

THE ELOGE PROGRAMME AS ACCESS TO THE SELF-EVALUATION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES ACCORDING TO THE TWELVE PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE: THE CASE OF LITHUANIA

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Abstract

The problem of quality of governance is one of the most important issues raised nowadays by international and local organisations. In order to adapt to the rapid processes of globalisation and localisation, various methods are being sought to optimise forms of democratic governance in Western countries or among countries which are leaning towards the West. The aim of the article is to increase government accountability and responsibility, promote citizen involvement, and strengthen government-societal relations and trust. In order to achieve this goal, the European Union proposes to give more powers to local government institutions, because they are closest to the citizens, can more effectively assess their needs, and attain them more effectively. To achieve this goal, the 12 principles of Good Governance, recommended by the Council of Europe, are used, and ELoGE (European Label of Governance Excellence) is used as a tool to assess the existence of these principles in local government. The purpose of this article is to identify factors that determine the implementation of the principles in local government, and to ascertain the most important characteristics that would influence the implementation of Good Governance in local government, taking into account the ELoGE evaluation methodology.

KEY WORDS: Good Governance, Principles of Good Governance, ELoGE, local government, residents of municipalities.

Anotacija

Šiandien viena svarbiausių yra valdymo kokybės problema, keliami tarptautinių ir vietinių organizacijų, siekiančių prisitaikyti prie sparčių globalizacijos ar glocalizacijos procesų. Vakarų šalyse ar į Vakarus besiorientuojančiose valstybėse ieškoma demokratinio valdymo formų optimizavimo būdų. Siekiama didinti valdžios atskaitomybę ir atsakomybę, skatinti piliečių išsitraukimą, stiprinti valdžios bei visuomenės santykius ir didinti visuomenės pasitikėjimą. Įgyvendinant šį tikslą Europos Sąjunga siūlo daugiau galių suteikti vietos savivaldos institucijoms, kurios, būdamos arčiausiai piliečių, tiksliau gali vertinti jų poreikius ir veiksmingiau juos tenkinti. Tam siūloma laikytis Europos Tarybos rekomenduojamų 12-os gero valdymo principų, o ELoGE (angl. *European Label of Governance Excellence*) įgyvendinti kaip priemonę, kuri leidžia įvertinti šių principų taikymą savivaldybėse. Straipsnio tikslas – nustatyti veiksmus, lemiančius šių principų diegimą savivaldybėse, ir pagrindinius požymius, kurie leistų tobulinti gerą valdymą savivaldybėse, taikant ELoGE vertinimo metodiką.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: geras valdymas, gero valdymo principai, ELoGE, vietos savivalda, savivaldybių gyventojai.

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Introduction

Whether it is a public institution, an organisation or a company, daily activities are unthinkable without a multitude of different activities that have to be managed and structured to keep everyone happy. A systemic approach to management is also relevant to organisations and society. The circularity of performance management is important in the context of changing lifestyles, forms of governance, and the reform of public institutions. The evolution of society and new technologies requires an ever-increasing refinement and critical evaluation of various forms of governance. From the earliest times, the need to manage, organise and plan has required planning and implementation skills. In today's globalisation and glocalisation, much is the same, but at a different level. Governance problems are emerging that highlight the shortcomings of democratic governance, the passivity of civil society, and the lack of transparency. The World Bank was the first to articulate the concept of Good Public Governance and define it as a policy strategy. It identified a list of key normative aspects that countries must respect, including efficiency of public services, an accountable administration, a sound legal framework, and a balance between government and regulation (Williams, Young, 1994). Later, other international bodies and organisations developed the concept of Good Governance, and scholarship on Good Governance has been, and continues to be, ongoing. There is no single specific definition for it, it is a very broad concept that is divided into different concepts. There exist concepts corresponding to 'Good Governance', but with other emphases, of 'New Governance' ('New Public Governance') (Reinholde et al., 2020; Guogis, 2010), 'Smart Governance' (Willke, 2009; Gaulé, 2014), 'Post-New Public Management' (Nakrošis, 2011), and 'Neo-Weberian State' (Rakšnys, Guogis, 2016; Bouckaert, 2022). The scientific and practical question is posed, with respect to these concepts, whether they are in contradiction or as supplements to New Public Management, which had too many quantitative initiatives and competitive responses concerning efficiency, which is immanent to the private sector. It is assumed that New Public Management has exhausted its possibilities. It has partly vanished, and nowadays there is a necessity for more humanistic, social governance, oriented towards a more qualitative approach and corresponding methods for leaders, organisations, teams of administrators and their public services' clients as participating and co-creating citizens. However, the quantitative measurements in these corresponding concepts are not rejected, and are applied in certain ways. According to researchers, the term 'Good Governance' refers to political processes and outcomes that are necessary to achieve a goal. When the EU declared Good European Governance as one of its strategic objectives in 2000, a number of measures were developed to achieve it.

