

Lasha Gogidze



**PECULIARITIES OF OPEN
GOVERNANCE PRACTICES AT THE
LOCAL LEVEL IN GEORGIA**

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To Mom

Abstract

Peculiarities of Open Governance Practices at the Local Level in Georgia

Open governance offers an alternative to the traditionally vertical interaction between the state and society (governor and governed). It conceives of the state and society as equal partners that interact horizontally to co-create public policies. It is also linked to *bottom-up* decision-making in public policy processes, stemming from community-based initiatives. This is vital for strengthening democracy worldwide and for building trust between the representatives of the state and the society.

The implementation of open governance model is of particular importance at the local self-government level, where local government is the primary, direct and regular point of contact for citizens with the state, is directly responsible for addressing the day-to-day needs of citizens, and has more opportunities to implement a variety of participatory mechanisms.

However, the implementation of such a model in practice is particularly difficult in post-communist countries, where command-based *top-down* decision-making dominated the governing systems and civic culture of those countries for years. Therefore, they still find it difficult to move to a *bottom-up* decision-making and to fully implement decentralization and open governance reforms. In the present study, these difficulties are discussed on the example of Georgia. Based on the research findings, a new model of multilevel, multisectoral collaboration has been developed, the introduction of which will be useful for other transitional democracies besides Georgia.

The introduction discusses the relevance, novelty, goals, methodology and theoretical-practical significance of the research. Key research topics are also set out.

The literature review presents all the basic theories, concepts, principles and models of democracy, open governance and local self-governance on which this study is based. It also analyzes shortcomings of the existing theoretical framework and presents how this study complements those shortcomings.

The first chapter *Open Governance and Decentralization - Context of Georgia* analyzes basic principles of open governance and decentralization as well as the political and legal context of Georgia in terms of the implementation of those principles.

The second chapter *Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities for Open Governance at the Local Level in Georgia - Analysis of Seven Municipalities* discusses the social situation and open governance practices in the municipalities of Tbilisi, Gori, Telavi and Marneuli in eastern Georgia and Batumi, Zugdidi and Ozurgeti in western Georgia. Along with quantitative, statistical data, this chapter also analyzes the unique qualitative information provided to the author by the leadership of the respective municipalities, representatives of opposition parties and civil society organizations.

The third chapter *Prospects for the Implementation of Open Governance and Decentralization Reforms in Georgia* analyzes the unique information provided in the previous chapter in a broader context. It forms a complete picture of general problems of municipalities, multisectoral and inter-municipal collaboration and public participation practices. In this context, the chapter also analyzes the role of the central government and the opportunities at its disposal for the full implementation of open governance and decentralization reforms.

Based on the theories and concepts included in the literature review, **the fourth chapter** *New Model of Multisectoral Collaboration and its Importance for the Development of Multilevel Open Governance*, presents a new model to support the full implementation of open governance and decentralization reforms in Georgia and to increase the influence of society in public policy-making. The chapter also provides a plan on

how to test this model in practice and the complex institutional, legal and practical reforms that need to be implemented for this purpose.

The conclusion summarizes the theoretical and empirical research conducted in the study, presents the main results obtained, and develops a new model of public administration and governance.

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List of Abbreviations

AMAG - Active Citizens' Local Unions

ENPARD - European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development

EUMM Georgia - European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia

GALAG - Georgian Association of Local Action Groups

GIZ - German Society for International Cooperation

LAG - Local Action Group

MSDA - Municipal Services Development Agency

NALAG - National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia

NDI - National Democratic Institute

NNLE - Non-entrepreneurial Non-commercial Legal Entity

OGP - Open Government Partnership

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

Introduction

“The strongest foundation for human progress lies in open economies, open societies, and open governments.”¹

Barack Obama

Open governance became especially relevant in the early 2000s, when information and technological advances increased the opportunities for the state to provide more information to the public and to more easily involve it in decision-making processes. It should be noted that this topic is relatively new and it is developing dynamically. Consequently many of its aspects are still unexplored.

Open governance offers an alternative to the traditionally vertical interaction between the state and society (governor and governed). It conceives of the state and society as equal partners that interact horizontally to co-create public policies. The public has the right to become acquainted with state policy documents and decision-making processes in order to carry out effective monitoring of public policy-making. For its part, the state is obliged to communicate its policy openly and sincerely to the public in order to empower members of the society and at the same time gain their trust. In this regard, the use of tools such as new technologies and innovations is very useful because they help people to access information more easily and participate more actively in decision-making processes. On the other hand, the knowledge, ideas and independent observation skills of civil society can be very useful for the state and help it to develop a policy tailored to the needs of the society, which will be equipped with social monitoring and evaluation tools. This in turn improves the state’s standards of integrity and transparency and helps the public make informed choices [1].

Open governance initiatives first came from the United States (US). It was US President Obama and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff who

1 The White House Office of the Press Secretary, *Remarks by the President to the United Nations General Assembly*, September 23, 2010, <https://bit.ly/3sl0Gmj>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

launched the global platform of Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011, which now unites 78 countries and 76 local jurisdictions.² Georgia joined this platform from the very beginning and is still a member of it. The main goal of the OGP is to make states more accountable to the public by increasing transparency, strengthening public capacity, fighting corruption, and using new technologies for democratic governance reform. In this regard, OGP member states should make specific commitments and include those in the two-year action plan. Most importantly, the state and civil society must work out these commitments together. This is the essence of the most salient principle of *co-creation* of the OGP [2].

The introduction of the concept of open governance is of particular importance at the local self-government level, where municipal government is the primary, direct and regular source of contact for public with the state, is directly responsible for addressing the day-to-day needs of citizens and has more opportunities to implement diverse participation mechanisms. This is directly related to decentralization, which involves the substantial transfer of powers from the central government to the local government, bringing the decision-making process closer to the citizens, equipping citizens with broader rights and articulating their needs.

However, the implementation of the concepts of open governance and decentralization in practice is particularly difficult in transitional democracies that were previously part of a centralized superpower like the Soviet Union with its large bureaucratic structures. These countries were greatly influenced by the Soviet legacy, namely rigged elections, one-party domination, *top-down* governance, secrecy of public information, and suppressed civic activism. Over the years, the model of command-based governance has been so entrenched in the governing systems and civic culture of the member countries of the Soviet Union that they now find it difficult to move to new models of open governance and decentralization, which are linked to *bottom-up* governance.

² OGP member countries and municipalities, <https://bit.ly/3f3HzZy>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

Georgia is one of those post-Soviet countries that is in the process of democratic transition and faces a number of challenges with many achievements in introducing the principles of open governance and decentralization. Analyzing these challenges and finding ways to solve them is a **relevant** task not only for Georgia, but for all countries of transitional democracies.

The **novelty** of this research is that the peculiarities of open governance practices in seven different municipalities of Georgia are comprehensively studied and based on unique information a new model of multilevel, multisectoral collaboration is developed for better implementation of the principles of open governance and decentralization. This model should help increase public participation in policy-making and accountability of state institutions to the public.

The **aim** of the research is to identify the main challenges related to the implementation of open governance in different municipalities of Georgia and to develop the theory of social change and the ways for its implementation in practice in order to address those challenges.

Research Subject - Implementation of open governance model at the local self-government level in Georgia.

Research Object - Opportunities for full implementation of open governance and decentralization reforms in Georgia.

Research Methodology. This study is mainly based on qualitative research, because this method can well explain the social behavior, interactions, perceptions and experiences between different subjects and objects. The author conducted a sociological survey with representatives of state bodies and civil society at the central, regional and local levels, as well as experts in the field, using in-depth face-to-face interviews. Structured interviews were conducted with the help of a special questionnaire that included open-ended questions (see Annex I). A total of 52 interviews were conducted (see Annex II).

In addition to in-depth interviews, the author also conducted a desk research based on the analysis of academic literature, statistical data, indices, legislation, policy documents and monitoring reports related to

the subject of the research. This included a study of scholarly works, Georgian legislation, data from the National Statistics Office, local government reports, academic and civil society research reports, and the experience of foreign countries.

Research Implementation Period - September 2019 - August 2021.

Research Limitations. In addition to in-depth interviews with relevant actors and desk research, the author of the study also planned to conduct quantitative surveys and focus groups with the population of the target municipalities. However, restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic prevented the implementation of this plan. Accordingly, information on the perceptions of the population was supplemented by surveys conducted by other organizations and by the feedback provided by the respondents of this study.

Key research questions:

- Why is open governance important and how does it relate to democracy and economic development?
- What are the peculiarities of implementing an open governance model at the local self-government level?
- What problems is the local population most concerned with in the municipalities?
- How do local government, civil society and business work together on addressing these problems?
- What is inter-municipal cooperation like?
- How do the mechanisms of open governance and public participation work in the municipalities?
- How to bring about social change? How to change the nihilistic attitudes in the society, which are related to its active participation in public policy-making, and on the other hand, how to show the state institutions the benefits of regular communication and collaboration with the society?
- What will be the incentive for local government and civil and business sector representatives to work together to address the problems facing the municipality? How can the resources of all three sectors

- be used wisely so that all of them and the general public can benefit?
- What mechanism should be used to exchange knowledge, experience and best practices between municipalities inside and outside Georgia?
 - What legal, institutional and practical reforms are needed to fully implement the concepts of open governance and decentralization?

From a theoretical point of view – this study outlines various theories, concepts and principles of human, group behavior and social change, which can be used to answer the key questions of the research. This will enable individual stakeholders and organizations to better understand the specifics of implementing open governance and decentralization reforms in Georgia and similar transition democracies, and to better formulate response strategies and action plans.

From a practical and educational point of view - based on theoretical principles, this study develops a new model of multilevel, multi-sectoral collaboration and the strategy and action plan for legal, institutional and practical reforms necessary for its implementation.

The practical implementation of this model will significantly increase public participation in public policy-making, deepen and multifacetedly support Georgia's implementation of open governance and decentralization reforms, and accelerate the country's closer integration with Euro-Atlantic structures.

Literature Review

In the process of this research, the author explored a number of sources and literature on the issues of democracy, open governance and decentralization. This included both key regulations and policy documents (e.g., Constitution of Georgia, European Charter of Local Self-Government, Code of Local Self-Government, Decentralization Strategy and Open Government Partnership Action Plans), as well as analysis of independent monitoring reports, surveys and academic papers. While the key regulations, policy documents, monitoring reports, and public opinion surveys are analyzed in the subsequent chapters, this specific section focuses on the review of academic literature. It should be noted that important theories, concepts, and academic publications have been developed in the field of this research both in Georgia and abroad, and this study is based on them. However, due to the novelty of the topic of open governance, specific issues related to it, especially at the local self-government level, have not yet been extensively studied in-depth. Among the academic sources related to the topics under discussion, some works have been singled out.

To better understand open governance as a constituent model of democracy, it is important to define democracy itself and its key features. **Alexis de Tocqueville's** *Democracy in America* (1835) stands out in this respect. In describing the American federal system and model of democratic governance, Tocqueville focuses on the free will of the people and the most decentralized governance, starting at the level of townships with two to three thousand inhabitants. Residents of common interest in these townships form free assemblies on an equal footing, bringing together people of different ages, professions, incomes and views to discuss issues of joint concern and to achieve public and political goals. The members of the assembly of the township elect their small group of representatives (selectmen) on the basis of universal suffrage annually (they elect three selectmen in the smallest township and nine in the largest). They also elect municipal magistrates (executives) to perform

a variety of administrative functions, including the person responsible for setting and collecting taxes, the clerk, the cashier, and the inspector. Democracy for Tocqueville is linked to associations of people created on such a free and equal basis, who have the appropriate financial resources (income from local taxes) and regulatory powers to solve the problems in their own settlement. Such a decentralized system enhances the sense of individual, free will and self-organization in people and encourages them to be actively involved in the development of local policies together with other people of common interest [3].

A modernist definition of democracy is provided by **Seymour Martin Lipset** in his paper *Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy* (1959). Lipset defines democracy as a political system that provides constitutional opportunities for regular change of governing officials. According to his theory, achieving a stable democracy has two principal characteristics: economic development and legitimacy. Economic development includes components of industrialization, wealth, urbanization, and education, and the more economically developed a country is, the better its chances of maintaining democracy. In such countries, the intelligent segment of the affluent population is constructively and meaningfully involved in policy-making, unlike in poorer countries, where irresponsible demagogues predominate. The stability of democracy in a country also depends on the legitimacy and effectiveness of the political system - that is, the extent to which state and public institutions and political parties have the trust of citizens, the ability of the authority to perform basic governance functions and to convince the public that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate for the society [4].

The work by **Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi** *Modernization: Theories and Facts* (1997) points out that complex and diverse social structures evolve in economically developed countries, new autonomous groups and organizations of producers and civil society emerge and organize, and labor processes require active collaboration of employees. With technological advancement, effective management of such

a system from the top down under an authoritarian or dictatorial regime can no longer take place, as the above-mentioned autonomous groups oppose such a system and give preference to the democratic competition of ideas. Moreover, the social changes achieved through the activities of independent producers and civil society organizations in the direction of industrialization, urbanization, education, communication, resource mobilization or inclusive policy-making deepen the processes of democratization in the country [5].

