

Working paper

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY IN HOUSEHOLD WASTE MANAGEMENT IN
LATVIA**

Tālis Tisenkopfs, Valts Kalniņš

**Rīga
Baltic Studies Centre
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study explores public accountability procedures in the case of household waste management. The purpose is to gain a detailed insight into public accountability – its formal mechanisms, actual functioning, and outcomes. The case study deals with the restructuring of household waste management system in Northern Vidzeme region of Latvia and implementation of large regional waste management project.

The focus on large waste infrastructure project – construction of a regional landfill and establishment of an operating waste management organisation (ZAAO) draws together in this case different stakeholders and actors – national government, local governments, groups of population, investors, green activists, consultants, entrepreneurs, EU integration policies and different mechanisms of their interaction.

Household waste management case involves significant accountability processes on all local, regional, national and European levels. There are several important public accountability procedures and mechanisms which can be analysed both from the point of view of their formal prerequisites provided by law, and from the point of view of their practical implementation by the involved actors:

- Expert analysis of HWM projects;
- Public surveys on the installation of landfills;
- Public consultations/ hearings on projects and site selection;
- Co-operation among local governments in pursuit of HWM projects;
- Public governance of waste management company;
- The establishment and work of consultative committees for drafting policy proposals in this area.

The study revealed discrepancies between formal mechanisms, actual procedures and outcomes of public accountability. There are formal prerequisites in place: citizen inquiries, questioning of population, opinion surveys, recorded public consultations and hearings, environmental impact assessment procedures etc. Practical implementation of these mechanisms depends on skills and interests of involved actors and not always leads to thorough deliberation of different interests, arguments and accountable political decisions. Democratic procedures themselves become an arena of contested interests and knowledge. Therefore outcomes of these procedures might be unpredictable and controversial in terms of public acceptance, legitimacy, efficiency, sustainability of decisions made. Controversial outcomes of public consultations regarding landfill construction in Kocēni and Stalbe municipalities are proof of that.

Effective public accountability appears to be limited due to the fact that in most cases the population is not highly concerned about waste management issues, there is lack of trust and passiveness of certain agents, and there are major flaws in civic skills to use available public accountability procedures. In this case and given that in the field of household waste management adoption of principal political and technological decisions takes place at national level and at regional level through co-operation among municipalities, the functional role of public hearings is rather to legitimatise technological and political decisions and to adjust them to the local situation.

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This study explores public accountability procedures in the case of household waste management. The purpose is to gain a detailed insight into public accountability – its formal mechanisms, actual functioning, and outcomes. The case study deals with the restructuring of household waste management system in Northern Vidzeme region of Latvia and implementation of large waste management project, one of the 12 regional waste projects in Latvia. In the region concerned 84 local governments formed a waste management organization (“North Vidzeme Waste Management Organization”, ZAAO) which began its operations with three tasks: the setting up of a new waste collection system, the creation of a new landfill, and the closure and re-cultivation of old waste sites. Later the fourth task was added – to inform and educate population and introduce sorting of waste at household level. While the Northern Vidzeme waste project may so far be regarded as technologically successful and conforming with EU environmental directives, it also encounters its problems with openness of decision making, representation and co-ordination of interests of groups of population and municipalities in the project and efficiency of public participation.

This case study analyses what public accountability procedures have been and are in place where the waste management policy is articulated and adopted at national, regional and local scale. The focus on large waste infrastructure project – construction of a regional landfill and establishment of an operating waste management organisation draws together in this case different stakeholders and actors (national government, local governments, groups of population, investors, green activists, consultants, entrepreneurs, EU integration policies) and different mechanisms of their interaction. This allowed us to look into the forms and effects of public accountability procedures and to address the issue whether public accountability mechanisms have affected policy outcomes and whether they have made these outcomes more acceptable to actors involved.

The work on this case study proceeded in two stages. During the first stage, we explored the process of development of national household waste management strategy and incorporation of public accountability mechanisms in it. Two main methods for this part of the study were the analysis of policy documents and normative acts and interviews with relevant public officials and representatives of waste management companies.

During the second stage, we explored the implementation of regional household waste management project in Vidzeme with special emphasis on site selection for the landfill and governance of ZAAO organisation. Two episodes or sub-cases here deserved a special attention, namely – environmental impact assessment procedures, public consultations and decision making regarding site selection for the new regional landfill which took place in Kocēni and Stalbe municipalities. These two communities and local governments were faced with an option to accept or refuse the building of landfill that would serve the whole region. Procedures and mechanisms involved in this decision making were the object of sub-case investigation. The principal fieldwork methods at this stage of research were interviews with local government officials, representatives of ZAAO, managers of small waste management companies. During research stays in Cēsis and Valmiera (two main cities of Vidzeme region), we also visited small dumpsites, which are going to be closed in a result of restructuring of waste management system and made interviews with their managers. A number of relevant questions regarding household waste management practices, population attitudes and participation in waste policy making were included in a nation-wide survey, which was carried out in October 2002.

RESULTS

I. MAPPING OF POLICY FIELD

1. Policy history and current state

Until late 1980s when Latvia was a part of Soviet Union environmental policy was not a priority and issues of environmental pollution and degradation by industry, agriculture and the household sector were hidden or excluded from official public discourse and ideology. In the beginning of 1980s there were some 1,400 small waste sites poorly arranged which harmed the environment. Every municipality might have several such dumps and there were no coherent system or policies of waste management at the level of the whole country. In the end of 1980s in the Baltic states environmental issues became arena of political opposition to communist regime. A powerful environmental movement emerged in Latvia in the conditions of *glasnostj* (Soviet type limited openness policy) which soon developed into a national independence movement.

After the restoration of Latvia's independence in 1991, laws and governing institutions in the area of environmental protection were established. Since the mid 1990s, Latvia has consistently harmonised its laws in this area with those of the European Union. The main laws which regulate waste management are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Laws which regulate HWM and their scope

Law	Year of adoption	Effect
A law on local governments	1994	The law specified the rights and obligations of local governments in the area of waste management.
An environmental protection policy plan	1995	The document identified key problems and set out priorities and tasks in the area of household waste management.
An action plan on environmental protection policy	1995	The plan determined the order in which the aforementioned steps would be taken and the schedule for the entire process.
A law on environmental impact assessment	1998	Regulates procedures of environmental impact assessment, including procedures of public consultations.
A household waste management strategy	1998	The document specified Latvia's strategic movement toward the shutting down and re-cultivation of small waste sites, followed by the establishment of regional landfills that are in compliance with EU environmental requirements.
A law on waste management	2000	The law regulates the relationships of the state, local governments, population and businesses in the area of waste management.
A law on packaging	2001	The law specifies that manufacturers are responsible for collecting packaging, and it provides tax relief for manufacturers who do so.

Thus in Latvia, the main problems related to household waste management (HWM) involve the large number of waste sites and their influence on the surrounding environment. In mid-1990s the government commissioned a study on the existing situation in household waste management and adopted a special investment program, "500-". The symbolic name of the program focuses on the need to reduce the number of waste sites in Latvia. More than 250

dumps have been shut down in the recent years and presently there are some 250 operational waste sites in Latvia. Their number still has to be decreased. Surface and groundwater pollution and soil and landscape degradation are also caused by unlawful dumping of waste in unauthorized locations.

In pursuit of a solution to these problems, a political document on waste management was developed in 1997 and 1998 – a strategy on HWM. The document says that Latvia will reduce the number of small waste sites by 2009, installing between 10 and 12 regional landfills that are in full compliance with the European Union’s environmental protection requirements in this area. Each landfill will service between 60,000 and 240,000 residents, while in the case of Rīga, the number will be around 1 million people. A centralized system for HWM is expected to involve more than 70% of the country’s residents. The strategy also speaks to a reduction in waste site-related pollution, and there are plans to re-cultivate existing waste sites by 2012. In relation to the strategy, ten regional waste management projects have been launched (see Table 2).

