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Current Tendencies of Citizens' Participation in Local Governments in Latvia

In public rhetoric, it is politically correct to assess the positive effect of citizens' participation in local governments. Officials include the participation as an unbiased dogma in political documents of various levels of governance. However, to what extent does this political rhetoric match the particular policy?

By use of diverse research methods, the author analyses legal and institutional opportunities of citizen participation, as well as limits of decision-making process in local governments in Latvia, structuring the analysis according to three levels of participation in the decision-making process: information, information provision (1), consultation practice (2), power distribution in the decision-making process between the local authority and residents (3).

The analysis of legal and institutional environment of the citizens' participation made by the author allows concluding that both the legislative power and local governments overall have strengthened the rights of the residents and elaborated procedural pre-conditions for participation in the decision-making process in local governments in Latvia. The regulatory framework of the participation and the institutional system of local governments ensure the rights of the residents at the lowest participation level – the rights to receive information and openness of the decision-making process of the local governments. Consultation practice as a higher level is put in practice involving the residents in the work of committees of local governments and implementing public deliberations. Practice of the local governments in expansion of participation opportunities of the residents outside the official participation framework is positive.

Still participation as direct involvement of residents in decision-making, where participation means *to have a voice in the government*, in the democracy system of Latvian local governments is possible in local elections only.

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