

# **Citizen Participation in the Local Public Service Provision and Quality Improvement**

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## **Abstract**

Since the 8<sup>th</sup> decade of XX century the scientific and practical level of public administration is dominated by the customer (client) oriented approach, often associated with the New Public Management (NPM) doctrine. As an alternative to the New Public Management "customer" model, R. B. Denhardt and J. V. Denhardt (2003) proposed a "new public service" idea, which is based on the concepts of democracy, citizen and citizen participation as an essential precondition for democratic governance. These conveyed two distinct concepts are named *government* and *governance*, which are interrelated in the local public service delivery and quality improvement processes. At the same time local public administration has to find suitable ways not only to increase effectiveness in service delivery but also to empower citizens as public service users to take more active role in the governance process of services. Citizen participation is defined as a part of democratic public service delivery and primarily means incorporation of those, who are affected by the performance of the service organization. This paper argues that democratization of public services is necessary and appropriate in order to improve institutional performance in the delivery of public services and to increase citizen satisfaction about public service quality.

## **THE MAIN REASONS FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE PUBLIC SERVICES**

Traditionally, the participation of citizens is associated with forms of political activity and citizen participation in political decision-making, while citizen participation in the administrative processes is less analyzed, and in particular the direct participation of citizens in the implementation of public policy issues, participating in public service delivery and quality improvement processes. Public administration in the context of citizen participation is defined as "interaction of citizens and administrators, concerned with public policy decisions and public services" (Callahan, 2007). In this sense, citizen participation is understood as having a direct impact on public policy creation and implementation, and citizens are regarded as an integral part of *governance* process, significantly influencing important decisions affecting the community (Roberts, 2004). Among scholars and practitioners

(Baccara, 2006, Hirst, 2000; Pierre, 2000; Sorensen, 2002) the view is increasingly accepted that the management or *government* age is moving to a system of *governance* in which public authorities are no longer directly responsible for the provision of social services, and this feature takes the third parties, mainly non-governmental organizations (Eikenberry, 2007). The ideal management is defined as the one, which finds a balance between the rational and efficient provision of public services, and open and democratic process (Box, 1998). In the new model, the decentralization process is very important when innovative forms of horizontal cooperation between governments and civil society replace a strong state power. Polycentric decision-making model for supporting the idea of citizen participation in decision-making, first of all emphasizes the principle of interdependence, rather than hierarchy and subordination. The shift towards the new forms of government and citizens interaction is identified differently by authors: Wamsley and Wolf (1996) indicate the idea of a democratic administration; Frederikson refers to the new trend in public administration as new public administration or neoinstitutionalism (Hansen, 1998), while Fox and Miller (1995) in the context of the post-modern ideas use the concept of discourse associated with less formal communication structures.

Many states' attempts to create management systems that are able to engage citizens and identify their needs of public services often have failed or have given unexpected results. On the scientific level such failure often is interpreted as shortcomings of today's representative democracy, which is unable to solve problems of the complex heterogeneous societies and interests, together offering the activation of citizen participation as one of the possible solutions. Implementation of citizen participation idea in public services is not an easy task. The experience of different countries shows that it is insufficient to establish legal measures to ensure participation in the proceedings, it is also very important that both-providers and users- would like to work together and would be motivated to improve public

service quality. The participation is an essential part of democratization; however more active participation does not necessarily lead to more democracy. Legal possibilities of participation and expression are important and the abundance of formal procedures may be viewed as a supportive factor for participation, however, bureaucratization of participation is also possible, which means that the democratization is declared but not implemented.

Public service provider's task is to provide citizens the services they need. It is important that citizens (customers) could get rid of often-unrealistic expectations from the state and could actively participate in service provision. Service marketing researchers have recognized the important role of the client's participation in both private and public institutions; the participation influences the quality of service and productivity. Studies have shown that the active participation strengthens the user's skills to use the service, increases the probability that needs are being met, and helps to reach mutual benefits (Raipa, Petukienė, 2009: 55-58). However, the organization does not benefit from the participation of citizens if the organization and the recipients of the service are not ready to actively cooperate and exchange information. Despite the similarities of public and private sectors management models, the role of public and private service user is not the same. Public services are associated with specific properties, such as equal access for all on non-profit basis, stability, effectiveness, as a control measure, the possibility to improve the quality of service, ensuring the implementation of citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms. It is difficult to achieve a high level of citizen satisfaction with public services, because of differences in public service as of a nature of public goods, and because of different recipients' roles and expectations for the same service.

