Report on the
**examples
of civic
involvement in**
the municipalities
of Latvia

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Report on the examples of civic involvement in the municipalities of Latvia

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INFORMATION ON
THE REPORT

The purpose of the report

To identify the most commonly used forms of civic involvement in the municipalities of Latvia, which the municipality and/or the residents have found to be successful and which could encourage both the municipalities and the local communities to seek successful ways for cooperation and involvement in their territories.

Target audience

Municipalities of Latvia, activists, associations.

The method and information sources

In search of examples of successful civic involvement, the municipalities were contacted in several ways: by e-mail, by addressing city governors, by using the database of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, by publishing repeated invitations in social media. Successful examples were also identified through questioning regional centres of non-governmental organisations and conducting qualitative interviews with the representatives of the municipalities (NGOs, employees of the municipality, activists). The descriptions of the examples of civic involvement are based on information obtained in the municipalities, published in the media, social media, as well as obtained in interviews.

Outside the report

- The municipality of Riga is included in this report due to only one, but very important instrument of civic involvement – participatory budgeting. Due to their incomparable scale, other examples of civic involvement were not identified, leaving this subject for viewing in a separate study.
- Project competitions are not included in this report. When identifying the municipalities regarding the practice of civic involvement, municipalities most often mentioned project competitions, co-funding for regional associations and informal groups of residents. The practice of municipalities in this respect is very diverse with significant differences in the scope of the project competitions, the available funding, the requirements for the applicants, and the allocation of funding for

a wide variety of needs through the process of competitions. The report includes examples of civic involvement that are of a pilot or experimental nature, have different forms of involvement that are not subject to annual, specific, restrictive cooperation frameworks or where the project funding is not a prerequisite for implementing the initiative. With regard to project competitions, the content of the project competitions carried out by each municipality should be analysed in order to evaluate the examples of civic involvement sought for the purposes of this report, assuming that such examples could also be found among the ones supported by the municipality project competitions. Due to the same reason, projects provided by other financers were also excluded.

- Public discussions on detailed plans, spatial planning, construction plans, tree felling (as activities stipulated by the law) were not included in the report, unless a specific role was provided to the civic involvement.

We would like express our gratitude for the support in preparing this report to:

SUMMARY

Why civic involvement is important in the work of municipalities

The essence of democracy is formed by the civic involvement in adopting decisions that affect the lives of the residents – both directly and through their representatives. Although municipalities are much closer to the residents than the authorities of national level, the proximity of these institutions does not itself guarantee extensive involvement. To a large extent civic involvement in the work of the municipalities depends on their openness and readiness to engage with the residents and whether they see the residents as cooperation partners that will help them make better decisions. Promotion of civic involvement in the work of the municipality strengthens local democracy, mutual trust, the ability to take responsibility, co-operate and achieve the most effective and efficient solutions according to the needs of the residents.

What is civic involvement?

Civic involvement in this report implies a wide range of activities aimed at targeted and meaningful interaction between the municipality and the residents in order to improve the quality of the municipality decision-making process and its results. Purposeful, meaningful interaction manifests in various forms: provision of information, detailed discussion of some issue, consultations before adopting important decisions, joint cooperation in dealing with a particular issue and creating the environment.

Trends in Europe and municipalities of Latvia

The report includes 38 examples from 21 municipalities of Latvia, summarising their experience in civic involvement in decision-making, solving of particular problems, budgeting and overall activity to reach the residents more effectively. There could be more municipalities open for cooperation, considering that 119 municipalities are currently operating in Latvia.

Examples of successful civic involvement in Europe show that municipalities are increasingly willing to experiment with a variety of civic involvement activities to reduce the distance and separation between municipalities and residents, recognising that residents are the source of important information and solutions in the municipality work.

The report reflects the experience of the city Gdansk in Poland, involving the residents of the city in solving important problems within special civic panels, which decide on important issues related to the city development and public processes by hearing out the views of the municipality specialists and experts. The example of Gdansk shows that meaningful civic involvement is not easy: in order for a consultation to have meaning, serious work is required for preparing it. The example of Gdansk is also notable for the fact that this city organises face-to-face consultations – so not all participatory innovations take place in the internet environment.

The representatives of the municipalities of Latvia mention the passivity of the residents as the biggest problem that municipalities often face, when organising various events, meetings, competitions for the residents. Municipalities point out that a limited number of people usually respond to such opportunities. The rest of the residents are hard to reach. As a result municipalities are sometimes very cautious in searching for new forms of involvement – they fear that only a few will attend their events. The report reflects the experience of Sigulda City Council in involving the residents in the city planning and preparing the topical development plan. This experience shows that the activation of the residents is a long-term process, where one of the essential prerequisites for success is to create a climate of trust between the residents and the municipality. Namely, both the municipality and the residents must feel that their involvement will be appreciated and that the involvement will be meaningful. When developing the topical plan of the city for two years, the municipality of Sigulda engaged the residents in the planning process by holding more than 25 meetings, actively discussing the ideas of the plan in social media, and holding numerous individual meetings, especially when separate streets were planned. These efforts resulted in an ambitious outcome – the city has obtained a well-considered and detailed topical development plan. Investments of time and other resources in the civic involvement have yielded results – also such residents of Sigulda, who were previously the biggest critics of the municipality, are now already defending this plan.

For approximately ten years now municipalities in Europe have been involving the residents in the budgeting process. Participatory budgeting is a widely used method in many places – in France (100 million euros have been assigned for decision-making by the residents of Paris), in Germany, in Poland and in the Nordic countries. Approximately 20 municipalities have introduced this method in Estonia. The report

includes two examples of how this process is taking place in Tartu (Estonia) and in Helsinki (Finland), where municipalities are working to increase the activity of the residents, to help formulate their wishes and to adopt decisions. Although so far this method has not been used in its classical form in Latvia, in many places indirect progress towards it can be observed. For example, in 2019 Kocēni Region involved residents in deciding, which projects of civic initiatives should receive municipality support that was previously decided by the municipality representatives only. In Mazsalaca region, the residents voted on how to use the development budget funds reserved for the development of one rural parish. The principle of participatory budgeting in the municipalities of Latvia is likely to become an increasingly widespread practice.[1] In 2019 the Municipality of Riga has launched the first pilot project on municipality participatory budgeting in cooperation with the Riga Neighbourhoods Alliance. At the time of preparing the report, the pilot project was still being implemented – the voting on the ideas suggested by the Riga Neighbourhoods Alliance was still continued, so it is too early to assess the use of this method in detail. Taking this into account, the report provides an overview of how the Municipality of Riga implemented this method.

In many parts of Europe a movement towards greater openness not only at a national, but also at a local level can be observed, by making all the information that is available on the activities of state or municipality authorities accessible and analysable, including budgeting in the form of open data. The report provides an overview of the open data approach in Gdansk (Poland), where municipality expenditure is published daily on the open data portal. Unfortunately, there is no such level of openness in the municipalities of Latvia. Besides, only a few municipalities have made efforts to involve residents in the discussion of the municipality budget or to produce budget information in a form that is easy to understand for the residents.

Technologies and social media have opened a new page for state and municipality communication with the residents. It is becoming easier and more convenient for the residents to influence the municipality processes using their smartphones, not only taking advantage of the growing range of e-services, but also helping the municipality to improve its work – by expressing opinions, participating in surveys, reporting problems, voting on solutions. Residents in Latvia also have the opportunity to use the advantages of various technologies, as many of the municipalities have developed reporting tools, mobile applications with the ability for the residents to notify various issues, such as damage to the road surfacing, updates on public order, traffic movement or environmental pollution. The report includes an example of a small rural parish, the residents of which use the "WhatsApp" application to communicate with the Governor of the Parish, and over time it has become common practice.

Examples in Europe show that neighbourhoods, territorial communities in which residents share similar interests, such as environmental cleanliness, accessibility, cultural life, security, etc., are playing an increasingly important role in urban life. The example of the Municipality of Bologna (Italy), included in the report, shows how the municipality appreciates and promotes the growing role of neighbourhoods by enabling them to engage in the development of the neighbourhood, and the creation of the social and cultural environment. On a smaller scale, however, with increasing dynamism, the activity of neighbourhoods in Latvia is growing. They have developed faster in Riga than elsewhere in Latvia. In the last two years in the majority of Riga territory associations of neighbourhoods have been established, and they have also founded their umbrella organisation – the Riga Neighbourhoods Alliance. Also, the organisers of Residents' Forum in Talsi consider the neighbourhoods of their region an important resource for the municipality. Sometimes municipalities themselves are determined to promote the formation of such neighbourhoods. The report includes the experience of the municipality of Cēsis in organising neighbourhood festivals to promote mutual trust and cooperation between the residents.

Elsewhere in Latvia there are examples, where municipalities create an impulse for the neighbourhoods and interest groups to be active in areas of interest to them, providing indirect benefits also to the municipality. The report includes a number of examples, where municipalities have assigned buildings for the use of activists and associations. Such actions provide significant benefits to the municipality and the urban environment, as the residents actively manage otherwise abandoned buildings, organise cultural events, gather like-minded people, generate ideas, develop projects etc. In addition, the municipality can later use these buildings, if it is willing to reach the residents, who have begun to gather there to address other issues that are important to the municipality in cooperation with the residents.

The summarised experience of the municipalities shows that the civic involvement in municipalities takes place in four main directions: 1) involvement in decision-making (development issues, problem solving, budgeting, general activity); 2) opportunities to report problems in municipality work; 3) municipality support in developing civic skills and forming cooperation; 4) search for various new solutions to communicate with the residents. The report is structured according to these directions, including vivid examples of experience from other countries as well.

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1. For example, the declaration of the government led by K. Kariņš includes a commitment to introduce a pilot project "participatory budget", allowing the residents of individual municipalities to decide directly on the priorities for the allocation of municipality funding. This principle is likely to be included in the regulatory enactments stipulating the activities of municipalities following the implementation of the ongoing administrative-territorial reform.

1. CIVIC INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

1.1. Civic involvement in solving municipality development issues

Development planning is a very important process as it greatly impacts the future activities of the municipality. Civic involvement at the stage of the decision-making process is very important, because it is the residents, who should be able to agree on what the city or the region that they live in should be like. Although the report does not analyse in general, how purposefully the municipalities are involving the residents in this process, getting familiar with the work of many municipalities in the process of involving the residents demonstrated a very different approach to this issue – from official announcements in the municipality newsletter on the opportunity to submit individual suggestions to various planning documents to an example, included in this report, of the Municipality of Sigulda actively involving the residents in the development of the City Topical Plan.

The municipalities are not always the initiators of the city development planning, and in some cases such role is successfully fulfilled by non-governmental organisations as well. Residents' Forums in Talsi is another example of how the residents of the municipality are involved in the decision process of development issues, cooperating with the municipality that takes into account the suggestions of the residents.

1.1.1. Civic involvement in city planning in Sigulda[2]

Sigulda ir viena no nedaudzajām Latvijas Sigulda is one of the few municipalities in Latvia, where positive natural growth can be observed – in the last three years the population of Sigulda Parish has grown. Population growth, rich historical stratification and many other factors prompted the municipality to develop an extensive topical plan for the future development of Sigulda – how it will look in the future, with a goal to create a high quality and sustainable municipality infrastructure and public space. The municipality developed the plan for two years, until it was approved at the municipality of Sigulda region in July 2019.[3]

In the development of the plan, the municipality of Sigulda region paid special attention to the engagement of the residents, identifying extensive and creative involvement of the residents already from the beginning as an important part of the planning process. The municipality succeeded in this, therefore the example is included in this report.

The plan consists of six major areas: traffic infrastructure, engineering communications, preservation of cultural and historical values, and architectural means of expression of buildings and structures, development of recreational territories, development of green areas. In the plan a voluminous section is devoted to each of them, containing graphical and visual materials, as well as explanations, which are compiled into a united, publicly accessible database of guidelines and integrated into a unique 3D city model that can be used in the process of future city planning. As a result of the planning, the municipality has created a map of the interconnected networks, which provides comprehensive information on the territory of the municipality according to many parameters – both the current situation and the planned.[4]

In developing the plan, the municipality devoted close attention to civic involvement. In total, over two years the municipality of Sigulda region held more than 25 meetings of the residents to discuss the issues to be covered in the plan at various

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2. Population: 18 938 (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs). Sigulda Municipality consists of Sigulda City, Sigulda and more parishes, which in 2009 were joined by Allaži Parish.
3. The topical plan is available on the municipality website here: https://www.sigulda.lv/public/lat/sabiedriba/siguldiesi_plano/. (Last viewed on 16.09.2019)
4. The map of the interconnected networks of the municipality of Sigulda region is available here: https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=353b12d7f25248649061561d0ca809b5&fbclid=IwAR19mzQe.

stages, before an exact proposal was made and to discuss a specific plan model developed by the municipality and the experts. The largest number of participants was 40-50 residents, less residents were present to discuss topics that were not as extensive – approximately 15 residents. Usually the meetings were scheduled after business hours to allow the residents to join them. When discussing the already detailed proposal, the municipality paid particular attention to whether and how the plan took into account the proposals or objections initially expressed by the residents, demonstrating, where they have been taken into account or explaining why a proposal could not be implemented.

For each of the six parts of the plan mentioned above, a series of meetings of the residents were held with the participation of the representatives of the municipality and experts in the field, who had been contracted by the municipality to develop the proposal. A detailed plan for the relevant area was made available to the public prior to the meeting, so that the interested parties could familiarise themselves with it beforehand. Additional meetings were held, when the residents had a lot of questions on some topic or when the proposed suggestion included some very significant changes. The issues of traffic infrastructure received the greatest interest, as specific street construction projects were already reviewed in the meetings. The meetings were held on very detailed issues, for example, together with the interested residents trees intended for felling were inspected on site together with the experts, who explained the condition of each tree and the need for felling it.

In addition to organising meetings on different areas of the Topical Plan, the municipality also organised other informational activities, including published information in the local newspaper, used the mobile application of Sigulda region, in which not only was information on the opportunities for involvement provided, but also various surveys for the plan organised. Residents were also actively involved in discussing various aspects of the plan on a special "Facebook" page called "Siguldieši plāno!" (The residents of Sigulda Plan!), followed by nearly 500 FB users. In addition, the municipality encouraged civic involvement by placing stands of the topical plan at various widely attended events in Sigulda (Sigulda Festival, Winter Taste Festival, etc.). The approach of the municipality was to respond to all questions of the residents it received through all the possible communication channels, including engaging in discussions on FB, replying to emails or meeting with the residents separately, etc. As the representative of the municipality admitted in the interview, extensive informing, invitations to participate, as well as regular reporting on how the

public opinion has been taken into account, and the regular provision of replies in all possible channels, by surveying some street that bothers the residents, as well as by responding on the "Facebook" page, has given the first visible results. The residents now trust the involvement process more and also participate in the meetings more often. However, this means that the municipality is also prepared to receive very critical opinions, when the residents are extremely dissatisfied with the proposed solution, but at the same time have not delved more deeply into it. Therefore, online communication also has its own challenges. As acknowledged by the official of the municipality responsible for planning, the municipality sees planning as an ongoing process, where it is important to listen to the views of the involved parties at every stage. As a result, while discussing the plan, you often have to return to the same street or the same topic several times searching for compromising solutions. In her interview Laura Skrodele, the Director of Sigulda Development Agency admitted that one of the significant benefits of developing this plan was that "it has been possible to achieve a relatively high level of involvement in preparing the municipality documentation that has not previously gathered wide representation of the residents."[5] Likewise, the prolonged process made it possible to observe cases when residents, who have always been critical of the work of the municipality, have become almost advocates of the municipality at regular meetings of the residents, helping the municipality to explain its decisions.

1.1.2. Residents' Forums in Talsi Parish[6]

Another example of civic involvement, which shows that the residents are an important resource in municipality development planning, can be found in Talsi. The Residents' Forums in Talsi is a set of regular activities, aimed at identifying the vision of the residents on the future development of the municipality, but the task of planning is not to find compromise solutions for specific issues, but to create a more extensive vision of the development of the municipality in various fields. However, these results also have an impact on the work of the municipality.

The Residents' Forum is held every four years and it is aimed to discuss the issues related to the development of the municipality and to find out the opinion of the residents about them, as well as promoting the residents to take responsibility themselves and to participate in the improvement of the quality of their lives. The Residents' Forum is organised by the Talsi Regional Foundation in cooperation with the municipality. The first

5. Interview and email communication with Laura Skrodele, Director of the Sigulda Development Agency, July 2019.
6. Population: 30 190 (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs). Talsi Region is one of the largest regions in Latvia. It consists of four cities: Talsi, Sabile, Stende, Valdemārpils and 14 parishes: Abava, Ārlava, Balgale, Ģibuļi, Īve, Ķūļciems, Laidze, Lauciene, Lībagi, Lube, Strazde, Valdgale, Vandzene, Virbi.

Residents' Forum took place in 2002, and a total of five Residents' Forums have been held, each gathering slightly more than 150 residents of Talsi.