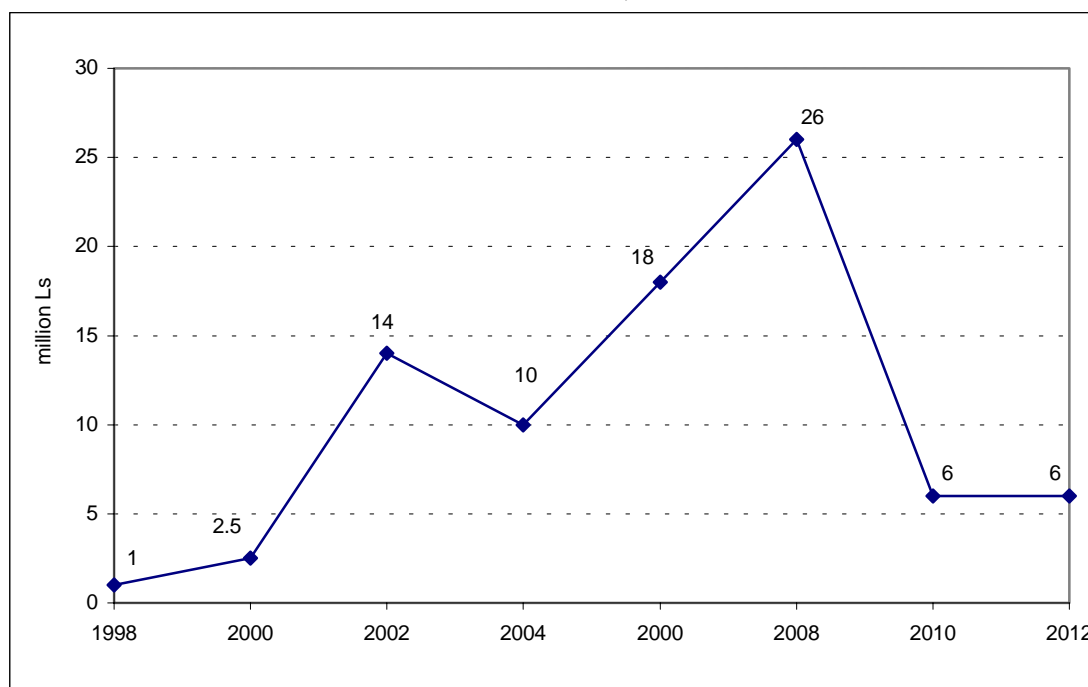
Table 2. Regional waste management projects

Project	Number of covered residents, ,000	Site location	Feasibility study and public consultations	Construction work started	Value of the project, million lats	Funding sources, %
Ventspils regional waste management project	61	Near Ventspils	finished	September 2002	4.6	Municipality-45% ISPA-37% Environmental Investment Bank-17% National budget-1%
Liepāja regional waste management project	150	Grobiņa	finished	June 2002	8.3	ISPA-35% World Bank loan-15% Carbon Reduction Fund-14% Nordic Investment Bank-10% National budget-9% Swedish International Development Agency-8% Municipality-7% Canadian International Development Agency-2%
Piejūra regional waste management project	164	Not selected	Not done	No	-	-
Zemgale regional waste management project	160	Not selected	Not done	No	-	-
Rīga regional waste management project	1,000	Getliņi	Finished	No	-	-
Ziemeļvidzeme regional waste management project	200	Daibe in Stalbe municipality	Finished	September 2002	4,8	ISPA-70% National budget-20% Municipalities-10%
Maliena regional waste management project	98	Not selected	Not done	No	-	-

Vidusdaugava regional waste management project	146	Not selected	Not done	No	-	-
Austrumlatgale regional waste management project	120	Not selected	Not done	No	-	-
Dienvidlatgale regional waste management project	240	Not selected	Not done	No	-	-

These projects involve major investments. Each landfill costs between EUR 8 and 26 million. Financing is coming from a variety of sources, but 50 to 60% of the investments, on average, come from international organizations and foundations (the EU's ISPA program, for example), some 20% come from loans that are issued by the World Bank, the European Investment Bank and other banks, and 10-20% come from the national government or local governments in Latvia. Already now it is visible that implementation of HWM strategy is lagging behind the planned schedule and it might be difficult to implement it by 2009. New dynamism in establishing regional waste management systems can be expected after Latvia joins the European Union in 2004 and Structural Funds resources might become available (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Planned investments in the HWM sector, million lats



Public accountability at various levels of policy-making

Household waste management case involves significant accountability processes on all local, regional, national and European levels. According to law, local governments are responsible for providing waste management services to population. Following the HWM strategy they are responsible for participation and co-operation in regional waste management projects and partial financing of them. Local governments have power in the sense that they may choose to

conclude a contract with this or another waste management organisation and set tariffs. Public accountability also manifests in informing and consulting population about improvement of waste management in the municipality – this may concern improving waste collection, participation in regional landfill projects, re-cultivation of local dumps. At local level public accountability procedures and actual functioning in a very dependent on local circumstances, personalities of municipal leaders, presence of environmentalist groups, often accountability functions in *ad hoc* manner.

At regional level where important decisions are made regarding construction of large landfills and management of inter-municipal operating companies the co-operation among local governments is the key mechanism of public accountability and the personalisation of accountability is less apparent. For instance in North Vidzeme the meetings of participants in ZAAO serve largely as arenas where a greater number of actors (primarily representatives of local governments) participate in policy making.

While solutions for local problems are sought in these regional arenas, the broader policies in the field of household waste management are formulated, adopted and implemented at the level of the national government or even set by EU directives and accomplishment of *acquis* process. Unless there is a crisis situation, the leaders of a parish may at times have no say with regard to ministerial decision even if those touch upon important interests of the parish in question. Where there is the European level of policy making involved, public accountability functions in the context of relations between Latvia and the European Union. European regulations are largely beyond any influence that local or even national actors might exert. Meantime virtually none of the interviewed persons doubted the overall usefulness of the application of EU environmental standards in waste management, for example, construction of landfills.

Phases of development of public accountability

Thus a brief overview of policy development in the area of household waste management in the last 10-15 years allows us to shortly outline different phases of policy development, which affected the way public accountability operated (Table 3).

Table 3. Household waste case

Phases of policy development	Timing	Public accountability
Latent phase (from initial plans to restructure household waste management and elaboration of National Household Waste Management Strategy till the actual implementation of Northern Vidzeme regional HWM project and particularly debate on landfill site selection in Kocēni and Stalbe communities)	Approx. 1997 – 2001	Strictly limited and formal public accountability practices (accountability primarily within the bureaucratic hierarchy with very limited interest from the broader public. Accountability by law, as written procedures)
Crisis phase (public controversy on the landfill site selection and construction in Kocēni, high mobilisation of population against construction works; contrary to that – acceptance and reconciliation with landfill in Stalbe community)	2001	Sudden active use of public accountability mechanisms previously found mostly “on paper” (public consultations), sudden mobilisation of various groups. Obscure implementation of accountability mechanisms with opposite outcomes in Kocēni and Stalbe which aggravates questions about efficiency, transparency, participation, manipulation,

Evolution phase (decision to move the landfill site from Kocēni to Stalbe, practical governance of ZAAO, implementation of regional HWM project)	2001 - present	responsibility, acceptability in accountability Drop in the intensiveness of civic participation. Development of regularized public accountability procedures (regular accounts of involved institutions, regular consultations with stakeholders, increased transparency. Reconsideration of earlier decision (to move landfill to another location) by some of stakeholders and decision makers and with this – reconsideration and evaluation of accountability procedures in the perspective of short-term and long-term outcomes
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From the above summary, we see that crises served as triggering factor for the development of regularised public accountability practices. Public accountability mechanisms were “discovered” when there were sudden conflicts. Actors who previously felt little impact of respective policies on their lives suddenly realised that further developments might harm their interests. This resulted in short term but highly intense participation. After the crises the some actors reconsidered the decisions made and accountability procedures used from the perspective of long term consequences and costs and benefits that landfill operation would bring to community. Both greater regularity and skilfulness in the use of accountability procedures as well as evaluation of efficiency of these procedures in short-term and long-term perspectives are gradual dynamism in evolution phase.

2. Main Problem Dimensions

Several problem dimensions can be traced in relation to public accountability in the household waste case: the problems related to information and attitudes of population, technology of waste management, governance of large waste infrastructure projects, public participation in decision making, the accountability of market actors. The following section briefly characterises these problems.

Current system of waste management gives few incentives for population to separate waste at household level. Few municipalities provide collection of sorted waste. Recycling is also undeveloped. Sorted waste disposal has been introduced in some towns and districts through pilot initiatives and regional waste management projects. For instance ZAAO offers collection of sorted waste in Valmiera city and some other municipalities in North Vidzeme. However, majority of population still do not have access to such procedures and collection points where different kinds of waste (paper, glass, plastic, etc.) can be disposed. The population survey showed that household practices are changing slowly. Asked about changes in waste management practices in their households 5% of surveyed 1000 respondents said they have started to sort waste during that period, 7% have concluded agreement with waste management company and 9% of respondents admitted they have considered to sort waste but actually have not started. Attitudes towards sorting waste in general are positive – 73% of respondents expressed readiness to sort waste if separate collection was ensured. People see local governments to be primarily responsible for establishing of such system (79% of respondents).