### **CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES**

Local government has to be interested not only to improve its performance, cost budgeting, but also to maintain public confidence in the implementation of citizen expectations. However, the efforts to improve the quality of public services often lack systematic approach. In this case, citizens are unused resources to improve service delivery. Narrow understanding of citizen participation limits the possibilities to use neighborhood groups as a basis for community formation.

Scientists conducting research on urban management notes that the local autonomy gives the most immediate opportunities for citizens and government representatives to interact. According to the theory of social capital, the incorporation of citizens into public affairs strengthens the social capital, because the citizens are involved in the adoption and implementation of new relevant decisions, which will directly influence the community. Boschen said if the organization does not know who they are and what services consumers want and how they evaluate the services, it is unlikely that such an organization meets the needs of citizens. In addition, the author points out that the most important is not how many citizens participate, but whether all of the citizens' opinion is represented (Aimee Franklin Ebdon, 2002).

The studies on citizen participation identify a number of factors that may influence the success of participation method. Summarizing the theoretical one, four groups of factors that are important for effective participation at the local level can be distinguished: urban structure, types of participants, participation instruments (methods), and participation process. Effective participation in public services is understood as the inclusion of citizens in public service development and delivery process, in which citizens do not only contribute directly to the service outlets, but the participation has impact on better public services, quality assessment, and satisfaction with public service. The distinguished groups of factors do not include all possible factors, which may influence the effectiveness of participation, but

they create an opportunity to assess the variables, analyzed to reveal the connection between normative theory of civic participation and practice, discrepancies and gaps in the theory, and to provide the possible directions of theory improvement.

*Urban structure.* The theorists of urban management distinguish several characteristics of the city that may affect citizen participation in public services as means of assessment of civil servants. The main three are frequently referred to: size of a city, the form of government and the legal basis of citizen participation. After the investigation, Ebdon (2002) concluded that larger cities provide more formal opportunities for citizens' entrance in comparison with the smaller towns. This can partly be explained by the fact that citizens in smaller towns may have more opportunities to contact with government representatives in informal ways. Similar results were obtained by Soos (2003) during the investigation of Hungarian municipalities. The results showed that the smaller municipalities do not have more formal and informal ways of participation in comparison with the bigger local authorities, i.e. in respect of citizen participation the small municipality is not necessarily more open to citizen involvement in administrative processes. Summarizing, the normative claims can be assumed that citizens in public service provision process will be included more often in cities where the population of a city is sufficiently large, in excess of 100,000 inhabitants, and where citizen participation is legally supported by the local government.

*Participating citizens:* who should participate, who will select the participants, what are the criteria for the participants to be selected and why do citizens participate. Traditionally, the representatives of government of the city, mayors, municipal council or an administrator invite citizens to participate. Invitation can be various: open participation to everyone, who wants to devote his time and is interested in the problems; direct invitation (for example by dividing the flyers, posters, advertisements, etc.) to the special meetings; the geographical representation of urban areas, according to demographic criteria for the selection and targeted

invitation of traditionally active participants, based on experience. In the public service decision-making case, all four possible strategies are possible for the invitation, but for the provision and the development of public services the first two are the most relevant techniques. It is also important, why the citizens decide to participate. On the one hand, the positive reasons are distinguished as a sense of civic responsibilities, interest in public affairs, etc. On the other hand, the negative reasons are dissatisfaction with the current situation, the desire to influence the decisions that are made without the participation of those actors, who will be directly influenced by these decisions, etc. In conclusion, it may be noted that the assumptions for effective participation occurs when: citizens are invited to participate by government or leaders of other responsible organization, i.e. when a two-way communication is initiated; when everybody, who wishes, can participate and when the possibility of representation is guaranteed for interests of all citizens; and when the participants can be involved in decision-making or service provision process, from the consideration of proposals to the final decision-making in all stages.

*Participation measures.* Civic participation can be effective if various opportunities are guaranteed to be involved in decision-making and service delivery processes: from the initial bidding stage, allowing sufficient time for reflection and the involvement of citizens in a strategic rather than "small" one-case decision-making.

The methods initiated by local government for the participation of citizens can be divided into five subgroups (Lowndes, Pratchett, Stoker, 2001):

1. Consumers' methods: firstly, the forms of participation are focused on consumers and are emphasizing the various aspects of the service provision (complaints, satisfaction surveys, and opinion polls).