The term ‘Good Governance’ aims to minimise corruption, to take into account the views of minorities, to listen to the needs of the public before taking decisions, and to respond actively to them now and in the future. According to Petrauskienė and Predkelytė, ‘Good Governance’ can be presented as an environment in which both individuals and public institutions are accountable for their actions (Petrauskienė, Predkelytė, 2014). The relevance of this article is that Good Governance is not just about decisions ‘from the top’. Decisions have to be effective, implemented, understood and trusted. In other words, Good Governance needs to be purposeful and sustainable. As noted in the National Strategy for Sustainable Development, ‘the reform of territorial administrative governance must be further pursued and the capacities of regional and local authorities must be developed to make the most of the opportunities offered by EU membership’ (NDVS, 2011). Good Governance reflects the fundamental values of a democratic society according to the 12 principles developed by the Council of Europe. Based on these principles, local authorities in Council of Europe member states can continuously and effectively improve their governance on issues such as democracy, public participation, efficiency, transparency and the fight against corruption, as well as on issues of economic development (Loewen, 2018, 103–126). Local governments are closest to citizens, have a direct and indirect impact on their well-being, and must therefore have a close, territorial relationship. The application of the 12 Principles of Good Governance is particularly relevant for coordinating activities and improving communication with local populations.

The problem is how to improve the implementation of the Principles of Good Governance in local government in relation to the local population.

The subject of this paper is the application of the 12 Principles of Good Governance in local government. The aim of the paper is to identify the factors influencing the implementation of the Council of Europe’s 12 Principles of Good Governance in local government, to define what ELoGE is, and to analyse how they interact with each other.

Objectives:

Review the 12 Principles of Good Governance recommended by the Council of Europe’s Good Governance and Innovation Strategy.

Analyse the purpose of ELoGE and its implementation methodology.

Discuss the practice of implementing ELoGE in Lithuania.

Compare the lowest ELoGE scores in Lithuanian local governments in relation to their population.

Research methodology: the document analysis method, used to obtain information by examining academic literature, various pieces of legislation, implementation reports and recommendations, was used to achieve the high value of the

recommended principles. The comparative analysis method was used to reveal the perception of the 12 Principles of Good Governance in local governments in relation to the assumptions of non-compliance with the assessment of their citizens.

Theoretical and practical relevance of the study: it is particularly relevant from a practical point of view, as a review of the lowest scores of the Good Governance Principles and the proposed recommendations and methodologies provides local government practitioners with the opportunity to improve the implementation of these principles in local government.

1. The Council of Europe's 12 Principles of Good Governance

Since the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the European Union has focused on building a 'European model' of governance based on the European values set out in Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty: 'respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States living in a society based on pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men' (Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2016), and 'European Governance' therefore includes the activities of European institutions and non-governmental organisations in line with the objectives and standards of the European Union. This is a cornerstone for becoming equal members of the union (Chepkirui, 2021, 43–50). These values are still relevant today, but public awareness is changing, becoming more 'secular', and the 'observer' position is no longer enough. In its quest for greater unity and the preservation of democratic values, the Council of Europe stated at the 2005 EC Summit that democracy and Good Governance at all levels are a necessary goal for promoting stability, preventing conflict, and facilitating the growth of the socio-economic environment, that is, for creating communities in which people can live and work well, now and in the future (Valencia Declaration, 2007), and that it is imperative to take immediate action to this end. In 2007, the Valencia Declaration adopted a strategy for innovation and Good Governance at a local level, which focuses on the public benefit in all European countries, when local government actions are guided by the principles of democratic governance, involving residents, meeting their legitimate expectations, and improving the quality of public services. One of the objectives of the strategy is to achieve these objectives through ELoGE, which is awarded to local authorities that have achieved a level of governance that is in line with the 12 Principles of Good Governance. The Council of Europe's Centre of Expertise for Good Governance provides capacity-building programmes and advi-