These findings are supported by the results of a public survey conducted by the *Pew Research Center* in 38 countries in 2017. In particular, 78 percent of respondents support a system of representative democracy, where elected representatives by citizens make laws and other important decisions. This strong support is particularly high in the rich, well-established democracies of North America and Europe, such as Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, and Canada, and the lowest in Russia, Vietnam, India, and Mexico. At the same time, nondemocratic systems of government, where experts, powerful leaders, or the military make individual decisions, have the highest support in countries with low education and low incomes or right-wing ideologies that believe democracy will not solve their problems and seek other alternative models of governance. According to the survey, such countries are the Middle East, Africa and South America, namely Jordan, Tunisia, Peru, Mexico and Colombia. It should be noted that in Georgia's neighbor Russia and Turkey, the regime of unlimited rule by a strong leader has gained the highest support. Criticism of some of the respondents towards the system of representative democracy is also conditioned by their negative perception of the economic situation in the country and the different ethnic, religious or racial groups living in the country [6].

It should be noted that Tocqueville, Lipset, Przeworski, and Limongi do not dwell on the preconditions for the origins of democracy and the prospects for its development in countries with low or middle incomes, education, and right-wing ideologies that may emerge from the collapse of superpowers. They also do not elaborate on the extent to which the

emergence and development of democracy in those countries contributes to their further economic development and the role of open governance in this process.

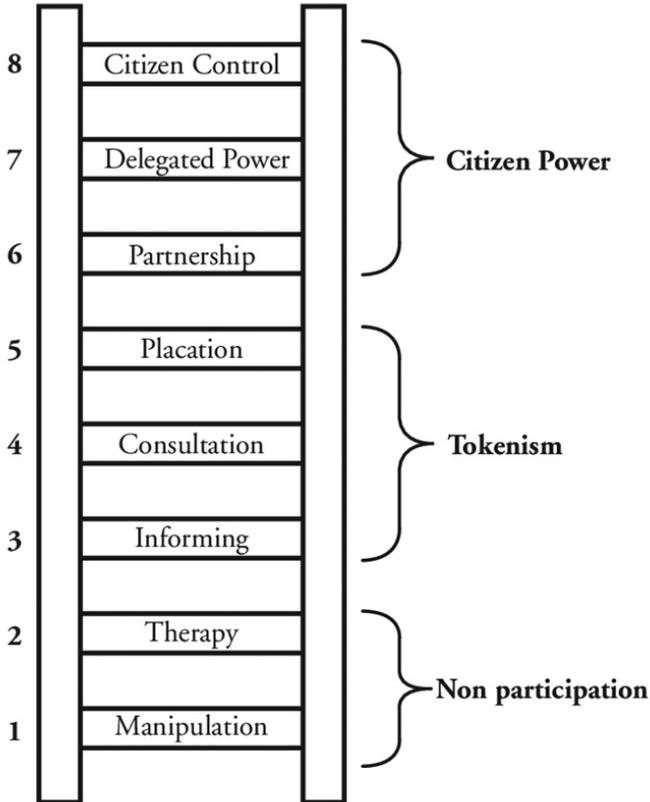
Tim O'Reilly's *Government as a Platform* (2010) is notable for establishing a link between democracy and open governance. This work offers a new concept according to which the government acts as a convener and an enabler and not as an initiator of action, as the latter function is performed by society. If in the traditional sense the government pre-determined what kind of services it should provide to the public, with the new model the public itself determines what services it wants to receive from the government and generates new innovative ideas in this direction, which are publicly discussed with various stakeholders. This in turn allows citizens to make a wider choice of the best idea, while the government creates an open platform for the whole process, participates in public discussions, provides a description of the ideas expressed during the discussions, and provides feedback to their authors. After selecting the best idea, it is of great benefit to the government to actively cooperate with civil society and business in the implementation of this idea and the provision of specific public services, so that the final product is maximally tailored to the needs of society [7].

Beth Simone Noveck, in her work *The Single Point of Failure* (2010), offers an analysis of two important concepts in the context of democracy and open governance – deliberation and collaboration. According to the first concept, citizens express their opinion on what the state should do, or what it should not do, in this or that field. However, as a rule, such opinions are shared only by citizens with their own acquaintances and relatives, which has no real impact on public policy change. This may be because the government is not open to citizens, or the citizens themselves are indifferent and / or unable to provide substantial comments to the government on changes in public policy. In contrast, collaboration is a more action-oriented concept, which aims to improve public governance and change policy. Concrete results can be achieved with the help of citizens' skills and expertise. According to this model,

the government is very open to the citizens and has effective mechanisms for collecting citizens' opinions. Citizens, in turn, are willing to use these mechanisms to leverage their own intellectual capacity to improve specific public services or policies. For example, before implementing an infrastructural project in the region, the local government begins an extensive consultation process with the local population to consider the potential impact of the project on their lives. It asks citizens to submit their scientific, engineering, or technical expertise. With consent, "citizens are no longer talking about the process: they are the process." According to this model, state and civil society perceive each other as partners who can work together in a friendly manner and share responsibility for better policy [8].

Assessing the degree to which state-society collaboration is ensured in decision-making processes is possible through **Sherry Arnstein's** *Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969) (Table 1).

Table 1. Sherry Arnstein's *Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969)



Arnstein, who worked on citizen participation issues in the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, explained each step of the ladder as follows:

Manipulation - In the name of citizen participation, people are put on the advisory committees for their *education*, or to gain their support for a pre-arranged plan by the state, which is a fraudulent participation.

Therapy - disguised as citizen participation. Its planners and implementers - specialists in the field of mental health - believe that pow-

erlessness is synonymous with mental illness. They subject people to clinical group therapy. The main goal is not to eliminate the racism and victimization that causes the *pathology*, but to cure the citizens from the *pathology*.

Informing - informing citizens about their rights and responsibilities. However, often the focus is on providing only one-way information from officials without any channels of feedback and cooperation.

Consultation - Citizens are asked to comment on the information provided to them. Consultation, however, will only remain a scam if there are no guarantees that the citizens' concerns and ideas will be taken into account.

Placation - Citizens have endless time to consult and plan, but the final decision on the legitimacy and expediency of their recommendations is still in the hands of those in power.

Partnership - Power at this stage of the ladder is effectively redistributed through negotiations between the state and the society and through structures such as joint steering councils and committees.

Delegated power - In the case of individual programs, citizens have decisive power. In particular, citizens have a majority of votes and clearly defined powers in the program steering boards, which gives them full control over the implementation of the programs.

Citizen control - Citizens are responsible for program planning, policy development and management work, and they set the rules for the participation of *outsiders* in the decision-making process [9].

However, Tim O'Reilly, Beth Simone Noveck, and Sherry Arnstein do not discuss how real collaboration between the state and society should take place when members of the society may have little desire, resources, and time to engage in regular, voluntary public consultation.

According to **Kevin Collins and Raymond Ison**, Arnstein's Ladder is too hierarchical and represents citizen participation as a struggle for power between citizens and state institutions. The first try to climb the ladder, and the second - to thwart their attempt. The ultimate goal is to climb the last step of the ladder and establish full civilian control,

without which the satisfaction of citizens and their real participation cannot be achieved. However, this approach does not take into account that some citizens may be satisfied with participating in the lower or middle level of the ladder, or may not want to participate at all. In addition, Arnstein presents the policy problem as a constant category in which only the approaches of the parties involved change. This notion ignores the uniqueness and context of many policy issues and does not well explain the motivation of citizens as to why they want to be involved in problem solving. In fact, the process of participation itself determines the nature of the policy problem, the way to solve it and the form and quality of participation needed to achieve this path. Finally, according to the Arnstein Ladder, the roles and responsibilities of society and state institutions vary depending on the level of power, or the step of the ladder, they are at. This does not take into consideration the complex interaction of the participants in the process, when their roles are not clearly defined, and their responsibilities arise from the process of participation itself and the definition of their interests in the process [10].

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed a modified *Spectrum of Public Participation* from the Arnstein Ladder, which is explained in the table below (Table 2).

Unlike the Arnstein Ladder, which does not consider consultation to be a real participation, according to this table, public participation begins at the consultation stage only if the reciprocity of the relationship between the state and the public and exchange of feedback is ensured. It should be noted that the OGP assesses the level of public participation and influence in the process of developing OGP National Action Plans by participating countries according to the IAP2 table [11].

Table 2. Spectrum of Public Participation (IAP2)

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

| INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|---|--|
| | INFORM | CONSULT | INVOLVE | COLLABORATE | EMPOWER |
| PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL | To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. | To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. | To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. | To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. | To place final decision making in the hands of the public. |
| PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC | We will keep you informed. | We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. | We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. | We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible. | We will implement what you decide. |

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In his work *Political Liberalism* (1993), John Rawls singles out “so-
 ciety as a fair system of cooperation over time, from one generation to
 the next”, which is an integral part of the public culture of a democratic
 society. According to Rawls, the idea of social cooperation consists of
 three elements: 1) publicly recognized rules and procedures established
 by the cooperation parties themselves; 2) Fair terms and reciprocity -
 all parties to the cooperation accept the terms that other parties accept.
 Those who do their part well and follow the pre-established rules and
 procedures, receive commensurate benefits; and 3) each side of the co-
 operation understands better what it wants to achieve as a result of the
 cooperation and seeks to receive rational advantage and good from the
 ongoing process [12].

Sylvain Giguere and Mark Considine discuss the concept of col-

laboration / partnership in the context of decentralization. In their view, this implies the creation of an institutional framework in which the various stakeholders will regularly cooperate with each other and share responsibility for policy development. This process makes it easier for both the state and society to reconcile differing views on public policy improvement. At the same time, such a model facilitates the formation of a partnership network of specialists in specific field of policy. At the local level, such partnerships are achieved through regular and institutionalized participatory mechanisms and consultation meetings between the civil / community, private and public sectors. Local actors should have sufficient powers and resources to perform this function, and the central government can assist them by introducing broadly decentralized governance and setting up a consultation platform [13].

Peter Haas calls such local, multisectoral partnership networks *epistemic communities*. Based on the unique knowledge of the local context, the *epistemic communities* created at the level of different territorial units will be able to jointly identify common problems and think of ways to jointly solve these problems in the best traditions of subsidiarity and open governance. By disseminating the unique information and practices at their disposal, they will help adapt national policies to local circumstances and involve the local population itself in these adaptation processes. As Peter Haas points out, *epistemic communities*' "control over knowledge and information is an important dimension of power" which can create new models of social behavior, new organizational forms, and become an important determinant of public policy coordination [14].

James March and Johann Olsen called partnerships between social groups and the resulting social change "socialization based on the logic of appropriateness." In their view, human actions and policy-making by groups of people are driven by appropriate rules and exemplary behavior that are organized in the form of an institution. This includes both cognitive and normative components - people follow rules because they perceive these rules to be natural, fair, expected, and legitimate. Accordingly, social actors seek to fulfill the obligations that arise from their

role, identity, belonging to political or social groups, and the culture, practice, and expectations of the institutions created by these groups. It also involves convincing other people and groups of the uniqueness, appropriateness, and legitimacy of the rules, policies, and governance models developed by their own group [15]. The idea is to create a model of *experiential learning* according to which institutions will change based on the study and interpretation of alternative forms of self-organization and governance by other relevant institutions in their environment. It was this method used by the EU to persuade Central and Eastern European countries to incorporate EU values, norms and practices into their own internal governance models, which led to their subsequent membership in the EU. By studying other groups' alternative and successful practices and understanding their relevance to their own social context, individuals and groups of people are more likely to change their own ways of behaving and solve the problems they face more successfully [16].

In *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* (2011), **Chip and Dan Heath** demonstrated the potential for social change through an in-depth analysis of the needs of individuals and groups of people. In their theory, the local community knows best what individual and collective problems are in the community and how these problems should be addressed. This may involve thinking of unusual ways to solve the problem by specific individuals and social groups, which can lead to successful results. This phenomenon is called *positive deviance* by scientists, and Chip and Dan Heath called it the *bright spots theory* [17].

According to Chip and Dan Heath, the concept of *positive deviance* was first put into practice by Jerry Sternin, who was invited to Vietnam in 1990 to address the problem of malnutrition in children. In a study of poor families living in one of the pilot villages, he found that Vietnamese children were usually fed twice a day with soft, pure foods such as the highest-quality rice. However, there were other poor families in the same village (so-called *bright spot families*) where the children did not have a problem with malnutrition and they looked much healthier than their peers from neighboring families. Sternin studied the reasons for this

and identified several important differences between *bright spot families* and malnourished families: 1) *Bright spot families* fed their children four meals a day instead of two with the same amount of food as malnourished families. Children were more likely to process four servings of food rather than two larger servings of food; 2) *Bright spot moms* washed their hands with soap before cooking, washed the hands of their kids before eating, and fed the kids more actively (sometimes through hand-feeding even), while malnourished families did not pay much attention to the hygiene of their kids and fed them from the communal bowl; 3) *Bright spot families* collected tiny shrimps and crabs from the rice paddies and mixed them with rice for their children, which was the norm only for adults and not for children. In addition, these families fed their children with sweet potato greens, which were considered low-class food in Vietnam. However, as a result of these dietary improvisations, children from *bright spot families* received more protein and vitamins than children from malnourished families. With the help of Sternin, the local community designed a program in which 50 malnourished families (in groups of 10) met daily at a hut and jointly prepared food based on the practices of *bright spot families*. Six months after the implementation of this program, the nutrition and health of 65 percent of children living in rural Vietnam improved. This practice spread to other villages, and as a result of their unification, a social laboratory was established, where families from different parts of Vietnam came to learn about the innovative nutrition model. In total, the program covered 265 Vietnamese villages and 2.2 million Vietnamese.