2. Traditional methods: methods that are used for a long time in municipalities, which have traditionally been associated with civic participation (public hearings, written consultation, representatives from the committees, questions, and answers events).

3. Forums: a series of activities that combine the users of specific services, residents in a certain area, and individuals, related to the solutions of specific problems (e.g. community safety) (users of the service, location/neighborhood, problem, and general interest).

4. Consultancy innovation: new methods, which are used to consult citizens on various problems at first, rather than include them into the long-term dialogue (an interactive web site with a group of citizens, referendums).

5. Advisory innovations: new methods to help individuals and communities to respond and contribute to, directly affecting them in solving problems (through focus groups, community plans, perceptions/expectations, clarification, participation in services, and civil courts). Advisory civic participation is a possibility to assess the consequences and costs of various alternatives before acting (Meng, 2008).

The method of participation varies depending on the attitude of the authorities. On the one hand, the citizen participation can be discussed emphasizing the aspect of the professionalism, while the treatment of opportunities of citizen participation - as the local arm extension. Each authority chooses the way of participation and decides whether the citizens in general must be included in the public process. The soft version of citizen participation occurs through the participatory citizens' organizations, which do not care as much about how to involve the citizens, as about the use of public resources, which are distributed by professionals. On the other hand, those, which focus on the ensuring of the democratic process, and not particularly of effective government, tend to give priority to neighborhood organizations, which act as an alternative to other citizens' organizations. In this case the view

is supported that the government does not have sufficient resources to meet the various needs of citizens. Citizens should be treated as a resource that can contribute to improving quality of life through participation in the overall design and delivery of services. The neighborhood organization occurs, when citizens are living together with a need for co-operation and are prepared to invest some of their resources in order to create better life (Glaser, Yeager, Parker, 2006, Meng 2008).

*Participation process* is one of the issues, arising from organizing the participatory process, when participants lack competence and skills. If indeed participants lack of knowledge in the matter under consideration, participation does not provide useful information. In the case of public services, this problem is partly avoided, because people, involved in creation and provision processes of public services, are directly or indirectly associated with a particular service; as a result, in any case their position in respect of the service is valuable. In this process, it is important that all the expectations would be evaluated. One of the ways to identify the “real” needs is to evaluate the needs in respect of the real financial situation, and the strength of the provisions, to pay for the service. When all the needs in respect of the service are identified, it is necessary to take the main preferences within the available financial opportunities into account, in the decision making. If the municipality applies science-based methods of citizen participation and organizes participation in appropriate ways, the participation helps local government to identify the real values and perceptions of all citizens. Such efforts help to strengthen public confidence in the necessity of participation, if the public sees that the participation makes affect on local government (Nelson, Robin, Simonsen, 1998).

Each of the distinguished factors create favourable conditions for the effective citizen participation in municipality level, however, it is not an inclusive model, because it does not consider all possible factors, but this model serves for the theory examination, in order to

identify the gap between theory and practice, and the importance of the individual factors for effective participation (Table 1).

Table 1.

**SPECIFICATIONS OF EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION AT THE MUNICIPALITY LEVEL**

<b>Group of factors/variable</b>	<b>Description of effective participation specification</b>
<b>Structure of the city</b> Size Legal norms	Larger cities often support the idea of promoting the participation The legal basis for citizens' involvement
<b>Participants</b> Invitation Selection Motivation	The government of the city encourages citizens to participate by inviting Targeted selection of the criteria for representativeness and creation of possibilities to all Civil responsibility and initiative, not only discontent
<b>Measures</b> Opportunities Time Scope	Multiple, interactive and institutionalized From the very beginning of the process, not once, but not long-term commitment The overall urban problems, rather than just one issue or location
<b>Process</b> Aim Form Needs	Clearly indicated, educative The material presented in non-specialist language (tables, diagrams, comparisons) Selected priorities
<b>Eligible Results</b>	Decision makers use the information for the specified purposes Bilateral communication and feedback usage Satisfaction of participants and significant impact on

Source: prepared by the author of the article, based on: Aimee L. Franklin, Ebdon C. (2002). *Citizen participation: looks good on paper but hard to do in practice*. Prepared for the 2002 ABFM Conference, Kansas City, October.