ce to local, regional and national authorities. It helps European countries to ensure Good Governance at all levels, which standardises public administration processes. The Centre's work is based on a set of European standards and 12 Principles of Good Governance, which are complemented by 25 capacity-building methodologies to assess and strengthen the capacity of local government. The Centre of Expertise for Good Governance continually invests in research, and cooperates with international organisations to develop practical tools for specific applications. One of the Centre's partners is the ISIG, the Independent International Institute for Social Research in Gorizia. This institute makes a strong contribution to the implementation of the 12 Principles of Good Governance in local government. It has also developed general guidelines (the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance, accessed on 31 March 2023 <https://isig.it/en/elogue/i-12-principi-europei/>) and norms to strengthen the indicators of each principle according to the evaluation criteria. *The first principle 'Fair elections, representation and participation'* focuses on participation, representation and fairness in elections. Citizen participation is a key element of representative democracy, and a necessary propeller for free and fair elections. Citizen participation takes place all the time, during and between elections, and is a part of the policy formulation and decision-making phases. Political participation can be defined as the active involvement of individuals and social groups in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Active participation includes formal political participation, e.g. standing for election and voting. However, there are other actions that can influence the decision-making process, such as citizens' petitions, requests, and proposals to promote changes to improve the interests of the community. *The second principle 'Response'* relates to the ability of public administrations to respect the needs and expectations of citizens, and to deal professionally with complaints relating to the provision of public services. Elected representatives play a crucial role in meeting citizens' needs, assisted by civil servants, and it is the duty of the institution as a whole to be aware of citizens' needs and expectations, and to establish strategies, objectives and rules. Not all citizens are empowered enough to be heard, and not all communities are able to make their needs known, but that does not mean they should be ignored or left behind. *The third principle 'Efficiency and effectiveness'* describes how local authorities need to have a clear strategy and the capacity to act effectively and efficiently. Local authorities should set clear directions for effective decision-making processes, and, at the same time, develop management systems that can implement their strategic plans effectively. It is generally accepted that effective organisations are those that know what they want to achieve and have a clear understanding of how to achieve their objectives. *The fourth principle 'Openness and transparency'* concerns the openness and transparency of public administra-

tion. Concepts of openness and transparency are widely recognised as key elements in the functioning of democratic systems, and in building trust between citizens and public administrations. When a decision is taken by a public body, it is important that the decision is implemented and communicated in a clear and transparent manner, in accordance with the law and pre-agreed procedures. *The fifth principle 'Compliance with the law'* relates to the rule of law. The rule of law underpins democratic societies, in particular through the adoption of norms that protect fundamental rights. This means that any law is only effective if it is enforced. Without the consistent application of the law, there can be no rule of law. The judiciary plays an important role in ensuring compliance with the law. Local governments have an absolute duty to comply with all applicable laws, rules, policies and standards. One of the fundamental requirements of the rule of law is that the powers of public administration must be defined by law. *The sixth principle 'Ethical behaviour'* relates to the ethical behaviour of elected officials and public servants. The aim of all public decision-making is to promote the well-being of citizens in accordance with democratic principles. The pursuit of the public good must be the primary objective of decision-makers. *The seventh principle 'Competence and productivity'* relates to the competence and capacity of civil servants. This principle emphasises in particular the need to continuously enhance the professional skills of civil servants in order to ensure and improve their performance in order to achieve better results. *The eighth principle 'Innovation and openness to change'* concerns innovation and openness to change, i.e. how public authorities deliver new and innovative services in a way that reflects the ever-changing needs of communities. Social and economic challenges are driving local governments to seek more innovation and creativity. *The ninth principle 'Durability and long-term orientation'* focuses on sustainability and long-term orientation. Local governments face increasing challenges to ensure that their activities are sustainable. Sustainable development is a topic that is more frequently on local government agendas. *The tenth principle 'Sound financial management'* focuses on sound financial management. Sound financial management is a key pillar of Good Governance. It concerns transparency in the use of public money, ensuring effective service delivery and the fair use of financial resources for the benefit of local communities. It is also about ensuring a sustainable financial future for local government services. *The eleventh principle 'Human rights, cultural diversity and social cohesion'* delivers on human rights, cultural diversity and social cohesion. Human rights are the inalienable fundamental rights of all individuals, and their respect is 'the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world' (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Lithuania, 2023). 'These norms are inherent in all citizens and every level of government must ensure that no person is discriminated against or exclu-