According to this theory, the unusual but successful practice of one group is introduced to neighboring groups, adapted to their own context, and disseminated to other groups. It builds the belief of each group that if groups like it and possibly with the same scarce resources manage to solve a given problem themselves, it should be possible for them as well. Regular repetition of this successful practice fosters a culture of self-organization within the group, establishes new thematic connections and alliances between individuals and groups, and promotes new opportuni-

ties and sectoral expertise. This, in turn, creates a constant cycle of social change, as the groups directly involved in the social interaction and the resulting public policy process become the owners of the policy that affects them. They identify the problem of joint concern, devise strategies to solve it, select the best strategy and, most importantly, jointly monitor and evaluate the implementation of the selected strategy [18]. The idea that those most affected by the problem should be fully involved in solving it aka *nothing about us without us* is a fundamental democratic and moral principle [19].

In *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (2002), **Mancur Olson** explains that a group of people must have agreement on a certain organizational form and normative framework with clear rules and procedures of participation and that all members of the group should take responsibility for coordinated and conscientious observance of those rules. In such a case there will be a greater chance of achieving public good. It should also be borne in mind that the fewer the members in a group, the more productive and rewarding the group's activities are, and conversely, the more members there are in a group, the less effective the group is in meeting the common interests. In the case of large groups, the decision-making process and agreement become more difficult, and transaction costs increase. In his work, Olson cites the theory of **John James** that the average number of members of small, action-oriented and result-oriented groups is six or seven, and that of larger but less effective groups - 14. Besides the number of members in a group, it is important to consider the key characteristics of group members as well. In particular, members of a small group of individuals with equal income and socioeconomic status will be more likely to share resources and work for the public good as well as the commensurate benefits than members of a group with unequal income and status. In the latter case, the motivation of the group members to continue participating in the group activities will also decrease, because they will not be able to equally distribute either the contribution to the group or the benefits from the group activities. Therefore, each member of the group should

feel that the benefits s/he personally receives from the group's activities outweigh the resources s/he spends for participating in the group [20].

Garrett Hardin has developed an important concept of the connection between the personal interest and the common good. Hardin calls the *tragedy of the commons* the aspiration of an individual to satisfy his or her personal needs first and foremost. People tend to make the most of limited public resources to satisfy their own desires, even if such selfish consumption exhausts those resources completely and other people can no longer use them. For example, the herder wants to keep as many cattle as possible on the common pasture, which then can help him sell the increased cattle for better money or consume more meat. This creates a positive utility of the common pasture for this specific herder. However, at this time, he does not take into account that common pasture is limited and that additional overgrazing created by one more animal leaves less grass for other herders' cattle to eat. He does not want to share the common pasture with other herders' cattle equally at the expense of not increasing his own cattle. This in turn creates a negative utility of the common pasture for other herders. To prevent this from happening, people must constantly remember that they have a civic responsibility to act not only in their own personal interests but also in the common interest [21].

A person's private benefits and interests are mainly related to material needs such as better housing, good job, and access to quality education and health services. However, it also includes a person's non-material interests such as having friends, respect, recognition, a sense of self-worth and importance in the local community and the wider society. A person alone can not satisfy all private interests alone. For this s/he needs the help of people with similar interests. This is where the need for collective relationships arises, which can then turn an individual's private interest into a group / collective interest and lead to concrete action. It is therefore important to first identify and analyze the individual needs of people and then find ways to collectively meet those needs. Collective relationships between its participants must be based on trust, caring, respect and integrity in order to produce results. All participants must be open in their

intentions and do what they promise to do in the common interest [22].

Davit Khvedelidze and Rusudan Kutateladze also analyzed the interaction of private and public interests in their work *Public Interests* (2017). According to them, the public interest is a sum of private interests and is formed on their basis. Therefore, they should not oppose each other, but on the contrary, they should complement each other, because it is through the realization of the public interest that the full realization of the private interest is possible [23].

It should be noted that during the last five years, important dissertations have been published in Georgia (in Georgian language) on the comparative analysis of modern concepts and systems of local self-governance and their application in Georgian municipalities. Considering the objectives of this study, **Alexander Svanishvili's** work *The Importance and Role of Territorial Social Self-Government in the Local Self-Government System* (2016) should be singled out from these dissertations. Svanishvili presents the concept of *local cocommunity*. It is a social unit with a certain hierarchy, consisting of small subgroups. Each subgroup has common interests that may differ from those of other subgroups and the *local cocommunity* as a whole. The formation of common interests of subgroups usually starts from neighborhood ties and it is related to solving problems arising from living together in a particular area. The more complex the problem, the wider the area it covers, as well as the segments of the population whose involvement is necessary to solve the problem [24]. Other notable dissertations include **Besik Kaishuri's** work *Modern Systems and Perspectives of Decision-making in Local Self-Government* (2016) [25], **Otar Tevdoradze's** work *Local Self-Government as a Conduit of State Interests* (2018) [26] and **Madona Tebidze's** work *Electronic Municipality - An Important Element of Local Self-Government Reform* (2019) [27].

The aforementioned works provide a rich academic literature for the analysis of issues of democracy, open governance and local self-governance. However, the theories, concepts, and models presented in international works lack the analysis in the context of post-imperial, transitional

democracies. Also not fully demonstrated are their practical applications at different levels of territorial units and public governance, especially at the rural and urban levels, where people's problems, private interests, and the interaction of social groups are most tangible. Little is said about their practical application in the context of multilevel, multisectoral collaboration, both between different territorial units within the country and abroad.

As for the Georgian works, they do not present the interplay of the concepts, principles and reforms of decentralization and open governance and the specific ways of their implementation in practice. Like international works, Georgian works show little practical application of multilevel, multisectoral collaboration models at different levels of territorial units. The purpose of this study is to fill in these gaps.

Chapter 1. Open Governance and Decentralization – The Context of Georgia

1.1. Basic Principles of Open Governance

Open governance continues to be relevant today, as its goal is to deepen democratic processes, for which there is a high demand in society around the world, especially in economically developed countries. Good democratic governance is primarily equated with free and fair elections, protection of human rights and the rule of law [28], while open governance is linked to the functioning of transparent systems of governance, integrity and public participation by elected authorities. The Open Government Declaration sets out the principles of open governance as follows:

Transparency - Publish information at all levels of governance in a timely, regular, proactive and easy-to-use way for the public.

Integrity - Introduce strong anti-corruption policies, mechanisms and practices in the state and civil service, especially in the areas of public finances, public procurement and the rule of law.

Public participation – Provide all interested stakeholders with equal opportunities for participation in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies. This also includes ensuring the freedom of expression, assembly and activity of civil society organizations and increasing their influence in the decision-making process, as well as promoting multisectoral collaboration between the state, civil and business sectors.

New technologies and innovative approaches contribute to the more effective implementation of those three principles in practice. The objective is to increase public access to online and mobile networks and platforms and to ensure the security of those networks and platforms.

Based on the principles, described above, it can be concluded that open governance primarily implies the involvement of the public in the decision-making process and the adaptation of final decisions to the

needs of society. The introduction of such a model determines the political legitimacy of the public administration system, its efficiency and the level of development of democracy in the country [29]. This study focuses on the exploration of this key component of the concept of open governance - **public participation**.

1.2. Open Governance at the Local Level - the Principles of Decentralization and Subsidiarity

The introduction of the concept of open governance is of particular importance at the local level, where the local government is a source of direct connection with the state for the public and is directly responsible for addressing the daily needs of the citizens. This is closely linked to decentralization, which involves the substantial transfer of powers from central government to local government, bringing decision-making processes closer to citizens, equipping them with broader rights, and more clearly articulating their needs. Decentralization consists of three main components - political, administrative and fiscal. Political decentralization is based on the principle of subsidiarity, according to which decisions must be made through close cooperation with citizens and the local government is the best means to do this [30]. Administrative decentralization implies the transparency and accountability of local government bodies and the transfer of clearly defined competencies and functions to them. Through fiscal decentralization, the central government allocates public finances and resources to local governments, but also allows them to raise their own revenues and become more financially self-sufficient [31]. With more decentralization, local government and community are more likely to regularly interact with each other, and open governance mechanisms are more commonly used in practice.

However, the effective implementation of open governance and decentralization principles is quite a difficult task, as it requires self-organization from society, civic responsibility, respect for divergent opinions,

processing large amounts of public information, developing their own opinions or initiatives, submitting these initiatives to the government and preparing responses. Many citizens may not be ready to take on such a serious responsibility.

1.3. Open Governance and Decentralization in Transitional Democracies – Georgia’s Experience

The introduction of the principles of open governance and decentralization is particularly difficult in transitional democracies that were once part of a centralized superpower like the Soviet Union with its large bureaucratic structures. These countries were greatly influenced by the Soviet legacy, namely rigged elections, one-party domination, *top-down* governance, secrecy of public information, and suppressed civic activism. Over the years, the model of command-based governance has been so entrenched in the governing systems and civic culture of the member countries of the Soviet Union that they now find it difficult to transform and move to a new model of representative democracy and open governance, which is linked to *bottom-up* decentralized governance.

In post-communist countries, the practice of deliberation works more than partnership / collaboration, with the result that public policy is often focused only on conversation rather than action. At the same time, neither the government nor civil society perceives each other as partners. There is often mistrust and strained relations between them, which in turn hinders their real collaboration in improving public policy and taking into account different visions in the decision-making process. As a result, public policy is less tailored to the real needs of society.

Georgia is one such post-communist country in the process of democratic transition, and it faces a number of challenges with many achievements in introducing the principles of open governance and decentralization. After the Soviet legacy and the devastating ethnic and civil conflicts of the 1990s, Georgia gradually emerged as a leader in the region in terms

of democratic reforms, driven by the strong support of Georgian citizens for these reforms. Competitive and multiparty elections are being held in the country and there is active opposition. Citizens can exercise their fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly and association, and civil society organizations are actively involved in policy-making. The Georgian media environment is free and diverse, and key democratic institutions are established and functioning well [32].

In 2011, Georgia became a member of the OGP, and in 2017, the country was elected chair of the partnership. In addition, Georgia has already developed four OGP Action Plans with a number of commitments on a wide range of issues such as the environment, energy, the penitentiary system, access to court decisions, labor safety, health, homelessness and public procurement. It is also noteworthy that local governments have made specific commitments in the OGP Action Plans to implement the principles of open governance.³

The central government is facilitating the participation of municipalities in the OGP and plans to transfer more powers to them as well as to allocate more financial resources. Georgia made this commitment in 2004, when it ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Charter defines the foundations of local self-government competencies and resources and is considered to be the main regulatory document in this area [33].

Based on the principles of the Charter, Georgia adopted the Local Self-Government Code in 2014, according to which citizens in 64 municipalities of the country elect by direct suffrage representative and executive bodies of local self-government - the Local Council (Sakrebulo) and the Mayor. The Code gave municipalities greater powers than in previous years and defined additional mechanisms for ensuring public participation in local self-government. Specifically, the Code defines five main mechanisms for public participation at the local level: General Assembly of the Settlement; Petition; Council of Civil Advisors; Participation in Sakrebulo Sessions; and Hearing Activity Reports of the

3 OGP Georgia, <https://bit.ly/385Iz8P>. Last viewed – August 31, 2021.

Mayor and Sakrebulo Members. A brief overview of each of them is given below.

The General Assembly of the Settlement ensures the right of the voter registered in the respective settlement (village / town / city) to consider, decide and submit proposals and initiatives to the municipal bodies on the following issues: important social and economic issues for the settlement and the municipality; planned, ongoing and already implemented projects in the settlement; establishing and changing the boundaries of the settlement; and including property in the settlement area in the list of privatized objects of the municipality. The municipal bodies are obliged to submit the projects for consideration to the General Assembly before they are reflected in the municipal budget as well as the issues related to establishing and changing the boundaries of the settlement. They are also obliged to consider the decision of the General Assembly and to provide the elected leader of the Assembly and its members with the reasoned answer on the results of review. The following have the right to initiate a General Assembly: at least 5 percent of the voters registered in the respective settlement; the Mayor of the municipality; and the elected leader of the General Assembly. An Assembly is authorized if it is attended by at least 20 percent of its members.

Petition - The General Assembly and no less than one percent of the voters registered on the territory of the municipality have the right to submit a petition to Sakrebulo, the legislative body at the local level. It should be noted that Sakrebulo is authorized to grant the right to submit a petition to a smaller number of registered voters in the municipality and also to determine the rules for submitting a petition electronically. The following can be submitted as a petition: a draft normative administrative-legal act; basic principles or specific proposals of the draft normative administrative-legal act; and request to study, discuss and resolve issues of general importance for the municipality at the Sakrebulo session. The Mayor of the municipality is obliged to review the petition sent to him by the Sakrebulo and to inform the Sakrebulo and the petitioner about the results of the review within one month after receiving the petition.

The Council of Civil Advisors is a consultative body of the Mayor of the municipality, which meets at least once in every three months. Entrepreneurial legal entities, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the public can be invited as members of the Council. The final composition, which is determined by at least 10 members, is approved by the Mayor. It should be noted that the Council of Civil Advisors is not authorized if the number of members of one sex is less than 1/3 among its members. The Mayor is obliged to submit to the Council for consideration the draft municipal budget, spatial planning documents of the municipality, proposals on the names of geographical objects of the municipality, as well as drafts of other important administrative-legal acts and infrastructural and social projects.

Participation in Sakrebulo Sessions - Any citizen has the right to attend public meetings of Sakrebulo and its commissions. Seats should be allocated in the meeting hall for citizens. If the number of people wishing to attend the sitting exceeds the number of seats allocated to them in the meeting hall, Sakrebulo is obliged to provide space for those wishing to attend the session. Interested citizens have the right, with the consent of the chairperson of the session, to ask questions to the speakers, to make a statement or explanation on the issue under discussion, and to submit new information.

