuring better outcomes for both decision-makers and stakeholders. When done in a meaningful way, public participation results in a greater understanding of facts, values, and additional perspectives gained through public input – to influence the decision-making process (The Vale of Glamorgan Council, 2022).

Creighton (2005), using the same approach, also defines public participation as a process by which public concerns, needs, and values are included in governmental and corporate decision-making. It is a two-way interaction and communication, with the overall goal of better decisions that are supported by the public (Creighton, 2005).

In 2001, the European Commission drafted the White Paper on European Governance, through which the creation of a broad culture of consultation and communication with citizens is suggested, through the establishment of a code of conduct that defines minimum standards, focusing on how should who be consulted and when (Commission of the European Communities, 2002).

Özden (2023) in her paper emphasizes the importance of citizen participation in decision-

making processes. According to Özden (2023), “It is of vital importance for democracy to build a stronger role for citizens. Participation, which constitutes an important starting point among the basic dynamics of democracy, contributes to a more transparent and accountable understanding of decision-making processes. Effective use of participation mechanisms will support citizens to be aware of the difficulties and drawbacks related to the management process, create public policies in a negotiation environment, and develop a sense of responsibility. Participation, at the same time, will enable citizens to be educated in this process, to develop their belongings, and to feel that they belong to the process” (p. 560).

Forrester and Sunar (2011) point out that ensuring a participatory law-making process has its own challenges and obstacles from the Government on the one hand and citizens and Civil Society on the other. Also, according to Irvin and Stansbury (2004, as cited in Forrester & Sunar, 2011), citizen participation can be seen as a common interest of both parties: of citizens and the Government. By analyzing citizen participation in a local project in the USA, both authors used the matrix below to summarize their general conclusions about the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation in the decision-making process. Table 1 best illustrates the summary (Forrester & Sunar, 2011).

**Table 1.** Advantages and disadvantages of citizens’ participation in decision-making processes

<i>Advantages for participants/citizens</i>		<i>Advantages for the government</i>	
Decision-making process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education (guide and inform government representatives);</li> <li>• Convince and advise the government;</li> <li>• Gain skills in active citizenship.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education (guide and inform the citizens)</li> <li>• Convince citizens;</li> <li>• Build trust and remove any citizens’ concerns or fears;</li> <li>• Builds strategic alliances;</li> <li>• Gains legitimacy of decision-making.</li> </ul>	
Participation results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminates possible obstacles and blockages in achieving results;</li> <li>• Gain control over the policy process;</li> <li>• More actionable decisions and policies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminates possible obstacles and blockages in achieving results;</li> <li>• Avoids possible court disputes;</li> <li>• More actionable decisions and policies.</li> </ul>	
<i>Disadvantages for the participants/citizens</i>		<i>Disadvantages for the government</i>	
Decision-making process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time-consuming;</li> <li>• Waste of effort if data is ignored.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time-consuming;</li> <li>• Costly;</li> <li>• This may create more disagreements among citizens.</li> </ul>	
Participation results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harmful decisions may be pushed forward by opposing interest groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of control in decision-making;</li> <li>• The possibility of a poor decision that would be impossible to ignore from a political standpoint;</li> <li>• Fewer sources available for the implementation of the policy.</li> </ul>	

Both parties benefit as can be seen from Table 1, both the citizens and policymakers, and certainty of implementation and acceptance of policies is also guaranteed. Normally, each process has its disadvantages, but compared to the advantages, these are minimized.

A positive example and model of other European cities is the model of the city of Helsinki. In the Finnish context, Helsinki’s participation model is well-resourced compared to other initiatives at the local level. From the outset, the model has employed a team manager, seven borough liaisons working in different city districts, and three business liaisons to ensure grassroots cooperation with local businesses, as well as a manager and technical project manager, to foster participatory budgeting. Additionally, citizen participation experts

work with different units of the organisation. They are not directly employed to support the model, but their work is closely connected to the implementation of its aims (Kurkela et al., 2024).