ded' (Valencia Declaration, 2007). Moreover, as cultural diversity increases, it is imperative to respect human rights and ensure social cohesion and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. *The twelfth principle 'Accountability'* focuses on local government accountability. Accountability refers to the commitment of individuals and organisations to be accountable, i.e. to take responsibility for their actions to others, and to disclose the results of their actions in a transparent manner.

B. Czepil (2020) explores the assessment of the quality of governance of Polish provincial communes, and tries to identify and investigate the conditions that led to the low level of the quality of government in the commune with the lowest score. The author observes that Good Governance is closely linked to the local community, as, for example, the inability of the local population to act together for the common good creates obstacles to problem solving. He notes 'that informal local governing bodies can improve democratic governance [...] The size of the commune affects the quality of local democracy. According to data from 2015, it was found that, in contrast to large communes, people living in small communes are more interested in local politics, declare a stronger sense of influence on local authorities, and report stronger civic engagement' (Czepil, 2020). The author stresses that the long-term dominance of one political party in a region, as well as the dominance of a commune office, a primary and secondary school, a state-owned enterprise, or even the leader of a commune, eventually influence the evaluation of the quality of governance in a negative way. In summary, a review of the 12 Principles of Good Governance recommended by the Council of Europe shows that they are closely interlinked. In other words, it cannot be the case that one principle is fulfilled while another requires additional methodology and reinforcement. The principles can be seen as criteria that characterise the performance of local government. The study carried out by Czepil in Poland is an excellent example of how each principle is intertwined with the others. The consolidation and review of the Principles of Good Governance for each individual local government enable it to identify weaknesses in its performance, or areas that should be addressed and strengthened. Local governments and national-level bodies should take into account a wide range of factors when assessing the criteria of the principles in order to apply the principles in their localities.

2. ELoGE: European Label of Excellence in Governance

ELoGE (EloGE, European Label of Governance Excellence, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/good-governance/elope>) is the Council of Europe's award for local authorities that have achieved a high level of Good Governance, based on the 12 Principles of Good Governance and assessed according to the Council of Euro-

pe's Good Governance benchmarking (European Label of Governance Excellence benchmarking, accessed on 31 March 2023: <https://rm.coe.int/elope-benchmark-en-17-09/16808d71d4>). It is awarded for one year, and is presented to deserving local authorities in the form of a crystal dodecahedron, with one of the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance engraved on each box. The Wider European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CEDG) acts as ELoGE's accreditation body, which has established the procedures and rules for the implementation of ELoGE in the ELoGE Implementing Regulations (ELoGE accreditation platform, regulations for implementing the European Label of Governance Excellence, accessed on 31 March 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/elope-regulations-rev-21-2768-3402-8293-v-1/1680a460ed>), adopted on 18 May 2016 and amended on 24 March 2020, and 21 October 2021 (ELoGE accreditation platform, regulations for implementing the European Label of Governance Excellence, accessed on 31 March, <https://rm.coe.int/elope-regulations-rev-21-2768-3402-8293-v-1/1680a460ed>). They note that the ELoGE procedure consists of two phases: accreditation and implementation. To date, ELoGE has been or is being implemented in Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, and Spain (Basque Country).

Accreditation: accreditation by ELoGE can be applied for by national or regional authorities, as well as by a national or regional body with practical experience in the field of Good Governance. An application for accreditation is accompanied by National Municipal Self-Assessment according to the Good Governance Principle Guidelines. Accreditation is granted if the accreditation body is satisfied that there is no objection from the state, that the local governments are well informed and free to participate, and that the accredited body can competently manage the implementation process. Accreditation is granted for a maximum period of three years.