Hearing Activity Reports of the Mayor and Sakrebulo Members - The Mayor and Sakrebulo members are obliged to hold public meetings with the voters of the municipality at least once a year, no later than November 1, to present a report on the work done and to answer the questions asked by the meeting participants. Voters registered in the municipality have the right to attend the mentioned meetings without any restrictions. They can also take part in public hearings on the draft municipal budget.

The Mayor and Sakrebulo can also set up consultative bodies (thematic councils, commissions and working groups) to study certain issues within their competence and invite representatives of civil society to work as members in these bodies. Finally, to increase the participation of

citizens in the implementation of local self-government, the municipality has the authority to introduce additional mechanisms to those mentioned above [34].

It should be noted that according to the amended Constitution of Georgia, “the citizens of Georgia shall regulate affairs of local importance through local self-government in accordance with the legislation of Georgia. The separation of the powers of state authority and self-governing units is based on the principle of subsidiarity” [35]. Considering this constitutional amendment enshrining the principle of subsidiarity and based on consultations with the municipalities, in December 2019, the government approved a new medium-term Decentralization Strategy (2020-2025) and an Action Plan for its implementation for 2020-2021. The Strategy has three main goals: 1) to increase the competences of local governments; 2) to provide them with material and financial resources; and 3) to increase their legitimacy, transparency and accountability by refining public participation mechanisms and developing results-oriented policies. The Strategy states separately that it will facilitate the involvement of all municipalities in the OGP and identify the specific commitments that will be included in the OGP Action Plans [36].

The above-mentioned political and legal bases create a good environment for the full implementation of open governance and decentralization reforms in Georgia and the establishment of a European standard of public administration system. However, this process is accompanied by many peculiarities and difficulties, which are discussed below.

1.4. Difficulties Related to the Implementation of Open Governance Reform in Georgia

Increased mistrust and strained relations between government and civil society representatives at the central level in recent years have hampered the introduction of the principles of democracy and open governance in Georgia. Civil society often criticizes the government for mak-

ing important decisions arbitrarily and without public consultation, while the government criticizes civil society for its political bias, destructive approach, and refusal to cooperate [37]. For example, according to 150 civil society organizations, the 2017 local self-government reform process was hasty and lacked transparency and public participation. The nine organizations even filed a lawsuit in court seeking to overturn a parliamentary decision on the reform on the grounds that mandatory public consultations had not taken place [38]. Civil society organizations have also been critical of the government's development of the OGP Action Plan for 2018-2019 and its disregard for important civil society recommendations such as the establishment of an independent anti-corruption agency to investigate elite corruption cases [39]. For their part, senior government officials are highly critical of leading civil society organizations, sometimes calling their activities *undermining* [40]. They also often criticize the fact that constant discussions with civil society can delay important decisions and their execution because government officials do not have enough time and resources to do several things simultaneously and effectively. It should be noted that public discussions in Georgia between the representatives of the government and the society are mainly related to personal attacks and past grievances, rather than to issues of public concern and ways to address these issues [41].

The situation is relatively different at the local level, where government and civil society representatives work more regularly and constructively with each other, and there are more successful examples created as a result of this collaboration. However, there are challenges at the local level as well, which have an impact on the full implementation of open governance and decentralization reforms. For example, citizens are mostly asking the local government for financial assistance, jobs, treatment of various diseases, and infrastructural issues in their neighborhoods. Public opinion polls also show that in recent years, the top priority issues for Georgian citizens at the national level have been jobs, poverty alleviation, halting price growth / inflation, and increasing pensions and salaries. At the local level, citizens are mainly concerned with the fol-

lowing issues: poor quality of roads, water and gas supply problems, traffic and public transport systems malfunction, stray animals, environmental pollution and lack of parks and green spaces [42]. This difficult socio-economic background, which was especially aggravated during the Covid-19 pandemic, prevents citizens from participating in thematic discussions on public policy-making in a particular area and presenting alternative visions for improving the current situation. The reason for the low participation of citizens in public policy issues may be their limited time and resources, or their belief that participation will not change anything. Due to the fact that the initiation of issues from *bottom-up* and citizens' interests are mainly centered on everyday household issues, rather than on specific thematic areas of public policy, increasing public participation in the decision-making process around the latter requires initiative and proactive actions by central and local governments.

The next Chapter presents the achievements, challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of open governance and decentralization reforms in Georgia based on the analysis of the country's seven municipalities.

Chapter 2. Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities for Open Governance at the Local Level in Georgia – Analysis of Seven Municipalities

The capital Tbilisi, Gori, Telavi and Marneuli were selected for the research purposes in Eastern Georgia, and Batumi, Zugdidi and Ozurgeti in Western Georgia. The selected seven municipalities have different status of self-government (Tbilisi and Batumi are self-governing cities with greater powers than other municipalities) and socio-economic, ethnic-demographic and political context. In addition to significant successes in implementing open governance reforms, they also face difficulties. The author conducted in-depth interviews with officials of the executive and legislative branches of the above-mentioned municipalities and staff, members of the Supreme Council of Adjara, representatives of the Parliamentary Committee on Regional Policy and Self-Government and the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure. In all selected municipalities, interviews were conducted with both ruling and opposition Sakrebulo members and at least two members of civil society and experts, which gave the author a good opportunity to see a full picture of the situation in those municipalities. Each target municipality was analyzed according to different components, which is based on both the quantitative and statistical data given in the tables below, as well as the qualitative information obtained as a result of in-depth interviews. It should be noted that many important statistics, such as the poverty rate, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, income from industry and agriculture, and the composition of natural resources, are not broken down at the municipal level. Consequently, the study cites only those social and open governance statistics that are currently available at the municipal level in Georgia.

2.1. Tbilisi

Local Problems - According to the representatives of the Tbilisi local self-government, Tbilisians are most concerned with the following problems: poverty and unemployment; polluted environment and lack of green spaces; chaotic constructions; poor street and community infrastructure; malfunction of the municipal transport system; and traffic jams and lack of parking spaces. According to civil society representatives, the lack of sports and youth infrastructure and the fact that citizens have little information about municipal services are also noteworthy.⁴

Multisectoral Cooperation - Cooperation of local self-government with business companies around the above-mentioned problems is mainly carried out through contracts, procurement of various services, or in the framework of charitable actions. There are several successful examples of this cooperation.⁵ In particular, in 2016, Tbilisi City Hall together with the e-book house *Saba* established by *TBC Bank* implemented a social-educational project *City - Library*. As part of this project, *Saba* e-libraries were installed on writers' streets, in house-museums, libraries, parks, metro stations and pantheons in Tbilisi, with e-books placed along the street / building sign. Through the QR code printed on them, interested citizens can download the e-book on their phone, in the *Saba Reader* application, and read it online [43]. In addition, the planting company *Gardenia* carried out landscaping works on *Marjanishvili Square* at its own expense, so that the municipality did not spend any money on it [44]. The company only placed its advertisement on the banner in the square. Business companies are also involved in modernizing bus stops and Christmas lights in Tbilisi and providing metro services. During the

4 Interviews with the Chairman of the Tbilisi Sakrebulo, the Chairman of the *United National Movement* faction of the Tbilisi Sakrebulo and the OGP Contact Person of the Tbilisi City Hall were held on September 10, 11 and 20, 2019. Interviews with local government expert, representatives of the *Institute for Development of Freedom of Information and Transparency International Georgia* were conducted on May 4, June 30, and July 8, 2020, respectively.

5 Interview with the OGP Contact Person of the Tbilisi City Hall, September 11, 2019.

Covid-19 pandemic, they also assisted the municipality in distributing food, hygiene and medicine parcels to vulnerable groups living in the capital [45]. However, according to the respondents of this study, this is not enough, because the business should be much more actively involved in the activities of the municipality and thus the benefit should be seen by both the business itself and by the municipality as well.

Table 3. Tbilisi - Social and Open Governance Data

| <i>Area and Population</i> | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Area (km.2) | Population | Population in Urban Settlement | Population in Rural Settlement | Ethnic Minorities | Number of Emigrants | Number of Immigrants |
| 504.2 | 1,108,717 | 1,078,297 | 30,420 | 111,437 | 27,956 | 84,009 |
| | 29.9%* | 97.2% | 2.8% | 10% | 2.5% | 7.6% |
| <i>Level of Education Achieved</i> | | | | | | |
| Higher | Professional | Secondary | Basic | Elementary | Without elementary education, but literate | Illiterate |
| 425,686 | 137,550 | 256,718 | 51,808 | 39,412 | 29,367 | 1,136 |
| 38.4% | 12.4% | 23.1% | 4.7% | 3.5% | 2.6% | 0.1% |
| <i>Employment and Economic Activity Status**</i> | | | | | | |
| Employed | Hired Worker | Employer | Working in their Own Farm | Auxiliary Member of the Family | Unemployed | |
| 360,226 | 307,820 | 14,572 | 37,336 | 381 | 146,581 | |
| 32.5% | 27.8% | 1.3% | 3.4% | 0.03% | 13.2% | |
| <i>Open Governance***</i> | | | | | | |
| Proactive Disclosure of Public Information | Electronic Governance | Citizen Participation | Accountability | Final Evaluation | | |
| 41% | 54% | 22% | 51% | 43% | | |

* In relation to the population of the whole country (3,713,804).

** The official data provided to the author by the National Statistics Office of Georgia on May 29, 2020, which includes the results of the last general population census conducted on November 5, 2014 in the country. The next census is scheduled for 2024.

*** Evaluation of open governance and citizen participation mechanisms is based on the latest results of the 2019 Local Self-Government Index, <https://bit.ly/31R9wx1>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

| <i>Functioning of Citizen Participation Mechanisms</i> | | | | | |
|--|----------|---------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------|
| General Assembly of the Settlement | Petition | Council of Civil Advisors | Ensuring Participation in Sakrebulo Sessions | Hearing the Reports of Sakrebulo Members | Hearing the Mayor's Reports |
| - | - | 30% | 60% | 60% | 30% |

At this stage, the local self-government does not have systematic cooperation with business companies, as the latter are mainly interested in simplifying the services available to them rather than participating in the development of local policies.⁶ Businesses also avoid cooperating with members of the Sakrebulo opposition on issues of local importance in order not to jeopardize their activities and relations with local authorities from the ruling party.⁷ In addition, citizens have little information that the above examples and business-sponsored charitable, cultural and sporting events are the result of successful collaboration between the public and private sectors. Neither the municipality nor the business itself pays much attention to this, as both sides try to present their role more than the process of joint work.⁸

As for the civil society organizations operating in Tbilisi, they cooperate more with the central government than with the Tbilisi Municipality. Mainly sectoral organizations and field experts cooperate with the local self-government in the format of a thematic working group and on issues related to architecture, cultural heritage, landscaping and ecology.⁹ The successful results of joint advocacy and social campaigns of civil society organizations, experts and activists working on these issues include the prevention of the construction of a hotel and other modern buildings in *Vake Park* and *Lado Gudiashvili Square*, which would change the appearance and recreational purpose of these zones to the detriment of the public.¹⁰

6 Interview with the OGP Contact Person of the Tbilisi City Hall, September 11, 2019.

7 Interview with the Chairman of the *United National Movement* faction of the Tbilisi Sakrebulo, September 20, 2019.

8 Interview with a local self-government expert, May 4, 2020.

9 Ibid.

10 Interview with a representative of the *Institute for Development of Freedom of Information*, June 30, 2020.

Representatives of the Sakrebulo opposition present the recommendations of their faction based on the research of sectoral civil society organizations and field experts during the approval of the municipal budget. According to them, the local self-government should actively involve civil society in the process of providing municipal services, and many services, such as free canteens for vulnerable groups and stray animal shelters, should be managed by civil society organizations that can better manage these services and better mobilize international donor funds to improve their infrastructure as compared to the local self-government.¹¹

According to the Chairman of the Tbilisi Sakrebulo, it is necessary to strengthen sectoral / thematic participation in the format of working groups through the invitation of external field specialists, as the municipality itself lacks human resources internally. For example, civil society organizations, business companies, and field experts were actively involved in the working groups on zonal parking and building regulations. Similar high participation needs to be sustained to work on important topics such as the environment, transport and urban issues. As a rule, the Sakrebulo is the initiator of the creation of these working groups, however, it is necessary for the civil society as well to become the initiator of similar formats of multistakeholder dialogue and cooperation.