Introduction of new waste management technologies inhibits aspects of public accountability in choice of socially acceptable and environmentally sustainable technological solutions. The full technological cycle of household waste management involves: separation of waste in households (glass, paper, plastic, food products, etc): collection of sorted or unsorted waste

from households; transportation of waste; recycling (which can be done separately for various groups of waste that can subsequently be used for other purposes, or which can involve the processing of unsorted waste for depositing at waste sites); incineration, with or without the extraction of energy; depositing of waste in landfills; closing down, re-cultivating and monitoring old waste sites. So far in the process of elaboration of national HWM strategy and implementation of regional HWM projects there has been little discussion around developing recycling, the main emphasis has been on construction of large regional landfills and Improvement of collection system. From the point of view of socially responsible choice of sustainable waste management technologies much greater attention had to be paid to recycling. However, this is not the dominant socio-technical orientation in HWM and there are few actors promoting alternative solutions.

3. Main agents and their characterization

The state: The state, in the person of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (VARAM), has undertaken responsibility for the introduction of environmental protection laws that are in compliance with all relevant EU requirements. The ministry works with Latvian and foreign experts in pursuit of a household waste management strategy, and it also manages all relevant investment programs. The VARAM oversees the work of six regional environmental protection structures. These, along with a series of environmental protection inspectors, engage in supervision and control functions. The state uses laws and tax relief to encourage manufacturers to collect the packaging in which their products are sold. The state plans to introduce greater centralization in tariff setting in the area of waste management, turning this function over to the newly established and unified public service regulator in the country. The state does not, however, have direct responsibility for the management of household waste. These functions have been assigned to local governments in collaboration with business. The state also does not undertake leading responsibility for the installation and management of the new regional landfills. This, too, will be a matter of co-operation for local governments. The state is, however, financing feasibility studies, technical design and environmental impact assessments when it comes to the new landfills. It is also providing partial financing of construction costs.

Local governments: The government is presently introducing strict environmental protection norms, and it is encouraging local governments to become involved in the establishment of the aforementioned regional HWM projects. The strategy has drawn both support as well as opposition from some local governments, especially small and rural ones. The opponents believe that they can continue to use their old waste sites. Many local governments doubt that they will have the money to co-finance the establishment of major landfills, nor are they certain that local population will be able to pay higher tariffs.

Local governments are of key importance in waste management in Latvia. Before adoption of national HWM strategy each of the country's 540 local governments had been working on waste collection and disposal on an individual basis. Local governments determined the location of waste sites, set tariffs, reached agreement with businesses on the management of the waste sites. Tariffs in general are low (in average some 3-5 lats per household member per year) and they considerably vary from municipality to municipality.

The establishment of regional HWM systems and construction of regional landfills demand much closer co-operation among local governments. Agreements have to be reached on a number of key issues:

- 1) Where the landfills are to be built;
- 2) How the old waste sites are to be shut down and re-cultivated – something that is important not only from the perspective of environmental protection, but also from the point of view of the economic viability of the new landfills;
- 3) How all of the relevant local governments will deliver waste to the landfill;
- 4) How the local governments are to set up a management company for the landfill, how capital shares in that company are to be divided up among the involved local governments and how the operating company will be governed and controlled;
- 5) How tariffs are to be set – unified tariffs are a key requirement if all of the residents of the relevant region are to have reason to use the landfill;
- 6) How the population will be informed and convinced to use new services.

Agreement and co-operation among local governments are a critical prerequisite for HWM policy implementation. Experience shows that local governments have problems in reaching agreement on the above issues, and conflicts are not uncommon in implementation of regional waste management projects. In Daugavpils (Dienvidlatgale regional waste project), for example, there were disputes over the distribution of capital shares in the waste management company. There were issues in Grobiņa (Liepāja regional waste project) concerning allegedly illegal proposals on the site for the new landfill. The local governments of Rēzekne and Ludza (Austrumlatgale regional waste project) have not been able to reach agreement on where the management company will be located and, by extension, in which of the two towns new jobs will be created. Disputes can arise over the benefits that will accrue from the construction of a landfill (improved roads, for example) and over the losses that will be caused (an increased flow of heavy trucks). The Kuldīga local government, for instance, has refused to join in the Liepāja regional HWM project, arguing that it would be economically unjustified for local population to transport waste for a distance of 70 kilometers. Thus improvements have to be made in municipal co-operation through wider application of democratic procedures.

The role for local governments is also to organise public consultations on the feasibility studies and on the location for the landfills. Local governments can propose sites for the landfills (the national government is not allowed to force any decision upon local governments). After several phases of feasibility studies and economic evaluation, only local governments have the right to select the final location for each landfill. Once the decision is taken, however, it becomes binding for all relevant local governments.

Population: The law provides for community surveys and public consultations when it comes to the construction of the regional landfills.

Businesses: The average resident of Latvia produces approximately one cubic meter of waste a year (the number is higher in the cities) and this volume is steadily growing with increase in consumption. Tariffs are currently set by local governments, and waste disposal costs might vary from municipality to municipality sometimes as much as five times. The calculated turnover in the waste management industry in Latvia is at a level of around Ls 10-15 million per year and this is the growing industry. Therefore businesses have their interests in regional waste projects. There are presently more than 50 companies in the waste management industry in Latvia. Five of them are large companies such as *Hoetica* in Riga and *ZAAO* in Vidzeme. Waste management companies in small towns usually belong to local governments, while in larger cities they are mostly private companies. The plan to set up large regional landfills will lead to establishment of larger enterprises (for example, such as *ZAAO*), which work with big waste sites and prompt closure of small firms, which currently operate in small

towns and work with small waste sites. Therefore there is a tension between waste companies and complicated relations between companies and local governments which sometimes play a double game with local business and inter-municipal operating company (for example relations of Cēsis municipality with city's Komauto company and ZAAO).

The Association of Waste Management Companies: Companies in the industry have set up the Association of Waste Management Companies, which currently has 35 members. The association says that only five of them, however, are truly active in the group's work. The association lobbies on behalf of the sector's interests when government decisions are taken. It has also been involved in the work of consulting groups which prepare policy proposals. The association worked with a VARAM working group that was setting out waste management tariffs, for example. The association is interested in the establishment of the large landfills, because it believes that this will improve the efficiency of companies that are in the industry. At the same time, however, one of the goals of the association is to protect the domestic market and to keep foreign companies from entering that market. Businesses in the sector informally insist that waste management is a specific business which is closely linked to local governments. There are unwritten laws among these companies about the distribution of "turf" – one company will not try to muscle in on another's territory.

The Green Point: Major packaging producers in Latvia (including such companies as the Aldaris brewery) have set up a Packaging Association which, in turn, has set up a "Green Point" organisation. Packagers undertake to retrieve at least 30% of their packaging for recycling purposes, and those that reach this goal can receive tax relief in return. In 2001, the government granted tax relief worth Ls 830,000. 60% of that money went to the Green Point project, 20% went to the development of packaging companies, and 20% of the money was used for education and training. The Association of Waste Management Companies believes that most of the packaging producers are not in fact retrieving 30% of their packaging and that the tax relief is being issued without sufficient justification. The association has also argued that the Green Point program has been doing inadequate educational work in the population. This however has changed in the very recent time – there are different informational campaigns and lotteries organised by the Green Point, for instance, collection of PET bottles.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE CASE

1. Case history

The case for in-depth investigation is the process of implementation of one of the regional HWM projects, namely – establishment and governance of "North Vidzeme Waste Management Organization" (Ziemeļvidzemes atkritumu apsaimniekošanas organizācija, ZAAO). In Northern Vidzeme 84 local governments formed a waste management organisation, which covers the territory of roughly four districts. This was a pilot project for the general policy whereby 560 waste sites were to be replaced by 10-12 regional landfills. Only four local governments do not participate in ZAAO.

ZAAO began its operations with three tasks: (1) the setting up of a new waste collection system, (2) the creation of a new landfill, (3) the closure of old waste sites. In 2000, due to changes in legislation, a new task – sorting of waste – was added.

While the Northern Vidzeme waste project may so far be regarded as successful, it also encounters its problems. One problem is that available financing is not sufficient. This is due

to the fact the amount of available waste is not always sufficient. This places strict economical limitations on waste management projects. Another problem is the insufficient capacity of regional environment administrations, which carry out supervision over waste management. While Latvia's legislation regarding waste management has been developed according to European standards, the technical and financial capacity of regional environment administrations does not catch up. Thirdly, while the awareness about the importance of waste management is growing in the population, it is still far from the desirable level. This is particularly true when the need for modern waste management results in higher tariffs that immediately raises objections among those who are economically worse-off.