According to De Pree, the effective participation requires certain conditions: respect and development of existing methods for constructive communication; the provision of opinions and decisions, rather than simple criticism and vague suggestions; willingness to invest personal efforts and be responsible for the participation; willingness to work together in good faith with each other and take responsibility for the tasks; to support the essential goals and mission of the organization; a desire to change own and others' attitudes and behavior; to trust and respect the process of participation (Donnelly, 1999). Municipality level authorities are generally legally required to analyze the external environment of the organization for consultation, in collaboration with the public. Usually the authority selects the method of interaction; however, in comparison with private sector organizations, public organizations are using more and different ways of interaction.

It is worth noting the fact that different forms of participation come from different social and political environment; the same method of the participation can lead to different practices depending on the state. In many ways of participation the main objective is not only to transform participant's own interests on the decisions, but also often to create the debate and discussion for general consensus, consequently it is difficult to measure the direct link between participation and effective decision-making. The authors, analyzing the various methods of participation, often do not exclude one universal way of participation, and suggest to integrate the features of several ways of participation and to select the best combination of methods of participation in a particular situation. The main value of participation is linked to increased legitimacy of public decision and improved communication between citizens and authorities. Many citizens of the participation studies at the local level emphasize that through civic participation it is possible to improve service and decision-making, as well as citizen satisfaction with the quality of incoming services (Wilson, 1999).

### **CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AS PUBLIC SERVICE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT TOOL**

According to Lawson Veasey and Hy (1999), the main challenge for public administration of the twenty-first century will be not the solution of centralization or decentralization issues, but the role of public administration: how to realize the expectations of its citizens. The local forms of participation are more likely a mode of expression of dissatisfaction with the services and the management. At the same time focusing on the expectations of citizens, it is inevitable to take the public decision-making and service provision process closer to citizens and thereby reduce the level of conflict and improve the efficiency of management. In addition, the author notes that in public administration it is not even so important to ensure the equality principle in the provision of public services as far as the development of civil and individual responsibility and tolerance of different values.

Barber argued that opposition to "weak" liberal democracy is "strong" democracy, a modern form of participatory democracy, which is based on the idea of self-governing community that connects citizens and non-homogeneous interests, as far as civic education. In such community citizens co-operate through common goals, civic attitude and opportunities, ensured by participatory institutions rather than self-sacrifice or altruism (Box, Marshall Reed, 2001). As an alternative to the market model of public administration, the model of cooperation is proposed: even if a large proportion of citizens decide not to participate in public decision problems, and services, all people want to know that they can participate and that their participation could change something.

In accordance with the experience from other countries, local authorities collect and analyze the social, economic and demographic data, but relatively rare the public opinion and market research methodology are used to identify the users' needs (Skelcher, 1992). Consultation and participation procedures are fragmented and not always focus on the users' actual involvement. As a result, the manufacturer or service provider's interpretation is dominating, while the direct perception and evaluation of services from recipient's side does not receive sufficient attention. If local government does not create a service delivery and administration systems, where the recipient of the service has an active role, participation of service users' becomes reactive, as a protest against the decisions taken by no alternatives, therefore, seen as a "limited" and "partial" against the local government.

It is possible to assess the quality of local public service on the basis of internal criteria, in accordance with legislative requirements, and to refer it as performance assessment or the external criteria, through the surveys of citizen satisfaction. To link these two evaluations is difficult, because different types of criteria are used, in particular it is difficult to assess what is the basis for the citizen's evaluation (the media of information, personal experiences, etc.); whether they all have the same objective information about performance and in which way

results of the researches of citizens' opinion could be used. It is equally important question of what has to be done, when the citizens negatively assess the quality of service, although the provision of service qualifies for or even exceeds all service objective requirements. The fact that provided service agrees with legal requirements may not influence the citizens' satisfaction, if the service does not meet the recipient's expectations, and the service issues, which are important to the recipient, does not comply with. Therefore, it is not perspective to seek for the universal service quality assessment criteria in the surveys of citizens' satisfaction, which may cover objective and subjective factors. The citizens' satisfaction research does not have such a goal, but it can give additional information, from citizen's side, as far as the service is efficient, causing the shifting citizens' conditions in relation to evaluation of quality. There are only few researches on how much the citizen satisfaction with the service depends on the "hard" or objective criteria for the effectiveness of services and knowledge of them. Even Elinor Ostrom in 1973 noted that the credibility in one of the service quality indicator's may distort the quality evaluation process, "adapting" the performance of the organizations to the criteria of evaluation, and lead to some "pathologies" of citizens' satisfaction surveys (Kelly, Swindell, 2002:611). Those citizens' satisfaction surveys, which are carried out at the local level, show that citizens are able quite objectively assess the quality of service, although based on subjective criteria, if the service is assessed by various criteria.