Inter-Municipal Cooperation - Tbilisi cooperates with other municipalities of Georgia mainly in the format of the National Association of Local Authorities (NALAG), which is supported by the Council of Europe. For example, the Tbilisi City Hall Municipal Services Development Agency (MSDA) has offered the introduction of all its e-services to the Batumi and Kutaisi municipalities. It also plans to offer these services to other municipalities based on their needs. In addition, in cooperation with business companies, Tbilisi periodically holds inter-municipal hackathons and Olympics. It should be noted that in other areas, as well as in the direction of open governance, Tbilisi, based on international experience, shares its experience more with other municipalities than vice

¹¹ Interview with the Chairman of the *United National Movement* faction of the Tbilisi Sakrebulo, September 20, 2019.

versa. At the same time, the public has very little information about the NALAG and this platform is not actively used in terms of inter-municipal cooperation, which is partly due to the fact that Tbilisi “looks a little down on other municipalities and therefore the latter have low self-esteem of their activities.”¹² To change this, it is necessary to have more thematic discussions and exchange more information on each other’s activities between municipalities.¹³

Open Governance and Citizen Participation - Tbilisi local self-government works with citizens mainly at the Sakrebulo level. The majoritarian system of the Sakrebulo as a representative body helps to increase the participation of citizens. Due to the daily issues that concern them, the citizens have more contact with the majoritarian members of the Sakrebulo elected by them than with the members of the Parliament. It should be noted that citizens mostly address personal, local issues to Sakrebulo members, such as requests for social assistance, financing of surgeries and repair of streets, buildings and yards, or construction issues, although they are less involved in discussions on public policy issues.¹⁴

As for Tbilisi City Hall, it works on open governance and citizen participation issues within the OGP platform, and its main partners in this regard are civil society organizations. Since 2017, the City Hall has developed two OGP Action Plans, which include important commitments to increase access to public information and citizen participation, such as: launching the e-petition portal *Your Idea for the City Mayor*; creating *SMART MAP* portal for information and civic activity; introducing a participatory budget planning mechanism; introducing mechanisms to improve the availability of municipal services with the involvement of citizens; developing an integrity and transparency strategy of Tbilisi Municipality; and improving the quality of transparency in Tbilisi City Hall through electronic mechanisms [46]. However, only one of these commitments has been fully fulfilled, while the others are still being implemented [47]. In particular, in February 2018, the Tbilisi City Hall

12 Translated by the author.

13 Interview with a local self-government expert, May 4, 2020.

14 Interview with the Chairman of Tbilisi Sakrebulo, September 10, 2019.

launched the e-petitions portal *Your Idea for the City Mayor* [48]. As of September 2020, a total of 1,389 ideas from citizens were submitted to this portal and distributed in 13 different categories. Most of the ideas were related to transport (321) and road infrastructure (229).¹⁵ However, after September 2020, no new ideas were registered on the portal and, consequently, the website data has not been updated, which indicates that the portal is currently non-functional.

In the process of developing OGP commitments, Tbilisi City Hall held public consultations in city districts and disseminated information about it through the chairmen of the condominiums of apartment owners. At these consultations, citizens mainly talked about social problems and were less interested in open governance. It should be noted that the boards of Saburtalo and Didube district executives within the City Hall have Council of Civil Advisors, but citizens do not actually participate in these councils. According to the person in charge of coordinating the OGP processes at the Tbilisi City Hall, in addition to general nihilism, this is also due to the fact that civic groups do not have organizers and community leaders, which complicates their participation in local policy-making. He also noted that civil society organizations are not active in this direction. The City Hall and civil society organizations have a lack of trust in each other. The politicization of issues prevents the creation of constructive dialogue formats between them. Tbilisi City Hall tried to change this situation with the format of the OGP working group and the above commitments, but civil society organizations provided a very few new initiatives and recommendations. This is due to the fact that the Tbilisi 2018-2020 OGP Action Plan included unfulfilled commitments from the previous Action Plan and civil society organizations had no incentives to raise new commitments.

For their part, civil society representatives noted that the leadership of Tbilisi City Hall lacks interest in the OGP platform. This is also reflected in the fact that this platform was coordinated by a UNDP con-

¹⁵ Tbilisi City Hall, Portal *Your Idea for the City Mayor*, <https://bit.ly/3csJfK9>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

tractor and not by any of Tbilisi City Hall staff. In March 2020, after the resignation of the said contractor and against the background of the Covid-19 pandemic, the process slowed down even more.¹⁶ OGP working group meetings have not been held since September 2020.¹⁷ Such low interest of the City Hall leadership also discourages the civil society organizations that are members of the OGP working group from actively participating in the implementation of the Tbilisi OGP Action Plan and presenting their own initiatives and recommendations, some of which are either not completed at all or are delayed. For example, according to the representative of the *Institute for the Development of Freedom of Information*, their initiative to create separate websites of all 10 district executives in the city on the website of Tbilisi City Hall, which would provide detailed information about the activities of those executives, was not implemented by the City Hall.

The functioning of citizen participation mechanisms provided by the Local Self-Government Code is also problematic in Tbilisi. The General Assembly of the Settlement and the petition mechanisms are not functioning at all, while the Mayor and district executives do not submit municipal projects to the Council of Civil Advisors for consideration.¹⁸ Public consultations are not held on the municipal budget either, and the participation of citizens in the activities of the local self-government is mainly manifested by periodic participation in the meetings of the Sakrebulo.¹⁹ Sometimes some majoritarian Sakrebulo members are active in budget planning to collect citizens' priorities in their constituency. However, in general, the budget priorities of the municipality are not formed as a result of public opinion polls. In addition, there are no thematic studies and data broken down at the municipal level on many issues.²⁰

16 Interview with the representative of *Transparency International Georgia*, July 8, 2020.

17 Tbilisi City Hall OGP portal, <https://bit.ly/37LlkBH>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

18 Local Self-Government Index 2019, Tbilisi Municipality, <https://bit.ly/31ycSEW>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

19 Interview with the OGP Contact Person of the Tbilisi City Hall, September 11, 2019.

20 Interview with the Chairman of the *United National Movement* faction of the Tbilisi Sakrebulo, September 20, 2019.

According to the representative of the Tbilisi Sakrebulo opposition, there is a great deal of nihilism among citizens towards public policy in general. They think that the Sakrebulo members communicate with them only to collect votes for the elections. Consequently, citizens have low trust in elected officials. He also noted that the higher participation of citizens requires the direct election of Tbilisi district executives (currently they are appointed by the Mayor) and the creation of a two-level Sakrebulo at the district and municipality level. Elected executives should be independent of the municipality, while the municipal Sakrebulo should exercise effective oversight over the City Hall. In addition, for Tbilisi, the use of electronic participation mechanisms will be more effective than holding physical meetings with citizens. A unified online platform should be created where plebiscites will be held on various topics important to the city. Currently, the Municipal Services Development Agency conducts online surveys during budget planning, although citizens have very little information about this and therefore these surveys have few respondents. *Your Idea for the City Mayor* is another good online platform on which citizens have come up with interesting ideas, such as installing air filters in kindergartens. Also a good platform was *Fix My Street*, which allowed citizens to provide information about specific street problems to local governments through an online platform. However many did not have information about the *Fix My Street* platform and it had very few users in practice, as a result of which it ceased to function.²¹ As mentioned above, the same thing happened with the platform *Your Idea for the City Mayor*, which is practically non-functional since September 2020.

It should be noted that the charge of solidarity and self-organization among young people is higher than in other segments of society, a good example of which was the high civic responsibility of young people during the 2015 Tbilisi floods and their active participation in eliminating the consequences of the floods. To further activate this segment, the municipality should carry out various fun and useful activities such as

21 Interview with a local self-government expert, May 4, 2020.

cleaning promotions and marathons and ensure the wide participation of all interested people in these activities.²²

Like the Sakrebulo member, the representatives of the civil society also shared the opinion that the planning of the municipal budget at the level of Tbilisi district executives, thematic focus groups, simple online surveys and competitions for project ideas in the communities would make the citizens more active in local self-government. Tbilisi local authorities also need to do more to use the resources of civil society organizations. For example, this resource could be used to conduct a survey of the needs of municipal beneficiaries, assess the functioning and impact of municipal services, and organize thematic advisory councils, meetings, and forums.

2.2. Telavi

Local Problems - According to Telavi local self-government and civil society representatives, Telavi residents are generally concerned with unemployment, inflation and infrastructural problems, such as water, gas and municipal transport system malfunctions, poor quality of roads, streets, outdoor lighting, schools, sports fields and recreation areas. They are also concerned with problems related to stray animals.²³

Multisectoral Cooperation - Telavi local self-government cooperates with local businesses mainly in the field of culture and sports within the framework of various charitable and one-time individual assistance projects.

22 Interview with the Chairman of the *United National Movement* faction of the Tbilisi Sakrebulo, September 20, 2019.

23 Interviews with the Mayor of Telavi, the Chairman of Telavi Sakrebulo, members of the Sakrebulo faction *Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia* and the Chairman of the Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement* were held on September 22, 23 and 24, 2019. Interviews with the Head of the Telavi office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* and the Director of the *Media Center Kakheti* were conducted on March 20, 2020.

Table 4. Telavi - Social and Open Governance Data

| <i>Area and Population</i> | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|--|----------------------|
| Area (km.2) | Population | Population in Urban Settlement | Population in Rural Settlement | Ethnic Minorities | Number of Emigrants | Number of Immigrants |
| 1,095 | 58,350 | 19,629 | 38,721 | 5,967 | 2,056 | 2,951 |
| | 1.6% | 33.6% | 66.4% | 10.2% | 3.5% | 5% |
| <i>Level of Education Achieved</i> | | | | | | |
| Higher | Professional | Secondary | Basic | Elementary | Without elementary education, but literate | Illiterate |
| 12,782 | 9,654 | 17,724 | 5,410 | 3,161 | 1,641 | 250 |
| 22% | 16.5% | 30.4% | 9.2% | 5.4% | 2.8% | 0.4% |
| <i>Employment and Economic Activity Status</i> | | | | | | |
| Employed | Hired Worker | Employer | Working in their Own Farm | Auxiliary Member of the Family | Unemployed | |
| 29,073 | 12,345 | 267 | 15,922 | 533 | 2,681 | |
| 49.8% | 21.1% | 0.5% | 27.2% | 0.9% | 4.6% | |
| <i>Open Governance</i> | | | | | | |
| Proactive Disclosure of Public Information | Electronic Governance | Citizen Participation | Accountability | Final Evaluation | | |
| 41% | 53% | 26% | 68% | 44% | | |
| <i>Functioning of Citizen Participation Mechanisms</i> | | | | | | |
| General Assembly of the Settlement | Petition | Council of Civil Advisors | Ensuring Participation in Sakrebulo Sessions | Hearing the Reports of Sakrebulo Members | Hearing the Mayor's Reports | |
| 0 | - | 0 | 100% | 60% | 0 | |

For example, the *Georgian Wines and Spirits Company (GWS)* sponsors basketball and chess tournaments in the municipality, while the second wine company, the *Kakhetian Traditional Winemaking (KTW)*, sponsors the *Chacha Festival*.²⁴ Also, the hotel *Old Telavi* hosts guests for children's competitions free of charge. However, in general, the cul-

24 Interview with the members of the Telavi Sakrebulo faction *Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia*, September 22, 2019.

ture of partnership between the local self-government and local business is not developed. The latter prefers to remain incognito, including when funding charitable projects.²⁵ Business companies are also less willing and interested in engaging in local self-government activities, developing and delivering municipal services, which would increase their corporate social responsibility. According to the local self-government representatives, in order to attract investments from businesses, the municipality should provide them with exemptions on local taxes. Another important area that would enhance cooperation with local businesses is the provision of solid waste management services by the municipality, which is in the interests of both parties and the public.

It is also noteworthy that despite their great willingness, civil society organizations find it very difficult to cooperate with local businesses due to the latter's lack of desire and interest. These organizations are particularly keen to work with business companies on issues such as the exploitation of juvenile labor and the employment of persons with special needs.²⁶

Telavi local self-government cooperates with the local civil society mainly on social issues. For example, the municipality has a co-financing project with *Lampari*, an organization working for people with special needs, on issues such as supporting parents of children with disabilities.²⁷ As part of another co-financing project with civil society, the municipality provides housing to homeless people free of charge.²⁸ In general, local as well as international organizations fund many social projects in Telavi. In order to implement these projects, the local self-government allocates municipal spaces to the relevant organizations free of charge.²⁹

According to the Telavi Mayor, with the help of resources from civil society organizations that are active members of the Council of Civ-

25 Interview with the Chairman of Telavi Sakrebulo, September 24, 2019.

26 Interview with the Head of the Telavi office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, March 20, 2020.

27 Interview with the members of the Telavi Sakrebulo faction *Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia*, September 22, 2019.

28 Interview with the Mayor of Telavi, September 23, 2019.

29 Interview with the Chairman of Telavi Sakrebulo, September 24, 2019.

il Advisors and the Gender Equality Council in the municipality, local self-government representatives can more easily reach large groups of citizens to better understand their priorities on social and infrastructural issues. The municipality also actively uses the results of thematic research and polls conducted by various organizations. However, local civil society organizations noted that the challenge remains that presentations of their thematic studies are often not attended by the local authorities and key recommendations from those studies are not taken into account.

The Council of Civil Advisors and the Gender Equality Council were also named by civil society representatives as the most commonly used mechanisms in terms of cooperation with local self-government and cooperation with each other. According to them, the convening of these coordination councils is more the result of the activities of civil society organizations than the initiative of the local self-government. Civil society was also actively involved in the drafting of the 2020 Telavi Municipality budget and submitted specific initiatives in social programs related to the provision of hygienic products for persons with special needs and the feeding of infants, which the local self-government reflected in the budget. However, according to a representative of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, the local self-government generally lacks interest in relations with civil society organizations, because it looks at the latter with suspicion and thinks that those organizations are only looking at the local self-government from an ambush position. Consequently, civil society organizations spend a lot of time to explain that they want constructive collaboration with the local self-government and not confrontation.