Implementation: the accredited body is responsible for managing the ELoGE labelling process and any associated actions and consequences. During the period of its accreditation, it undertakes to implement the 12 Principles of Good Governance in most of its areas. With the support of the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance, the accredited body commits itself to implementing ELoGE in a large number of local governments within one year.

How the principles are measured: for those who have expressed a desire to measure their performance and progress according to the Good Governance Principles, in local governments (which vary from one country to another) these are the key criteria for performance. It should be evaluated by residents of the area, the staff of local government bodies, and local government politicians, and

it is suggested that the local government should set up a group of staff and councillors to evaluate its own performance, so that they can give their opinion on the implementation of the principles of Good Governance in the local government and identify the reasons for problems in the implementation of the principles of Good Governance (European Label of Governance Excellence benchmarking, accessed on 31 March 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/eloge-benchmark-en-17-09/16808d71d4>)

A separate questionnaire is provided for residents, as well as for local government employees, and the questionnaires are structured according to the level of the competences required, which are related to the 12 Principles of Good Governance in the operation of the local government. It is proposed to assess the level achieved by the local government in its local government activities on the basis of the evaluation scores indicated (from 0 to 4) (European Label of Governance Excellence benchmarking, accessed on 31 March 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/eloge-benchmark-en-17-09/16808d71d4>).

Table 1. Part of the assessment of the level of implementation of the Municipal Principle

The local government level of maturity of the principle is assessed as:				
Not applicable	Very poorly	Quite poorly	Quite well	Very well
0	1	2	3	4
Not applicable, don't know, no opinion	We are aware of the key issues to be addressed, but currently have no or very few approaches or activities developed to address them	We recognise the key issues and are developing approaches or activities to address them, although there has been limited practical implementation so far	We have well-developed plans and activities to address the key issues, with significant examples of implementation	We can show clear evidence of good practice which can be shared, and are further developing our approach to ensure long-term and sustainable improvement

European Label of Governance Excellence benchmarking, accessed on 31 March 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/eloge-benchmark-en-17-09/16808d71d4>

The score for each of the 12 Principles of Good Governance is calculated by adding the scores of the criteria for assessing the performance of the local authority and dividing by the number of criteria for that principle. 'If the local government's level of achievement in terms of the application of the principles of Good Governance in local government operations is rated "very good", then the local authority's level of Governance is in line with the Strategy for Innovation and

Good Governance at a local level. If the score is between 0 and 1.99, this principle of Good Governance is not applied in the local authority. Having identified the causes of the problems in the implementation of the Good Governance Principles, the local authority should pay more attention to the implementation of the under-implemented Good Governance Principle in the local authority (Savivaldybių veiklos vertinimo kriterijai pagal Gero Valdymo principus, accessed on 31 March 2023, [https://vrm.lrv.lt/uploads/vrm/documents/files/LT_versija/GERO%20VALDYMO%20PRINCIPAI%20\(002\).pdf](https://vrm.lrv.lt/uploads/vrm/documents/files/LT_versija/GERO%20VALDYMO%20PRINCIPAI%20(002).pdf)).

The overall score for the local authority's performance assessment is calculated by taking the average of the scores for all the Good Governance Principles and dividing it by 12 (European Label of Governance Excellence benchmarking, accessed on 31 March 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/eloge-benchmark-en-17-09/16808d71d4>). After careful analysis of the data collected, the accrediting body awards an ELoGE to local governments that successfully complete the whole programme. This award, valid for one year, recognises local authorities that have achieved a high level of Good Governance according to the Council of Europe's standards. ELoGE is not designed to monitor, but rather to assess how the 12 Principles of Good Governance are manifested in local government. Once a local authority has assessed the value of a principle, it has the opportunity to implement it in its own operations. However, ELoGE is a process without an end. It is a tool that needs to be monitored in order to understand all the strengths and weaknesses, and to take timely and effective action. The award also contributes to competitive interest between local governments, which in the long run develops into cooperation.