The preparation works for the Forum take place in the idea workshops of 16 neighbourhoods of the region – these are meetings of the residents held in the parishes of the region to involve as extensive representation of the residents as possible in deciding issues of the development of the region. The idea workshops of the neighbourhoods are organised by the Talsi Region Community Foundation, which has developed a network of local coordinators. The local coordinators of the neighbourhoods are well aware of the relevant territory and its residents, and are therefore important support in activating the residents. In order to invite the residents to the idea workshop of the neighbourhood or later to the Residents' Forum, the local coordinators hand out personalised invitations to the residents, who have previously demonstrated active involvement or whose views would be useful, trying to invite representatives of different social groups. In this way, the organisers manage to attract a significant number of participants: In 2018, a total of 350 people participated in the idea workshops; in 2014 – 467, but in 2010 a record number of residents – 602 participants.[7] Proposals expressed in the idea workshops of the neighbourhoods are summarised and later discussed at the Residents' Forum in Talsi. An important part of the workshop process is to look back on the ideas expressed in the previous forum, thus demonstrating the results of civic involvement. The organisers of the Forum use different working methods for engaging the residents in each of the Residents' Forums and set additional goals that they aim to achieve along this process. For example, before the Forum held in 2018, one of the goals was to promote co-operation abilities between the residents of the region, therefore the idea workshops of the neighbourhoods were organised by gathering not only the residents of one parish, but several nearby parishes, so that the residents might see what they share and what differs, to create contacts and to cooperate.

After the suggestions of the residents are summarised in the idea workshops of all the neighbourhoods of the region, they end up in the Residents' Forum (hereinafter – "The Forum"), which takes place in the centre of the region – in Talsi. Every resident is invited to participate in the Forum, and also representatives of the workshops of all neighbourhoods take part in it. So far, various methods have been used in the Forums, diversifying the ways in which the widest possible range of participants could express their opinions. For example, at the 5th Residents' Forum a special method – making of a documentary movie of the future – was used, inviting the participants to imagine themselves in the role of the documentary filmmakers, creating a movie in which Talsi is depicted after 10 and 20 years in various fields – urban infrastructure, culture, traffic, recreation facilities, etc. The genre of a documentary movie

was chosen to bring ideas closer to reality, at the same time inviting one to think about more far-reaching goals.

In all the Forums held so far, the unifying approach has been to discuss the issues in the topical fields, such as traffic management, recreation facilities, preservation of cultural history, cultural events, etc. The participants of the Forum join one of the topical fields, and in a smaller group together with the group leader, discuss the key issues and make suggestions for the development of the relevant field. At the Forum it is also possible to discuss the suggestions of the work groups with the participants of other topical work groups. The results of the Forum are used by the Talsi Region Community Foundation, as it organises project competitions for implementing the suggestions and financially supports the projects of the residents' initiative. The ideas of the Forum are also used by the municipality, when preparing various documents about the regional development. Residents' Forums are funded by the Talsi Region Community Foundation and the municipality of Talsi region, also using the funding allocated for the projects (such as the Society Integration Foundation).

Iveta Rorbaha, the Director of the Talsi Region Community Foundation and the organiser of the Forum, admits that over time, the residents' forums have had a positive impact on promoting the activity of the residents, for example, to develop the implementation of the ideas further the residents have formed informal groups, some of which have formed into stable foundations or associations. The regularity of the Forum plays an important role as the residents are already expecting the Forum, where they will be able to express their ideas, as well as the gathering is gradually becoming a common practice. The organisers agree that the support of the municipality is essential for the success of the Forum, and over time the municipality has found it to be an important event, that brings together a large number of local residents, and is taking more active part in the Forum, as well as uses the results of the Forum in its work.

Similar residents' forums have been held in other municipalities of Latvia, for example, in Alūksne, Valmiera and Ķekava, but for various reasons they are no longer held or take place in a different form, for example, as a conference (in Alūksne).

Iedzīvotāju forumus finansē Talsu novada fonds un Talsu novada pašvaldība, izmantojot arī projektos piesaistīto (piemēram, Sabiedrības integrācijas fonda) finansējumu.

Foruma rīkotāja Talsu novada fonda vadītāja Iveta Rorbaha atzīst, ka laika gaitā iedzīvotāju forumi ir atstājuši pozitīvu ietekmi uz novada iedzīvotāju aktivizēšanu, piemēram, ideju turpmākai īstenošanai iedzīvotāji ir apvienojušies neformālās grupās, no kurām dažas ir izveidojušās kā stabili nodibinājumi vai biedrības. Foruma regularitātei ir būtiska loma, jo iedzīvotāji jau gaida, ka forums būs

7.   Information provided by the Talsi Region Community Foundation.

un tajā varēs izteikt savas idejas, kā arī pulcēšanās pakāpeniski kļūst par ierastu praksi. Rīkotāji atzīst, ka Foruma veiksmīgai norisei būtisks ir pašvaldības atbalsts, turklāt laika gaitā pašvaldība ir novērtējusi, ka tas ir nozīmīgs pasākums, kurā pulcējas daudz vietējo iedzīvotāju, un aktīvāk piedalās gan pašā forumā, gan izmanto tā rezultātus savā darbā.

Līdzīgi iedzīvotāju forumi ir notikuši arī citās Latvijas pašvaldībās, piemēram, Alūksnē, Valmierā un Ķekavā, taču tie dažādu iemeslu dēļ vairs netiek rīkoti vai notiek citā formā, piemēram, konferences veidā (Alūksne).

1.2. Civic involvement in solving specific problems

The solving of different problems in the municipalities usually lies in the hands of professionals of the relevant field and political officials, but the experience of the municipality of Gdansk (Figure 1) shows that residents can make a significant contribution to solving important municipality problems, thus achieving such solutions that are supported by the majority of the municipality residents. There is no such extensive experience in the municipalities of Latvia, but the involvement dynamics of the residents in solving various problems is positive.

The municipalities of Latvia have appreciated the advantages of social media, and especially "Facebook", when communicating with the residents. Municipalities are also increasingly consulting with the residents on different problem issues with the help various electronic surveying tools. Some of the municipalities in Latvia have assigned certain functions to local public organisations, thus engaging the public in solving various problems. The more often delegated functions include issues of social assistance. However, municipalities also tend to use more creative forms of involvement, for example, organise a hiking trip to a specific area of the municipality, where a new walking trail is planned. The experience of the municipalities of Latvia shows that sometimes the municipalities have managed to find solutions to problems at the meetings of the residents, as the local activists or associations undertake certain tasks to tackle it, but initially the municipality had not even considered involving them. This indicates that municipalities should make more targeted use of consultations with residents in solving problems that are topical to the municipality.

1.2.1. Surveys of the residents in Alūksne region[8]

Several municipalities in Latvia are increasingly using electronic surveys (visidati.lv or "Google forms") in their work to find out the opinions of the residents. The frequency and scope of the surveys varies. They are most often used by the municipalities for the annual evaluation of the municipality work. Voting in paper format is also usually available.

In Alūksne region, the surveys of the residents are used relatively often. For example, over the past three years, the municipality has been questioning the residents on the content issues of the Alūksne Development Programme, the necessity to build a car wash, the facilitation of a playground or nominating the candidates for various municipality awards on the "Google forms" platform. The response level of the residents in the surveys varies according to the survey subject. 318 residents participated in the survey about the new development programme of Alūksne region for the next five years and the municipality used the data of the survey in the development programme. 104 residents took part in the survey about the necessity to build a car wash, while 430 voted for the idea of facilitating a playground.[9] Usually, the municipality informs people about the surveys on social media, such as "Facebook" group "Labi dzīvot Alūksnē" (Good to live in Alūksne), which is followed by many residents of the region.

Over the past three years, the most popular has been the survey of whether the municipality of Alūksne should spend money on fireworks for city festivals. 508 residents expressed their opinion in the survey. In the Residents' Conference of 2018 devoted to environmental issues, the residents encouraged Alūksne to become the first municipality in Latvia to refuse festive fireworks for environmental reasons. Approximately 80 residents attended the conference and the majority supported the suggestion. Alūksne NGO Support Centre presented the results of the conference to the deputies of the municipality of Alūksne, and this suggestion created intense debate between the deputies, as a result of which the deputies decided to assign the decision of the suggestion to the residents. The results of the survey were split in half, with only a small prevalence supporting the opinion that the municipality might spend the funds for other purposes.[10] However, as the results of the survey did not give a sufficiently clear position of the residents, the majority of the municipality deputies were in favour of the municipality continuing its usual practice of organising fireworks twice a year – on New Year's Eve and at the city festival.

8.   15 843 residents live in Alūksne region (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs), the region consists of Alūksne City and 15 parishes. The largest population is in Jaunalūksne (1 116 residents) and the smallest in Kalncempji Parish – 187 residents.
9.   Information provided by the municipality of Alūksne region.
10. Vīksna L. Fireworks in Alūksne to Remain, 22.07.2018 Alūksniešiem.lv. Available here: https://www.aluksniesiem.lv/laikraksta-arhivs/saluts-aluksne-tomer-bus-125544?prices=1.

1.2.2. Surveys of the declared residents in Mazsalaca[11]

The municipality of Mazsalaca region regularly conducts consultative surveys of the residents on various subjects. If the issue to be decided affects the municipality budget, only the opinion of the residents declared in the territory of the municipality is taken into account in the surveys.[12]

The experience of the last five years shows that in this region this is an important instrument of civic involvement, which the municipality has developed over time. One of the most important surveys of the region concerned a decision that was very polarising to the residents of the municipality – what should be done with the historic crossing, which had become dangerous for use. The Development Plan of Mazsalaca region provided the dismantling of the crossing, but as soon as the municipality began its first preparatory works, part of the municipality residents protested against the dismantling of the crossing, collecting more than 200 signatures in favour of renovating the crossing. Because of this resistance, the municipality of the region decided to conduct a survey of the residents, to find out which of the options they support. Only those residents that are declared in the region could take part in the survey and the survey was conducted in paper format. As a result of the survey, with the prevalence of only a few votes the residents supported dismantling of the crossing. The municipality decided to dismantle the crossing. Part of the residents questioned the results of the survey, considering that the municipality had only conducted the survey formally, because at the time of the survey the municipality had already announced a price survey on the demolition works of the crossing. In the interview the head of the region explained that the municipality was not prepared for the fact that the plan to demolish the crossing, which had already been approved in the Development Plan, would cause such great opposition from the residents and the protests had already started after the decision to conduct the price survey. The head of the region admitted that this was a communication error and that the municipality has learnt from this case. The head of the municipality admitted that civic involvement in this matter has been the most extensive that has been experienced in the region so far.[13] In 2018 the reconstruction works of the crossing were completed by constructing a driveway and a promenade instead of the demolished crossing.

The region continues to use surveys to identify the opinion of the residents. In order to promote trust and transparency, the collection of survey results is no longer the responsibility of a single person, but is done by a commission created for this purpose. The results of the surveys are reflected in detail in the municipality newsletter.

1.2.3. Meeting with the residents in Brocēni[14]

The municipality of Brocēni organises meetings of the residents on various subjects that are of particular importance to the residents at the given moment. The representatives of the municipality admit that the way the meetings of the residents were usually held in the past, was unsuccessful, as very few residents participated in them, and decided to change the way these meetings were organised. To discuss various issues, the representatives of the municipality decided to go where there were more residents in the region, organising meetings outside the premises of the municipality, for example in Brocēni Market Square, and involving many more residents, including those who otherwise would not have joined the meeting. In this way sometimes the ones visiting the market as accidental passers-by turned into those who were actively expressing their opinions. The representative for the municipality admits that by improving the order of the meetings, as well as by organising them on a regular basis, setting a specific goal, civic involvement has improved, it is meaningful and reasoned.[15]

The case of Brocēni is an example of how discussing a problem with the residents in a meeting can lead to a very successful solution that the municipality would otherwise not be able to provide. At the meeting of the residents in the summer of 2018, the municipality discussed the fate of the public bathhouse in the city with the residents. The property was in poor condition and a decision had to be made as to what to do with it. The municipality suggested one of the solutions – to sell the property to a private person. Since public bathhouse traditions in Brocēni have been around for decades, the municipality wanted to involve the residents in solving the issue, by organising a public discussion. During the discussion a group of activists formed, who were ready to take over the management of the bathhouse in order to keep it accessible to the residents of Brocēni. Shortly after the meeting, these activists formed the association "TERME",

11. 3 194 residents live in Mazsalaca (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs). Mazsalaca region consists of Mazsalaca City and 4 parishes: Mazsalaca, Ramata, Sēļi and Skaņkalne.
12. The description is based on publicly available information, an interview with the Head of Mazsalaca region, as well as the Master's Paper by Elīna Rubule "Direct Participation of Citizens in the Municipality of Mazsalaca Region", defended at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in 2019.
13. Phone interview with Harijs Rokpelnis, the mayor of Mazsalaca region, on 19 July 2019.
14. 6 277 residents live in Brocēni region (17.07.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs). The region consists of Brocēni City and 4 parishes: Gaiķi, Remte, Blīdene and Ciecere Parish.
15. Phone interview with Ilze Tomanoviča-Barone, Specialist of Strategic Planning in Brocēni Region, July 2019.

which already received an order (assignment) from the Municipality in August 2018 to provide access to bathhouse services and to preserve Brocēni traditions of public bathhouse.[16]

1.2.4. Social network platforms in the municipality of Cēsis[17]

At a time when 1/3 of all the residents of Latvia are actively using one or more social networks, they provide an excellent free platform for the municipalities to quickly and easily contact the active residents of their parish or city. Social media, especially the "Facebook" platform, has become one of the most important communication points for many municipalities in Latvia, with the help of which they can reach their residents quickly, efficiently and without great expenses, provide important information, discuss particular issues, participate in discussions, conduct surveys and implement other activities. Cēsis is one such municipality, which through the successful use of social network platforms such as "Twitter", "Facebook" and "Google Forms" regularly engages the residents in deciding matters that are important to the municipality. On average 600 to 800 respondents take part in the surveys of the residents. One example of successful civic involvement is the electronic survey on the train route Riga-Cēsis and Cēsis-Riga, which was conducted with the goal of adjusting the departure times of this route to meet the needs of the economically active residents. As a result of this survey, additional express train routes were introduced, which soon proved to be in high demand and the train stock was increased. In another example the municipality noted a public discussion on "Twitter", where residents related to the traffic field and town planning discussed the issues of traffic organisation at one of the city traffic junctions – Union Square. The municipality took note of the traffic management problems identified in these discussions, as well as the proposed solutions to make the departure safer. The municipality used this information to develop a traffic reduction plan in the Old Town.

1.2.5. Hiking with the residents in Sigulda region

The municipality of Sigulda continues to carry out more detailed planning creatively involving the residents in the process even after the basic work on the topical planning has been completed. On 20 August 2019 the municipality organised a hike on the upper slope of Gauja National Park for the residents of Sigulda, in the distance of about 10 km to explore the area, where within the topical plan, depicting the identity of Sigulda, it is planned to create a walking trail. The municipality aims to make the scenery of Gauja National Park more accessible to different groups of people, for whom the steep stairs and uneven roads currently severely hinder this opportunity, as well as to make the potential viewpoints that have not yet been created in such places available. In order to clarify all the issues related to creating the trail, the municipality invited the residents, municipality experts and representatives of the Nature Conservation Agency and the municipality to go on a hike along the planned route. The municipality also invited those landowners, the territories of whom could be potentially affected by the new trail. Approximately 20 people took part in the hiking event. The intention of the municipality is to actively involve the residents in the stage of creating the trail, by organising territory clean-up activities in the problematic areas.

1.2.6. Transfer of social support functions to the NGO in Valmiera[19]

There is an extensive network of social non-governmental organisations in Valmiera Municipality, which have been successfully involved in the execution of municipality functions within the social sector, delegating some of the municipality functions to local non-governmental organisations. To strengthen the cooperation, the municipality and social organisations signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in December 2015, pledging to jointly promote the social well-being of the residents, as well as to support the initiatives and cooperation of non-governmental organisations.

The municipality considerations in delegating certain functions were to use the intellectual resources and infrastructures already existing in the industry, the knowledge of the organisations and proximity to certain social target groups, so that the provided social support and services they offer would be more accurate and meaningful. In addition, by cooperating in the provision of social assistance the municipality thus strengthens the abilities of the local organisations to contribute to the social well-being of the community, and makes more efficient use of the available resources, since the costs of the municipality for carrying out these activities would be higher.

16. The same.
17. 18 252 residents live in Cēsis region (01.07.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs). The region consists of Cēsis City and Vaive Parish.
18. Face-to-face interview with the representatives of the Public Relations Department of the municipality of Cēsis in August 2019.
19. Population: 24 967 (data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, 01.01.2019) Valmiera is the ninth largest city in Latvia, the administrative and economic development centre of Vidzeme region.

In 2019 the municipality of Valmiera signed delegation agreements with seven non-governmental organisations. A few examples.