In the case of Northern Vidzeme waste management, there are two episodes that deserve a special attention. This is the issue of where to build the new regional landfill that would serve the whole region. One of the sites initially identified was in Kocēnu parish near Valmiera city and near Zilaiskalns, which is a hill with quite significance in the historic tales of the region. One of possible variants was right next to the hill; the other was in four kilometers distance. However, both were rejected due to active protests from large groups of the population. As the result, the construction site was set to be in neighboring Stalbe parish (Daibe locality) where the attitude of the local population appears to have been much more welcoming. These two *sub-cases* will be elaborated in greater detail in the parts to follow.

2. Agents

Household waste case can be regarded as multi-level model of governance with division of responsibilities among EU institutions, national government, ministries, local governments (city councils, district councils, and parishes), international funding organisations, experts, enterprises and population. The interests of wide variety of agents: state institutions, local governments, businesses and the population are engaged and represented in some aspects of household waste policies.

Government: The government has commitment to implement the National Household Waste Management Strategy and to construct 12 technologically up-to-date regional landfills in Latvia.

Population: The population has had few institutional mechanisms and systematically applied procedures of expressing their interests in the field of household waste management. These have been surveys of residents regarding landfill site selection, public consultations as a part of environmental impact assessment procedure, protest activities. Population groups which are economically weak and dependent on social benefits from local municipalities may be even afraid of complaining about flaw public services and opposing opinion of municipal leaders.

Local governments: Local governments seem to be key instance in enforcing practical mechanisms of public accountability at local and regional levels through their mutual co-operation, their co-operation with business sector and community. In household waste case local governments may implement such mechanisms of accountability as mutual co-operation in planning of regional landfill, organisation of public consultations, open decision-making about the site selection and construction of landfill, setting up an inter-municipal household management company, deciding upon tariffs, and other. All these mechanisms presume intense consultations, and the weakness of accountability can be observed exactly in weakness of communication and inability to achieve mutually acceptable solutions.

Enterprises: Waste management companies act as catalysts for change in household practices and urge individual households to sort waste. For this reason ZAAO offers a separate waste collection to population and organises information campaigns. The elements of public accountability manifest in the way how ZAAO co-operates with 84 local governments that established this organisation, in the way how the organisation is governed through board meetings, and in active communication with population. ZAAO, which is in charge of household waste management in Northern Vidzeme, is making regular efforts to explain its activities for the population and local governments, which are affected. The accountability practices in Northern Vidzeme household waste management case appear to be strengthened by the business type of relations, which have developed. Namely, ZAAO's operation is basically financed by its clients – consumers of waste management services. In order to persuade people to use these services, ZAAO is making continuous efforts to achieve broad support for its activities.

NGOs: The waste case did not reveal systematic presence and impact of NGOs on policy-making. Instead, sporadic civic actions were undertaken by Vides aizsardzības klubs (Environmental Protection Club), which is a leading environmental NGO in Latvia, Latvijas dienvturu sadraudze organisation as well as spontaneous activist groups, like in the case of environmental activist protests during public consultations in Kocēni.

3. Interactions, conflicts, solutions

In the case of planned landfill in Kocēni parish, active interaction between various agents took place. The parish council members, the local population both as groups and particular individuals, several local business people, environmental and other activists from outside the parish, and the experts who developed necessary technical documentation were active participants in the resolution of this issue. The parish council did not have a unified and strong stance on the issue. While the majority of the members may have been inclined to support the construction of the landfill in their parish, they voted against it due to the population pressure.

Parts of the local population did not trust that the new landfill would not harm the environment and the prospects of business related to rural tourism. This distrust was particularly mobilized by outside environmental and other activists who launched a signature campaign against the landfill. Approximately 1000 signatures of local people (approx. 1/3 of the whole population of Kocēni parish) were collected. *“From this pressure we understood that, if almost one third of the whole population has signed the petition, we had to vote against.”* (Int. No 4)

The population attitudes towards the installation of a landfill were confused. A part of residents believed the opinion which was conveyed by some local administration representatives and business leaders that this would improve the local infrastructure and create new jobs. If property rights were affected by the installation of a landfill, the nearby land owners were interested in the state provided land compensation which is calculated on the basis of land prices in the region immediately around the city of Rīga. These can be several times higher than the land prices in Kocēni. Objections against the construction of a landfill were based on fears that the rhythm of life in the community will be disturbed or that the future rural tourism business intentions of some entrepreneurs will be under threat.

A conflict occurs also between ZAAO on the one hand and smaller waste management companies on the other hand. Given the relatively large volume of operation and support from public funds, ZAAO is by far more competitive than any of the small companies. As a representative from one such company, which operates in Cēsis, said: *“Our prospects equal zero. ZAAO is so highly subsidized that we have no way to compete.”* (Int. No. 6). It was claimed that an organization like ZAAO should have been formed by private companies rather than by local governments because, in the latter case, the private companies are discriminated against. This competition related conflict will most likely be solved simply by pushing the small companies out of the market. It is only large waste management companies that might potentially compete with ZAAO. The small company in Cēsis was able to continue operation only thanks to support from Cēsis local government that had concluded an agreement with this company.

A latent conflict is also seen between at least some of the local government and ZAAO. This conflict is chiefly about payments that the local governments must pay to ZAAO. Perceptions differ whether these local governments and their populations benefit directly from the returns of these payments. The other potential conflict exists regarding governance of ZAAO and possibilities of small municipalities to participate in this process: *“we are not satisfied how decisions are made at ZAAO board. Our objection is that operators of small waste sites have no access to decision making in the board, and that this board which is a representative body of local municipalities has decided to shut down our waste side even without consulting and informing us.”* (Int. No. 2).

Another important interaction and potential conflict is among waste management companies and local governments on the one hand and inhabitants that attempt to avoid paying for waste collection and management services. This is a particularly acute issue in rural territories where it is very easy to dump waste illegally in forests or holes in private land. This is also one reason why among rural population waste management is not an issue of high priority: *“A countryside dweller can dump waste behind his cowshed. Other problems like public transportation are much more pressing.”* (Int. No. 1) Also in towns, for example, in Cēsis, dwellers attempted to avoid paying for waste collection. Thus the owners of individual private houses have been trying to use waste containers of large residential multi-storey buildings, i.e. they employed a sort of free-riding strategy. As one interviewee stressed the importance of accountability in this case: *“Accountability is related with the necessity to impose an obligation for everyone to sign contracts for waste collection and management. Everyone has some waste!”* (Int. No 1)

Eventual conflict may arise between local governments, which are ultimately responsible to population for provision of qualitative services and ZAAO company which is responsible to the board and clients (households which have signed contracts). Hence contradiction between public and corporate accountability. Establishment of joint municipal enterprise and delegation of former municipal functions to this new business entity rises questions about proper governance and public control. Our study revealed difficulty for public authorities to influence decisions of ZAAO as new accountability actor and discrepancies between public and corporate accountability logic. Economic strive of business organisation to operate according to market logic (cost efficiency, increasing market share, profitability, improvement of technological standards etc.) might neglect certain social responsibilities which the business stakeholders (local governments) are primarily concerned about, for instance – tariffs, provision of waste collection services in remote rural settlements and other.

This raises the issue of “accountability privatisation”. The law states that if local governments delegate certain functions to other legal entities, they have to resign from provision of these functions in order to avoid duplication. Delegation of service provision functions into private hands, to NGOs or to municipal enterprises limits possibility to influence further decision making and control over quality of services. Delegation of functions in practice often means their privatisation and increased dependence on market mechanisms such as competition and market concentration.