3. The case of Lithuania: an analysis of scores by self-assessment and the scores of the population in Lithuania

ELoGE activities were carried out in 2020: the public enterprise Dainava was accredited for the venture until 2023. This accredited institution provided training, with the support of experts from the Council of Europe. There was also cooperation with the ISIG on the preparation of ELoGE for Lithuania. The methodology was discussed and adapted to Lithuania in accordance with the 12 Principles of Good Governance. An implementation plan was prepared. Local authorities carried out their own assessment, surveys of residents, local government staff and councillors, and collected documents to verify whether the assessment was valid. This meant that particular attention was paid to improving their performance in the areas covered by the self-assessment. The methodology for calculating the final score was as follows: the score of the questionnaires submitted by local government staff and councillors represented 20% of the total final score, the average of

the self-assessment scores represented 50% of the total final score, and the score of the citizens' evaluation by the questionnaires represented 30 points. A total of 35 local authorities registered to take part. Some did not make it to the next round, because not all of them met the requirements, for example, the required number of population questionnaires was not collected (the number of questionnaires is determined by the population of the area). They were asked to set up teams of at least four people to carry out the local government self-assessment analysis, and a link to the questionnaires was sent to local government staff and councillors by email. Residents filled in the questionnaires on www.manoapklausu.lt. Of the 35 local governments, 24 fully met the methodological requirements and have completed the whole process to be assessed. Of these, 14 were awarded the ELoGE Good Governance Label. A comparison chart based on data from the report submitted to the Centre for Good Governance with the scores of all local governments and the scores of all citizens (author's remark: it is not pointed out in the report whether all local governments received the ELoGE label, or 24 which fully accomplished the ELoGE project) show a very clear gap between the scores of what citizens think and how the local authority, i.e. the team of professionals working in the local government, assessed itself. The scoring methodology is the same for everyone. The local governments' self-assessments were supported by more detailed guidelines on what should be addressed, and by individual indicators for each principle. There was ongoing consultation during the self-assessment process. Dainava has provided on its website a table of frequently asked questions, and tips on how to answer them. It can therefore be argued that the work of the local governments in the self-assessment has been much more comprehensive, and they have provided what is validated in one way or another as a performance activity. The reasons for the poor assessment of the population can also be found. One reason for the marked gap between local governments and their residents is that the whole process of implementing ELoGE in Lithuania took place during the pandemic, which may have led to people's dissatisfaction with the national government, which has been shifted on to the shoulders of the local authorities, and this is reflected in the report (European Label of Governance Excellence, *report*, accessed on 3 March 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/final-report-on-the-european-label-of-governance-excellence-in-lithuan/1680a1d401>). However, it can be assumed that dissatisfaction is a common feature. Thus, there is room for strengthening in the local governments, and the statements in the questionnaires should be formulated differently. The five principles with the lowest scores are five which, according to ELoGE's scoring procedure (scoring from 0 to 1.99, the principle is not applied in the local government) and the corresponding logic, if we were to assess Lithuania as a whole for the principles that are not applied, would be recorded as not occurring in Lithuania.