Since the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the analysis of relations between citizens and government is supported by "social contract" idea in Europe, when through elections, citizens entrust the government to take care for their safety, social welfare and other essential needs. Authorities through the public administration bodies have to ensure the effective service provision. In the theoretical sense, the most important goal for both political authority and the administrative authorities is to work for the public interest, and that the members of the

public would be satisfied with the services provided. Otherwise, the "social agreement" does not make sense. The efficiency is not possible, if the public does not know what to expect from government and if the authorities, providing the service, do not know what citizens want from the services received. The accountability of the service organizations is complicated, because citizens' satisfaction with the public services is not leading argument for the survival of the organization, providing the service, since in many cases, citizens have no real exit from the service access process, which is guaranteed by private services. Citizens' satisfaction with the quality of service becomes an important factor in the elections of politicians, or, when citizens have an opportunity to choose the service or method of administration.

Bovaird and Down (2008) conducted a survey of municipal officials and stated that the citizens' involvement in the process of public services leads to the better services, which comply with the needs of citizens, better informed decisions, more affordable, better quality and more efficient collaboration in using tax money for the services. However, the studies are necessary for the analysis of citizens' attitudes towards participation and the impact of participation in the assessment of service quality. It is unrealistic to expect and to ensure the participation in public services of all citizens in one or another way, however, it is relevant to analyze whether the citizens' assessment of service quality varies according to the active or passive participation in services. Moreover, it is relevant to determine the impact of the participation on the citizen's satisfaction about service quality, whether the form of participation is important for assessing the quality of the service used.

### **CITIZENS AS PARTICIPANTS IN PUBLIC SERVICES: THE CASE OF LITHUANIA**

The most significant factor, which determines the participation of citizens in municipality government and public services, is legally defined possibilities of participation.

Republic of Lithuania ensures for the citizens the opportunity to participate in the process of local governance and public services by national and international law: the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, Act of Local Self-Government, Public Information Act, etc.

In the context of citizen participation in the public services, the term "citizen" includes also those persons, who do not have citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania, but the law gives them some opportunities to participate in decision-making process (Viešasis, 2010: 203). In addition, the provision of public services is linked to the category of the population, rather than the institute of nationality. Persons, who do not have citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania, shall have the right to petition, complaints, and requests to participate in the activities of associations. This is particularly relevant in the municipalities, as permanent residents of the municipality, with a residence permit, are using both active and passive suffrage, i.e. they have the right to elect municipal council or to be elected to it.

Municipalities (in total 60) are responsible for the provision of public services for the people. Public services are provided free of charge or for a fee. Municipality organizes the provision of public services through the public service providers (budgetary and public agencies, municipal enterprises, joint-stock companies), by the establishment of new public service providers, or by the conclusion of public service contracts with individuals and legal persons. Municipalities has to continually look for ways and means of their statutory functions as efficiently as possible, taking into account the needs of local communities and the use of advanced economic methods. However, in spite of Lithuania's rather comprehensive regulatory options for public participation in local governance, few citizens are involved not only in social activities, but also in political processes. A small population activity trends through its statutory opportunities to participate in decision-making processes may be significantly associated with awareness of the local (municipality) dysfunctions.

Research data shows that about a third (33 percent) of the respondents thinks that the information about the activities of the municipality or the eldership simply does not exist, while 43 percent of respondents receive it only upon arrival in the municipality (Savivaldybių administracijų, 2010:48).

The involvement of citizens as recipients of public services in the process of public service provision is not required as the implementation of the various quality models in state and municipal institutions. The democratization of public services significantly depends on the individual efforts of local governments and on the opportunities created for residents to participate in various stages of public service provision and development. The positive trend is identified that the number of municipalities, implementing the quality management system instruments, all of which are somehow related to the improvement of the quality of public services and citizen satisfaction, increases. The usage of European Social Fund support significantly influences the growth trend. The most common Lithuanian municipalities select measures of quality management system as one stop shop principle, Harmonic Organization, Co-assessment model, the ISO 9001 standard.