Switzerland is the best example of the frequent use of mechanisms for the direct implementation of the will of the citizens through legal mechanisms, including referendums and initiatives that citizens can use to influence decisions. The most used mechanisms in this country are referendums and initiatives at the local level. Switzerland is among the rare countries in the world, that through the use of these mechanisms enables citizens to withdraw even the decisions taken by the local authorities. Also, Switzerland has local bodies that consist of citizens and that have in their scope of action the control and the way of directing the executive.

The good practice of local governance in the involvement of citizens in local policy-making in the Balkan states is the example of the Republic of North Macedonia. Thus, North Macedonia through Law No. 03/L-040 on Local Self-Government is among the rare Balkan states that has foreseen in its legislation the institution of the Referendum with citizens and as such has regulated it by law. Article 28 of Law No. 03/L-040 on Local Self-Government provides for a referendum as a process by which the most effective involvement of citizens in local governance decision-making is ensured, as this process is mandatory upon the request of at least 20% of the voters of the municipality and can be organized in all matters from the competence of local self-government except for issues such as the budget and the organization of the municipal administration. As mentioned in this paper, even though the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo mentions the referendum as a possibility of involving citizens in decision-making, this is not being implemented in practice because there is no special law that regulates the procedural aspect of the implementation of this process.

Also, a very good practice and an example for Kosovo can serve the legal regulation offered by the German state, where the referendum is legally mandatory, and as such the bodies are authorized to implement it whenever requested by a certain number of citizens which is usually from 20 to 30% of the citizens.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To ascertain the real situation in the field of transparency, accountability, and responsibility of municipal bodies in Kosovo, from the point of view of the practical application of legal values at the local government level, a questionnaire was developed to collect opinions and evaluations from citizens regarding their satisfaction with the work of local bodies, their participation in decision-making and in general their impact on the work of local bodies. The survey is designed in such a way as to test citizens' evaluations regarding important issues and elements of municipal transparency and democracy. The spectrum of respondents is quite wide ranging, and extended to most municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo, including categories of different age groups and trades.

Based on the structure of the study, 704 respondents were surveyed, the results of which are provided in Section 4. In parallel with the survey, 12 officials of different profiles were also interviewed, among those: mayors and former mayors of municipalities, Civil Society members, and representatives from the field of public consultations coming from the central level. Respondents of the survey include a variety of ages, starting from 18 to 56 years old and onwards, by age groups: 18-25 (25%), 26-35 (33%), 36-45 (27%), 46-55 (9%) and 55 and over (6%). The gender ratio was 60% female and 40% male. The study aimed to answer the following questions of the questionnaire described in Section 4.

To create a more realistic overview of the conditions of transparency and citizen involvement in decision-making in municipalities, we also

conducted 5 interviews with mayors and former mayors of municipalities: Kaçanik, Hani i Elezit, Obiliq, Kamenica, and Shtime. The interviews were carried out in a semi-structured interview format and were aimed at obtaining the spontaneous impressions, thoughts, and approaches of the responders regarding the implementation of transparency and local democracy. The questions were similar for all the mayors, but the answers were with significant divergences.

The other methodology developed in this paper is the study of literature using the constitutional and legal acts of the Republic of Kosovo in comparison with other countries, literature from various professors in the administrative field as well as reports and other international acts relevant to this field of study.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Viewed from a legal perspective, the Republic of Kosovo has in general harmonized its legislation with international standards and principles that refer to public consultations and the involvement of citizens in decision-making. Satisfactory progress has been achieved in regulatory, planning, and strategic aspects, as also evidenced by international mechanisms and the EC Kosovo country report in recent years. The mechanisms required for the implementation of legislation and enforcement of development strategies have also been created.

As a democratic constitution, the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo guarantees transparency and the involvement of citizens in decision-making and defines all the premises of a democratic society. The Constitution, under Article 41, stipulates that each person enjoys the right to access public documents, and Article 45 obliges state institutions to support opportunities for the participation of everyone in public activities (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008a).