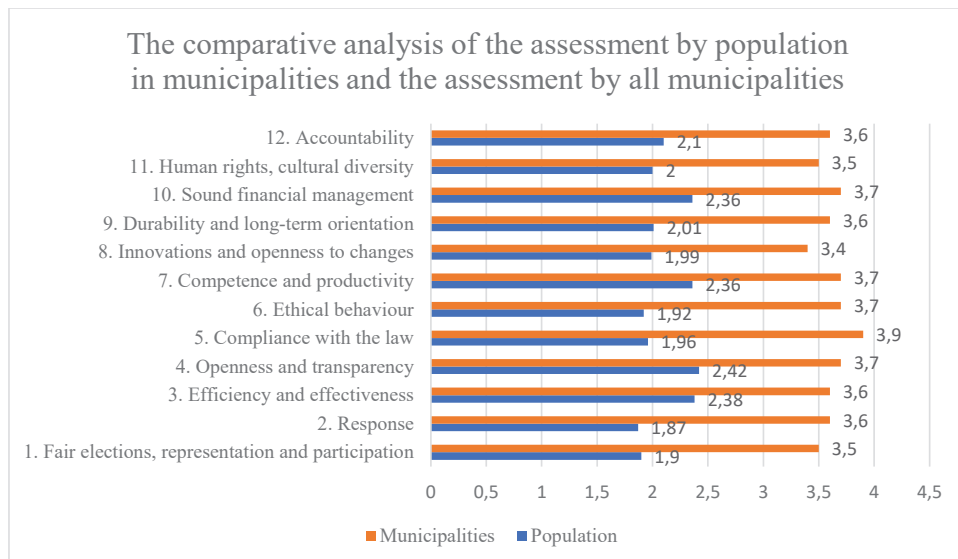


Diagram 1. A comparative diagram of the assessment by the population and the assessment by local governments in Lithuania according to the 12 Principles of Good Governance (compiled by the authors according to the Good Governance in Lithuania Report)

European Label of Governance Excellence, Report, accessed on 31 March 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/final-report-on-the-european-label-of-governance-excellence-in-lithuan/1680a1d401>

Based on the ISIG’s description of the implementation and the indicators of the 12 Good Governance Principles, the following general observations can be made:

In the questionnaire given to residents of the area, the statement ‘The local authority handles complaints about the provision of services in a competent manner’, which was made in the evaluation of *Principle 2* (Responsiveness), was the lowest overall rating among all residents. According to the ISIG’s description of the principle at (Principio 2 Ricettività, accessed on 6 April 2023, https://isig.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Documento-A2_EI.pdf), the indicator underlines that public services are designed to meet the needs of residents, which requires service providers to understand and accurately assess, and to respond appropriately to meet demand. Public service providers need to take a consistent approach to communicating with residents. There must be clear and effective complaints procedures that residents can use and understand. Poor communication between them leads to a loss of trust, hindering residents’ use of public services and preventing services from receiving feedback or evaluation to improve quality. Maintaining

residents' trust should be a clear objective: it is the basis for effective and efficient public administration.

Principle 1 (Fair elections, representation and participation) scores next lowest. The questionnaire statement was worded as follows: 'I am satisfied with the current opportunities to influence local authority decisions on issues that concern me.' The ISIG sets out (Principio 1 Partecipazione Civica, Rappresentanza, Corretto svolgimento delle elezioni, accessed on 6 April 2023, https://isig.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Documento-A1_EI.pdf) that local elections must be free and fair, in accordance with international standards and national legislation, and free from fraud. In organising elections, public bodies must follow international norms and practices that do not hinder residents' participation in public life at a local level, and which allow for unhindered learning and better decision-making. Local residents should be actively encouraged to participate in the decision-making process, and be provided with the knowledge and information they need to make participation more meaningful and effective. When designing a participatory process, it is necessary to think about ways in which the outcome will be achieved. Consultation is particularly effective in the formulation and development of policies. This process is linked to the willingness of elected representatives to respond to the real needs of residents, to represent their interests, and to seek to improve their quality of life.

Principle 5 (Compliance with the law) (Principio 5 Stato di diritto, accessed on 6 April 2023, https://isig.it/wpcontent/uploads/2022/01/Documento-A5_EI.pdf). The interests of the community, not the interests of individual residents, prevail in the area. It is the absolute duty of local government to comply with all applicable laws, rules and standards. One of the fundamental requirements of the rule of law is that local authority powers must be defined by law, and the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania devotes an entire section to this. The work of public administration only produces actual results when the rule of law is specifically respected. Local authorities must always be accountable and transparent in the community in which they operate. It is essential to make this kind of information public, and it is therefore important to be transparent about whether they have been subject to judicial measures or other sanctions. The rule of law, and therefore its constituent parts, means that all regulations and rules adopted and applied by local authorities have their own legal framework. Operating under the rule of law, local governments must react accordingly to guarantee the legitimacy of civic initiatives, the social and economic progress of the state, and the development and implementation of reforms.

Principle 3 (Ethical behaviour) (Principio 3 Efficienza ed Efficacia, accessed on 6 April 2023, https://isig.it/wpcontent/uploads/2022/01/Documento-A3_EI.pdf).

All residents are treated equally in the area, regardless of their relationship with elected councillors or other local government staff. The proper conduct of government is closely linked to administrative efficiency. Behaviour contributes directly to improving public administration, which is aimed at securing and strengthening residents' trust. For civil servants, the Code of Conduct means a lot when it comes to corruption involving gifts, including public procurement and the sale of local government assets. Conflicts of interest are also included in the improvement of ethical behaviour in local government, and interested parties must remove themselves from the relevant decision making.