- The municipality has delegated to the Charity Association "Kristīgais žēlsirdības centrs", the provision of assistance and hygiene services to children and families at risk of social exclusion. For these families and children, the Social Welfare Office of the municipality issues an order to receive the services of the Charity Association "Kristīgais žēlsirdības centrs", such as to use the hygiene room "Mazgāmutis" (the possibility to bathe, to wash clothes), to receive good nutrition, and for the children of the families at social risk to spend time at the premises of the Association.
- The Foundation "Iespēju tilts" organises social rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities, records the recipients of social rehabilitation services, assesses and analyses the possibilities for this society group to receive social rehabilitation services, as well as facilitates the employment and integration of these persons into the labour market. In September 2018 the Foundation launched a social business by opening a shop named "Čaklās bites bode", where persons with disabilities, elderly, unemployed persons, unemployed persons with disabilities from Valmiera and its surrounding areas can submit their home-made products for sale. For these groups of people it is an opportunity not only to earn income from selling their own goods, but also to socialise and to engage in social activities.
- Association "Sev, tev un ģimenei" provides support groups for families with children at risk of social exclusion, for example, the new families have the opportunity to attend school for the new parents, and new mothers have the opportunity to receive first assistance – individual counselling on childcare and mother's well-being.

In order to receive these social services, Valmiera City Social Welfare Office issues an order, which is an important municipality instrument, as it allows you to track whether this social group is using municipality support, whether the support is improving the well-being of the person, whether it is required to adjust the support measures to motivate the resident to be more responsible for his or her own life. It is also an instrument, which the municipality can use to track the quality of the services provided by the associations. The delegation agreements concluded by the municipality are published on the municipality website.

Non-governmental organisations, which are involved in the performance of municipality functions, regularly report to the municipality on the implementation of the agreement: both the measures implemented and the use of the funding. In 2019 the municipality of Valmiera spent just over 70 thsd euros on the delegation of these functions. Both the social service of the municipality and social organisations assess this cooperation as very successful.

Similarly, several other municipalities in Latvia, for example, in Livāni and in Liepāja, take an active part in solving social problems by delegating these functions to the local social organisations.

Figure 1. Foreign experience: civic panels for solving problems in the municipality of Gdansk (POLAND)

Since 2016, the municipality of Gdansk has used an innovative form of civic involvement – the Civic Panel – to address the major issues. They have so far helped the municipality to address issues such as flood prevention, reduction of air pollution, the involvement and integration of the LGBT community.

The Civic Panel is a place, where the representatives of the residents and experts meet. The municipality invites people of different ages, genders and territories to participate in the Panel, using the electoral register of voters as the basis. The appointment of the representatives takes place in three stages. For example, in the first Civic Panel, 9 000 residents from 34 municipality districts in four age groups were selected from the register of voters observing gender equality. The selected group of residents was invited to participate in the Civic Panel. 894 of the addressed 9 000 approved their interest in participating. Finally, approximately 60 residents were randomly drawn out of those who expressed their willingness to participate in the Panel. The drawing process is usually broadcast live on the internet, ensuring that the selection process is transparent. In such way, the Civic Panel is a sort of mini-model of the municipality, because the representation of the residents in the Panel proportionally reflects what it is in the municipality as a whole, while the principle of random drawing allows one to ensure neutrality.

The issues are dealt with for four full days – four weekends in a row, during which the residents evaluate the key issues together with the experts and devote one of those days to developing suggestions. Initially, the Civic Panel hears out industry experts on the convened topic, then it is divided into smaller groups to discuss the topic in more detail before everyone comes together and prepares suggestions for the municipality. In order to forward the proposals of the Civic Panel for further implementation, the Panel must reach the largest possible consensus – at least 80% of the representatives of the Civic Panel must support the proposal.

Although the establishment of such a panel may take a few months and incurs additional costs for the municipality (the establishment and operation of one such panel costs the municipality of Gdansk approximately 30 thsd euros), it has nevertheless been recognised as a very useful mechanism for adopting better decisions, as well as decisions that are politically very complex. Issues discussed by the Civic Panel could be compared to those decided elsewhere in local referendums. However, unlike in referendums, the decisions adopted in Civic Panels are carefully assessed, as they are subject to in-depth evaluation. As the authors of this idea admit, the experience so far shows that the residents value the opportunity to participate and influence the processes in the municipality and engage with great responsibility.

Source: Krzysztof Garski: Gdansk Shares its Know-How on Open Data, 8 July 2016. Available here: https://medium.com/@gdansk/gdansk-shares-its-know-how-on-open-data-82bb317bce40 (last viewed on 06.09.2019).

1.3. Civic involvement in solving municipality budgeting issues

Civic involvement in municipality budgeting is a common practice in many parts of Europe. In Latvia the efforts of the municipalities to involve the residents in budgeting have been modest. By identifying the experience of the municipalities, targeted actions can only be observed in individual municipalities. In the majority of cases the discussion of budgeting issues is limited to the Annual Meeting of the Residents, which provides the residents with a general overview of the priorities. The experience of Ķekava Region in involving the residents before approving the budget is rather an exception from the general background of the municipalities.

In many places participatory budgeting has encouraged municipalities to pay more attention to civic involvement issues, looking for ways to not only promote the residents to participate in municipality budgeting, but also to help formulate their needs. A special board game (Figure 2) has been created for this purpose in Helsinki, the capital of Finland, which the employees of the Municipality use to promote the activity of the residents. The municipality of Tartu has succeeded in implementing a number of significant urban improvements in the city, initiated by the residents (Figure 3). In Latvia, the only municipality that has begun to experiment with this method of civic involvement is Riga, but some municipalities have so far involved the residents in the decision-making process regarding the use of the municipality funds, which have some common elements with the participatory budgeting method.

Figure 2. Civic involvement in participatory budgeting (OmaStadi) in Helsinki (FINLAND)

The municipality of Helsinki has planned to spend approximately 4.4 million euros a year for the implementation of ideas suggested by the city residents. While participatory budgeting is known as a widely used instrument around the world, the municipality of Helsinki has decided to take a significantly different approach to this process. Mass media has described it as a bold experiment of direct democracy . Namely, when compared to other countries, more attention is paid to the unhurried process of brainstorming. The ideas do not have to be submitted in the form of detailed projects with cost estimates in order for the idea to reach the voting process. The ideas are developed gradually. The municipality of Helsinki began to introduce this approach in 2018, so the experience is very fresh.

How are the ideas of participatory budgeting developed? Stakeholders are invited to attend a two-hour planning meeting, in which a card game is used to generate ideas. It promotes the assessment of the idea from different perspectives and fine-tunes it, achieving more targeted suggestions for its implementation. The playing cards provide instructions, what the group should do at each stage. The employees of the municipality responsible for participatory budgeting helps guide the process of the game, but the cards are freely available to anyone, who wants to use them himself or herself.

The game progresses in a way, so that first the group has to agree on the areas, in which the residents are willing to be involved, and has to understand the scale of the issue – whether it is restricted to a specific area or to the entire territory of the municipality. The card game then guides the participants to identify the limitations of the idea implantation. Usually they are: 1) implementing an idea is a one-time case, a project, not regular activities that have to be continued on an ongoing basis; 2) the limitation of the project implementation costs is 35 thsd euros; 3) the project idea must not contradict the values of the city – equality, security, sustainability.

Once the residents have understood the rules of the municipality, the time has come in the game for them to consider their idea in the light of the interests of different community groups, such as whether the solution will also be good for an immigrant housewife, who has recently arrived in Helsinki and wants to live in the city; or – how will the solution help people with reduced mobility, students, etc. The purpose of this stage is to encourage the residents to think not only about how the proposal will improve their lives, but also the lives of others around them. As the game draws to a close, the players are encouraged to think "outside the box" and "to challenge" their idea, for example, on your turn, you may need to call a family member or a relative, friend, and to briefly tell them your idea and the possible solution, and ask for their comment; or write your idea down on a piece of paper and give it to the person sitting next to you to develop it further, and similarly. Finally, to revive the group's work, there is also a kind of wild card in the card game, where the members of the group are invited to take a short break and to take a walk to give ideas time "to settle" or are even asked to leave the discussion room for a moment and to tell the idea to a by-passer on the street/in the hallway to find out the thoughts of the by-passer on the idea.

The game ends, when the idea is thoroughly discussed and polished and the authors of the initiative can submit it to the participatory budgeting platform. The idea is then forwarded to the department of the municipality, where the employees of the municipality assess the compliance of the idea to the regulations. Approximately 2/3 of the ideas submitted are usually given the green light for their further development. If the municipality has received several ideas for the same field, or the suggested solution is similar, the municipality organises conciliation meetings, inviting the residents to discuss the suggestions together and to summarise them in a single plan. The plan then returns to the department of the municipality responsible for calculating the implementation of the plan. Once the calculations are completed, the plans are forwarded for the voting process. All the applied projects are published on the homepage, as well as it is established, whether the projects comply with the rules. In the next stages of the participatory budgeting process, the ideas forwarded for the voting process are published on the website along with the stage they are in, for example, the reconciliation phase, the budget estimation phase, the implementation phase (with the implementation deadline), etc. Voting is available for residents starting from the age of 12.

At the time of preparing the report, 1273 proposals had been submitted at the participatory budgeting website, of which 839 were approved for further progress. Of the submitted suggestions, 351 plans have been prepared and 293 have been approved for further progress. In total almost 5 000 residents have been involved in submitting ideas.

Sources:
Helsinki participatory budgeting platform: https://omastadi.hel.fi/?locale=en.
Game cards. Game rules. Game video instruction.
How a card game can help city residents suggest new ideas, Bloomberg Cities, 13 March 2019: https://medium.com/@BloombergCities/how-a-card-game-can-help-city-residents-suggest-new-ideas-b1da60bb112b

1.3.1. Participatory budgeting in Riga[20]

Participatory budgeting as a form of civic involvement in the municipalities of Latvia has not been used so far (a brief description of this method is attached to the report). In spring of 2019 Riga began the implementation of a pilot project – project competition of the Development of Riga City Neighbourhoods and this is the first attempt of such a kind in Latvia.[21] As at the time of preparing this report the pilot project reached the civic voting phase, and it is not known how many projects will be supported and how the projects will be implemented, the report includes a description of the pilot project without the further evaluation of experience.

The project competition of the development of Riga City neighbourhoods is a pilot project created as a result of cooperation between the Riga Neighbourhoods Alliance (the umbrella organisation of Riga Neighbourhoods Associations) and the Municipality of Riga. The Municipality of Riga is implementing the project "to promote the development of the neighbourhoods in Riga, the identity, recognition and revitalisation of their territories as part of the city, as well as to continuously and purposefully promote the involvement and participation of the residents in the development of the neighbourhoods".[22] The Riga Neighbourhoods Alliance, which encouraged the Municipality to involve the residents in adopting the city development decisions, saw it as a logical next step in pursuing the goals of Riga neighbourhoods associations and the Neighbourhoods Alliance itself.

Implementation of the project competition of the development of Riga city neighbourhoods is planned in the following stages:
1. the development of the regulation;
2. the submission of the projects from April till 1 June;
3. the evaluation of the submitted projects from 1 June till 30 July;
4. voting for the submitted projects from 19 August till 19 September;
5. project implementation.

The regulations of the pilot project were jointly developed by the representatives of the Riga Neighbourhoods Alliance and the representatives of the relevant institutions and departments of Riga City Council. The regulations provide that non-governmental organisations, associations and foundations may be eligible to apply for the project competition for the Development of Riga City Neighbourhoods, if they meet the following three criteria: a) has their registered office in Riga; b) the purpose of the activity does not contradict with the objectives of the competition regulations; c) they represent the interests of Riga City neighbourhoods.[23]

For the submitted projects to be forwarded for the allocation of funding they must meet two criteria: a) the project implementation place must be a public open space, available to the public, in public use, owned by the municipality or held by it; and b) the project must be related to the improvement of the neighbourhood infrastructure that has a remaining and socially significant value.[24] The project application is considered valid for further evaluation, if it consists of all the supporting documents: a) completed and signed project application form, b) documents approving the right of the applicant or its authorised representative to act on behalf of the applicant, c) project sketch (the sizes of all the significant project elements must be provided, as well as their layout on the land boundary plan or printout from www.tipografijas.lv), d) it has been prepared in accordance with Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 558 of 04.09.2018 "The Procedures for Drafting and Preparing Documents".

34 projects from 18 neighbourhood associations were submitted to the project competition of the Development of Riga City Neighbourhoods. After assessing the compliance with the regulations, 14 projects were submitted for public voting.[25]

The projects of the residents submitted to the project competition are very different according to their size, nature and costs. For example, one of the proposals is to renovate the public drinking water faucet in the centre of Riga (project of Association "Pilsēta cilvēkiem", the estimated cost EUR 2 500). In turn, Āgenskalns Neighbourhood Association encourages the reconstruction of Āgenskalns Market Front Square to create a recreational area for the residents. This project costs are 100 000.

The usual reasons for why projects are rejected: a) the submitted project price exceeds the limit of one project (100 thousand euros) stipulated by the regulations; b) the project site is not a public open space owned or held by the municipality; c) the project has been judged to be useless in the long term or has no remaining value; d) the project implementation is judged as impossible.

20. 693 487 residents live in Riga (data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, 01.07.2019).
21. Within several repeated invitations and in-depth research, the think tank "PROVIDUS" has not been able to find municipalities in   Latvia that have so far used the method of participatory budgeting.
22. Riga City Council information portal. "Project Competition of the Development of Riga City Neighbourhoods Announced". 6 April 2019 Available here: https://www.riga.lv/lv/news/izsludinats-rigas-pilsetas-apkaimju-attistibas-projektu-istenosanas-konkurss?16775 (last viewed on 13.09.2019).
23. The same.
24. The same
25. Civic involvement programmes of Riga for the development of the city – participatory budgeting on the electronic voting website. Available here: https://balso.riga.lv/ (last viewed on 13.09.2019).
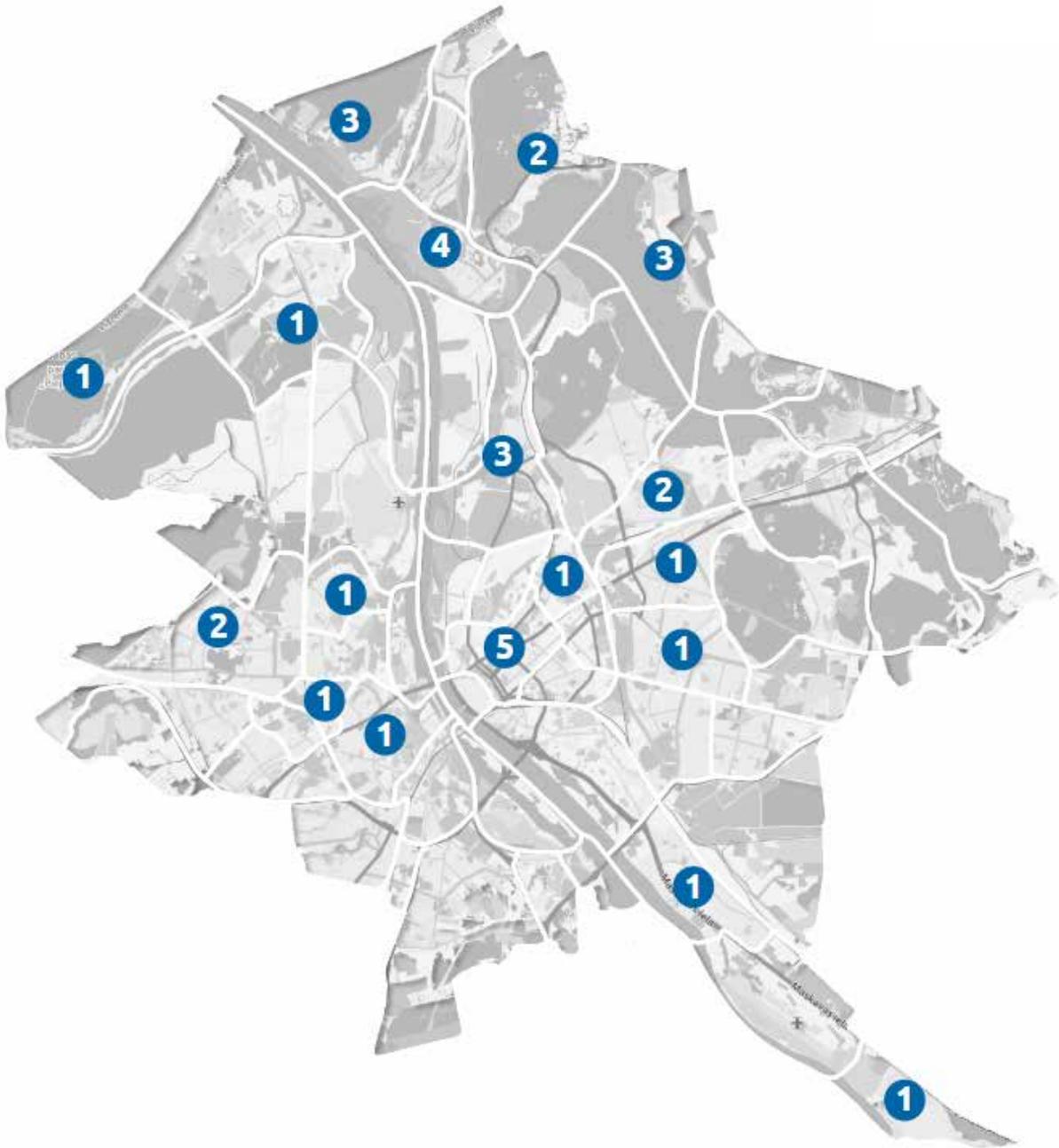
Screenshot of the online voting system of the project competition on the Development of Riga City Neighbourhoods; the division of the neighbourhoods and the project breakdown, Source: https://balso.riga.lv/

The project assessment was carried out by the Board Members of the Association "Riga Neighbourhoods Alliance", as well as the responsible employees of Riga City Council Finance Department, the City Development Department and the Eastern, Pārdaugava and Northern Executive Offices. The representatives of Riga City Council delegated the Chairmanship of the Assessment Committee to the Deputy Executive Director of Riga Northern Executive Office.