4. Public accountability mechanisms and procedures

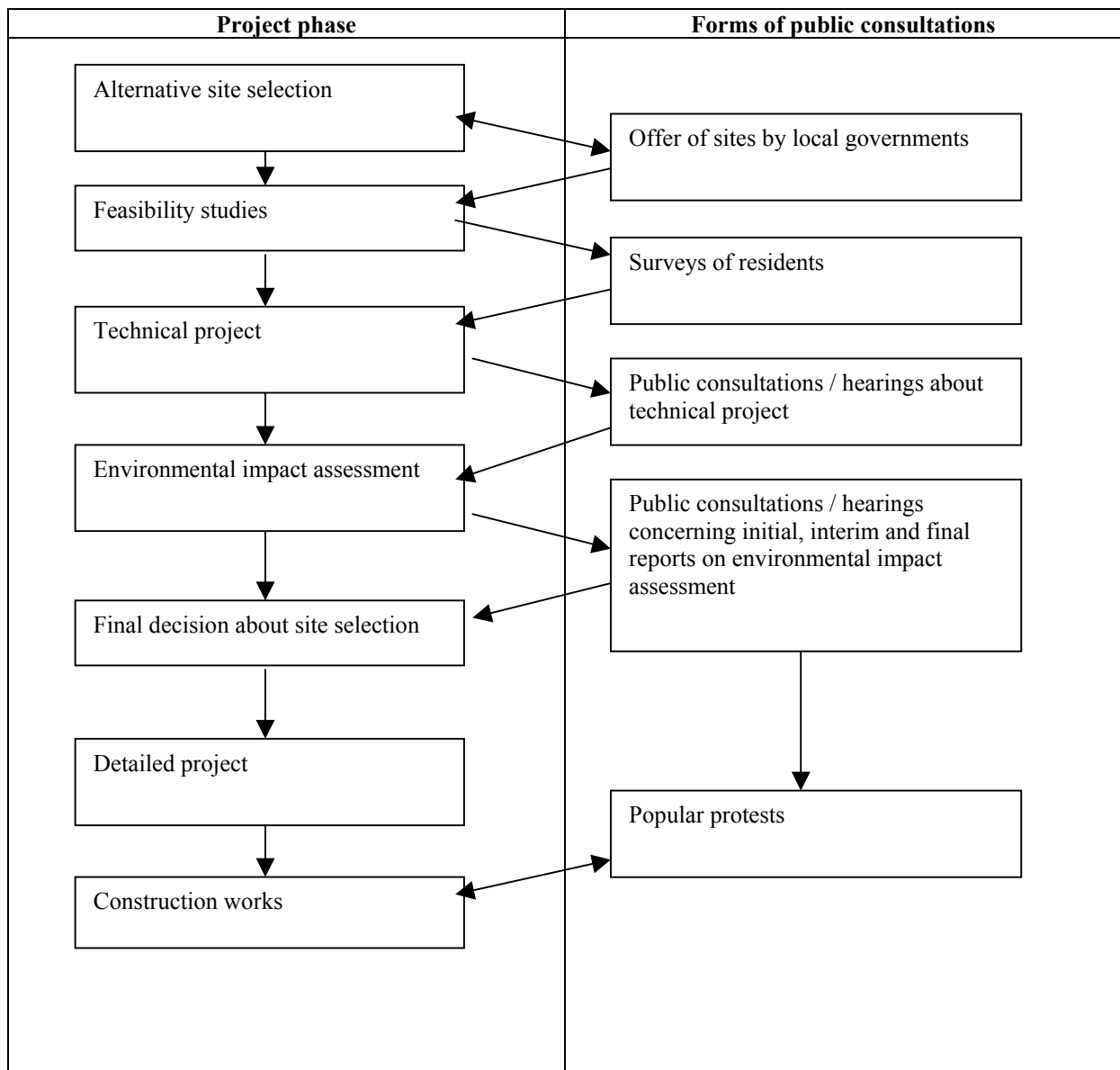
There are several important public accountability procedures and mechanisms evident in the case of household waste management which can be analysed both from the point of view of their formal prerequisites provided by law, and from the point of view of their practical implementation by the involved actors:

- Expert analysis of HWM projects;
- Public surveys on the installation of landfills;
- Public consultations/ hearings on projects and site selection;
- Co-operation among local governments in pursuit of HWM projects;
- The establishment and work of consultative committees for drafting policy proposals in this area.

Formal accountability procedures

Public consultations: The law states that public consultations should be organised concerning issues that affect the inhabitants, such as large-scale construction projects, elaboration of territorial plans, etc. In waste management public consultations are a part of environmental impact assessment procedure. Public consultations are the key instrument how population can participate in decision making regarding large HWM projects. Organisation of a series of public hearings is a component of compulsory environmental impact assessment procedures and prerequisite for the taking of decisions in this area. The process of installing regional landfills involves various technical phases – alternative site selection, feasibility studies, technical design, relevant economic evaluations, environmental impact assessments, decisions on a specific location, and then all of the necessary design and construction work. Some of these technical steps are related and dependent on outcomes of public consultation procedures (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Formal public accountability procedures in pursuit of HWM projects



The process of selecting locations for landfills in Latvia has typically involved the following procedures: First, local governments in the relevant region propose 15 or 20 potential locations. The VARAM contracts consulting companies which conduct feasibility studies at the various locations. The law mandates feasibility studies at no fewer than three alternative sites, but usually the consulting companies have surveyed between seven and 15 locations. Surveys of local population are conducted to learn about land transformation issues, attitudes toward the installation of access roads, the readiness of people to sell land for the landfill and related infrastructure, and the compensation that people wish to receive for their land. People are also asked about their thinking in relation to environmental, infrastructure and social service issues. Residents sign the surveys to confirm that the documents contain their views, demands and recommendations. All households in a radius of two to three kilometres around each potential landfill site are surveyed.

Once the feasibility study is completed, the consulting organisation prepares a full report and a summary that runs to about 20 pages in length. These are distributed to all of the local governments where the feasibility studies were run. People can access the reports at the local parish council, as well as at schools and libraries. Public hearings are organised and announced two weeks in advance. These allow local government representatives and local population to express their proposals and considerations. After these public hearings, the relevant local government decides to move forward with the project or to withdraw its proposal concerning the placement of the landfill. The decision reflects the views of local government officials and population alike.

The technical design of the landfill is the next step. Consultants look at the selected site to ascertain that it is appropriate for a landfill, and they start to develop a sense of what the project will cost. The resulting report is a voluminous document, up to 600 pages in length. It contains geographic, economic and cartographic information. The report, along with a 20-page summary, is submitted to the relevant local governments and is also available to local residents. The report is then discussed at public hearings, where consultants talk about the project and the approximate cost. If participants at the meeting – local government representatives and area residents – don't like what they hear, they can withdraw their offer of land for the landfill.

The next step is an environmental impact assessment, where at least three alternative sites are evaluated from the perspective of environmental considerations and human health. The possible effect of the landfill on plant and animal life, drinking water quality, the local landscape, etc., is evaluated. The research is done on the basis of a unified methodology, and the process is supervised by the Environmental Impact Assessment Bureau. During the course of the process there are several public hearings – at least three in most cases. At the first hearing, the consulting firm talks about the technical design and the goals of the environmental impact assessment. Transcripts of everything that is said at the meetings are produced, and it is the duty of the consultants to study all of the questions and proposals that are presented in great detail, then issuing conclusions about these statements.

Next, the experts prepare an environmental impact assessment report in four month's time. This, too, is submitted to the relevant local government and to all neighbouring local governments. Another public hearing is organised, and at it, the consultants report their preliminary conclusions. Officials from the Environmental Impact Assessment Bureau are always on hand, and the meetings are recorded on audio and video. If people make fundamental objections, the consultants must adjust any instances of imprecision that are contained in their reports, and if residents make additional demands, then additional research must be done.

Once the additional research is conducted, a final report is prepared. It must contain written responses to all proposals that have been made by local residents. A public hearing is organised to discuss the final report. Afterward, residents have 30 days in which to submit written proposals to the Environmental Impact Assessment Bureau.

Once the research and public hearings have been completed with respect to at least three alternative sites, the Environmental Impact Assessment Bureau selects the place where the landfill is to be installed. At this point the direct involvement of the public comes to an end. It is at this stage that public protests often erupt, and this can be true for various reasons. Sometimes people find out that they will suffer losses as a result of the project, and they

launch a protest. Perhaps these are land owners who have not been able to sell their land for the project. Some people have missed the public hearings and feel that they have not been taken into account. They, too, protest. A special group of protesters involves pensioners who do not want any economic changes or alterations to their ordinary way of life. Another group of people understand that major investments will be made, but they are bitter because no personal benefits will accrue to them, so they protest. The consultants have said that this is a very varied group in terms of the kinds of people who are involved. Academic experts also protest at times. A key role in motivating people to protest is played by rumours. Protests are also made by people who find no other way to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the relevant local government and the politicians who are involved.

Practical implementation of accountability procedures

Public consultations: In waste management case public consultations (hearings) regarding landfill site selection, technical project evaluation and environmental impact assessment are the main mechanisms how population can express their attitudes, interests, concerns and proposals. In Northern Vidzeme region a number of public consultations were held regarding the issue where to build a new landfill. Although these consultations were taken into account by local governments in their decisions (Stalbe municipality permitted construction of landfill in its territory whereas Kocēni municipality refused) the level of participation and interest in public consultations were generally low and participants lacked skills of argumentation. Some hearings were manipulated by outside activists.