Other acts that regulate transparency, accountability, and involvement of citizens in decision-making processes at the local level are Law No. 04/L-025 for Legislative Initiatives (Assembly of Republic of Kosovo, 2011), Law No. 03/L-040 on Local Self-Government (Assembly of Republic of Kosovo, 2008b), Administrative Instruction (MLGA) No. 06/2018 for the Minimum Standards of Public Consultation in Municipalities (Ministry of Local Government Administration, 2018), Law No. 06/L-081 on Access to Public Documents (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2019), Regulation (MLGA) No. 02/2021 on the Procedure for Drafting and Publishing Municipal Acts (Ministry of Local Government Administration, 2021), Administrative Instruction (MLG) No. 03/2020 on the Transparency in Municipalities (Ministry of Local Government Administration, 2020).

Seven hundred and four (704) respondents were surveyed based on the structure of the study. The respondents' gender representation was 40% female and 60% male. Moreover, the survey shows that the largest number of respondents were aged 26-35 years old and the largest portion of respondents had a high school education and 72% of them were employed.

**Table 2.** Age of surveyed respondents

<i>Age</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
18-25	25%
26-35	33%
36-45	27%
46-55	9%
56 and over	6%

**Table 3.** Respondents' academic degrees

<i>Academic degrees</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Secondary	11.95%
Bachelor	47.94%
Master	36.13%
Ph.D.	3.56 %

Regarding the question “*Are you informed about the means and mechanisms for accessing decision-making in your municipality?*” the answers were as follows: Only 22% of the respondents declared that they are informed about the means and mechanisms of citizens' access to decision-making, while 30% declared that they do not know of them, versus 48% of the respondents who declared that they are partially informed about these means. Based on the results obtained, this situation raises the need to increase the awareness of citizens on their rights to be informed and involved in decision-making processes. We estimate that the municipalities have done very little towards informing their citizens. The participation of citizens in decision-making would have very positive inputs for both municipal bodies and citizens.

To the question “*Do you have any knowledge about municipal documents that must be referred for public consultation*”, the answers received show that only 21% of respondents state that they have sufficient knowledge of municipal documents that are referred for public consultation, versus 38% of respondents who do not know and 41% of respondents who state that they are partially informed on this matter. Based on the answers to this question, it results that the highest percentage of citizens do not have sufficient knowledge and have not been consulted about important municipal documents such as development strategies, budget planning, draft municipal statutes, and other municipal acts.

Another question that was put to the citizens was “*Have you ever provided feedback about the documents in public consultation?*”, based on the answers received the fact that 61% of the respondents have never provided any feedback on documents sent for public discussion in a manner is very indicative and meaningful in and of itself. Of the respondents, 31% stated that they rarely provided any feedback, whereas only 8% of the respondents provided feedback. Consequently, this situation requires a more serious and comprehensive reflection by both Civil Society and municipal officials regarding steps to be taken to encourage citizens to actively participate by providing feedback. Citizens not having any proposals/feedback on documents that are of vital importance to them is an unacceptable phenomenon. Through elaborating and researching this phenomenon, both theoretically and practically, it can be concluded that one of the reasons for the abstaining of citizens from providing feedback on documents sent for public consultation, lies in

the perception that their feedback, a priori, will not be used as the foundation, and the perception that municipal bodies have only formally sent these documents for public consultation simply to meet their legal obligations.

The answers given by the respondents to the question “*If you have provided feedback, have they been taken into account by your municipality?*”, show that only 5% of the respondents stated that the feedback on documents that were sent for public consultation were fully accepted, 18% stated that they were partially accepted, while 15% stated that the comments were not accepted. The vast majority of 62% of the respondents stated that they did not know. In the absence of publication of reports by the municipalities on the progress of public discussions, it is impossible to objectively assess compliance with the procedures provided for by Administrative Instruction (MLGA) No. 06/2018 for the Minimum Standards of Public Consultation in Municipalities.