Voting for projects takes place from 19 August 2019 till 19 September 2019, both in person (at the Riga City Council Visitor Centres) and on the online website of Riga City Council. On the online platform it is possible to vote by authorising with Latvija.lv authentication, but in person using a passport or ID card. At the time of preparing the report, two days before the voting is closed 7 700 people had taken part electronically.[25] Any resident of Latvia can vote on projects in the pilot project, as long as they find motivation to decide on the development issues of Riga neighbourhoods. In the future, the initiators of the project would like to limit the number of voters to those declared in Riga.

As stated in the regulations, the implementation of the projects is the responsibility of the competent municipality authorities, hence the relevant departments of the municipality.[26]

Figure 3. Participatory budgeting in Tartu (ESTONIA)

Participatory budgeting has become an integral part of the decision-making process of the municipality of Tartu City. Each year the municipality allocates 200 thsd euros of the budget to be decided by the residents of Tartu. The implementation of one idea submitted by the residents may not exceed 100 thsd euros, so at least two projects are supported per year. Tartu was the first of the municipalities in Estonia to start using this participatory method, and its positive experience has inspired at least 19 other municipalities in Estonia.

Anyone can submit the ideas – residents, associations, organisations. The submitted ideas must be investment objects, not activities, events. The municipality provides support in the development process of the idea, but it is also the applicants themselves, who have an important role to play in attracting a sufficient number of supporters for the municipality to implement the idea.

In 2019 the participatory budgeting process is organised as follows: in April brainstorming takes place; technical consultations on the technical and financial aspects of the project and the time required for the implementation takes place in May; in June extensive discussions and meetings on the ideas that are assessed as implementable take place (perfecting of the projects, combining of similar projects, etc.). From July to October, the public is actively introduced to the ideas forwarded for the voting process, and the submitters of the projects themselves gather support for their ideas through social media and meetings. At this stage the Municipality gets involved with the support to make such meetings possible. The voting period for the ideas is one week in October. Anyone starting from the age of 16, who is a declared resident of Tartu can vote and one voter can support up to three ideas. Voting takes place electronically or at the Tartu City Information Centre. The ideas supported by the residents (usually two or three in total depending on the costs of the project) will be implemented by the municipality by the end of 2020.

Participatory budgeting includes renovating barriers along the river in the city, renovating pedestrian paths, rebuilding a roof of a historically significant building, redesigning of a schoolyard to motivate the students to spend more time in the open air and to engage in sports activities, etc.

More information on the process of participatory budgeting in the municipality of Tartu is available on the website of the municipality https://www.tartu.ee/en/participative-budgeting#participative-budgeting-in-tartu-2019.

26. The same.
27. The municipality of Riga website. "Regulations for the Implementation of the Competition of the Development of Riga City Neighbourhoods." Available here: https://pasvaldiba.riga.lv/NR/rdonlyres/CD376CD1-E6D3-4346-B5D2-D246E2A9BFC3/74486/Apkaimju_konkursa_nolikuma_projekts.pdf(last viewed on 13.09.2019).

Although the first pilot project has not yet been completed, so far its implementers have identified a number of challenges during the progress, that would improve the process in the future. They are provided below.

1. To provide as precise criteria as possible in the regulations to reduce the possibilities of interpretation at the project evaluation stage, as well as to make the assessment criteria and the decision motives clear to the project applicants.
2. To provide support and consultations to the project applicants in the application process, so that the submitted initiatives would be sufficiently well developed to reduce the number of rejected projects. For example, to inform people about the options of finding out the territories that are owned or held by the municipality, and whether construction works could be planned in the long term at the planned project territory, that could interfere with project implementation. The opportunity to meet the representatives of the responsible authorities would allow one to learn about the most common problems of the submitted projects. This stage would generally educate the residents on the criteria that the municipality should take into account, when implementing various infrastructure projects.
3. To conduct a broader communication campaign on the opportunities for the residents to get involved in deciding the budgeting – both to submit ideas and to vote. Taking into account the fact that educating the public about the involvement opportunities and the possibility to influence the processes is an important part of participatory budgeting, it is important to inform the residents about such a platform.

1.3.2. Think tanks of the municipality budget planning in Ķekava region[28]

As in other parts of Latvia, the municipality budget in Ķekava region was usually discussed at the meetings of the residents after it had been approved by the Municipality Council. However, in 2018 the municipality decided to try a different approach and to engage the residents in discussions on what the municipality budget should be like, hence at a stage when the residents were still able to influence it.

For this reason in November 2018 the Municipality organised six think tanks for budgeting in Mellupi, Baloži, Daugmale, Valdlauči, Katlakalns and Ķekava, inviting residents of the surrounding neighbourhoods

to attend at each location. Meanwhile the residents were also invited to submit their ideas electronically to "Google Forms". In the introduction of the think tank, the municipality presented what had been done so far, including what had happened to the proposals that had been put forward by the residents at the meetings in the past. The municipality presented priorities and major projects of the next year. Further discussion took place between the residents and the representatives of the municipality in the topical groups, in which the representatives of the municipality of the respective field also took part.

Budgeting think tanks were the first attempt at civic involvement in the budgeting process. They took place on weekday evenings, after business hours, to allow the residents to participate in larger numbers. However, the response from the residents was low, with 10 to 25 residents attending each think tank, and with only 5 participating in one of them. Comparatively much better visited are the meetings, which usually take place in spring, when the municipality introduces the already approved budget and discusses a wider range of issues, but where there is no further development of ideas or involvement of the participants. This leads the representatives of the municipality to conclude that the residents as a whole are not accustomed or ready to come up with constructive suggestions, as it is more common to be in a passive, critical position. Much greater civic involvement could be observed in developing budget ideas on the internet. In total, approximately 120 different proposals were received and summarised in a table published on the website. It also states the status of these proposals – implemented, rejected or in process – and provides a brief explanation of the municipality activity.

It should be noted that the municipality of Ķekava region is one of the few municipalities, which publishes information on municipality budgets in an easy to understand format – as an infographic, showing the main items of the budget expenditure, as well as the sources of revenue.

1.3.3.Crowdfunding platform in Cēsis

In 2017, the municipality of Cēsis created a platform of ideas and initiatives called "Cēsu projekti" (Projects of Cēsis) in order to encourage the residents to participate in the development of the region. The residents have the opportunity to propose and to implement their own ideas there for the development of Cēsis region, reaching wider support of the residents to their idea with the help of the platform. By making a small contribution

28. 24 818 residents live in Ķekava region (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs). Ķekava region consists of Baloži City, Ķekava Parish and Daugmale Parish.
29. Data for the report were acquired in interviews with the municipality employees.
30. Interview with Vineta Vītoliņa, Public Relations Manager at the municipality of Ķekava and Agita Eizenberga, Project Manager at the municipality of Ķekava, August 2019.
31. The budget, including infographics, and presentations of the budget planning think tank are available on the municipality website https://www.kekava.lv/pub/index.php?id=1418.

payment for the implementation of the applied idea, the residents are not only supporting it, but it also increases the likelihood that the municipality will grant 50% co-funding to it. The promotion of the support from the residents and the collection of the funding in the project "Cēsu projekti" takes place on the collective fundraising platform "Projektu banka" (Bank of Projects). In order to receive 50% (but no more than 1 000 euros) of the Municipality co-funding, the submitters of the idea must raise half of the funds required to implement the idea in the form of crowd fundraising. On the platform "Cēsu projekti" the projects can be submitted by natural persons (capacitated persons starting from the age of 18), associations and communities, as well as companies.

The competition of the residents' initiative "Cēsu projekti" takes place in six stages: 1) developing ideas; 2) advertising; 3) obtaining crowd funding; 4) acquisition of municipality co-funding; 5) implementation of the project; 6) submission of the report. In the first stage, the proposer must develop a project application (idea description, project estimate and visualisations) and must submit it to the platform. Once the application is published on the platform, the second phase begins, which is communicating the project to receive crowd funding. The second and third stages can coexist, since the submitter of the idea has 14 to 90 days to raise the funding requested in the application. The regulations of "Projektu banka" state that, if the project has not received support and the necessary crowd funding has not been raised, all the funds already collected will be returned to their contributors. The municipality of Cēsis has stated that "co-funding is granted to such projects which, during the fundraising campaign proves to be attractive for its investors, but it is only paid to those projects that collect all the funding required for the project."[32] The implementation of the project is the responsibility of the project submitter.[33]

Of the six projects submitted at the platform so far, three have been implemented: "Disc Golf Park", "Cēsis Youth Day", and "Centennial Flag for Cēsis". According to the project implementers, the total number of the projects submitted at the platform "Cēsu projekti" is lower than the municipality had initially planned. As possible reasons the authors mention the fact that not all submitters of the ideas are ready or able to reach 50% of the crowd co-funding that is required to receive the co-funding of the municipality. Taking into account the fact that the platform has not achieved the planned level of civic involvement, the future existence of the project is unclear.

1.3.4. The voting of the residents on the use of the budget at Sēļi Parish in Mazsalaca region

In the spring of 2019, the municipality of Mazsalaca organised a survey of the residents asking the respondents to decide where the municipality should spend almost 13 thsd euros reserved for Sēļi Parish. Should the money be used for the renovation of Sēļi Manor Complex, so that cultural events and exhibition halls could be held there, as it had been encouraged by some activists, or for the development of the Sēļi Parish. The management of the municipality wanted to invest these funds in the development of the Parish. However, taking into account the initiative demonstrated by an active resident to develop the Manor Complex, the municipality decided to consult the residents on this issue. The municipality commission received 175 completed questionnaires, but only took into account those completed by the declared residents of the region, which totalled 120 questionnaires, as the issue to be decided concerned the budget of the region. In the questionnaire the majority supported the idea that in 2019 the municipality uses EUR 12 947 for the development of the technical project of Sēļi Manor Complex, rather than for the development of Sēļi Parish in general. The deputies of the municipality reviewed the summarisation of the questionnaire in committees and supported the opinion of the majority, allocating the funding for the renovation of the Manor Complex.

1.3.5. Civic initiative projects involving residents in the assessment in Kocēni region[34]

For the seventh consecutive year, in 2019 Kocēni region organised a project competition for the initiatives of the residents. The project competition is implemented with the aim to support socially important activities and events in the region, to encourage active participation and civic involvement in solving topical problems and improving the quality of life. The aim of the competition is also to strengthen the cooperation between the residents and the municipalities, as well as among the residents themselves by uniting them in informal groups. Similar project competitions take place in many municipalities in Latvia, but the example of the municipality of Kocēni is included in this report, as it differs from the usual practice by the fact that the residents themselves are involved in the evaluation of the submitted initiatives.

32. The municipality of Cēsis region website. "Regulations for the Development, Assessment and Implementation of the Civic Initiative Project Competition "Cēsu Projekti" Co-Funded by the municipality of Cēsis". Available here: http://www.cesis.lv/uploads/files/81__pielikums_Nolikums.docx (last viewed on 13.09.2019).
33. The municipality of Cēsis region website. "Cēsu projekti" (Projects of Cēsis) Available here: http://www.cesis.lv/lv/pasvaldiba/sabiedribas-lidzdaliba/platforma--cesu-projekti- (last viewed on 13.09.2019).
34. 6 269 residents live in Kocēni (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs). Kocēni region consists of five parishes: Bērzaine, Dikļi, Kocēni, Vaidava and Zilākalna parish.

In the initiative competition, applications are accepted from informal groups of residents (consisting of at least five local residents), as well as from non-governmental organisations, associations, foundations and religious organisations willing to implement activities of public interest, contribute to the improvement of the surrounding environment and improve the quality of life of the residents.

In 2019 the municipality decided to involve the residents of the region in the assessment of the ideas of the residents and submitted the applications for the public decision process. The residents could vote on the submitted ideas both electronically and in person. Eight ideas were submitted to the project competition, 316 votes were received for them in the public voting process within ten days. The voting took place on the e-formas.lv platform, which allowed one vote to be cast per IP address. Of the eight ideas submitted, the green light was given to four for further development and assessment. The final decision was made by a commission created by the municipality. The total budget for the project competition was EUR 3500, but the amount of the requested funding for the project could not exceed EUR 700.00.

In 2019, in this way the residents and the municipality supported an initiative to organise a children's and youth art plein air in Caurumkrogs and other activities to revive this tourist attraction; the residents also supported the purchase of equipment for the local amateur theatre; restoration of mailboxes for the residents of Dauguļi Parish; as well as the promotion of local cultural and historical sites.[35] Deputy Head of the Development Department of Kocēni region A. Šulmeistare-Tupreine commented on the civic involvement in the assessment of the initiative projects as follows: "It was important for us to involve the residents of the region and to see active participation, involvement in the development and improvement of the region. Through these submitted ideas and the responsiveness to the voting process, we learnt what the interests of the residents are and what is topical to the people in our region."[36]

1.4. Civic involvement in the general work of the municipality

In a previous study implemented by "PROVIDUS" it was concluded that, in general, in Latvia the civic oversight of the municipalities is underdeveloped, the local NGOs rarely engage in the meetings of the Municipality Council or Committee due to various systemic reasons.[37] At the same time, there are more and more examples, where the residents in critical cases are ready to express their attitude towards the municipality, if they feel it is doing the wrong thing. Recognising the success of the municipalities in this field, it can be seen that the municipalities are involving the residents in the general work through various established bodies, such as advisory panels, senior panels, youth panels, or by establishing regular activities that are used to provide and discuss information.

Taking into account the fact that the size of the municipalities will soon significantly increase after the administrative-territorial reform, the organisation of the issue of civic involvement will be on the agenda of the municipalities. The larger a municipality is, the better considered its approach to reaching the widest possible range of residents must be. The municipality of Rēzekne, which is the largest region in Latvia according to its territory, has established voluntary civic panels in each of the 25 parishes of this region for this purpose. They are not equally active in all parishes, but in many cases, the residents gather regularly to address issues important to their parish together with the governor of the parish, to find ways to solve issues of every-day character, or undesirable social phenomena, such as vandalism of the grown adolescents etc. This makes it easier for the administration of the parish to reach the residents of the parish, to find out their needs more precisely and to seek more targeted solutions.

35. Read more about the ideas of the winners of the project competition 2019 here: http://www.koceni.lv/dome/attistibas-nodala/iedzivotaju-iniciativu-projektu-konkurss.
36. Correspondence with A. Šulmeistare-Tupreine, Deputy Head of the Development Department of Kocēni region, July 2019.
37. Kažoka I., Stafecka L. "Power Balance and Control in the Municipalities of Latvia", February 2017. Publication available here: http://deputatiuzdelnas.lv/assets/upload/userfiles/files/PROVIDUS%20petijums%20par%20pasvaldibam%202017.pdf (last viewed on 18.09.2019).

1.4.1. Advisory Panels of the Residents in Rēzekne Region[38]

Rēzekne region is the largest region according to its territory – it consists of 25 parishes: Audriņi, Bērzgale, Čornaja, Dricāni, Feimaņi, Gaigalava, Griškāni, Ilzeskalns, Kantinieki, Kaunata, Lendži, Lūznava, Malta, Mākoņkalns, Nautrēni, Nagļi, Ozolaine, Ozolmuiža, Puša, Rikava, Sakstagals, Silmala, Stoļerova, Stružāni, Vērēmi.

In order to ensure the largest possible civic involvement in the decision-making of the municipality, the municipality of Rēzekne region decided to establish a civic advisory panel in each parish of the region. In 2017 the State Audit Office assessed the cost-effectiveness of the administrative expenditure of the municipality of Rēzekne region and pointed out the possibilities for more efficient use and saving of the funds.[39] The region followed these recommendations and, to some extent, carried out an administrative reform of the region, by merging 25 parishes into larger forms of administration – four unions of parishes[40] and centralising the accounting of the region.[41] Despite these administrative changes, the Civic Advisory Panels have been retained in all 25 parishes.