One of the ways for citizens to participate in an organized provision of public services and quality improvement is the participation in non-governmental organizations. In 2011 the public opinion survey on voluntary regulations of Lithuania was conducted. The results showed that 34 percent of people are involved in volunteering and further 35 percent, who has never been involved in such activities, and would like to participate in the future, if they are offered. Even 40 percent of respondents complained about the lack of information about volunteering and a weak volunteering tradition through education in schools (Nevyriausybinų, 2011). Despite the positive attitudes of the people to participate in non-governmental organizations, local non-governmental organizations are included only in a few public services. The experience of EU countries shows that NGOs provide services with

lower price due to lower costs of administration, in comparison with private and public sector companies; moreover, the members of communities, particularly the consumers of social services, accept and attract NGOs service providers than private and public sector companies. In Lithuania, however, NGOs in most cases are not taking part in service provision, and if employed, their market share is only about 20 percent at best, i.e. their services are not sufficient in the market. The development of their activities is interfered by non-separated funding support for NGOs from NGOs participation in public service provision. NGOs development activities should be targeted to the programming principle, strengthening the capacity of NGOs and training of personnel; therefore procurement of services should be held by using public contracts or concessions with NGOs (Savivaldybių organizuojamų, 2010:69).

Active participation of service users depends on the public service, people motivation and present alternatives to public service. Civil Society Institute already has been doing survey of people for four years in order to determine the civil power index: the general civil power, though not significantly, but has been rising since 2007: increased from 33.9 to 35.5 points. The survey of 2010 showed that most residents of Lithuania are willing to take actions to promote local problems that they face themselves or people of their environment: 19 percent of respondents said that they would take efforts to organize such activity and 55 percent indicated that would contribute to local problem solving, but still 26 percent would stay away (Pilietinės, 2011). Thus, it is possible to assume that people are more interested in participating in areas, where their presence could influence someone to change the development of own quality of their life. In other words, people are more involved in public administration at all levels and in areas that directly affect the population in the form of various services. The studies confirm this assumption, because many people are involved in the three civic activities in Lithuania: donate to charity (56 percent), participate in

environmental management works (50 percent) and participate in local community activities (34 percent) (Pilietinès, 2011).

The local government administrative-territorial units, named elderships (or elderates, *lith. seniūnijos*), have a significant impact on citizen participation in the promotion and coordination of local governance structures. In total there are 551 elderships in Lithuania, of which 450 rural-type and the remaining 101- urban-type (Petukienė, 2010:113). The Local Government Act since 2008 provides the possibility that the community residents of residential areas (one or more) can elect the community residential delegates, who are called *seniūnaičiai*. The main task of this delegate *seniūnaitis* is to take care of the community and represent the interests of the community in the municipality, and if necessary, in municipal authorities and local public bodies, operating in the territory. Many problems of the elderships should be solved on the basis of cooperation between *seniūnaitis* and elder (*lith. seniūnas*). Although official statistical data, counting the number of elected *seniūnaičiai* is not yet given, in 2010 the Ministry of Internal Affairs has made the research “Analysis of Local Government administrative structures” (2010:59), where it is noted that elderships have been established in most rural-type of elderships. Moreover, it is observed that many residents of rural areas are more involved in *seniūnaičiai* elections. They have their hopes for their community activities. In the view of this practice, the structure of local administrations should be improved in such a way that would create favorable conditions for local residents to participate in local activities. This is realized in two main ways: the establishment of small municipal authorities or territorial structural units of municipality administration. In large municipalities, the community is not active. The size of the territory has a direct impact on the people’s participation activity in the local governance. The smaller the area – the greater the probability to bring local residents together is. In order to make the community more involved in local affairs, it is suggested to establish elderships (elderates), which provide their service

in a small area. Lithuania's case presents the contrary arguments to Ebdon (2002) and Soos (2003) researches, regarding the impact of municipality/city size on the civic participation; this argues for a more detailed investigation of territorial administrative unit's seniūnaitijos and evaluation of opportunities, created at lower local government levels, as well as their impact on citizen participation activity.

It is noted that the municipal administrations of territorial structural units exist in most countries that have large municipalities (such as Portugal, Bulgaria, and Great Britain). In each country, they have specific historical names – quarters, parishes, city districts, and villages. The main advantage in the service provision is that the services are brought closer to the people, stronger relationship between the municipality and the community; more people have the opportunity to visit the local branch and join in affairs of their residence place. The structural territorial units are the alternative to municipality size reduction to smaller units. The municipalities, through the creation of territorial structural units bring their activities to the population and facilitate the development of local democracy.