Whereas regarding the question “*How often do you access the municipal website?*”, 78% of the respondents stated that they only access the municipality's website very rarely and only from time to time, while only 8% of the respondents stated that they regularly access the municipal website. Even the results of the responses provided to this question testify to the presence of reluctance on the part of citizens to collect information related to municipal governance activities. Such a reluctance to be informed is even more worrying than the phenomenon of non-participation in decision-making and directly affects the participation statistics because to be part of the discussions and give citizen input there is a prerequisite of being informed and having at least basic knowledge on the issues being discussed. Such statistics, as presented in the chart above, draw attention to the unsatisfactory level of citizens' willingness to influence municipal governance activities.

Also, regarding the question “*Have you ever been part of public meetings?*”, the results of answers received show that 57% of the respondents have been a part of any form of public gathering, while 43% of the respondents stated that they have not been part of any public meeting. According to Law No. 03/L-040 on Local Self-Government, municipalities have a legal obligation to hold at least two public meetings with citizens. Despite this legal definition, the statistics presented show an unsatisfactory level of citizens' interest even though they were notified of the public meeting taking place following established procedures.

Concerning the question “*Are you satisfied with the manner of setting up meetings?*” to those who stated that they were part of these meetings, the majority of the respondents stated that they were moderately satisfied (41%), while 23% stated that they were not at all satisfied. Only 9% of the respondents expressed that they are completely satisfied and 27% expressed that they are moderately satisfied. Administrative Instruction (MLGA) No. 06/2018 for public consultations in municipalities regulates the procedures that the municipalities must follow about informing and the content of the invitation to the public meeting, also determining the obligation of attendance for the highest municipal officials and the members of

the working group in charge of drafting the document that is submitted for public discussion. This instruction also explains the overall order of the public discussions by insisting on explaining the content of the draft paper by the carrier and records of any proposals submitted during the consultations. All these technicalities of running and organizing public meetings affect the degree of satisfaction of citizens regarding public meetings.

Since previous illustrations have proven that the number of participants in public meetings is not satisfactory, the factors of non-participation of the respondents in meetings are listed below. The highest number of respondents (42%) stated that lack of time is the main factor for their non-participation in meetings. Thirty-five (35) percent stated that the lack of adequate information is the reason for their non-participation, 19% stated that they abstained from the meetings because they do not consider that their opinions and feedback will be taken into account, and 22% stated that the reason for their non-participation is negligence on their part. Therefore, municipal bodies should find the most suitable time for holding public meetings, to ensure a reasonable numerical presence of citizens and to guarantee the effectiveness of the meetings.

Also, to the question *“How much do you believe that the official invitation to public gatherings and public consultations is aimed at inclusion of citizens in decision-making, raising the quality of services, and determining priorities according to the citizen’s needs and demands?”*, the responses received reflected the perception of the respondents related to the real goals of holding such public meetings and consultations. The question posed to the respondent was formulated in the affirmative, while the respondents had the opportunity to answer by choosing a short response using a simple scale of responses such as: yes, no, to some extent, and in cases where no answer was given the option cannot say was chosen. From the result we see that 24% of the respondents stated that they cannot say, 32% of the respondents stated that they believe so, 32% of the respondents believe to some extent and 9% of the respondents do not believe. We consider that it is essential to create the perception that the demands and proposals of the citizens will be treated seriously.

In a simple causal, cause-and-effect analysis, resulting from the examination of the results of surveys and interviews conducted with mayors, it can be concluded that there is a consensus regarding the inadequate level of citizen involvement in decision-making by the subjects of research. While we have a consensus regarding the result (consequence), the same cannot be said regarding the cause that produces this level of involvement. If we examine the data obtained from the survey of the citizens, it appears that the citizens point the finger of blame at the institutions for the lack of real information about their rights and how to realize them.

On the other hand, interviews with mayors reveal the passivity and unwillingness of citizens to participate in consultations and decision-making at the desired level. All interviewed mayors declared that they nurture and respect transparency as

the basis of good governance and local democracy. They also emphasized the non-existence of the necessary interest of citizens to be part of public gatherings. Therefore, according to them, it is necessary to develop awareness programs in the upcoming periods to encourage citizens to be active participants in municipal activities

## 5. CONCLUSION

Citizen participation in decision-making processes is also a legal standard today, sanctioned by international treaties such as the Lisbon Treaty of the EU in its entirety. Similar to the legal standard of EU institutions, EU member states have implemented the legal standard of citizen participation, where citizen initiatives are instruments of particular importance to encourage citizens in decision-making processes.