Telavi civil society organizations actively cooperate with each other and conduct thematic research on the needs of citizens. It should be noted that *Media Center Kakheti* launched a special advocacy platform called *Initiative* (initiative.ge), within which civil society organizations and the Telavi local self-government have a joint advisory council. This council, which meets once a month, has a total of 15 members - five representing the City Hall and the Sakrebulo, and 10 civil society. Through joint consultation, civil society organizations formally submit initiatives

from citizens to the municipality. For example, in 2019, the council introduced eight civic initiatives, of which six were considered by the municipality - three were on social issues and the rest were on regulating traffic, painting ugly walls in the city and arranging exhibition space for women entrepreneurs.³⁰ The main challenge is to sustain this successful collaboration, as the advisory council meetings have to be organized and this requires human and financial resources, the mobilization of which would be very difficult without donor assistance.³¹

Another successful example of joint collaboration between local self-government and civil society organizations was the format of inclusive budget cooperation organized by the *National Democratic Institute* (NDI). Under this format, all major civil society organizations and local self-government representatives worked together to define priorities for the municipal budget. In the context of cooperation between civil society organizations, it is noteworthy that many organizations carry out similar projects on topics such as supporting ethnic minorities in the Pankisi Gorge and preventing domestic violence, which causes overlaps and complicates the division of labor between these organizations.³²

According to Telavi Sakrebulo members, civil society and business should act as a mediator between the local self-government and the citizens and should cooperate regularly with the representatives of the local self-government, including in the framework of co-financing projects. In the case of business, however, there is a lack of desire and interest in this, while local civil society organizations do not have sufficient resources and institutional capacity to cooperate regularly with the municipality.

Inter-Municipal Cooperation - According to the Telavi Mayor and members of the Sakrebulo, Telavi Municipality has inter-municipal projects mainly on the construction of stray animal shelter and tourism. For example, with the funding of the Municipal Development Fund, the first inter-municipal shelter for stray animals is being built in Gurjaani, which

30 Interview with the Director of *Media Center Kakheti*, March 20, 2020.

31 Interview with the Head of the Telavi office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, March 20, 2020.

32 Ibid.

will serve all eight municipalities in the Kakheti region [49]. Also, all the municipalities of Kakheti are united by the non-commercial legal entity in charge of tourism and economy promotion (Non-entrepreneurial Non-commercial Legal Entity (NNLE) Kakheti Destination Management Organization – Visit Kakheti (abbreviated as *DMO Visit Kakheti*)), which is financed by the municipalities themselves. The EU energy efficiency project, which brings together the mayors of different municipalities, is also noteworthy. Finally, it is worth mentioning the Regional Advisory Council under the State Trustee/Governor, which is actively working on the issues of inter-municipal transport development.³³

Civil society is also interested in inter-municipal cooperation and is implementing certain projects. For example, *Media Center Kakheti* has introduced a model of inter-municipal cooperation around municipal social programs among local self-government and civil society representatives in Telavi, Gurjaani and Kvareli. In particular, a comparative analysis of the social programs of these three municipalities was conducted and a joint presentation was held, which aroused great interest both in the local self-governments and in the civil society.³⁴ For its part, the Telavi office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* wants to introduce the Zugdidi Municipality program *Social Housing in a Well-Equipped Environment* in Telavi, which will provide temporary shelter to socially vulnerable homeless families.³⁵

According to the respondents of this study, it is desirable to have more intensive thematic cooperation between municipalities under the umbrella of the NALAG, including on issues such as co-financing projects with the business sector and civil society. It is also important to share best practices on these and other topics.

Open Governance and Citizen Participation - According to Telavi local self-government and civil society representatives, citizen participation in the activities of the municipality and in the development of lo-

33 Interview with the Mayor of Telavi, September 23, 2019.

34 Interview with the Director of *Media Center Kakheti*, March 20, 2020.

35 Interview with the Head of the Telavi office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, March 20, 2020.

cal policies is low. The Mayor's trustees and the majority members of the Sakrebulo work most actively with the citizens at the village level within the framework of the government's *Village Development Program*. With them, citizens mainly raise personal issues, such as requirements for solving social and infrastructural problems and obtaining construction permits. Notable community-wide issues raised by the citizens included well drilling, as well as youth initiatives on renovating bus stops and stadiums. However, such community initiatives are not systematic.

It is also problematic to effectively implement the mechanisms of citizen participation provided by the Local Self-Government Code. For example, the General Assembly of the Settlement is practically non-functioning. According to the representative of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, she remembers only one such Assembly, the convening of which was the merit of one active person. At the Assembly meeting, a project to build a gym and a mini stadium in the village of Vardisubani was put forward, but in the end the project was not approved by the municipality and the citizens participating in the meeting lost their interest in applying this mechanism again. There are generally very complicated legal procedures for convening a General Assembly of the Settlement, and that is why this mechanism does not work in practice. Its alternative is village assembly meetings held under the *Village Development Program*. However, according to the opposition representative of the Telavi Sakrebulo, the local government often brings its supporters to these meetings and the general population is less involved in the process. Citizens generally have little information about what municipal services are available to them and what programs are provided in the municipal budget.

The officially registered petitions from citizens are not submitted to the municipality at all, as it is legally difficult for citizens to formulate official petitions independently and to submit them to the local self-government.³⁶ Of the several informal petitions, noteworthy are requests for

36 Interview with the Head of the Telavi office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, March 20, 2020.

road construction and petitions against the construction of a hydropower plant in the village of Artana [50].

As mentioned above, the Council of Civil Advisors at the City Hall is relatively more active, which, according to the Telavi Mayor, can meet twice a month as a result of the activities of civil society organizations. As for participation in Sakrebulo sessions and thematic public meetings, including discussions on the municipal budget or hearing the reports on the activities of elected officials, citizens are quite passive in this regard. According to Sakrebulo members, these meetings are mostly attended by the same individuals from local civil society and youth groups, as well as political activists. Despite the announcement and advertisement of such meetings by the local self-government, the general public is not interested and does not believe that anything will change with its participation. The Sakrebulo members also noted that citizens become more active when a particular problem concerns them personally, although they are less likely to come to participate in discussions on important decisions for the village or city. Most of the population does not have the perception that they should be involved in local self-government activities and that this city and village is their own. According to the representatives of the civil society, it is especially difficult to talk about the participation with the Roma living in Kakheti, because they do not have the appropriate desire and skills. In particular, Roma do not know the state language and do not have identity documents. They are also distrustful of local self-government. Civil society organizations also link the low participation of citizens in public meetings to the fact that the representatives of the local self-government come to these meetings to show off rather than to listen to the opinions of citizens and to take into account their initiatives. It is generally difficult for citizens to access municipal bureaucratic systems independently, without the assistance of civil society organizations. Therefore, the latter try to help the citizens to participate in the meetings of the Sakrebulo, to submit initiatives on the draft local budget and to write various statements to the municipality.

According to the representatives of the civil society, in order to

make the citizens more active, it is necessary for them to see that the local self-government wants to cooperate with them. If a citizen fails to resolve an issue with the help of the municipality, s/he will lose interest in local policy-making. Therefore, the City Hall and the Sakrebulo should take into account the initiatives of the citizens as much as possible and should proactively invite them when presenting their activity reports, especially during the non-election period. When the local self-government listens carefully to the citizens and takes their recommendations into account, the latter will then be more willing to be actively involved in local policy-making.

According to the respondents, in order to effectively implement citizen participation mechanisms, it is necessary for the municipality, civil society and the media to regularly raise citizens' awareness of these mechanisms. It is also important to have simple mechanisms to increase citizen participation. For example, the above-mentioned civil society platform *Initiative* (initiative.ge) and its advisory board mechanism is easier to use than the participation mechanisms provided for in the Local Self-Government Code.

Telavi Sakrebulo members noted that the local self-government should work especially towards engaging with young people. It is desirable to establish youth advisory councils at Sakrebulo commissions and to discuss budget programs with them. Another good mechanism to increase citizen participation will be the regular outdoor community public meetings of all Sakrebulo commissions.

2.3. Gori

Local Problems - According to the representatives of Gori local self-government, the residents of Gori are mainly concerned with the following problems: unemployment, lack of access to social and healthcare services, water system malfunction, especially in villages, poor quality of roads and apartments as well as of municipal transport system and tourism infrastructure. They also noted problems with stray animals, poor

kindergarten infrastructure and low salaries of kindergarten staff, lack of a master plan for urban development and land use, and the resulting chaotic constructions, as well as risks of corruption and nepotism during municipal tenders. Along with these problems, civil society representatives highlighted the lack of municipal powers and the low participation of citizens in local policy-making.³⁷

Table 5. Gori - Social and Open Governance Data

| <i>Area and Population</i> | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Area (km.2) | Population | Population in Urban Settlement | Population in Rural Settlement | Ethnic Minorities | Number of Emigrants | Number of Immigrants |
| 1,352 | 125,692 | 48,143 | 77,549 | 4,290 | 2,121 | 4,134 |
| | 3.4% | 38.3% | 61.7% | 3.4% | 1.7% | 3.3% |
| <i>Level of Education Achieved</i> | | | | | | |
| Higher | Professional | Secondary | Basic | Elementary | Without elementary education, but literate | Illiterate |
| 24,923 | 20,029 | 42,184 | 10,821 | 6,815 | 3,448 | 416 |
| 19.8% | 15.9% | 33.6% | 8.6% | 5.4% | 2.7% | 0.3% |
| <i>Employment and Economic Activity Status</i> | | | | | | |
| Employed | Hired Worker | Employer | Working in their Own Farm | Auxiliary Member of the Family | Unemployed | |
| 56,084 | 20,458 | 594 | 33,396 | 1,631 | 10,966 | |
| 44.6% | 16.3% | 0.5% | 26.6% | 1.3% | 8.7% | |
| <i>Open Governance</i> | | | | | | |
| Proactive Disclosure of Public Information | Electronic Governance | Citizen Participation | Accountability | Final Evaluation | | |
| 25% | 29% | 23% | 63% | 27% | | |

³⁷ Interviews with the Mayor of Gori, the Chairman of Gori Sakrebulo and the Chairman of the *United National Movement* faction of Sakrebulo were conducted on September 10, 19 and October 21, 2019. Interviews with the Head of the Gori office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* and the Head of the Gori Branch of the *Civil Society Institute* were held on March 17, 18, 2020.

| <i>Functioning of Citizen Participation Mechanisms</i> | | | | | |
|--|----------|---------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------|
| General Assembly of the Settlement | Petition | Council of Civil Advisors | Ensuring Participation in Sakrebulo Sessions | Hearing the Reports of Sakrebulo Members | Hearing the Mayor's Reports |
| 0 | - | 100% | 30% | 0 | 60% |

Multisectoral Cooperation - with local business, mainly with the company *Kula*, Gori Municipality cooperates within the framework of charitable projects, which include providing one-time assistance to vulnerable groups and funding sports events. There are also cases when local farmers donate their products to the homeless free of charge.³⁸ According to a representative of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, her organization provides legal assistance to local businesses on labor rights and business registration issues. However, business companies are not generally involved in local self-government and community activities. They mainly negotiate issues of private interest with the municipality and are also active during elections with donations benefiting the ruling party. She also noted that the business interest is in tax breaks and advertising their products. If the local self-government does not support businesses in this direction, then private companies do not see the benefit of participating in municipal activities because they have a low awareness of corporate social responsibility. According to Gori Sakrebulo members, the local self-government should be a lobbyist for business in terms of creating new jobs for citizens and providing high quality municipal services, while many municipal services should be handed over to businesses for management. Improving the business environment will also help develop local tourism infrastructure and attract additional private investment.

As for the civil society, the local self-government cooperates with it mainly in the format of the Council of Civil Advisors, where quite active organizations are members. According to the Mayor of Gori and the Chairman of Gori Sakrebulo, these organizations submit various initia-

³⁸ Interview with the Chairman of Gori Sakrebulo, October 21, 2019.

tives in the field of social protection, infrastructure, education, youth and culture, such as projects supporting people with special needs and war veterans, which are then co-financed by the municipality. However, from the perspective of civil society, co-financing projects with local self-government are mainly used by small non-governmental organizations, and the projects themselves lack transparency.

According to the members of Gori Sakrebulo, the local self-government should use the resources of the civil society especially actively to conduct thematic research and to study the level of citizens' satisfaction with the quality of municipal services. The Mayor should be the initiator of such cooperation projects with both civil society and business. To do this, he should use the mechanism of the Council of Civil Advisors even more actively and offer concrete benefits to the members of the Council so that they become interested in cooperating with the municipality.

Inter-Municipal Cooperation - Gori Municipality has signed memoranda of cooperation with 12 municipalities in different countries, under which international businesses finance certain projects in the municipality, such as the project of providing shelter for stray dogs. As for cooperation with local municipalities, Gori has imported the participatory budgeting project *Citizen Budget Project* from Marneuli, which has since been exported from Gori to other municipalities, such as Zugdidi.³⁹

In addition, the model of inter-municipal cooperation created by NDI around the issue of inclusive budgeting, which covered five municipalities (Gori, Zugdidi, Telavi, Marneuli and Ozurgeti) is noteworthy. Also, five municipalities (Batumi, Gori, Ozurgeti, Khelvachauri and Chokhatauri) were united by the project of the *Civil Society Institute*, in the framework of which local self-government leaders and civil society representatives exchanged their approaches to participatory budgeting and citizen participation and introduced common criteria.⁴⁰ According to civil society representatives, it is desirable that such formats of inter-municipal cooperation, where City Halls, Sakrebulos and civil society orga-

39 Interview with the Mayor of Gori, September 19, 2019.

40 Interview with the Head of the Gori Branch of the *Civil Society Institute*, March 17, 2020.

nizations come together and share citizen participation practices, become more sustainable and thematic meetings become more regular.