The size and operation of the Advisory Panels vary from one parish to another. Usually the representatives are elected to the Advisory Panels for a period of four years by the general meeting of the parish residents and the representatives act on them on a voluntary basis. On some of the Advisory Panels the principle of the widest possible representation of territorial and also age groups is purposefully followed. For example, the Civic Advisory Panel of Ozolaine Parish is formed so that all villages of the parish are represented in it by one or two representatives. Similarly, the residents of Nagļi Parish have formed their Advisory Panel, where the residents decided to observe the representation of different age groups, involving not just the representatives of villages, but also the representatives of youth and senior generations in

the work of the Panel. But in the Advisory Panel of Malta Parish such nuanced representation is not observed.

There is also a difference in the way the Advisory Panels operate. One of the most active Civic Advisory Panels is in Ozolane Parish, as it meets once a month (excluding the summer months). The representatives of the Panel have decided that the main initiator of the Panel is the governor of the parish, who has been entrusted with convening and coordinating the meetings, as well as an active role in the Panel meetings, explaining the possibilities, plans, and other issues. In Malta Parish the residents act independently of the representatives of the Parish Administration, convening the meetings themselves every two months or as required, sometimes preparing written submissions on behalf of the Advisory Panel with questions, recommendations or objections to the governor, or by inviting representatives to the meeting. The Advisory Panel of Nagļi Parish meets approximately four times a year.

The representatives of all three surveyed Civic Advisory Panels recognised the work of the councils as a good way of civic involvement in solving various problems of the parish or encouraging them to solve the issues of the unions of parishes or regions. Usually in the Civic Advisory Panels the budget of the respective region must also be discussed, but the representatives of the Panel along with the Governor of the relevant territory participate in the discussion and the approval of the general budget of the region.

1.4.2. Youth Council in Aizkraukle Municipality[42]

Most municipalities in Latvia have established a special position for the youth – a Specialist of Youth Affairs. Some of the municipalities have delegated this function to "youth houses" (this report describes the example of Aizpute). The most common method

38. 26 465 residents live in Rēzekne Region (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs). Rēzekne region consists of 25 parishes, the largest of which is Malta Parish with 2 750 residents and the smallest – Puša Parish with 390 residents.
39. The report of the State Audit Office "Is the administrative resource of the municipality of Rēzekne region used for the implementation of its functions in a productive and economic manner?", Riga, 2017. Available here: http://www.lrvk.gov.lv/uploads/reviziju-zinojumi/2015/2.4.1.48_2015/Zinojums_Rezekne_14_03.pdf (last viewed on 23.08.2019).
40. On 1 January 2019 four institutions of the municipality of Rēzekne region were created – four unions of parishes: the Union of Dricāni Parishes (Dricāni, Gaigalava, Nagļi, Ozolmuiža, Rikava, Stružāni, Sakstagals, Kantinieki Parish), Union of Kaunata Parishes (Čornaja, Griškāni, Kaunata, Mākoņkalns, Stoļerova Parish), Union of Malta Parishes (Feimaņi, Lūznava, Malta, Ozolaine, Puša, Silmala Parish), Union of Nautrēni Parish (Audriņi, Bērzgale, Ilzeskalns, Lendži, Nautrēni, Vērēmi parish).
41. By implementing the recommendation of the State Audit Office, the municipality of Rēzekne region will save 180 000 euros per year, State Audit Office information, 26.06.2019. Available here: http://www.lrvk.gov.lv/ieviesot-valsts-kontroles-ieteikumu-rezeknes-novada-pasvaldiba-ietaupis-ap-180-000-eiro-gada/ (last viewed on 23.08.2019).
42. 8 561 residents live in Aizkraukle region (01.07.2019, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs), the region consists of Aizkraukle City and Aizkraukle Parish.

of youth involvement in municipalities is youth councils, which is a structural unit established by the municipality and the management and operation of which is entrusted to the youth of the region. The activism and the scope of activity in youth councils differs. The Youth Council of Aizkraukle Municipality has been operating for less than a year[43] and is one of the most active youth councils, so it is included in this report as an example of this form of civic involvement.

The Youth Council of Aizkraukle is an institution established by Aizkraukle Municipality Council to ensure the representation of the interests of young people, to protect the needs of young people, as well as to offer the municipality solutions and suggestions from the perspective of the youth.[44] In practice this means that young people regularly attend the meetings of the Council of the Municipality, sometimes also the meetings of the Council Committee. If the issues of interest of young people are discussed at the meetings, the representatives of the Youth Council are involved in the discussion – they express their opinion, provide explanations, bring forward their objections. The representatives of the Youth Council have access to all the materials before the meetings, so they can follow the decision-making process in detail. Approximately 40 active young people of the region form the Youth Council (aged 13-25 years). The Youth Council has an internal hierarchy – the Head of the Council and the Council Board, which holds regular meetings, manages the Council. The Youth Council has set up three committees: the Committee of Sports and Health, the Committee of Culture and Education and the Committee of the Environment. Young people can join these committees by taking part in organising the relevant events of these fields, in the development of cooperation with the municipality, businesses and the local residents. The Youth Panel meets regularly, at least once a month (similarly also the Youth Council Board). At the time of preparing this research, the main focus of the Youth Council was to develop the youth strategy for Aizkraukle region from 2020 to 2022. Usually, at the meetings of the Youth Council the most topical events are discussed that require youth involvement, various ideas of project application etc. Vladislavs Judins, Head of the Youth Council, admits that the deputies of the Municipality did not initially take youth participation in the meetings of the Municipality Council and Committee seriously, but over time, the attitude and cooperation have improved; youth opinion at the meetings of the municipality is considered, sometimes the employees of the municipality can also be persuaded, when youth opinion differs, for example, about organising some events.[45]

Another important area of activity is volunteering, for which a volunteer agreement is signed. The representatives of the Youth Council volunteer in the work of the municipality, helping with the development of publicity materials (e.g. videos, photos), organising, directing and also translating various events, and especially great support by the volunteering youth is provided in the organisation of cultural events, helping with the sounds and lights for events etc.[46] In 2018, 1 087 young people aged 14 to 25 lived in Aizkraukle County. Approximately 56 young people are involved in volunteering, of which 28 have spent more than 50 hours working as volunteers.[47]

The municipality financially supports the work of the Youth Council by providing additional funding to it every year. The Council has provided premises for the needs of young people – Youth Studio at the Aizkraukle Centre of Interests Education. One of the deputies of the municipality admits that the municipality contribution to promoting the activity of young people makes them more loyal, responsible for the environment, for example, by reporting cases of vandalism – municipality property damaged by peers.[48] At the same time, the representative of Aizkraukle Municipality admits that the Municipality Specialist of Youth Affairs has the major role in the youth involvement, enthusiastically involving young people in various activities and helping in the preparation of project applications. The Municipality Specialist of Youth Affairs runs one of the most active Youth Organisations in the region – "Yes".

Youth Council is used as a method of youth involvement in other municipalities of Latvia as well, for example, in Cēsis, Līvāni, Rīga, Ventspils, Lielvārde, Mārupe, Jūrmala, Viļaka, Daugavpils, Dobele, Bauska and others.

43. The Youth Council of Aizkraukle Region was established on 25 October 2018. Here the main topicalities of the Youth Council can be viewed: http://aizkrauklesjauniesudome.mozello.lv/ (last viewed on 17.09.2019).
44. Regulation of Aizkraukle Regional Youth Council. Approved on 25 October 2018.
45. Phone interview with Vladislavs Judins, Head of Aizkraukle Regional Youth Council, 3 September 2019.
46. The activities of the Youth Council were described by Inga Ramane, Specialist of Youth Affairs at Aizkraukle Regional Council, and a phone interview with Inga Ramane took place on 8 July 2019.
47. Mikasenoka Guna. "Youth Policy Strategy of Aizkraukle Region to Be Developed", Staburags, 2 July 2019.
48. Phone conversation with Arvis Upītis, Deputy of Aizkraukle Regional Council and Public Relations Specialist, 3 September 2019.

1.4.3. Seniors Panel in Kuldīga Municipality[49]

Since 2013, a special advisory body – Senior Panel – has been operating at Kuldīga Municipal Council, which aims to exchange information with the municipality on issues of importance to seniors, to draw the attention of the municipality to issues that require municipality involvement or financial support.[50] The Seniors Panel meets once a month and consists of eight senior representatives, who are elected by the seniors themselves for a period of four years.[51] Everyone can apply for the opportunity to become its representative. The Seniors Panel cooperates with organisations of other regions, as well as organises meetings with the residents – opportunities to meet the representatives of the Seniors Panel to report on issues that are important to them. For example, the Seniors Panel encouraged the introduction of covering of the transportation costs for seniors, providing each pensioner in Kuldīga region with 50 euros a year, which can be spent on city transport. The Seniors Panel also encouraged the establishment of the Kuldīga Seniors School.

2. THE OPPORTUNITIES OF THE RESIDENTS ON REPORTING PROBLEMS IN MUNICIPALITY WORK

Mobile applications and interactive reporting maps are the most common tools developed by the municipalities to promote civic involvement, making it as convenient as possible to report on a variety of issues. In some municipalities the use of such tools has not become a habit, and they are used rarely. However, there are municipalities that successfully use their websites for such kind of information exchange, they have become quite popular among the residents, and there is no need to develop separate tools. The report also includes one of the smallest examples of communication between the residents and the municipality according to its scale, which was described as successful by the central administration of the municipality. It can be observed in Rēzekne region, Audriņi Parish. Here the WhatsApp platform is used for communication of the residents with the Governor.

2.1.1. Mobile application "Cēsis 8911"

For direct communication with the residents of Cēsis, irrespective of their location, the municipality of Cēsis in cooperation with SIA "Mobio" has developed the mobile application (app) "Cēsis 8911". The platform is relatively simple – three basic steps can be performed in it. First, the residents have the opportunity to report any problems in the territory of the municipality to the municipality and to receive a response from the responsible services to their reports. If the residents have submitted a message in the mobile application, the received message is forwarded to the responsible services, which will address the particular problem and respond to the person reporting the problem. Secondly, the residents have the opportunity to receive notifications from the municipality (for example,

49. 23 383 residents live in Kuldīga (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs), the region consists of 13 parishes: Ēdole, Padure, Renda, Kabile, Rumba, Vārme, Snēpele, Pelči, Laidi, Turlava, Kurmāle, Gudenieki, Īvande.
50. The municipality of Kuldīga region website. "Committees and commissions". Available here: https://www.kuldiga.lv/pasvaldiba/komitejas-komisijas#kuldigas-novada-domes-senioru-padome (last viewed on 13.09.2019).
51. Phone interview with the Head of Kuldīga Seniors Panel Astra Gūtmane on 25 July 2019.
52. A face-to-face interview with the representatives of the municipality of Cēsis Public Relations Department, August 2019

about traffic restrictions at a certain period of time). Thirdly, the municipality has the opportunity to publish surveys to find out what the residents think about different issues.[52]

According to the municipality of Cēsis, the application is easy to use for both the residents and the municipality. The application is used by over 1 000 users, who have submitted more than 500 submissions in total (data of July 2019). According to the representatives of the municipality, this type of mobile application allows a much more efficient and convenient communication with the residents, but it is important that the responsible person of the municipality is able to quickly respond to the received submissions and to forward them to the responsible services (for example, if a report about traffic lights that are out of order is received, replying to it a week later would be too late).

2.1.2. Mobile application in Sigulda

The municipality of Sigulda region uses the mobile application, which is available to the residents since 2017. In the application it is possible not only to read news and information about various discounts available to the holders of Sigulda card offered by the businesses, but it is also possible to report problems or submit questions to the municipality. Reporting is the most popular section of the application according to the representative of the municipality. Over two years the municipality has received more than 420 suggestions through the application, which mainly concern the roads of the region and street infrastructure or properties that poorly managed. Messages submitted by the users are visible in the app, as is the action taken by the municipality, indicating whether the report has been resolved or whether it is in the process of being resolved, and the reply of the municipality is attached. Other users can join in with their rating – support or disapprove of any of the suggestions or messages.

At the time of preparing this report approximately 6 000 people had downloaded the application – one in every three residents of Sigulda. The application is used more by economically active people aged from 18 to 34 years (61% mobile app users).[53]

2.1.3. Interactive map for reports of the residents in Jelgava[54]

The residents of Jelgava have the opportunity to report to the municipality online about various types

of deficiencies, damage to the urban environment or other problems. This can be done using an interactive map, providing a concise description of the problem, capturing it on the city map, with the option of also adding photos. After the report has been sent to the map, a message and its status is displayed (In process/New/Accepted/Completed/Long-term) so the user can see what is happening with the reported problem.[55] The operation of the map is supervised by the municipality of Jelgava Operational Information Centre, which processes the received messages and forwards them to the responsible municipality authorities.

The map was created in 2011, but has improved significantly over time. Since 2019 other issues can also be reported in the map, not only utility issues, as it was during the early operation of the map. Over time the mobile app "Jelgava pilsēta" has been developed by the municipality, in which this interactive map is an essential part of the content, as it greatly facilitates the reporting process, also using a smartphone. On average 70-80 messages are received per month. In 2018 the Municipality Operational Information Centre processed 663 messages in the interactive map, which is the highest number of messages received in the map in the eight years, since the Centre began its work.

In 2018 the Municipality Operational Information Centre received 12 976 messages in total. The activity of the residents in reporting has increased significantly, with 3 628 notifications received in 2011 and with this number quadrupling during eight years.

The interactive map also provides other additional functions, such as early warning service, that allows the residents to receive timely information about their property via text message or email, for example, about floods, fires or other civil protection cases. In order to receive such information, the residents must submit their address (two addresses can be submitted) in the municipality of Jelgava. The map allows you to keep track of the city road repairs and traffic restrictions, as well as the likelihood of flooding over a longer period of time.[56]

2.1.4. Municipality website for the reports of the residents in Iecava[57]

The website of Iecava municipality is an important resource for the local residents. Approximately 9 000 residents live in the region and the website

53. The mentioned data were provided by the municipality of Sigulda.
54. 60 764 residents live in Jelgava City (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs). The fourth largest city in Latvia by population, the fifth largest city in Latvia by area (60.3 sq. km).
55. The interactive reporting map is available here: https://karte.jelgava.lv/reporting.
56. The description is based on publicly available information, interviews and electronic correspondence with the representatives of Jelgava Municipality, as well as statistics compiled by the Municipality Operational Information Centre.
57. 9 019 residents live in Iecava (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs).

of the municipality has approximately 400 unique users per day. The three most frequently visited sections are municipality news, the announcement section (e.g., the offers of services by electricians, cleaners, plumbers, translators) and the section "Municipality replies", which is included in this report as a successful form of civic involvement.[58]

Using the opportunities offered by the website of the municipality, the residents of Iecava region can report problems, submit questions to the municipality and receive public or private answers according to their choice. The section "Letter to the Municipality" provides an electronic reporting form, where the person submitting the question must provide his or her name, surname, legal name, e-mail address, and residential address. The representative of the Municipality Public Relations Department, which prepares answers to the questions of the residents, explains that the municipality can sometimes use the email address for clarifying information about the content of the message, such as where the problem has been stated. The municipality answers, even if the place of residence is not provided. The electronic form provides the possibility of attaching files, and the person submitting the question has the choice to receive the answer on the website or by e-mail. The municipality publishes the answers on its website without revealing the identity of the person submitting the question. Most people choose to receive the answer by e-mail, and approximately 1/3 of the answers to the questions are published on the website. A reply is provided within 15 days. The municipality reserves the right not to answer: if

the submitter of the question cannot be identified, if the content of the question is clearly offensive or the question does not require an answer in its essence. The frequency of the questions is variable, with the municipality receiving up to 5 questions per week, and approximately 100 answers are published on the website. Usually the questions are related to city facilitation works and everyday problems.

2.1.5. "WhatsApp" communication in Rēzekne county Audriņi parish

Rēzekne county Audriņi parish with approximately 1000 residents, is an example of how direct civic involvement successfully works in a small area. In particular, the Governor of the parish actively uses various direct communication methods with the residents – meeting with the residents, social networks, as well as the "WhatsApp" mobile application, where the local residents willing to reach out regularly communicate with the Governor, reporting problems by adding photos from different territories etc. The phone number of the Governor is publicly available. In this way the residents have drawn attention to illegally dumped waste in the parish area, road surface damage, or even an anthill that disturbs the residents. The Governor of Audriņi Parish recognises this as a convenient way of communicating with the residents. Such form of communication has emerged unintentionally, but could be turned into a purposeful way of communication in the future by creating a special "WhatsApp" group.

58. The description is prepared using the annual report of the municipality of Iecava, the information published on the municipality's website and phone interview with the Municipality Public Relations Specialist in August 2019. The section of the municipality of Iecava website can be viewed here: http://iecava.lv/lv/pasvaldiba_atbild/ (last viewed on 17.09.2019).