For clarification, participatory democracy does not violate the constitutional and legal powers of the legislative and executive powers. On the contrary, participatory democracy helps the exercise of these powers by the institutions, in terms of creating policies and laws that reflect the true needs of citizens, facilitating dialogue and reaching consensus, ensuring the legitimacy and compatibility of the proposed rules, and also producing other useful effects through which to strengthen democracy and prevent disagreements and various possible conflicts.

In reality, in practical implementation, consultations and other instruments of citizen participation in decision-making processes are not producing proper effects. Among the main reasons are the lack of honest commitment by the institutions to really consult and involve the citizens in decision-making, treating these instruments more as legal obligations than as value and content. The other reason is the lack of a culture of institutional action by the citizens who are more inclined to criticize, to prejudice than to act institutionally and to use the available legal means.

This research shows that municipal bodies have done very little in terms of informing citizens about their opportunities and raising awareness about the need for their activation in decision-making. This is confirmed by the results of the survey, where the majority of respondents state that they did not have information about these legal instruments and did not exercise their right to be an active part in decision-making.

The data obtained from the survey show that the municipal bodies have not sensitized and notified the citizens about their rights and opportunities for involvement in decision-making, and consequently, this has created the perception that the lack of legal initiatives is favorable for municipal bodies. In this regard, it must be understood that good governance includes raising the activation and interest of citizens, informing them on time, and obtaining their opinion based on which local policies will be created and acts will be approved (B. Ilazi, personal communication, June 9, 2022; M. Ballazhi, personal communication, August 22, 2022; X. Gashi, personal communication, June 16, 2022; Q. Kastrati, personal communication, June 14, 2022; N. Ismajlin, personal communication, June 8, 2022).

In this regard, Kosovo is already facing a political crisis in the northern municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo, which is a typical example that shows that even though the actions taken in these municipalities for the organization of elections are completely constitutional and legal, in practice however, lack of engagement of citizens in this decision-making has led to a situation where the Kosovo state bodies have to extend their decision-making through the force instruments of the Kosovo Police, because the residents of those areas, regardless of the reasoning, have themselves indicated that they are against such a process. This is a typical example that shows the importance of citizens in decision-making, especially in local institutions, pointing out that there can be no implementation of decision-making in practice if there is not the full will of the citizens for their implementation.

Kosovo, like other Balkan states, has created mechanisms for the involvement of citizens just for the sake of meeting legal requirements established as a prerequisite for membership in the EU, rather than in a practical sense what should be the involvement of citizens in decision-making as subjects, with a determining role in the establishment of these policies, causing an interactive decision-making policy to be created.

The involvement of citizens in decision-making should not be considered only as a goal of fulfilling legal obligations but as the right of citizens to determine the decisions in the area where they live and as a guarantee or balance between the attributes that are given to local bodies and the limitations that can be placed by their constituents themselves.

The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo should demonstrate a stronger commitment to promoting the role and importance of transparency and socialization of the Public Administration. The Assembly must develop an effective consultation process with the public before adopting laws through hearings and especially with stakeholders.

As highlighted throughout the paper, Switzerland can be taken as the most positive example of the application of local democracy instruments. The Republic of Kosovo should implement the practice established in the Swiss state, in which citizens are enabled not only to declare their will for municipal issues but also to recognize the right to review or revoke the acts of the municipality through referendums, which they consider against the public interest.

One of the limitations of this paper is that the authors consider only the participation of citizens in the decision-making of the administration bodies without releasing the substantive aspect of their proposals within the initiative of the bodies for inclusion in decision-making. The paper also does not include the analysis of the inclusion of citizens' proposals in the final drafts of municipal acts, respectively the question of how many municipalities take into account the comments of citizens and make them a substantive part of the act which is in public consultation. These limitations of are important topics for future research in the field of substantive analysis of citizens' proposals and their inclusion in the relevant legislation, which can be undertaken by local self-government researchers.

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