Open Governance and Citizen Participation - Representatives of local self-government and civil society named village assembly meetings and public meetings in Gori as the most effective mechanism for citizen participation in the framework of the *Village Development Program* and the *Citizen Budget Project*. For example, according to the *Citizen Budget Project*, each community / administrative unit of the municipality is allocated GEL 100,000, which is spent according to the priorities of the citizens. These priorities are selected by a special representative council, which includes active citizens living in the community and representatives of the City Hall. The decision on the selection of projects to be funded by the municipal budget is made by the council by secret ballot and by a majority of votes. Prior to that, the municipality clarifies the voting procedures, its expected results and the role of citizens in the process as a whole. It is such an inclusive model that determines the success of the *Citizen Budget Project*. It is noteworthy that the citizens mainly bring in infrastructure projects, including the improvement of outdoor lighting, sports fields and recreation squares.⁴¹

Civil society organizations also noted the positive role of the *Citizen Budget Project* in increasing citizen participation in municipal activities. However, they also identified some challenges in this direction. For example, the local self-government mainly invites the supporters of the ruling party to the public meetings held under the project, and the views of the general rural population are often not reflected in final decisions, which negatively affects the credibility of the whole process. According to the representative of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, community organizations also find it difficult to bring citizens to these meetings, because many citizens believe that their vote will still be lost and therefore nothing will change with their participation. She also noted that small villages are often disadvantaged because the local self-government takes the interests of large villages into account when selecting projects

41 Interview with the Mayor of Gori, September 19, 2019.

to be financed from the municipal budget. In response to this challenge, the population of small villages offered their own resources to the municipality to take into account the interests of all small villages. This included offering physical labor of village residents in exchange for the hired labor of a private company during the implementation of a priority project for the village, and thus saving local budget funds. This scheme has been successfully implemented in a number of cases.⁴² According to the opposition member of Gori Sakrebulo, in order for the *Citizen Budget Project* to be more successful, it is necessary for the local self-government to conduct a large-scale information campaign about the goals of this project and the public meetings held within it, and to hold regular meetings with the population at least once a month.

As for the citizen participation mechanisms provided for in the Local Self-Government Code, the most effective of these mechanisms is the Council of Civil Advisors. However, according to the Secretary of the Council, representing *Civil Society Institute*, the effective implementation of this mechanism depends largely on active individuals, and many Council members are just members on paper and do not participate in Council meetings. According to the representative of the opposition in Gori Sakrebulo, the Council of Civil Advisors should be more representative and it should unite people of all professions, while open applications for membership in the Council should be published.

As an alternative to the General Assembly of the Settlement, village assemblies and public meetings are held within the framework of the *Village Development Program* and the *Citizen Budget Project*. The mechanism of the petition does not work in practice, because according to the Mayor of Gori, the citizens prefer to raise issues directly with the Mayor's village trustees or the majoritarian members of the Sakrebulo. According to civil society representatives, the reason for the low use of the petition mechanism is also that the one percent threshold of registered voters in the municipality is high to collect mandatory signatures on the

⁴² Interview with the Head of the Gori Branch of the *Civil Society Institute*, March 17, 2020.

petition. The same holds true for the General Assembly, the convening of which requires the initiative of at least five percent of the registered voters in the settlement, and the General Assembly itself is authorized only if at least 20 percent of its members are present, which is quite high number and makes this mechanism very difficult to practice. At the same time, the citizens have no guarantee that their petitions or the initiatives put forward within the General Assembly of the Settlement will be taken into account by the municipality, which negatively affects their motivation to use these mechanisms. According to the representative of the *Civil Society Institute*, if the law obliges the local self-government to take into account the initiatives received from the petitions and the General Assembly of the Settlement, it will greatly increase the use of these mechanisms by the citizens and their general self-confidence. She also noted that Sakrebulo public meetings in the past were mainly organized by NDI and were mostly attended by non-governmental and media organizations. Citizens generally do not have enough information that they can also participate in such meetings.

The representative of the opposition in Gori Sakrebulo named the lack of education and awareness of the citizens as the reason for their low participation in municipal activities. She said it is especially difficult to work with young people because they are less interested in public policy issues. Citizens generally avoid talking openly about their problems with the opposition, which, in the opinion of an opposition member of the Sakrebulo, is explained by the lack of political balance in the local self-government. For example, if the opposition were represented in any decision-making position in the municipality, even at the level of Deputy Mayor, it would share the problems of its constituents and the constituents themselves would no longer avoid participating in public meetings organized by the local self-government and talking openly about their problems.

According to civil society representatives, the local government often does not take into account the interests of vulnerable groups living in the municipality, such as young people, Internally Displaced Persons

(IDPs) and people with special needs. Consequently, these groups also think that it does not make sense for them to participate in municipal activities. Village assemblies and public meetings under the *Citizen Budget Project* focus on infrastructural issues and less so on the interests of vulnerable groups. In response, the CSO members of the Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors jointly raised the issue of taking into account the interests of persons with special needs when laying roads, for example. The local government took this issue into account in the municipal budget.

A representative of the *Civil Society Institute* noted that in general, if the citizen is not personally affected by the problem, such as repairing a sewage pipe or roof, s/he will be less bothered to discuss community issues. There is a lack of solidarity and support in the society. "However, if we are only focused on the personal, we will not be able to create something valuable. If you are well and the surrounding environment is bad, you will still not be well. When the population becomes accustomed to self-organization, then local self-government will also become more productive. Currently, the population views the local self-government as a father and expects that all the problems will be solved from above. But for this, it is necessary to be active at the grassroots level and share many successful examples of citizen participation."⁴³ For instance, within the framework of co-financing projects, local infrastructure, roads and playgrounds are being set up in Gori multi-apartment communities. If the initiative of one community is taken into account by the local self-government, then other communities will also have an incentive to be more actively involved in local policy-making to pursue their own interests. To encourage this process, Sakrebulo's outdoor community meetings can be a good mechanism.⁴⁴

The Mayor of Gori also emphasized the creation of active civic groups in the communities and the role of the Sakrebulo in this process. According to him, more effective than the Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors in the past was the Public Council at the Sakrebulo, within the

43 Translated by the author.

44 Interview with the Head of the Gori office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, March 18, 2020.

framework of which decisions were made in the form of Sakrebulo's decrees and resolutions and were therefore binding.

According to the representative of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, the participation of citizens in public policy issues is hindered by the politicization of these issues, the polarization of society and the difficult socio-economic background in the country in general. In the case of Gori, this is exacerbated by the constant stress of people living in South Ossetian conflict zone villages. Therefore, if a particularly acute issue is not on the agenda, then the population is not active. Also, the citizens are quite pragmatic and are more active in the pre-election period, because they know that their problems will be taken into account during this period. For example, at the request of locals living in the village of Kere in Gori Municipality, the status of a mountainous settlement, which allows locals to enjoy more privileges, was granted to this village in March 2020, a few months before the October parliamentary elections [51]. In such cases, street rallies also work well, which are much easier for the population to use than the citizen participation mechanisms provided by the Local Self-Government Code. The status of a mountainous settlement for the village of Kere was granted through street rallies. However, this is not a format of dialogue and cooperation. The General Assembly of the Settlement will be more useful in such a format and it is necessary to apply this mechanism effectively by the local government.

Representatives of both local self-government and civil society noted that raising the interest of the citizen to take a more active part in the development of local policies is primarily the responsibility of the municipality. In particular, the local government must show the public its importance and also that it takes into account the opinion of the latter. In this process, it is especially important to provide citizens with regular information on issues to be discussed with them and relevant procedures and to simplify and depoliticize citizen participation mechanisms, which would encourage the population to use these mechanisms more actively.

2.4. Marneuli

Local Problems - According to the representatives of Marneuli local self-government, the residents of Marneuli are mainly concerned with the following problems: lack of knowledge of the state language, lack of education and information (especially in villages), malfunction of drinking water and irrigation systems, garbage disposal and other utilities, lack of sports fields, complex issues related to land procurement and registration. According to civil society representatives, these problems are compounded by low citizen participation in local self-government, lack of citizens' willingness to speak openly about their problems, inequality between ethnic Azeris and Georgians, unemployment, limited opportunities for small business development, and complicated trade relations with Russia. It should be noted that according to civil society representatives, most Marneuli residents do not perceive Russia as an occupier of breakaway Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.⁴⁵

Multisectoral Cooperation - *Marneuli Food Factory* is the largest local enterprise in Marneuli Municipality, which finances various municipal events, such as events related to the Independence Day of Georgia, exhibitions-sales and charitable actions. The municipality also plans to ask this company for funding for building the central stadium.⁴⁶ Also noteworthy is LLC *Alma*, a company which renovates bus stops in Marneuli and commits to maintaining these bus stops in exchange for placing its own advertisements at the stops.⁴⁷

45 Interviews with the Mayor of Marneuli, the Deputy Chairman of Marneuli Sakrebulo and a member of the Sakrebulo from *European Georgia* party were conducted on October 23, 2019 and March 9, 12, 2020. Interviews with the Director of the *Community Radio Marneuli* and the Coordinator of the *Marneuli Center for Civic Engagement* were held on March 11, 19, 2020.

46 Interview with the Deputy Chairman of Marneuli Sakrebulo, March 9, 2020.

47 Interview with the Director of *Community Radio Marneuli*, March 11, 2020.

Table 6. Marneuli - Social and Open Governance Data

| <i>Area and Population</i> | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|--|----------------------|
| Area (km.2) | Population | Population in Urban Settlement | Population in Rural Settlement | Ethnic Minorities | Number of Emigrants | Number of Immigrants |
| 935.5 | 104,300 | 20,211 | 84,089 | 95,235 | 2,191 | 3,444 |
| | 2.8% | 19.4% | 80.6% | 91.3% | 2.1% | 3.3% |
| <i>Level of Education Achieved</i> | | | | | | |
| Higher | Professional | Secondary | Basic | Elementary | Without elementary education, but literate | Illiterate |
| 9,343 | 6,490 | 42,914 | 11,981 | 7,665 | 4,933 | 1,889 |
| 9% | 6.2% | 41.1% | 11.5% | 7.3% | 4.7% | 1.8% |
| <i>Employment and Economic Activity Status</i> | | | | | | |
| Employed | Hired Worker | Employer | Working in their Own Farm | Auxiliary Member of the Family | Unemployed | |
| 47,847 | 9,677 | 184 | 34,724 | 3,259 | 2,699 | |
| 45.9% | 9.3% | 0.2% | 33.3% | 3.1% | 2.6% | |
| <i>Open Governance</i> | | | | | | |
| Proactive Disclosure of Public Information | Electronic Governance | Citizen Participation | Accountability | Final Evaluation | | |
| 18% | 26% | 26% | 35% | 22% | | |
| <i>Functioning of Citizen Participation Mechanisms</i> | | | | | | |
| General Assembly of the Settlement | Petition | Council of Civil Advisors | Ensuring Participation in Sakrebulo Sessions | Hearing the Reports of Sakrebulo Members | Hearing the Mayor's Reports | |
| 0 | - | 0 | 100% | 0 | 0 | |

For ethnic Azerbaijanis, especially students, *Marneuli Tea House* and *SOCAR* fund various courses in management, computer science and Georgian language. Basalt production is also active in the municipality.⁴⁸ Sakrebulo opposition members mainly cooperate with local small entre-

48 Interview with the Coordinator of the *Center for Civic Engagement* in Marneuli, March 19, 2020.

preneurs and advise them on tax and legal issues.⁴⁹

Despite such high activity of business companies operating in Marneuli, corporate social responsibility is not developed in these companies. They lack interest in engaging in local self-government and community activities and policy-making, while civil society has very little information about their activities. For example, most of those companies are not represented in the Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors. The companies that are members of the Council are generally very passive and become active only during the elections in terms of donations to the ruling party. As for the training courses funded by the above-mentioned companies for the ethnic Azerbaijani population, ethnic Georgians do not participate in them and therefore these courses do not ensure the integration of the two ethnic groups.⁵⁰

According to the opposition member of the Sakrebulo, for the development of local production and corporate social responsibility in business companies, it is important to introduce the practice of open and competitive tenders on public procurement, where priority will be given to local enterprises and employment of local people, something that should be initiated by the local self-government.

As for the local civil society, Marneuli Municipality mainly cooperates with it in the form of working groups and various thematic councils, such as the councils on issues of youth, persons with special needs and gender equality. In addition, the local self-government held public meetings on the draft municipal budget for 2020, where civil society organizations actively presented their own initiatives. Part of these initiatives related to the development of local infrastructure was reflected in the 2020 municipal budget.⁵¹ Civil society representatives cited successful examples of cooperation with the local self-government: in particular, they submitted an initiative to improve the infrastructure of kindergar-

49 Interview with Sakrebulo member from *European Georgia* party, March 12, 2020.

50 Interview with the Coordinator of the *Center for Civic Engagement* in Marneuli, March 19, 2020.

51 Interviews with the Mayor of Marneuli and the Deputy Chairman of Marneuli Sakrebulo, October 23, 2019; March 9, 2020.

tens and increase staff salaries, which the local self-government included in the 2020 municipal budget. The second issue was about increasing local self-government transparency and openness, which was raised by civil society at a public meeting. In response, the municipality created its own website and Facebook page, where information about its activities is published in Georgian and Azerbaijani languages.⁵²

However, a representative of the Sakrebulo opposition noted that local CSOs do not have the resources to cooperate more effectively with the municipality, nor does the local government feel accountable to them. According to him, the latter feels more accountable to international organizations. For example, in 2019, NDI implemented an inclusive budgeting program in Marneuli and the local self-government successfully worked with it, including in terms of taking into account the recommendations proposed by the international organization. According to the opposition member of the Sakrebulo, civil society organizations operating in Marneuli should have more opportunities to disseminate information. In this regard, it would be good for the central television to broadcast information about the activities of these organizations at least once a month.