Figure 4. "#GetTheMayor" Civic involvement platform in Heidelberg (Germany)

"#Get the Mayor" is an online platform for the city residents and guests to engage in city development and to address the attention of the Municipality Administration to the projects they believe are useful and will benefit the city and the local community. It may be a suggestion to organise the street, the work of an institution, social processes, etc. All that the residents have to do – is submit their project/idea to the online platform and get the support of at least 100 other city residents or guests. The submitter of the project or the idea can mark his/her project on the city map, when submitting it, and the other users of the platform can view it and vote, if they support the idea or the project. There is no limit to the number of votes – people can vote on any of the projects they would like to see implemented or solved. Once a month, the mayor of the city visits the location for implementing the project that has received the most votes, together with the representatives of the municipality, to learn more about how the municipality can help. In this way, the platform not only promotes the activity of the residents to participate in improving the local environment and addressing the community needs, but also provides easy and transparent access to the city administration.

As a result of the civic activity, the mayor of Heidelberg together with the representatives of the municipality, has visited many neighbourhoods in the city to address issues such as preserving a nursery, integrating the immigrants, housing bees in the city, road surface issues, also discussing the options for reducing bureaucracy in the municipality with groups of residents and other issues.

The platform is operating for several years. When it was launched in 2015, approximately 10% of the residents in Heidelberg visited it during the first four weeks. This was achieved by the municipality through an extensive advertising campaign. Approximately half of the platform users are aged 18 to 34 years old. This is a significant benefit, because until then this age group did not use the usual opportunities for civic involvement that exist in the municipality. In the first four years approximately 100 projects were submitted to the platform and more than 7 000 residents had cast their votes.

Sources:
"#Get the mayor" platform: https://holdenoberbuergermeister.de/?lang=EN
The projects that have won in the voting of the residents are described on the website: https://holdenoberbuergermeister.de/blog/ (last viewed on 17.09.2019).
RAZORFISH Announces a world-first future platform for citizen engagement. 17 March 2015 Available here: https://www.accesspr.com.au/news/1362/220/RAZORFISH-ANNOUNCES-WORLD-FIRST-FUTURE-PLATFORM-FOR-CITIZEN-ENGAGEMEN (last viewed on 06.09.2019).
The description uses information from the "#GetTheMayor" "Facebook" page.

3. MUNICIPALITY SUPPORT FOR PROMOTING THE CIVIC SKILLS

Experience in Latvia and elsewhere shows that the role of the municipality in promoting the activity of the residents is much more extensive than providing direct involvement opportunities, which allow quick feedback. The role of the municipalities is significantly increasing through a wider range of support measures to influence the social processes, promote the civic skills of the residents, including the ability to participate in democratic debates, form associations and take initiatives. This type of support has long-term effects.

The city of Bologna, in Italy, has undergone a dramatic change in recent years, with targeted support for activities in different neighbourhoods to strengthen the willingness of the residents to form more local cooperation communities aimed at improving the quality of life in their territories. An example of Bologna is illustrated in Figure 5. Separate similarities, but on a much smaller scale, can also be observed in some municipalities of Latvia.

The report includes inspirational examples of civic involvement that focus on reducing the risk of social isolation, which is more likely to affect the senior age group. There is a positive trend in the municipalities to promote people-to-people cooperation, so that the residents can provide each other with the support they require, reducing the risk of problems and some group of people who might gradually be isolated, creating greater challenges for the municipalities later in solving social problems of already more serious scale.

3.1. Promotion of democratic discussions

3.1.1. Democracy Cafe in Kuldīga region

"Demokrātijas kafejnīca" (Democracy Cafe) organised on 2 August 2019, is the first event of this kind, which was organised as a result of cooperation between the residents of Kuldīga, the municipality and the non-governmental sector, and introduced with the goal to create a platform for meaningful conversations between the residents of Kuldīga, the representatives of the administration and other interested persons. The event used the "World Cafe" discussion model[59], which allows structured discussion of different topics in small groups. When arriving at the event, the participants had the opportunity to submit a topic of interest to them, such as nature issues, human responsibility, life in a small town, regional identity and technologies. The discussion groups were randomly formed to facilitate a diverse exchange of views, and as a result the lessons learnt from these discussions can be used both to assess the attitude of the public towards different issues and to plan the development of the region and the local communities. Democracy Cafe was organised by discussing various topics of importance to the residents of Kuldīga at the tables; a publicly known person was sitting at each of the tables, for example, an actress, a writer, a social worker. One of the groups was led by the Chairperson of Kuldīga Municipality.[60]

Democracy Cafe was financially supported by the municipality of Kuldīga, attracting additional funding from the Society Integration Fund (as part of a larger project, where Democracy Cafe was one of the activities). The costs of the project were approximately 2 000 euros, but according to the organisers of the event various additional costs were incurred during the implementation process, which were not initially planned.

3.1.2. "Ražojums Bodnīca" in Brocēni

The municipality of Brocēni, in cooperation with the association "Saldus un Brocēni RažoJums", established a store-cafe-tourist centre "Bodnīca" to promote the opportunities of local home producers to carry out and promote their economic activities in the region, as well as to create a place, where the residents of the region can engage in meaningful and free meetings with other residents of the region. The store itself, which is located in a newly created Market Square of Brocēni, is managed by the association "Saldus un Brocēni RažoJums", that has received these premises for use without remuneration. It is important that "Bodnīca" works not only with the purpose to implement economic activity, but in cooperation with Brocēni Cultural Centre regularly organises musical evenings: the cultural centre provides the content of the event, but "Bodnīca" takes care of the practical presentation and catering. "Bodnīca" also hosts different types of workshops and classes for everyone interested, thus promoting tourism in Brocēni region and ensuring the existence of "Bodnīca" itself. Over time, "Bodnīca" and the Market Square of Brocēni have become a place, where the residents prefer to be at, and the municipality has also started using it, holding regular meetings with the residents there. Cooperation of "Ražojums Bodnīca" is an example of how the municipality and the community associations can work together in an effective and meaningful manner, providing the municipality with the infrastructure, while the association becomes the manager of the infrastructure, organising meetings with the local residents.

3.1.3. Place for gathering of the residents and NGOs at Kapelleru House in Saldus[61]

Saldus "Kapelleru House" became a venue for meetings and activities in 2010, when an abandoned building in the centre of Saldus was temporarily granted for use to the association "Ilizanna"

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59. The "World Café" model is characterised by discussions, during which in small groups (usually of four to six people), under the guidance of moderators over a definite period of time some topic is discussed (pre-defined or selected by the participants of the discussion). The members of the group discuss the forwarded topic, express their views and exchange opinions with the other participants. The group moderator summarises this exchange of views to present a summary of the discussion(-s) after it is (they are) completed. Usually, several simultaneous discussions take place in a room/event, in which the participants take part in different groups (at the end of one discussion, the participants are given the opportunity to join another group discussing a particular topic).
60. Phone interview with Maija Jankovska, the organiser of Kuldīga Democracy Cafe in August 2019.
61. 24 035 residents live in Saldus region (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs). The region consists of Saldus City and 15 parishes: Ezere, Jaunauce, Jaunlutriņi, Kursīši, Lutriņi, Nīgrande, Novadnieki, Pampāļi, Ruba, Saldus, Šķēde, Vadakste, Zaņa, Zirņi and Zvārde parish.

to create a premises in it for creative and non-governmental organisations, art and culture events. Since 2010 the association, together with activists, has been renovating "Kapelleru House", making the premises accessible and usable for various types of events and projects. In this way, the municipality promotes civic involvement in the cultural life of the local community.[62]

Over time the centre has proven to be successful in bringing people together during various cultural events and other activities, therefore the municipality has entrusted it (by signing a delegation agreement) a number of cultural tasks, allocating approximately EUR 8 500 for it per year.[63] With the support of the municipality, "Kapelleru House" hosts educational workshops, training, projects and tourism-related activities. Since 2017 "Kapelleru House"[64] has been registered as an association with a wide range of operational goals, including promoting a democratic society and local economic growth and employment. As a result, the abandoned building has been rescued, the municipality has acquired a new gathering place that promotes the development and involvement of the local community, while the residents have found a place, where they can pursue their own interests and the interests and activities of their associations, and form cooperation.

3.1.4. 3.1.4. Community Centre in Alūksne[65]

The municipality of Alūksne actively cooperates with the local NGOs, the leading of which is the Alūksne NGO Support Centre. The organisations have ensured that the municipality provides a very important support to the residents of Alūksne region, as well as associations, interest groups, foundations, religious organisations and trade unions – a place of co-working or gathering – the Community Centre. The municipality previously supported the NGO, by providing spaces in different parts of the city, and the Community Centre ensures that the organisations can gather in one place. The Centre is managed by the Alūksne NGO Support Centre and

seven organisations permanently operate in it.[66] More than 40 NGOs and various community groups gather for activities at the Community Centre. At the Community Centre open public workshops, seminar rooms, meeting rooms and kitchen are available, and these facilities are available free of charge to associations of public benefit upon prior application. According to the price list the premises are also available to other interested parties, which do not provide public benefit. The Community Centre is used for various purposes, such as classes for children with disabilities of mental development; for cooking together; for meetings of religious organisations; for general meetings of many associations; also for playing board games etc. It has become an important gathering point for the active residents. According to the Head of the Alūksne NGO Centre, an average of 500 people visit the Centre per month. The NGO Centre is raising additional funding to gradually renovate the premises.[67]

In cooperation with the municipality, Alūksne NGO Centre organises conferences of the residents once a year, which have changed their long-term practice – to organise residents' forums. In this way, the NGO Centre seeks new forms of civic involvement. Conferences are topical: The conference of 2018 was devoted to environmental issues and the conference of 2019 discussed the involvement of people in the development of the urban environment. If the residents' forums were more focused on formulating the suggestions as to what is expected from the municipality, the aim of the conferences is to create a climate of cooperation between the residents and the employees of the municipality, who are directly involved daily in the decision making process of the issues of the conference.

3.1.5. Youth House in Aizpute[68]

In 2008 the local youth, learning from the experiences abroad, decided to establish a Youth House in Aizpute. For this purpose the municipality provided premises in the city centre. The aim of the

62. Phone interview with Saldus Region Tourism Consultant at "Kapelleru House" in July 2019.
63. The municipality of Saldus region website. "Minutes No. 2 of Saldus Regional Council meeting of 28 February 2019". Available here: https://saldus.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Saldus-novada-domes-2019.-gada-28.-februāra-domes-sēde.pdf (last viewed on 13.09.2019).
64. "Lursoft". "Kapelleru House". Available here: https://company.lursoft.lv/kapelleru-nams/40008271465.
65. 15 843 residents live in Alūksne (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs), the region consists of Alūksne City and 15 parishes. The largest population is in Jaunalūksne (1116 residents) and the smallest in Kalncempji Parish – 187 residents.
66. Association "Alūksnes nevalstisko organizāciju atbalsta centrs" (Alūksne NGO Support Centre), foundation "Alūksnes un Apes novada fonds" (Alūksne and Ape Regional Foundation), association "Alūksnes Invalīdu biedrība" (Alūksne Association of the Disabled), association "Alūksnes lauku partnerība" (Alūksne Rural Partnership), association "Latvijas Neredzīgo biedrība" (Latvian Society of the Blind), Alūksne Organisation, Club of the politically repressed of Alūksne and Ape Region "Sarma", association "Latvijas Astmas un alerģijas biedrība" (Latvian Association of Bronchial Asthma and Allergy Patients) Alūksne branch.
67. Information provided by I. Zvejniece, Head of Alūksne NGO Centre.
68. 8 644 residents live in Aizpute region (01.07.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs), the region consists of Aizpute City and five parishes: Aizpute, Cīrava, Kalvene, Kazdanga, Laža.

Youth House was to create a place for young people to meet, learn new skills, and spend a meaningful time. The supporters and activists of the idea felt that such a platform for young people of secondary and post-secondary school age was very necessary in order to promote civic activism, to enable them to implement their ideas and to contribute to the daily life of the municipality. Taking into account the interests of all the involved parties, since 2009 the implementation of youth policy in Aizpute region has been entrusted to youth associations: initially association "NEXT", but later to the association "Izgaismo". Delegating youth tasks to young people themselves allowed them to appreciate that they could act more freely in this way, more effectively and more in line with their own interests.

Also in 2019 the Youth Idea House is actively operating, continuing the initiated cooperation with the municipality: "to promote the development of youth-friendly environment, to develop the youth information system, to promote youth non-formal education, to develop international youth cooperation, to promote the processes of inclusion and integration into the society of young people from various cultures and social groups, etc.)". Over time the Youth House has become a place for young people to meet, implement their ideas, such as organising projects both nationally and internationally, to professionally record music in the Youth House Music Recording Studio[69], to participate in educational lectures, classes and training, to participate in transnational youth exchanges, etc.[70]

Aizpute Youth House was founded in 2008 in cooperation with the municipality of the Aizpute City, association "NEXT" and foundation "Soros Foundation Latvia". The association "NEXT" has been operating in Aizpute since 2006, implementing various projects aimed at strengthening youth involvement and civic activism. Aizpute is a relatively small city in Latvia, but the amount of activities, projects and various initiatives implemented in the city is equivalent to the activity level of the largest youth centres/youth houses. The experience of the municipality of Aizpute with youth involvement is often mentioned by other municipalities as the first city in Latvia, where an association has agreed with the municipality on the delegation of municipality functions. The example of Aizpute has encouraged young people to become active in other regions. For example, the idea has been taken up by young people in Ventspils, where a similar type of Youth House has been operating for several years and where the municipality has delegated tasks to young people in the association "Ventspils Youth Council".

3.1.6. Neighbours Festival in Cēsis

In order to promote the activity of the local city communities, the municipality of Cēsis region, together with the residents of Cēsis City, organises neighbour festivals – events in the local neighbourhoods – which promote the local residents getting to know each other and cooperating with the help of games, discussions and other activities. The desire to revive this method of civic involvement was born at the Residents' Forum of Cēsis City, when a group of interested parties committed to turn the idea into an actual activity. The activists, who organised this festival, explained that the purpose was to encourage the willingness and motivation of the people to get involved in improving the life of their community themselves, to talk to their neighbours, to the people in their neighbourhood, to take the initiative, to unite in order to implement ideas.[71]

At the beginning of summer 2017, four neighbourhood festivals took place in different neighbourhoods of Cēsis[72], three of them (Bērzaine, L. Paegles Street, Valmieras Street) were organised by the above-mentioned activist group, but the fourth (in the vicinity of Saules Street) was initiated by the residents of the neighbourhood[73]. As part of these events, the organisers provided activities such as cooking soup, creating applications, playing board games, and even listening to a live hockey broadcast. Local organisations and activists were also involved in the events, in cooperation with whom workshops and informative discussions were organised, for example, the local residents were provided the opportunity to consult specialists to learn about home insulation, yard improvement, waste sorting, and other issues. Social media was used to promote the event, and printed posters of the event were distributed in the neighbourhood. Approximately 100 participants took part in Bērzaine Neighbours Festival 2017.

Only a few of the neighbourhoods continued to host such an event the following year, when the municipality no longer took the role of the initiator. "The Children and Neighbours Festival of Saules Street" was also held in 2018 and 2019.[74] Also in June 2019, the second neighbours festival was held in Bērzaine neighbourhood. In other neighbourhoods the tradition was not established.

69. Idea House website. Available here: http://idejumaja.lv/?page_id=40; phone interview with the Head of the Aizpute Regional Council Development Department Biruta Konrāde, in July 2019.
70. The same.
71. Face-to-face interview with the representatives of the Public Relations Department of the municipality of Cēsis in August 2019.
72. "eDruva". "Neighbours Festival – A Good Tradition that Should be Continued". Available here: http://edruva.lv/viedokli/kaiminu-svetki-laba-tradicija-kam-vajag-turpinajumu/ (last viewed on 13.09.2019).
73. "Facebook" platform. "Neighbours Festival in Cēsis". Available here: https://www.facebook.com/kaiminusvetki/.
74. "Facebook" platform. "The Children and Neighbours Festival of Saules Street". Available here: https://www.facebook.com/events/2262873280695610/ (last viewed on 13.09.2019).

Figure 5. Cooperation agreements, Office of Civic Activism and Office of Civic Imagination in Bologna (ITALY)

In 2011 three Bologna residents decided to repaint the city park benches, because of their peeling paint, which made the use of the benches unpleasant. It turned out to be not that simple – in order to paint the benches, the initiators had to obtain permits from five different municipality services. It was a turning point that showed that the municipality needed to reduce its bureaucracy significantly, providing ways of greater civic involvement in the governance of their city.

The municipality used a governance reform that decentralised the city administration into six districts, setting up a neighbourhood laboratory in each of them, the task of which was to promote civic involvement in rebuilding the neighbourhood and creating a more attractive environment. The municipality of Bologna developed a regulation for civic involvement to keep it as simple as possible in the future. The necessary infrastructure was also set up for this purpose.

The regulation introduced a new form of cooperation – cooperation agreements – to encourage that the residents form informal groups and associations in the local neighbourhoods, cooperate with businesses and the administration of the municipality of the relevant neighbourhood and jointly implement various projects related to the renovation of the neighbourhood territory, organisation of cultural activities and many other fields. The municipality has allocated 150 thsd euros in total for the projects of the residents per year. The residents submit project applications to a special institution – the Active Citizenship Office – which together with other municipality departments evaluate the technical requirements: what the possibilities of implementing them are, as well as, how they fit into the overall city planning. It is also necessary to assess what kind of support the project promoters should receive from the municipality – instruments, materials, marketing support, financing, administrative support or other. Once that is identified, the project transforms into a cooperation agreement as the municipality becomes the partner in the project implementation.