Principle 8 (Innovation and openness to change) (Principio 8 Innovazione e Apertura al Cambiamento, accessed on 6 April 2023, https://isig.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Documento-A8_EI.pdf). The local authority takes into account the suggestions of residents on how to improve the delivery of public services to residents. Innovation is about improving the lives of communities. Socio-economic challenges, in particular advances in e-society, encourage more innovation and creativity. Local government should seek to change and transform the way public services are delivered. This can be small changes. Change requires clearly developed vision, effective long-term planning, and skills development, linked by a new approach to operations. It is often possible to draw on good practice, what other local governments have implemented, and adapt it to your own. Local authorities often have similarities, as they share many common aspects, from the legal framework to the political culture and the territory. It is important to experiment and try things out to ensure that the results are what is expected. Any good practice that a local authority intends to implement for the benefit of the community should be based on actual issues and have clear objectives. It should also correctly identify the areas where new ideas need to be successfully implemented, monitor development, and have a long-term vision. Stakeholders should be directly or indirectly involved. And at the same time, local authorities should inform citizens about the implementation of new solutions and best practices. It could be argued, as mentioned earlier in this article, that the principles are intertwined. Responsiveness refers to ethical behaviour and compliance with the law. Residents' dissatisfaction with the local authority's responsiveness to complaints triggers a backlash from civil servants for ethical behaviour and non-compliance with the law. Innovativeness can be linked to transparent electoral behaviour, representation and participation, but as is noted in the text, the ELoGE evaluation took place during the pandemic, which caused disruption. In addition, there were parliamentary elections in Lithuania in 2020. Therefore, the suggestions from the public to change the electoral arrangements were not accepted. The evaluations from a citizens' point of view show where all local governments need to improve. It is worth observing that the

last local government and mayoral elections in Lithuania, which happened on 5 March 2023, presented clearly the results of the quality of the work accomplished by local governments and their mayors. Although the activities of the mayors do not comprise all the work accomplished by local authorities, the large number of reelected mayors points to the good previous work done: 12 mayors out of 14 who were awarded the ELoGE Good Governance Label were reelected in the first round of the elections.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Council of Europe and the EU aim to develop and maintain democracy. The 12 Principles of Good Governance are used to achieve this. They should guide local government performance at a European level. An analysis of the 12 Principles of Good Governance reveals a clear tendency for each principle to be ‘parallel’ to the others, with one weaker principle causing the dodecahedron to lose its symmetry.

Members of the European Union have the opportunity to strengthen their Democratic Governance. Countries that express their interest in adopting ELoGE receive comprehensive support from the Centre for Good Governance, advice from the ISIG, and other methodologies that strengthen their activities. ELoGE is not about control or punishment, but is an educational, supportive tool to help assess the weaknesses and strengths of the performance of local government.

In Lithuania, ELoGE was implemented in 2020, when 35 local governments registered for it, and 14 were awarded. During the accreditation period, local governments were invited to various courses and conferences on how to strengthen their performance according to the 12 Principles of Good Governance.

All local governments score quite low on the 12 Principles of Good Governance. This could be for a number of reasons, but apart from these, the assessments need to be taken into account and the proposed methodologies for strengthening the principles should be reviewed and responded to accordingly.

Local governments are encouraged to take into account all the Principles of Good Governance, and not just to get ELoGE. Performance based on the 12 Principles of Good Governance is much more efficient, and local residents are more satisfied with their government. It is proposed to review the principles for local governments where one political party has a long history of leadership, as well as for local governments that are significantly less populated or smaller than others. The principles should also be taken into account for local governments with a higher concentration of ethnic minorities.

Citizens are invited to take a more active part in local government, expressing their views and making suggestions. Citizens should be politically active and take an interest in the decisions taken by their local government, and there is always room for change if their needs are not met. At a national level, it is proposed that national authorities should be more responsive to EU recommendations and increasingly empower local governments to oversee them. All public sector bodies are recommended to acquaint themselves with the 12 Principles of Good Governance, as their application can help improve the quality of public services provided.

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