The population survey of 1000 respondents carried out in October 2002 showed that 8% of respondents have taken part in some form of public consultation or have otherwise expressed their opinion about the issues of household waste management. From those who have expressed their opinion 29% have participated in meetings, 27% have signed petitions and complaints, and 10% have filled out questionnaires. Few respondents indicated that they were involved in politics on a more regular base, e.g. participate in NGOs.

86% of survey participants agreed with statement that greater public participation should be ensured in transport, household waste and GMO policies. Questioned about the most efficient forms how population could express their opinions and engage in tackling the above problems, the preferred forms of participation were: protest forms - signing petitions, participating in meetings, pickets and demonstrations (59%), meetings with local government officials (40%), participation in public discussions (33%), meetings with representatives of state institutions (31%), participation in NGOs, addressing NGOs (27%), writing letters to newspapers (26%), writing letters to politicians and civil servants (15% of respondents).

Structural factors – such as the economic situation of a particular locality, the socio-economic situation of various groups of population, the geographic disparities, etc. – largely determine participation. While public accountability mechanisms in principle provide certain access to virtually all groups of population, in reality those actors and groups, which control larger resources such as finances and/or knowledge, are advantaged compared to worse-off groups. Particularly in the rural areas covered by the fieldwork, large segments of the population have extremely vague understanding about the functions and powers of public institutions and the forms how citizens can influence decision-making. The worse-off groups, due to their dependency on various types of public support, may even become suppressed by the public authorities.

Participation may be influenced by the way, how people perceive division of responsibility in policy sectors, in other words – whom they claim to be most and least responsible for formulating and implementing of policies. According to survey data in household waste management area people mainly hold local governments and citizens themselves responsible for right decisions, and to a lesser degree they claim responsibility from national government, enterprises and experts.

Institutionalised mechanisms of accountability: The establishment, exploitation and closure of landfills is subject to a number of legally established public accountability requirements. Thus, if the construction of a landfill is financed from the state, local governments or international financial institutions, the owner or manager of the landfill must produce a technical-economical justification paper (*tehniski ekonomiskais pamatojums*), which includes among other things: the description of the territory in question, the socio-economic characteristic of this territory including the purchasing power of the local population, information extended to the population about the system of waste management, information about public hearings about the potential site of the landfill.¹ When a new landfill is to be established, it is the local governments that make decisions on this matter while the Ministry for Environment and Regional Development co-ordinates the setting up of such landfills.²

Corporate accountability: The activity of ZAAO is subject to a number of public accountability mechanisms. First, ZAAO holds common meetings where all 81 local governments participate. The common meeting is the highest decision-making body in the organisation. All of these local governments have a certain number of votes in the meetings. The exact number of votes is subject to the population size of each local government. Another, public accountability mechanism is the visits of ZAAO managers to the local governments in order to promote particular new approaches or actions. *“Joint meetings per se are not sufficient. To achieve decisions, we go to them and ask for the floor. Work with local governments is very important. It’s one thing to persuade the chair of a local council but one also has to persuade deputies.”* (Int. No. 3) The managers of ZAAO also participate in the meetings of district councils.

Thus one may summarise that ZAAO works in close co-operation with the local governments that established this organisation. At least on the face of it, this is a clear example of functioning public accountability. Since local governments, almost by definition, are publicly accountable bodies, one can identify a public accountability chain where ZAAO is accountable vis-à-vis local governments that are, in turn, accountable to their populations.

Moreover ZAAO is active in communicating with population directly: *“Nothing would happen unless a great part of money was spent to education. Everything must be channelled to the population. One has to emphasise what the benefit will be for the population.”* (Int. No. 3) In other words, ZAAO prioritises public relations work, which in this case fulfils an important public accountability function. Since the work of ZAAO is largely steered by constitutive local governments, the supportiveness of local population is a key to the further development of its activities.

¹ “Rules on requirements for the establishment of waste landfills as well as for the management, closure and recultivation of landfills and dumping sites. (Noteikumi par prasībām atkritumu poligonu ierīkošanai, kā arī atkritumu poligonu un izgāztuvju apsaimniekošanai, slēgšanai un rekultivācijai). Cabinet of Ministers rules No. 15, adopted on 03.01.2002.

² Law “On waste management” (Likums "Par atkritumu apsaimniekošanu"). Articles 8 and 9.

Apart from ZAAO's accountability procedures and practices, there are also certain legal requirements with regard to public accountability. Thus all infrastructure projects are to be discussed in public hearings. In this case, public accountability procedures are a part of the general national policy and are not dependent only on the preferences and chosen practices of one semi-public organisation.

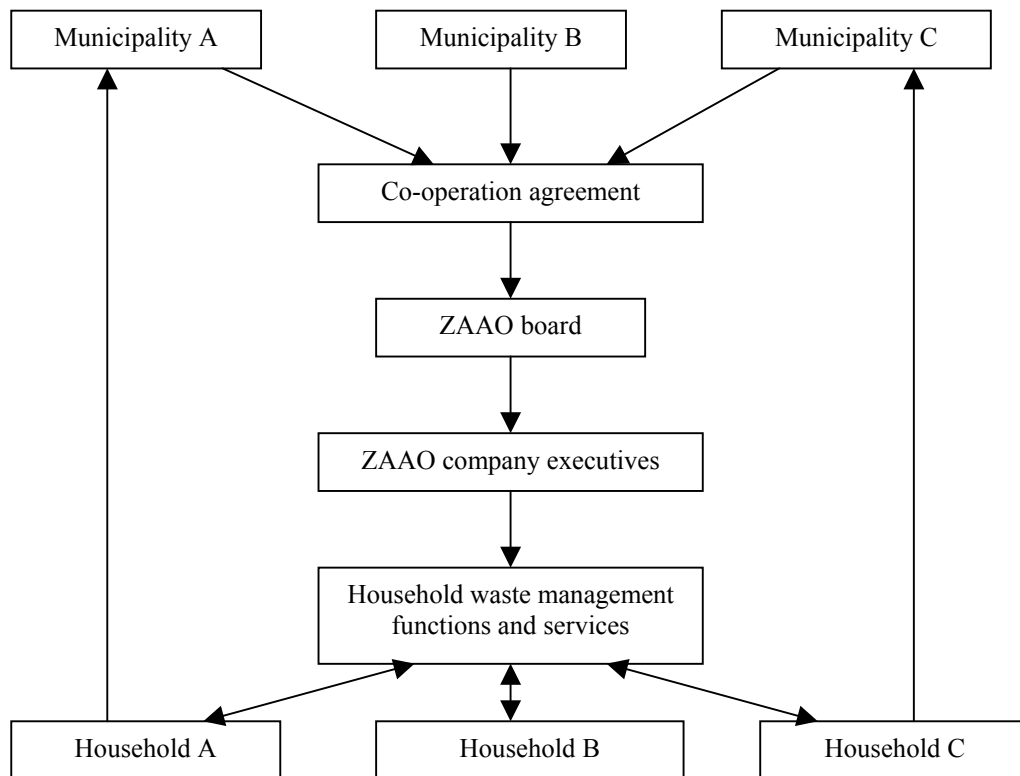
Co-operation of local governments: Co-operation of local governments facilitates accountability. Recently many municipalities have joined in so called co-operation unions through which they jointly implement functions of local governance, such as road maintenance, household waste management, parish courts, cultural activities and other. In Latvia the law obliges local governments to implement more than 35 different functions whereas in reality, as shown by some studies, local governance are able to fulfil only 25 to 30 functions. This has urged local governance to co-operate and to establish common institutions to provide fulfilment of certain functions and services to population, and regional waste management project might be looked upon also as result of municipal co-operation. Accountability in co-operation unions is fostered by increased mutual control and responsibility over service provision, common procedures of decision making, ability to mobilise larger technological and financial resources, social consultations with wider groups of population. Through participating in regional waste project municipalities gain access to higher quality services, delegate functions to a company, and in the meantime retain certain control over quality of these services through such mechanisms as:

- municipal shares in ZAAO,
- municipal contracts with the company,
- participation in ZAAO board,
- public complaints and proposals.

Process of municipality co-operation and joined governance is usually slow, time and skill demanding. It also requires good co-ordination between local governance. If there is no regular communication and deliberation of issues, municipal control over operating company is weakened.

Public governance of public service organisation (ZAAO): Co-operation agreement between 84 municipalities in Vidzeme has been the lurching mechanism to recognise public governance of waist management company ZAAO. Each municipality participating in the project possesses stakeholder shares and one vote in an assembly of municipal representatives which elects the governing board of ZAAO. The structure of governance of ZAAO is given in figure 3.