By the end of 2018, the Office had received more than 480 cooperation agreements. In order to make it easier for the residents to create such cooperation agreements, a special website is provided with instructions, requirements, etc. One example of such cooperation agreement is the "object library": residents have the opportunity to share items, equipment that they rarely use themselves, but which may be useful to others in the short term, such as mattresses, drills, specific home appliances, etc. The city provided the premises.

In addition to the aforementioned infrastructure, each of the six city administrations has a laboratory for promoting civic involvement, which is part of the Office of Civic Imagination. Each of the neighbourhood laboratories is run by a leader, the task of whom is to have very good knowledgeable about the local area, its residents and their needs, therefore the leader participates in most of the neighbourhood events, joins the places, where the residents of the neighbourhood tend to gather most often, and keeps in touch with them. These laboratories act as points of innovation and collaboration (hence the name "imagination" used in the name), where the employees of the municipality meet with the residents and co-create various initiatives. Neighbourhood leaders are also helping to promote civic involvement in participatory budgeting, which was introduced by the municipality of Bologna a few years ago, achieving high voting activity, for example, in 2017, 14 000 residents cast their votes for the submitted ideas.

In 2018 Bologna received the "Engaged Cities" Award for the most successful municipality strategy implemented for engaging the residents in the solving of the local issues. The candidates of the prize are usually cities with more than 30 000 residents and they represent Europe, North and South America. The winners are selected by a special commission evaluating the impact, the results and many other parameters of the strategy chosen by the municipality. The description of civic involvement activities included in the report is based on the Bologna case study (https://citiesofservice.org/resource/co-creating-urban-commons-bologna-italy/) developed by the holders of the mentioned prize – "Engaged Cities" – as well as on other publicly available information on civic involvement practices in the municipality of Bologna.

3.2. Development of civic skills and social inclusion

3.2.1. Volunteer movement in Gulbene

Gulbene region has been running a volunteer movement for almost ten years, with an average of 60-70 volunteers of different ages per year. Although the volunteers are also involved in other municipalities in Latvia, in the municipality of Gulbene it can be called a volunteering system, as the municipality in cooperation with the most active NGOs has purposefully used the available project funding over the years to gradually develop and improve the system, addressing ever new cooperation groups, developing a clear order for the involvement of the volunteers, including the assessment of motivation activities and contributions, as well as preparing institutions that use volunteering work for successful cooperation.

The volunteers can get involved in municipality work to perform individual works, as well as can sign an agreement with the municipality on long-term volunteering work. Having completed the work of 60 hours, the volunteer receives a certificate, which includes information on the length of service, the work to be done, the knowledge and competence acquired and a brief description of the volunteer. Each spring the municipality collects information from the municipality authorities on the type of volunteer support they require, the specific works to be implemented, and who is responsible for organising the volunteering work at the authority. After the needs are summarised, the municipality announces open application process. Usually, at the beginning of May each year, the municipality organises an introductory event for all the volunteers, who have responded to the invitation. During the event the volunteers apply for specific activities, submitted by the municipality authorities. An agreement is signed with the long-term volunteers. The most active volunteer work takes place during the summer period, when support is required to clean up the city, to decorate it, to organise festivals, etc.

To encourage the volunteers' motivational and uniting events are organised with the support of the municipality, such as a joint visit to the Nature Concert Hall and a trip to the Conversation Festival "Lampa". In appreciation of the contribution, the municipality organises a Thanksgiving Event each year expressing its recognition to the most active volunteers.

Volunteer work is developed through both municipality and regular project funding, which allows the representatives of the municipality to develop volunteering in a more targeted way, for example, by achieving a balanced relationship between young people and seniors as the volunteers. Project support has also made it possible to strengthen the institutions that use volunteer work to better prepare for the involvement of the volunteers, to be able to articulate their needs more clearly, and to work with the volunteers.

Volunteers are attracted by several institutions of the municipality each year: Youth Centre "Bāze" (attracts both local and foreign volunteers), Gulbene Primary School, Gulbene Pre-School Educational Institutions, Tirza Elementary School, Gulbīši Elementary School, Gulbene Regional Library (also accepting volunteers from abroad), Litene Elementary School, the municipality of Gulbene region, Gulbene Art School, Gulbene Museum of History and Art. Volunteers also work in the nearby parishes, as well as in several local associations. As Anita Birzniece, Head of the Association "Dēms" and also an employee of the municipality of Gulbene region admits in her interview, the stereotype that volunteering applies to young people only has been overcome in recent years, as older people are increasingly involved in the movement. For example, the seniors are involved in Gulbene Committee of the Latvian Red Cross, helping to arrange donated clothing, distributing soup to those in need, or co-operating in the facilitation of an exhibition at Gulbene Regional Museum of History and Art; are involved in the tidying up of the interior and exterior of Gulbene churches, as well as spend time with the residents of Social Care Centre "Dzērves", go to primary schools or kindergartens to jointly cook, run classes, and help clean up the territory.[75]

For the past two years, after the initiative of the volunteers movement "Selfie with a Senior" has been introduced, within which, after identifying the wishes of the residents of the senior care homes, approximately 16 seniors visit the senior care homes each month to talk to their peers, to spend meaningful time together, to play table games and to engage in other activities.

The organisers of volunteering work mention several benefits for the municipality. First of all, although the municipality has not estimated the specific amount it saves by engaging the volunteers in various activities, its representative acknowledges that it is significant support to the Municipality Specialist of Youth Affairs, the city landscapers and other professionals in facilitating their work. Secondly, by getting involved, the residents get to know the work of the Municipality better, find out what the employees of the Municipality are doing, how much effort is needed to organise various festivals, etc. Thirdly, by engaging people become more loyal to their local community and municipality. Fourthly, there is a growing sense of responsibility towards the environment, and the awareness that many opportunities of improving their lives in

75. Interview with Anita Birzniece, representative of the municipality of Gulbene region, Head of the Association "Dēms", July 2019.

the municipality lay in the hands of the residents themselves. Fifthly, the movement of the volunteers reduces the isolation of certain social groups.

The municipality has succeeded in strengthening the volunteering movement through the successful use of available project funding and creating close cooperation with local NGOs. The representative of the municipality, which also works in one of the most active NGOs in this field, admits that the benefit of the projects is not only the financial opportunities, but also the mobilising role, as the project applications require the identification of precise objectives to be achieved within a set time frame and the implementation of various activities, that are targeted towards achieving the goals.[76] Projects are also co-funded by the municipality, and the municipality also allocates funding for the coordination of the voluntary work unrelated to the project activities each year. The municipality together with the most active local NGOs, has used the "ERASMUS+" programme (both youth programmes and adult education sub-programmes), as well as the support of the Society Integration Foundation and other sources to establish the system of the volunteering work. Applications for project funding are drawn up by both local NGOs and authorities of the municipality.

3.2.2. Co-working space "SKOLA6" in Cēsis

In order to encourage the residents to stay in a small town by providing a platform for economic activities and to renovate the city centre building, the municipality of Cēsis in cooperation with the local activists created the co-working space "SKOLA6", which has now become a co-creating house for the creative industries.

After a relatively large building in the city centre was released, the municipality of Cēsis decided to solve two problems at once with one decision: how to occupy an empty building in the city centre and how to provide co-creation space in Cēsis. Initially, in order to evaluate the real demand for this type of platform, everyone was given two weeks to test the premises. By the end of the two-week period, a group of ten members had formed and expressed their desire to launch/to continue their economic and/or creative activities in these premises. Initially, the building was managed and maintained by the municipality, but a few months later the vacancy of the Head of the co-working space was announced. Since April 2016 the premises have been opened and

made available to everyone, who is interested.

Over time the activists united in association, to which the municipality delegated the management of the co-creation space. Since 2018 (continuing cooperation in 2019), a delegation agreement[77] has been signed with the foundation "Koprades māja Skola6" and the municipality of Cēsis "to maintain a place to bring together representatives of different creative, cultural and digital industries in order to promote the industries of the creative and educational processes in Cēsis region, to encourage the creativity of the residents through various non-formal education activities, to develop the leadership skills of the residents, and to develop the creativity and entrepreneurship skills." The agreement includes specific criteria and the number of activities to be carried out per year. During one year (2019) the association is granted 25.5 thsd euros, but in order to earn additional income for the operation of the co-working space, the association, managed by its Head, can implement various events and activities, as well as attract various funds and foreign financial instruments. At the time of preparing this report, according to the representatives of the municipality, the co-creation space is being used to its maximum capacity.

3.2.3. Flash mob events of the municipality authorities in Smiltene[78]

Smiltene municipality Council or its structural units organise various flash mob events with a certain regularity, the main purpose of which is not very common in the municipalities of Latvia, namely to unite the residents of the region and to strengthen their sense of belonging to the region, its values, to educate people on some issue or to encourage people to change habits. For example, the municipality organised flash mob events to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Latvia, to encourage people to ride their bikes, to encourage them to read more books or to build snowmen in the city during the winter and to share photos of them on social networks. In addition to this goal, the municipality organises various competitions for the residents, such as for the most beautiful yard or creating the best Christmas mood in the city. The representative of the municipality admits that the residents are responsive to such flash mob events and get involved in them. For example, in the winter of 2018, during the snowman competition the municipality received approximately 100 photos, by which the residents had responded to the challenge of building their own snowman.[79]

76. The same.
77. The municipality of Cēsis region website. "Delegation agreement" (between the municipality of Cēsis Council and the foundation "Koprades māja SKOLA6"). Available here: http://www.cesis.lv/uploads/files/Delegesanas_ligums_Skola6_2019.pdf; face-to-face interview with the representatives of the Municipality of Cēsis Region Public Relations Department in August 2019.
78. Population of the region: 12 718 residents (data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, 01.01.2019). The Region consists of Smiltene City and 8 parishes: Smiltene, Blome, Branti, Launkalne, Variņi, Palsmane, Grundzāle and Bilska.
79. Information provided by the Public Relations Specialist of Smiltene region for the purpose of the report.

3.2.4. Social inclusion with the help of the growing non-formal adult education programme in Gulbene[80]

Gulbene Municipality has relatively unique experience in implementing various activities that involve the residents, using human resources of the municipality itself. One of these is the adult non-formal education programme that the municipality of Gulbene has been implementing since 2012. The programme allows the residents to acquire additional knowledge, skills that can be used for self-employment or for the development of their interests and hobbies close to where they live. In such way the municipality also wants to promote the activity of people, having different job skills, but who for some reason have not found a job or have become aware of their potential as a self-employed person. This may include knowledge of the basics of entrepreneurship or marketing, language skills, or various educational training events aimed more at reducing social isolation and strengthening self-esteem, etc. At the same time it is an opportunity to strengthen the local communities. When assessing the needs of the residents, the municipality identifies priority areas of the programme each year, and over time the following have emerged as the main ones: possibility to improve knowledge for promoting self-employment and reducing social isolation. The non-formal adult education programme is one of the directions of the Lifelong Learning concept in Gulbene region.

How does non-formal adult education work? The municipality is organising a competition, which is open to associations and institutions operating in Gulbene region with their educational programmes. The educational programmes should be innovative, focused on promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment and reducing the social isolation of those living in rural areas. The municipality supports programmes up to EUR 700 (remuneration for the lecturers and additional expenses), the granted funding is not transferred to the organiser of the training, but the municipality itself covers the invoices in the amount of the granted funding. The programmes are evaluated by a commission set up by the municipality according to certain criteria. The training takes place every year from January to June. The participants need to make a small co-payment to motivate them to participate in all the activities, as well as to emphasise the importance of the participant's own contribution to the further use of the knowledge and skills they receive.

In 2019 a total of 12 training programmes were implemented with the total co-funding of the municipality in the amount of EUR 7 021.50. Within the programme, the residents of Gulbene were able to improve their skills in floristry, gift wrapping,

environment design, as well as acquire basic marketing skills. In Ranka Parish, one could learn the basics of entrepreneurship, in Druviena one could learn the basics of making festive costumes, in Lizums Parish one could learn the basics of sewing clothes, etc. In some cases, the purpose of such training is not so much about the skills in the particular vocation, but more about strengthening self-confidence and social inclusion, therefore also seemingly simpler training programmes are supported in rural municipalities, where social exclusion is more distinctive.

The programme has been running for less than a decade, and the number of applications for training has increased, creating more competition for acquiring the support of the municipality, which also improves the quality of the programmes. After each programme, the participants evaluate the content of the programme and indicate, which knowledge they would like to supplement in the future. This helps the municipality to plan the programme for the next year.

3.2.5. Seniors School in Kuldīga

Seniors School of Kuldīga is a non-formal education platform provided for people of pre-retirement and retirement age, not only to help them acquire new skills, but also to help them integrate into social life and to reduce the risk of social exclusion. Unlike the Seniors Panel of Kuldīga, which serves as an advisory and representative office for seniors in the municipality of Kuldīga, the Seniors School operates similarly to a non-formal education programme for older people: its members meet several times a week to attend lectures and creative activities and to engage in physical activities. Founded on 9 January 2019, the Seniors School of Kuldīga is relatively new, but it already regularly enrols nearly 200 seniors from Kuldīga region (both from the city and its parishes). Because of the great interest, several interest groups have been formed at the School and classes are held several times a week. The programme of the Seniors School includes three main activities: it organises physical activities (e.g., swimming pool visits, walks, excursions); creative activities (e.g., sewing, felting); carries out educational work (lectures on various topics relevant to seniors). According to Ruta Orlova, the Head of the Seniors School of Kludīga, the training is organised so that the content is useful for the students themselves (the members of the Seniors School call themselves students). For example, after computer training, almost half of the students have created their own email addresses, and now all of the students use mobile phones daily. Seniors School promotes the involvement of the seniors in social life and helps them adapt to the changes in their daily lives.

The Seniors School primarily operates with the co-

80. Reģionālā 21 attīstības centru apvienība RACA. "Kuldīgas novada pašvaldība un Kuldīgas Senioru skola paraksta sadarbības līgumu". Pieejams šeit: http://raca.lv/kuldigas-novada-pasvaldiba-un-kuldigas-senioru-skola-paraksta-sadarbibas-ligumu/ (pēdējo reizi skatīts 13.09.2019.).

funding of the municipality and funding from various project competitions. Currently, a cooperation agreement is signed between the Seniors School of Kuldīga and the municipality, which provides that the municipality financially supports various activities of the Seniors School, such as covers bus expenses for excursions or provides the opportunity to visit Kuldīga Swimming Pool. The Seniors School has also signed a cooperation agreement with the Main Library of Kuldīga, which provides premises and equipment (computers, projectors, sound, etc.) for the meetings of the seniors. Within the framework of the cooperation agreement, Kuldīga Technology and Tourism Technical School provides the Seniors School with lecturers for various classes and lectures.[81]

The idea for the Seniors School in Kuldīga was taken from the Seniors School of Krāslava, which is the first non-formal education movement of its kind in Latvia (Seniors School of Krāslava was founded in 2015 and is run by the association "Pieci airi")[82], but unlike in Krāslava the School in Kuldīga has formed successful cooperation with the local government. The need for a senior school in Kuldīga was suggested by Kurzeme NGO Centre. The initiative to establish and to run the Seniors School has been implemented by the seniors of Kuldīga, who, after gaining experience in the Seniors School of Krāslava, have founded the association "Kuldīgas Senioru skola" (Seniors School of Kuldīga) for this purpose.[83]

4.4. NEW METHODS OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE RESIDENTS

Although the municipalities in Latvia do not conduct any daring experiments in the field of civic involvement, in some cases the municipalities may be looking for new ways to reach the residents. This section gives examples of how the municipalities form cooperation with entrepreneurs, how they promote civic involvement in the annual meetings of the residents, or how they use technology solutions to demonstrate greater openness and to encourage the residents to return to live and work in the region. In some cases, the municipalities also use visual solutions to represent issues, for example, the cost items of the municipality budget in a simple, comprehensible and visually appealing way.

One of the newest trends in Europe is the promotion of openness of the municipalities by publishing very extensive information on the activities of the municipalities. One of the most impressive examples in this field is the Open Data Portal in Gdansk (Poland) (Figure 6), where the municipality allows everyone to access various data arrays in education, culture, traffic management,

provision of health services, as well as publishes all daily costs of the municipality in the form of open data. This allows competent non-governmental organisations, the media, and also the municipality itself to evaluate these data in the light of various regularities, trends or activities, the effectiveness of implementation of which might be higher.