However, it is worth noting that the establishment of the structural territorial units of municipalities is not sufficient factor for the activation of citizen participation. The real citizen involvement in local affairs largely depends on the staff's ability of local structures to employ a variety of citizens in the current decision-making or methods to improve public services, and how the efficiency of the citizen participation in the improvement of service quality is valued. The research results of the local administration directors and elders show that generally passive forms of civic participation are applied: the draft decisions are published and awaiting the assessment of the population (42 percent) or draft resolutions to be discussed with the population in public meetings (31 percent). (Savivaldybių administracijų, 2010:86). Although the elderships are the closest local structures for the community, the more active involvement forms of residents are very low, such as work with young people and older

people's groups, citizens' initiative, promoting the various interests in drafting decisions, involving people in working groups and commissions. The elders are very skeptical about the involvement of residents in the functions of elderships and the activity of community delegates seniūnaičiai, suggesting that there is a shortage of initiative to look for the most diverse and effective forms of public participation at the local level. The main determined reasons for this are: inadequate legal framework, absence of reference material, lack of enthusiasm of the population, negative interaction dominates, when the citizens complain, but do not propose the salvation of the problem, lack of material resources, especially in the rural-type elderships.

In Lithuania the citizen involvement in public services at local level is a new idea and practice, which just has been started to be implemented, by applying the different tools of quality improvement, by training of local government staff, and educating the people about the main benefits of their participation and importance of addressing common issues. The mutual-citizens and local government staff, confidence building has a great importance to the positive outcomes of participation too. It is appropriate to exclude a number of mutual confidence-enhancing policies:

1. Municipalities should examine the shortcomings and problems of citizen participation in public service quality improvement process and develop it in accordance with citizen participation in the process of public service strategies that would provide the monitoring of the dynamics of civic participation.

2. In order to have people satisfied with the public services received, it is necessary to determine the expectations of the community; and to promote cooperation between the elders and community delegate's seniūnaičiai, in order to strengthen trust seniūnaičiai. The communities need more possibilities and support for the community activity together

promoting more responsibility to all community residents, participating in the salvation of problems.

3. To provide information in such a way that it could reach all the residents and make them be interested; to regularly provide information that could be easy accessible to residents; to present the examples of good practice of cooperation between municipalities and the people.

4. To enable the people themselves to ascertain that they are able to influence the quality of public services in the municipality. An effective measure would be the publicity of the appropriate examples of people/communities that have managed to find a solution, acceptable to all.

5. To organize more trainings for local government officials, politicians and residents, which are related to the methods of citizen participation and possible techniques to clarify and use the opinions and preferences of citizens in developing and evaluating the changes in service quality (Savivaldybių administracijų, 2010:105).

6. To encourage non-governmental organizations not only as an element of civil society, but also as full-fledged participants of the local public services market. At the same time it is necessary to note that NGOs also lack the skills to participate in the market of public services (skills of people, knowledge, resources, etc.). The municipality has to provide financial and technical assistance in the development of NGOs to provide public services.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The analysis results suggest to accept the opinion of Petukienė, Tijūnaitienė and Raipa (2007) that although the participation as a desirable activity is included in the documents and laws in many countries, however it often remains in the formal rather than real action. These activities are often based on different perceptions of participation and the participation level or quality is required partially because of the lack of effective participation in practice.

Local governments find themselves in a contradictory situation. On the one hand, they increasingly lose autonomy and the capabilities of independent problem solving; they increasingly depend on co-operation with other governmental, private or non-governmental actors. On the other hand, local authorities are obliged to be accountable to their citizens: clear communication about public service quality improvement decisions is necessary.

Municipalities should involve citizens in the policy making and implementation process not only because of good governance, but also in order to receive input for increasing the quality of local policies and services. The main problem is that the shift from local *government* to local *governance* calls for a redesign of democratic processes, especially in public service provision. The traditional representative approach to local democracy is therefore increasingly supplemented with forms of direct democracy. However the institutional design of citizen participation is weakly developed at local level and many tensions between representative and direct democracy still exist. As a result, citizens and local authorities become disappointed if there is no agreement between both sides of democratization forms of public service provision and concrete procedures of the ways, by which citizens are able to participate in public service quality improvement process.

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