Figure 3. Governing structure of ZAAO



In practice local governments have limited possibility to influence ZAAO decisions. The board election procedure and promotion of candidates was reported to be non-transparent, some municipality majors were said not being informed about elections and could not influence this process. Several representatives of local governments also reported that board meetings were irregular and ZAAO executives dominated board decisions. This points at real difficulties to achieve satisfactory public control over service provider and hints at deficiency in information exchange and co-operation between public authorities as potential cause. Complicated governing structure of ZAAO potentially also hardens enforcement of efficient representation of public interest in ZAAO decisions.

Problems in public accountability

There seems to be little disagreement about the general policy with regard to household management policy in Northern Vidzeme. However, disagreements do occur when the policy adversely affects the interests of certain agents. These agents then tend to blame the lack or insufficiency of public accountability mechanisms.

One parish council chair complained that no one even cared to inform him that a landfill in his parish would no longer be allowed to accept waste starting with the next year. He also did not understand why he was not on the board of ZAAO while the members of the district council were. Namely, it is his parish where a landfill is situated and therefore he should be on the board. He had a feeling that he was pushed away from decision making because others had their private business interests at stake. Thus he indirectly referred to the lack of public accountability in the tackling of particular issues. There are also some claims that the bargaining power of ZAAO vis-à-vis local governments is so great that the latter are not in a position sufficiently defend their interests: *“Now it is the director of ZAAO who makes*

decisions and then brainwashes the leaders of local governments. [...] All problems of ZAAO will anyway be solved. Too much money has been invested there.” (Int. No 6)

Lack of trust and passiveness of certain agents appeared to be major flaws in the functioning of public accountability in Kocēni parish. In this case, there was highly mobilized population and active outside groups, indecisive local government and, to a degree, indifferent national government, as the latter did not have any particular interest in the choice of a particular construction site.

Effective public accountability appears to be limited due to the fact that in most cases the population is not highly concerned about waste management issues – Kocēni case appears to be rather an exception: *“The popular wish to express opinion is truly minimal. Kocēni was an exception.”* (Int. No 5)

The local media in Northern Vidzeme does cover waste management issues in their localities. However, the papers often lack own competence in the issue and they have to rely uncritically on the information provided by waste management companies. At times such information is published as paid open or hidden advertising: *“Newspapers inform regularly about the development of ZAAO project. ZAAO pays newspapers so that the latter provide information. the papers do not have people who can write about these things in a qualified manner. So they are happy when somebody writes anything for them.”* (Int. No 6) The representative of the small Cēsis company was even somewhat bitter that paid material from his company was published as an advert while paid information from ZAAO was allegedly published as editorial material. Thus one may cautiously conclude that, in the context of public accountability, the role of local media for public accountability has been rather limited.

The representative of the smaller waste management company also indicated that ZAAO in its current form received a highly favorable status due to the fact that local government leaders – founders of ZAAO – belonged to a particular ruling party that ensured also a favorable attitude from the national government: *“It was important that the people of [X] party pushed ahead ZAAO.”* (Int. No 6) While this claim cannot be taken for granted, the bargaining power of some local government leaders vis-à-vis the national government might well have been determined by their party affiliation. This is a problematic aspect from the public accountability point of view because, in this case, some government officials would tend to be more responsive – and consequently – more accountable to those local governments where their party comrades are in office while being somewhat discriminating against other local governments.

According to law three different sites for landfill construction should be evaluated in public discussions. Often communities are in similar economic situation and competing for or against the same decisions using economic, social and environmental arguments. The potential gains and losses are on the weights. Participants of public hearings do not have sufficient information and competence to formulate their opinion. Although technical studies and environmental impact assessment reports are made available to public, they are written in “expert language” and it might be difficult for population to translate expert assessments into costs and benefits that landfill construction would bring to everyday life of people. The striking thing is that by large the same social, economic and environmental situation in which decisions are to be made might lead to a fully opposite decisions, like it was in Kocēni and Stalbe – one community decided prohibit the construction of landfill whereas the other voted positively. Several controversies of accountability can be found behind this paradox.

- 1) In one situation rational choice driven decisions might take over, particularly if involved parties put forward economic benefits (new jobs, improved road infrastructure, tax revenues. etc) that landfill operation would bring to the community, and if parties can achieve common decision. Environmental worries are counter-argued by technological perfection of new landfill. Local society is mobilized with slogan “if not us, then who?” That was the situation in Stalbe.
- 2) In another situation manipulation can win public consultations and influence decision. In Kocēni green activists, some of them were even not community residents, mobilised local public opinion against construction works. This campaign blocked other arguments and groups of population to express their opinions. The local government officials took passive role and there were some hidden of local business leaders to block discussions.

These two situations characterise that public accountability procedures can be applied in a narrow and limited way and become dominated by few actors and their interests.

5. Outcomes

The household waste management policy in Northern Vidzeme has been highly successful in terms of legal and technological development. ZAAO has a clear mission, which is to provide all necessary services that are needed for the management of waste. Virtually the whole population of the region has access to quality service for waste collection. On the downside, the fact that the household waste management system is to be equipped according to standards developed by economically highly developed countries, i.e. current EU member states may mean that the costs of the system will be disproportionately high for Latvia with its considerably lower level of economic development and many competing needs. This concern is at least partly outweighed by the generous EU co-funding. In terms of public accountability, however, the European regulation is largely beyond any influence that local or even nation agents might exert save for the government’s ability to negotiate for exceptions and transition periods during accession negotiations. Meantime virtually none of the interviewed persons doubted the overall usefulness of the application of EU standards to, for example, landfills in Latvia; differences in opinions appeared only where the issues of tactics and timing were concerned.

On the business side, there is an overwhelming concentration of virtually whole market in the hands of a single organization. While so far this has facilitated rapid technological and service development, in the long run this *de facto* monopoly may create certain tensions, which would be the case if the costs of the service would further raise while the quality of service remained roughly the same.

It also appears that the technological and organizational development has proceeded ahead of public awareness on the environmental and practical importance of a sound waste management system. This results in attempts by certain segments of population to avoid subscription to waste management services – they choose unauthorized dumping instead. One may interpret this as a lack of accountability on the side of these people.

Kocēni parish that refused to construct a landfill on its territory appears to have lost considerable economic and infrastructure gains by refusing the construction of the landfill. The principal losses include tax revenue that would be received if the landfill were built and underdeveloped road infrastructure that would have been improved for the needs of the landfill.

In the household waste case the various mobilised groups actually prevented the construction of the landfill in Koceni. Instead, another location – Daibe in Stalbe parish was chosen, where there were fewer objections from local residents and municipalities could reach agreement. It was paradoxical that in Daibe with roughly the same geographical, economic and social conditions and anticipated environmental impact as in Kocēni there was no popular crisis whereas in Kocēni high mobilisation and protests burst out. This happened due to certain manipulation of local public opinion by green activists who themselves were not local residents. Public consultation process became dominated by a group of protesters whereas majority of local population felt obscured and misinformed about the new landfill. Variety of interests, arguments and worries could not be expressed and discussed in full at hearingd which were dominated by radical activists. This increased popular pressure in Kocēni and lead to refusal of construction works in that municipality. In another community Daibe the site was less suitable from economic point of view and environmental conditions were about the same but there were no mobilisation and protests against construction works. At public consultations population was more interested about new jobs and other economic benefits that landfill operation would bring into community. Thus this case inhibits the contradiction between processes and outcomes of public accountability – the same procedures might lead to opposite, often unpredictable results. The case also illuminates contradictions between accountability procedures themselves – discrepancies between short-term protest and regular “skilful” forms of participation. Later the negative decision was regretted by many local actors in Kocēni.

In the case of finding a construction site for a landfill, the policy process had a built-in procedure (environmental impact assessment procedure and public hearings as part of it), that allowed for possible changes in preliminary decisions. However, the case revealed difficulties and controversies in these procedures related to how public consultations are organised and managed. Usually Environmental Impact Assessment Bureau hires consultants who prepare environmental impact study and distribute materials for discussion. Consultants work closely together with landfill construction company and both actors look at site selection procedure from the project promotion perspective. They formulate argumentation for and against and actually are those who shape discussion agenda. Local public opinion is dependent on expert knowledge. On the other hand, expert statements, although available at municipality offices and public libraries, are not properly studied by residents. They might overlook interests of certain groups of population or be indifferent to endogenous knowledge of place. This increases probability that rumours, particular interests and views, endogenous knowledge, presuppositions will influence public discussion more than rational expert argumentation. Local governments are responsible for practical arrangement of consultations and involvement of population in discussions. On the other hand local governments are those who make decision regarding site selection and they have to consider all costs and benefits involved. Population usually have little skills to participate in public debates.