4.1.1. The meetings of residents in Valmiera

For the past two years, the municipality of Valmiera has chosen creative solutions for organising the meetings of the residents to attract them to discuss the topical issues. Similarly to other municipalities of Latvia, the municipality of Valmiera regularly organises meetings of the residents, but in the last two years the format of the meetings has changed. They are combined with some extra activity for the city residents, for example, as a guide, the mayor of the city takes the residents on an excursion around the city or to the city swimming

81. The Association of 21 Regional Development Centres RACA. "The municipality of Kuldīga region and the Seniors School of Kuldīga sign a cooperation agreement". Available here: http://raca.lv/kuldigas-novada-pasvaldiba-un-kuldigas-senioru-skola-paraksta-sadarbibas-ligumu/ (last viewed on 13.09.2019).
82. Phone interview with Raimonds Lazda, the Head of the Seniors School of Krāslava, July 2019.
83. Electronic correspondence and phone interview with Kristīne Dubļinska, Head of the Marketing and Public Relations Department of the municipality of Kuldīga, 18 and 19 July 2019; phone interview with Ruta Orlova, Head of the Seniors Schools of Kuldīga and member of the association "Kuldīgas Senioru skola" (Seniors School of Kuldīga), 24 July 2019.

pool. In this way, the municipality not only motivates the residents to attend the meetings, but it can also focus on a topic that is important to the municipality, for example the development of the municipality infrastructure, while also retaining the opportunity to discuss any other issues of interest to the residents at the meetings.

In February 2018 a meeting of the residents was organised in the form of a tour around the city, which was led by the Head of the municipality. Travelling in a specially assigned bus the residents visited the main infrastructure objects of the city. The mayor presented the works, projects and future plans of the infrastructure development of the municipality. Approximately 40 residents of the city went on the tour. After the excursion, the meeting continued in the premises of the Council, in which the residents could find out the issues of interest to them, also communicating with other officials of the municipality.

In early 2019 the meeting of the residents was combined with the opportunity to view the new swimming pool of the city, which opened in the autumn of 2018. The meeting was held at the premises of the city swimming pool, the first part of which took place in the traditional way – the residents heard out the management of the municipality regarding the competed works, and clarified the issues of interest, etc. In the second part, the residents were able to walk around the premises of the swimming pool and learn about the facilities it offers. This format is recognised by the representatives of the municipality administration as successful, as it brings the residents closer to the municipality, and the chosen format of the meetings is a way for the municipality to demonstrate the completed works at their actual location and to discuss more specific needs with the residents. Additional benefits of organising the meeting of the residents in the city swimming pool building: the myth that the municipality swimming pool is only suitable for young people was dispelled, and the participants could find out that seniors of the municipality also have the opportunity to use the swimming pool at a reduced cost, which some attendees recognised as a benefit of attending the meeting.

4.1.2. Business Breakfast in Kuldīga

Every year the municipality of Kuldīga organises a "Business Breakfast" – an event that aims to promote cooperation between the municipality and entrepreneurs by informing about the plans and topical issues of the municipality. At the Business Breakfast, the Head of Kuldīga municipality introduced the present entrepreneurs to the plans of the municipality for the next year, which may affect the interests of the businesses, for example, the current projects or street reconstruction plans. After the presentation, the present entrepreneurs were given the opportunity to discuss important issues for the businesses, in the solving of which the municipality might get involved.

The Business Breakfast is usually attended by approximately 50 entrepreneurs of the region and representatives of the municipality. The event visitors point out that the opportunity to learn about the current events of the region in such format is necessary and useful, as the entrepreneurs do not always know the future plans of the region, but it is these plans that have the most direct impact on the development of their businesses. For example, according to the representatives working in the hospitality field in Kuldīga region, the tourism field is influenced not only by the weather, but also by the city plans for the tourist season.[84] Likewise, according to the opinion expressed by the visitors, such meetings help avoid misunderstandings that often arise due to the lack of information. During the Business Breakfast it is possible to find out all the news in a short time, as well as to engage in discussions with the responsible representatives of the municipality.

4.1.3. Entrepreneurs' Meetings in Preiļi[85]

Preiļi municipal Business Centre has been organising business meetings for the entrepreneurs of the region for more than three years already.[86] They take place once a month at one of the entrepreneurs of Preiļi region. The purpose of the meetings is not only to establish cooperation between the entrepreneurs, but also to get to know the businesses, their problems, information about job vacancies, which the municipality then uses to help attract the employees. The municipality uses this format to introduce the development projects and plans of the region. In 2018 8 meetings were held. An average of 15-20 entrepreneurs attend them. Since January 2019, Preiļi Municipal Business Centre has introduced a co-working space for entrepreneurs to support and promote entrepreneurship, and it offers not only a place to work at, but also a variety of training seminars for entrepreneurs on a regular basis.

84. TV Skrunda. "Business Breakfast in Kuldīga". Available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpGcHoHeB0I (last viewed on 24.09.2019).
85. 9 742 residents live in Preiļi region (01.01.2019, data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs). The region consists of Preiļi City, Aizkalne Parish, Pelēči Parish, Preiļi Parish and Sauna Parish.
86. The description is based on publicly available information, as well as a phone interview with Ineta Liepniece, the Director of Preiļi Regional Business Centre, and also the Director of Preiļi NGO Centre in August 2019.

Regular business meetings also take place in other municipalities. For example, unlike in Preiļi region, where meetings are organised by the municipality authority, in Ādaži region such meetings are organised by the entrepreneurs themselves – the Association of Ādaži Entrepreneurs, also inviting the representatives of the municipality to attend.

4.1.4. Afternoon with the mayor in Valmiera

Valmiera is a very economically active city, the unemployment rate in the municipality is less than 3%, also residents of the nearest regions go to Valmiera to work, and entrepreneurs are a very important part of the city. Valmiera Development Agency, together with the municipality of Valmiera City has been organising the event "Afternoon with the Mayor" for more than two years to inform the city entrepreneurs about the activities of Valmiera and the surrounding regions, to discuss issues of importance to the development of the municipality and business environment and to seek opportunities for cooperation. In this way, the municipality can present the planned investment projects, procurements, municipality support programmes for the entrepreneurs and to involve the entrepreneurs in developing the business environment.

Afternoons with the mayor take the form of a discussion, setting one specific subject for each of such meetings. For example, businesses operating in the territory of the municipality are regularly understaffed. Therefore, in 2018, one meeting "Afternoon with the Mayor" was devoted to attracting employees, viewing this subject from different perspectives: the unemployment dynamics, the recruitment and wage tendencies, foreign labour force, the involvement options of the remigrants, etc. In the afternoon with the mayor not only the mayor of Valmiera and the governors of the neighbouring regions, but also experts in the field and representatives of state institutions take part. Similarly, a meeting was held on education and opportunities for the municipality to cooperate with the entrepreneurs to prepare the future employees according to labour market needs, etc.

4.1.5. Interactive maps to support remigration and entrepreneurship in Smiltene region

In order to attract residents and to promote entrepreneurship, Smiltene municipality has created several interactive maps, where information is available on farmsteads for sale or on business premises in the territory of the region.

The housing fund map was created in 2018, which aims to supplement the housing fund of the region that is demanded there. In such way the region is hoping to attract the residents to return or to move to live in Smiltene. At the time of preparing this report information about 21 property was included in the map. In 2019, nine properties were added to the map, two of which were sold. The properties are included in the map in cooperation with the Governors of the Parishes of Smiltene region, whom the municipality has ordered to identify the vacant properties in their area and to find out from their owners about the activities planned with them. If the person or family does not have plans to use the property, the managers offer to include it in the interactive map of the housing fund.

In order to promote entrepreneurship, the municipality has created an interactive map[88] that provides information on the premises available for purchase or lease for business purposes. Information on the map is available about properties owned by the municipality, individuals and legal entities.

4.1.6. Visualised budget overview in the municipality of Cēsis

In order to raise public awareness of what constitutes a municipality budget and how it is spent, the municipality of Cēsis publishes an annual infographic that provides a general breakdown of the budget. While the infographic offered by the municipality is not interactive and does not show the lowest cost items, it contributes to the general understanding that, for example, more than ⅓ of the revenue of the municipality of Cēsis is generated by personal income tax and that almost ½ of the expenditure items are allocated to education. According to the representatives of the municipality, creating a simplified infographic of the budget items is not difficult, but the municipality would potentially be prepared to develop it further, producing data such as the municipality budget into open data format that would allow working with this information to those interested, making larger data arrays easier to understand for every resident.

This form of civic involvement is passive and it aims to raise awareness of the municipality income and the use of the resources. Taking into account the fact that the basic budget documents are usually too complex to read, municipalities in many parts of the world use different digital tools, as well as visual solutions to help the residents to better evaluate the activities of their municipality in terms of the budget. Unfortunately, in the municipalities of Latvia such practice – to provide information on the municipality budget to its residents in a clear, easy to perceive manner – is not common. Similarly to in Cēsis, Ķekava region also informs its residents.

87. Housing fund map is available here: https://smiltene.lv/sabiedriba/nac-dzivo/ipasumi-dzivesvietai/ (last viewed on 17.09.2019).
88. The map of investment objects is available here: https://smiltene.lv/uznemejdarbiba/atbalsts-uznemejiem/investiciju-objektu-karte/ (last viewed on 17.09.2019).

Figure 6. Open Data in the municipality of Gdansk (POLAND)

Since 2014, the municipality of Gdansk has developed an open data policy in the municipality. "The Open Gdansk" is a portal where, according to widely used open data standards, data about the municipality is available to anyone interested, free of charge and without any other restrictions. The purpose of open data is to promote cooperation between the different parties – the municipality, NGOs, activists, media, start-ups, etc. For example, the open data application allows you to find new owners for animals housed in Gdansk Shelter. The portal helps visualise information in various areas, such as municipality budget revenue and expenditure.

Various categories of data are published in the Open Data Portal: safety, urban planning, demography, education (educational institutions, exam results, foreign students, etc.), economics, culture (collections of artworks, cultural monuments), environment, sports and recreation, transport (vehicles registered in Gdansk, licensed taxis, etc.), the activities of the municipality (expenses, taxes, budget, etc.), health (health care, social assistance). A total of 62 data sets are available. The most relevant and most widely used open data set is comprised of a section that publishes all daily expenses of the municipality. At the end of each working day, data on the expenditure incurred by the municipality on the relevant day is automatically generated, publishing information on the amount of expenditure, the recipient and other details. The following information is available from 1 January 2015 till the present day.

To maintain the open data portal, the municipality has set up a dedicated open data group, consisting of representatives of the municipality IT Bureau, the representative of the Mayor's Office, representatives and authorised persons of the Communications Department, specialising in the protection of personal data, as well as external representatives of non-governmental organisations, who work in this field. This group regularly analyses various municipality data sets and evaluates the possibility of opening them for publication, taking into account all the costs, – both financial resources and the investments that will be required for the technological solutions and the legal issues.

In this way, the decision-making process of the municipality has become significantly more transparent, helping to build and strengthen cooperation between the municipality and the various stakeholders (NGOs, media), and also civic involvement in the municipality has also increased. The open data portal has significantly decreased the bureaucracy in the municipality by reducing the time the residents have to spend at the municipality, when solving some issue.

Open data portal: https://www.gdansk.pl/otwarte-dane

Krzysztof Garski: Gdansk Shares its Know-How on Open Data, 8 July 2016. Available here: https://medium.com/@gdansk/gdansk-shares-its-know-how-on-open-data-82bb317bce40 (last viewed on 06.09.2019).

ANNEX

What is the participatory budgeting method

Participatory budgeting has become popular around the world as a relatively new form of civic involvement. But it dates back to the eighties of the 20th century, when it was first tested by Porto Alegre in Brazil.[89] Over time, the idea has travelled to other countries on different continents and has become increasingly popular in Europe over the last decade.

Participatory budgeting is a democratic process, in which the residents decide how the municipality spends part or all of its budget. This method is used by the municipalities to encourage residents to participate in the life of the municipality; to be involved in the planning of the municipality budget, including to be educated on the budgeting process and prioritising it; to improve the governance of the municipality and to promote mutual trust, both among the residents and in relations with the local authority.

The process of participatory budgeting usually takes place in the same way, having only a few differences. The main activities within participatory budgeting:

1. the municipality decides, what proportion of the budget will be allocated to the residents for decisions;
2. the municipality decides, how the decision-making process of the residents will be organised. Usually it is online voting, with the possibility to also vote in person;
3. the municipality prepares regulations – the procedure – according to which the residents can submit their ideas, what criteria must be met by the initiatives of the residents, before it can be forwarded for the voting process;
4. the residents have the opportunity to consult with the employees of the municipality and the experts on various technical issues related to the implementation of the idea (e.g., the landowner, the technical solution, the safety requirements, the impact on traffic organisation or similar issues);
5. the residents prepare and submit their ideas;
6. the municipality together with the representatives of the public evaluate the compliance of the submitted ideas with the regulations;
7. the ideas that comply with the regulations are submitted to the public voting;
8. the municipality implements the ideas that have received the greatest support from the residents.

In order for the participatory budgeting to be successful, so that the residents would submit well-considered ideas, as well as would take active part in discussing and voting on them, it is important that the municipality undertakes the role of the leader, for example, by holding discussions on the principles of municipality budgeting and the order of financing, organising public meetings, explaining the opportunities to submit ideas to the residents, as well as providing a helpful mentor, who consults the residents on various issues of a technical nature.

Trusting the process is a very important prerequisite for the residents to be ready to participate in it, so it is important that the municipality ensures that the decision-making process is open, the rules are equal and comprehensible, as well as that the municipality does not delay the implementation of the ideas supported by the residents, providing regular reports on the achieved results.

Budget size

The amount of funding allocated to participatory budgeting varies from country to country, but on average it totals from 2-10% of the municipality budget, which usually equals the amount of the

89. In the eighties of the 20th century, when participatory budgeting of the public was introduced in Porto Alegre, Brazil was going through a period of changes from dictatorship to democracy. The inequality of the living standards of the country's population were among the highest in the world. Although the constitution adopted in 1988 was very progressive for the period and provided varied civic involvement in the different processes, in reality the level of corruption was high and civic involvement was only symbolic. Although Porto Alegre was not the first city in Brazil to engage in civic involvement experiments, it was Porto Alegre which was the first city to strengthen this method due to various factors (historically high civic involvement, relatively high level of income, support for left-wing political forces). With the rise of the Workers' Party in 1988, participatory budgeting became an essential part of the decision-making process. When the Workers' Party lost the leadership of the city, participatory budgeting was institutionalised to such a level, that it had become independent of the political dimension.

municipality investment budget. However, there are some exceptions – countries, where the entire municipality budget is allocated for participatory budgeting, for example in the municipality of Mundo Novo in Brazil.[90]

Civic involvement

Taking into account that the very name itself of the method – "participatory" budgeting – reveals that this process must be as open as possible in order to maximise civic involvement. This means that the municipality must do its utmost to inform the residents that they have the opportunity to influence the municipality budget; the terms of involvement must be explained, support to the brainstorming process must be provided during the development of the budget to ensure that the suggestions are of high quality, as well as civic involvement must be promoted in the decision-making stage. One of the benefits of participatory budgeting is that it promotes the inclusion of marginalised groups by providing a more accessible, comprehensible, direct system that provides a sense of interaction between the residents and the municipality. Similarly, the participatory budgeting process has great potential to reduce the inequality between the poor and the wealthy classes of the society, and to reduce the territorial inequality by redirecting funding to areas that, as a rule, receive lower investments and funding.

The main advantages

Participatory budgeting strengthens democracy, promotes transparency of budgeting, educates the public and government officials, strengthens professional capacity in the state or municipality administration, makes the state administration more efficient and more in line with the public interests and needs, as well as improves communication between the residents and the authorities. The advantages can be observed, if the participatory process is well organised, implemented in a targeted and meaningful way over a long period of time, involving as many of the residents as possible. For example, according to some researchers in Porto Alegre, in Brazil, or in Kerala, India, it has helped to reduce corruption in the public administration and inequality among the residents. Elsewhere, it has been estimated that targeted civic involvement has improved the efficiency and communication of the public administration. However, if the model is implemented without providing specific targets and the process is rather symbolic, and serves as an additional reinforcement of the existing initiatives, a wider range of residents loses their motivation to engage in such a process, and it does not bring any significant improvements.

Challenges

The main challenges that have to be identified before the implementation of the participatory budgeting process are:
1. how to ensure the fair distribution of funds among the neighbourhoods, so that due to the developed model in smaller neighbourhoods situations would not emerge, when it is proportionally impossible for them to gain the required number of the votes for the implementation of the projects;
2. how to ensure that the voting process is equally accessible to all residents eligible for voting;
3. how to develop a project regulation that is logical, understandable and includes clear, comprehensible criteria for the project applicants, without creating situations, where the parties involved in the project evaluation have a disproportionately high opportunity to declare the submitted projects ineligible;
4. how to implement a good publicity and advertising campaign in order to involve a sufficiently representative part of the residents both in the project submission and the voting stage;
5. and, ultimately, how to ensure the sustainability of the project itself.

90. Abers, R., Brandao, I., King, R., Votto, D. "Porto Alegre: Participatory Budgeting and the Challenge of Sustaining Transformative Change." World Resources Report Case Study. 2018 Available online at: https://www.wri.org/wri-citiesforall/publication/porto-alegre-participatory-budgeting-and-challenge-sustaining

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