In Latvia the whole household waste management project is split in two streams – technical/organisational stream which involves rather intense co-operation between local governments to adopt acceptable technical solutions and organisational forms for standardised waste management in the whole region. The other stream is public legitimisation of the project with the main mechanism of public consultations and hearings. This is the most blurred form of public accountability with hardly predictable functional outcomes. On one way citizen participation makes peoples worries, objections, interests and arguments explicit, bringing them to local public arena. On another way, the actual deliberation process is short,

and participants at public hearings often lack knowledge of the matter and skills to argue. Therefore it is possible for particular individuals or groups to manipulate consultations and achieve selfish and from a wider public perspective non-accountable goals. It is also possible to influence local opinion leaders, deputies and officials in a hidden way. For example it was reported that some businessperson operating in rural tourism persuaded deputies to vote against because he was afraid of impact of landfill on tourist flows. In another case it was reported that local deputy bought land around the site with purpose to sell it to landfill company later and he persuaded other deputies to vote for construction

Thus every agent is characterised by particular stock of interests, knowledge and skills of participation in democratic procedure, which itself becomes an arena of contest. The way how it influences political decisions depend on which interests take over and which groups have more skills to use these procedures. Practical implementation of public hearings may lead to advert results and two situations in Kocēni and Daibe are proof of that. This epitomises to the in-built contradiction in the very procedures of public accountability between mobilisation and participation, autonomy and dependency, radical and gradual ways of participation.

III. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Various agents are involved in household waste management – the state, local governments, businesses, population, environmental protection institutions, experts, etc. Successful policies in this area require technologies, as well as harmonized policies and activities on the part of the various agents.

The current emphasis in the area of waste management policies is being placed on the introduction of EU laws and environmental protection standards in Latvia, as well as on the installation of regional landfills at the cost of closing down smaller waste disposal sites. This means that the technological modernization of waste management and the shaping of policies in this area are processes that start at the “end” – the establishment of landfills through efforts to harmonize the activities of the various agents and the technological requirements that are associated with the process.

The state has created norms to regulate waste management, and it has a strategy for household waste management. Major investments are being made, and financial stimuli are available for companies in the sector. There are, however, certain problems in terms of the state’s “macro policy” activities not being in line with the level of information, interest and readiness to participate in modern waste management procedures that exists among local population.

Local government and private companies are becoming involved in waste collection, sorting and recycling for economic reasons. It’s expected that these activities may, in the future, encourage people to start sorting waste in their homes.

As government policy in this area changes, local governments are becoming increasingly important actors in the area of household waste management. In the next few years they will have to shut down small waste disposal facilities and become involved in major joint projects. That will require local governments to change their activities and policies in a very significant way, and it will also force local governments to work together much more intensively.

The participation of population in these landfill projects can be viewed in two different ways. People take part in public hearings before a decision is taken to install a landfill, and they

protest after the decision is taken. These are very different forms of participation, and they involve different strategies and participants.

Functional role of accountability

Communicative: Public accountability activities fulfil a number of functions that foster effective and accountable problem solving. One such function is communicative. Public accountability provisions allow local governments and ZAAO to learn what the population expects from those who provide household waste management services. *Crisis prevention:* In the case of Northern Vidzeme public accountability procedures seem to be fulfilling the function of a safety valve or crisis prevention. They provide mechanisms that could be used as remedies if, for example, a certain infrastructure project appears socially or environmentally particularly damaging or if, for example, a public waste management organization would reveal a serious financial misconduct. *Legitimising:* Moreover public accountability procedures fulfil a legitimising function. The very existence of public accountability procedures allows, for example, ZAAO to claim that their activities are aimed at the benefit of the whole region and its population. The same is true for local governments whose procedures and practices of responsiveness to the needs of their population allow them to claim legitimacy for their action in the field of waste management.

The waste case demonstrates yet another aspect of public accountability – public acceptability and sustainability of strategic political choices. Currently the waste management strategy in Latvia is oriented towards building large regional landfills with some elements of public information, environment education and changing household practices of handling waste. It seems that priority was given to short and medium term technical solutions like building regional landfills, rather than towards recycling the waste.

The Latvian waste case demonstrates contradictions between procedural and outcome accountability. The procedures might be elaborated and complicated whereas outcomes could be negligent side effects to mainstream decisions. We can also speak about direct and indirect outcomes, the last being increased confidence of citizens about means and ways of their participation in political process and empowerment.

Both processes and outcomes are important in public accountability. Processes should increase participation, transparency, legitimacy of the whole of policy making process, ultimately – citizen trust in politics, diminish alienation between citizens and politicians and alienation in social sphere in general. Outcomes of public accountability should improve the quality of any stage of public policy process – setting priorities and objectives, assessing alternatives, making decisions, implementing policies. The ultimate goals of public accountability should be: socially, economically, technologically and environmentally acceptable solutions; efficiency (cost efficiency, time efficiency, reduction of negative consequences, etc); competence embodied in political decisions and technical solutions based on knowledge (often expert knowledge) and evaluation and choice between alternatives; empowerment as efficient ways citizen participation and influence in decision making.

The Kocēni situation showed that public accountability procedures alone do not guarantee the adoption of economically and socially sound decisions. Kocēni saw a high level of participation and sufficient access to information. However, the situation was influenced by public distrust in information provided by the national government and experts. Distrust in fact undermined public accountability because many people did not rely on information that they received even if it was accurate or objectively reliable. If public accountability is to

improve the quality of decisions, involved agents should attempt to promote the atmosphere of trust among them.

Public accountability procedures partly indicate who are legitimate agents to participate in the preparation and adoption of decisions and who are legitimate agents to actually influence decisions. Thus the people and groups who have interests in keeping small dumping sites and running small waste management companies are effectively excluded from real influence on decision-making. This is largely determined by the logic of the broader policy that does not foresee prospects for small dumping sites and – in the case of Northern Vidzeme – for small waste management companies.

Household waste management is a policy where there are virtually all possible levels of policy involved. One can identify at least four levels here – the European level where principal technical requirements for waste management are set, the national level where the formulation and coordination of a national policy takes place, the regional level where waste management projects are being developed, and the local level where the clients of waste management live and where some small organizations and companies operate. Public accountability procedures among these levels generally function as a link. The case of Northern Vidzeme waste management system illustrated that this link does not always function perfectly. Unless there is a crisis situation, the leaders of a parish may at times have no say with regard to ministerial decision even if those touch upon important interests of the parish in question. Similarly the leadership of a parish may not have any significant say with regard to certain moves carried out by ZAAO. This situation may well be due to the considerations of effectiveness since the empowerment of too many agents with conflicting interests may lead to a stalemate. A major challenge here is finding the right balance between the considerations of effectiveness and public accountability, which may prevent major policy failures. Moreover policy making levels happen to be so distant – say the European and local levels – that virtually no practical interaction may take place between the two.

The sheer bargaining power of certain agents may well limit the importance of public accountability procedures. Thus ZAAO, which has already received large public investments, may use these investments as an argument for further investments and co-operation. ‘Invest more or the previous investments will be wasted’ – might be the argument. In this case it might be of secondary relevance that local governments are actually the ‘share-holders’ of ZAAO.

In short – in the field of household waste management, practical solutions are determined by technology and EU legislation. The adoption of principal decisions takes place at institutions nearly inaccessible for population (such as European institutions, central Latvian authorities). The functional role of public accountability is to legitimatise technological and political decisions and to adjust them to the local situation. The general level of local popular participation in this field is low save for a few exceptional cases. Some public officials who are in charge of policy making in this field tend to view their accountability in terms of the long-term results of the waste management policy. Namely, for as long as they expect these results to be socially good, accountability needs are viewed as satisfied.

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List of interviews

- Interview No. 1: Member of Cēsis city council
- Interview No. 2: Amata parish (novads) council chair
- Interview No. 3: ZAAO, director
- Interview No. 4: Kocēni parish council chair
- Interview No. 5: Official from the Ministry for Environment and Regional Development, Department of Investments
- Interview No. 6: Representative of a small waste management company
- Interview No. 7: Sociologist and consultant
- Interview No. 8: Representative of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development
- Interview No. 9: Chairmen of the Latvian Association of Waste Management Companies
- Interview No. 10: Environmental scientist and consultant
- Interview No. 11: Vice-director of Environmental Impact Assessment Bureau