For example, *Community Radio Marneuli* actively covers the activities of local civil society organizations and activists who run advocacy campaigns on citizen participation issues and City Hall openness. The radio invites representatives of various organizations and civil activists working on a specific issue to have joint discussions. However, there is no format for systematic cooperation between civil society organizations. According to the director of the radio, the lack of funding and resources of non-governmental organizations also hinders their regular cooperation with the local self-government. These organizations are always limited in time and they need quick effects as well as good project writing skills to attract donors. Consequently, they find it difficult to work on long-term issues and cooperation mechanisms. The develop-

52 Interview with the Coordinator of the *Center for Civic Engagement* in Marneuli, March 19, 2020.

ment of donor-independent and membership-based CSOs is generally linked to the country's economic development, and Georgia is not yet at this stage. The director of *Community Radio Marneuli* also noted that local self-government openness to civil society depends more on specific individuals than on sustainable systems of institutionalized cooperation. Municipal officials generally perceive civic activism as a political opposition, which hinders cooperation between the two sectors.

This challenge was also highlighted by a representative of the Marneuli *Center for Civic Engagement*, who noted that local self-government is generally politicized and that the appointment of staff to municipal positions is politically motivated. Staff appointed in this way often fail to meet the minimum competency requirements, leading to a lack of civil society trust in local government. She also noted that in the face of scarce funding and resources, staff outflows from CSOs are common after a particular project is completed. In general, there is no unified civil society in Marneuli and competition between different organizations prevails over solidarity.

Inter-Municipal Cooperation - Marneuli Municipality does not have an institutionalized mechanism for inter-municipal cooperation. However, in this regard, the *Citizen Budget Project* is noteworthy, which was first introduced in Georgia in Marneuli in 2015 and then it was exported to other municipalities, such as Gori and Zugdidi, as mentioned above [52] [53]. The *Citizen Budget Project* has no longer been implemented in Marneuli after 2017, which was largely due to the exhaustion of funding allocated for this project by a Polish donor organization.⁵³

In terms of inter-municipal cooperation, the inter-municipal meetings on tourism, civil integration and diversity held by the administration of the State Trustee of Kvemo Kartli Region are also noteworthy. According to the representatives of the civil society, similar thematic meetings with the municipalities of other regions should be held regularly, which should be initiated by the local self-governments with the active

53 Interview with the Coordinator of the *Center for Civic Engagement* in Marneuli, March 19, 2020.

involvement of the civil society and the youth in this process.

Open Governance and Citizen Participation - Representatives of local self-government and civil society pointed out that nihilism reigns in among most Marneuli people and they are generally quite passive when it comes to their participation in municipal activities. Citizens go to the local government mainly to negotiate employment, land registration, meat storage and street vending regulations. There are very rare cases when Marneuli people have been active beyond personal issues, namely in community and public policy issues. According to the representative of the Sakrebulo opposition, such passivity of the local population is partly explained by the fact that many members of the ethnic minority do not speak the state language. For example, according to the National Statistics Office, about 79 percent of Marneuli residents (81,941 citizens) do not speak Georgian fluently. According to the representative of the ruling party of the Sakrebulo, this is a serious challenge, which the municipality is trying to solve by launching Azeri-language programs on Marneuli TV and translating the information into Azerbaijani on the municipality's website and Facebook page. However, this alone is not enough and more activity on the part of the local self-government is needed in this direction. According to the Mayor of Marneuli,⁵⁴ it is especially difficult to involve people with special needs in local self-government activities, because they are always dissatisfied and distrustful of the municipal authorities.

In terms of local self-government's cooperation with citizens, public and individual meetings work best in Marneuli. For example, with the help of NDI, Marneuli Municipality conducted a representative public opinion poll and large-scale public meetings to collect citizens' priorities for the 2020 local budget, the results of which were taken into account while drafting municipal budget-funded programs. Marneuli Sakrebulo members stressed that the inclusiveness of the budget process and the active participation of various stakeholders in this process was significantly

54 It should be noted that the Mayor of Marneuli resigned before the October 2020 parliamentary elections. As a result of the elections, he became a majoritarian Member of Parliament representing Marneuli and Gardabani constituencies.

influenced by an international organization, in particular NDI.

As for the citizen participation mechanisms provided for in the Local Self-Government Code, they are practically non-functioning in Marneuli. According to the Deputy Chairman of the Marneuli Sakrebulo, the 20 percent threshold for the presence of the members of the General Assembly of the Settlement is quite high and it would be better if the percentage is not specified at all.

According to the representative of the civil society, the Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors does not work effectively and the members of the Council are not selected through transparent procedures. She noted that the local government perceives this mechanism as an unnecessary headache because it fears dissent and tries to staff the Council only with supporters of the ruling party. The petition mechanism also does not function in the municipality.

Marneuli residents are not active in Sakrebulo sessions either. According to the director of *Community Radio Marneuli*, citizens prefer to go directly to the Mayor on private issues rather than to the Sakrebulo, because everything is decided on a personal level. In her opinion, the Sakrebulo itself does not show willingness to change this fact. Sakrebulo publishes dry agendas about its sessions and does not provide detailed information about the topics to be discussed. Consequently, people are not interested in these topics and do not want to participate in Sakrebulo sessions. Political polarization also contributes to such passivity and nihilism of citizens. In particular, the population is divided into support camps for the ruling party and the opposition, while the political parties themselves use the public more to pursue their narrow party interests than to actually solve the problems in the municipality.

As mentioned above, there is no willingness among citizens themselves to effectively implement legal mechanisms of participation in practice. This is also due to the fact that many are not at all aware of the existence of these mechanisms, or do not believe that their participation will change anything due to their general distrust of local government. It should be noted that the local government thinks of its citizens mostly

during the elections. Consequently, citizens are trying to solve infrastructural and other types of issues through street rallies in the pre-election period, rather than using legal mechanisms of participation.⁵⁵ According to the director of *Community Radio Marneuli*, this issue of citizen participation in local self-government would not be on the agenda in Marneuli without the activities of local civil society and assistance projects of international donor organizations. For example, thanks to local civil activists, community centers have been set up in villages, which are currently supported by the *Taso Foundation* and the Dutch Embassy. These centers are actively involved in education issues, especially the education and participation of young mothers, and are advocating for independent organization of village assemblies.

The member of the opposition of the Sakrebulo also emphasized the role of the civil society in increasing the citizen participation and the inclusiveness of the budget process. He also noted that the local government should submit regular reports to the population on the activities carried out and should explain well to what extent it has taken into account the initiatives put forward by the citizens. According to the Mayor of Marneuli, “when you explain the importance of their participation to the citizens, their readiness and solidarity with each other increase.”⁵⁶ The Mayor named the working groups and thematic councils as the most effective mechanisms for public participation, in which all stakeholders should be actively involved and promote the inclusiveness of these mechanisms.

2.5. Batumi

Local Problems - According to the members of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara and the representatives of the Batumi local self-government, the residents of Batumi are mainly con-

55 Interview with the Coordinator of the *Center for Civic Engagement* in Marneuli, March 19, 2020.

56 Translated by the author.

cerned with the following problems: chaotic construction, environmental pollution, unemployment, poverty and severe social background, as well as poor municipal and tourist infrastructure. Civil society representatives further identified the following problems: unprotected cultural heritage, malfunction of the transport system, traffic jams and lack of green spaces.⁵⁷

Table 7. Batumi - Social and Open Governance Data

| <i>Area and Population</i> | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Area (km.2) | Population | Population in Urban Settlement | Population in Rural Settlement | Ethnic Minorities | Number of Emigrants | Number of Immigrants |
| 82.3 | 152,839 | 152,839 | | 10,046 | 1,713 | 6,640 |
| | 4.1% | 100% | | 6.6% | 1.1% | 4.3% |
| <i>Level of Education Achieved</i> | | | | | | |
| Higher | Professional | Secondary | Basic | Elementary | Without elementary education, but literate | Illiterate |
| 40,290 | 28,144 | 40,584 | 8,936 | 6,478 | 3,796 | 141 |
| 26.3% | 18.4% | 26.6% | 5.8% | 4.2% | 2.5% | 0.09% |
| <i>Employment and Economic Activity Status</i> | | | | | | |
| Employed | Hired Worker | Employer | Working in their Own Farm | Auxiliary Member of the Family | Unemployed | |
| 52,676 | 41,352 | 2,049 | 9,145 | 118 | 18,125 | |
| 34.5% | 27% | 1.3% | 6% | 0.07% | 11.9% | |

57 Interviews with the members of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara from the parties *Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia* and *United National Movement*, with the Deputy Mayor of Batumi and with the chairmen of the Sakrebulo factions *Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia* and *United National Movement* were held on February 26 and 28, March 2, 2020. Interviews with the Head of the *Independent Journalists' House*, *Transparency International Georgia's* Batumi Regional Coordinator, *Batumelebi* Journalist, *Intellect* Board Chairman, members and activists of society *Batomi*, and the Head of the Batumi Branch of *Civil Society Institute* were held on February 28, March 1, 2 and 16, 2020.

| <i>Open Governance</i> | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------|
| Proactive Disclosure of Public Information | Electronic Governance | Citizen Participation | Accountability | Final Evaluation | |
| 61% | 56% | 87% | 40% | 61% | |
| <i>Functioning of Citizen Participation Mechanisms</i> | | | | | |
| General Assembly of the Settlement | Petition | Council of Civil Advisors | Ensuring Participation in Sakrebulo Sessions | Hearing the Reports of Sakrebulo Members | Hearing the Mayor's Reports |
| - | 30% | 100% | 100% | 0% | 30% |

Multisectoral Cooperation - Large business companies (e.g., construction companies, hotels, restaurants and shopping malls) are mainly interested in urban planning, land and property issues and cooperate with the local self-government on these issues. There are cases when the above-mentioned companies (for example, the restaurant *Sanremo* and the petroleum company *Wissol*) take responsibility for the improvement of the area around their buildings and municipal transport stops in exchange for placing their own advertisements. In addition, business companies often fund one-time charitable / social assistance, cultural and sports projects or events. However, in general, they are less willing to cooperate with local self-government on public policy issues that are important to the citizens.⁵⁸ It is especially difficult for civil society to cooperate with construction companies, as they want to avoid protests and criticism of civil activists in the wake of the chaotic constructions in Batumi, and generally avoid publicity.⁵⁹ Representatives of the Adjara Chamber of Commerce and Industry are members of the Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors, although they are largely passive and mainly share their views on the issues of standardization and tourism. Due to the fact that many business companies participate in public procurement and public service delivery, cooperation with the government is a priority

58 Interview with the Chairman of the Batumi Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement*, February 26, 2020.

59 Interviews with the members of the society *Batomi* and the journalist of the newspaper *Batumelebi*, March 1, 2020.

for them.⁶⁰ Consequently, they avoid criticizing the government and cooperating with the opposition in the Adjara Supreme Council and in the Batumi Sakrebulo.⁶¹ According to civil society representatives, the local self-government is trying to adapt to the private interests of business companies rather than to promote the development of corporate social responsibility in the business sector and to involve this sector in the process of improving municipal services.

The local government cooperates with the civil society in the format of the Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors, Sakrebulo's Public Council, the Municipal Gender Equality Council and working group and public meetings. This cooperation is mainly with civil society organizations providing social services in the field of assistance to people with special needs, victims of trafficking and violence, as well as on gender equality and waste management issues. It is more difficult for local government to work with organizations advocating for urban development and cultural heritage issues. According to municipal officials, the interests of these organizations often conflict with ongoing constructions on the private property of construction companies.⁶² Representatives of the Adjara Supreme Council and the Batumi Sakrebulo opposition are cooperating more actively with the advocacy-based organizations, as well as with the organizations working on election and legal aid issues. The opposition representatives ask those organizations to reflect in their reports the problems identified by the opposition in the municipality.⁶³

Significant challenges in cooperating with local authorities have been identified by civil society organizations operating in Batumi. According to the representative of the *Independent Journalists' House*, the local self-government often ignores the initiatives put forward by civil

60 Interview with the Head of the Batumi Branch of the *Civil Society Institute*, March 16, 2020.

61 Interview with a member of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara from the *United National Movement* party, February 28, 2020.

62 Interview with the Chairwoman of the Batumi Sakrebulo faction *Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia*, March 2, 2020.

63 Interview with the Chairman of the Batumi Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement*, February 26, 2020.

society, does not hold thematic public hearings, and restricts civil activists from participating in Sakrebulo sessions. The local self-government informs the civil society post-factum about the decisions already made, but does not inform them at an early stage of decision-making. This, in turn, leads to mistrust and nihilism of civil society organizations, and they consequently no longer attend meetings organized by the municipality. According to a representative of the *Civil Society Institute*, civil society organizations are influencing more local, small-scale infrastructural issues, although they find it very difficult to influence politically sensitive issues such as the sale of municipal property, encroachment on cultural heritage, and chaotic constructions where large business and political interests and investments are involved. Civil society organizations themselves collaborate with each other through internal social media networks, closed groups. In these groups, they share important issues for the community and ask each other for support and participation in joint advocacy campaigns.

According to the representative of the Batumi Sakrebulo, the local self-government should have regular communication with civil society organizations via e-mail, invite them to thematic working group meetings at least once a month and actively involve them in information campaigns on important issues for the society, including on the involvement of the business sector in local policy-making. For example, with the joint advocacy of local self-government and civil society, a business company may be asked to draw bicycle lanes in the city in exchange for placing company advertisements. It is also possible to announce a tender for the provision of municipal services and transfer the function of providing these services to private companies instead of municipal non-commercial legal entities, including on issues such as private auditing of municipal services and programs. In addition, the local self-government can receive and fund alternative budget programs from civil society organizations. In order to develop such tripartite cooperation, the municipality should develop a special strategy and action plan. For their part, civil society should offer constructive formats of collaboration to the local

self-government, the management of which should be the responsibility of the municipality. Establishing thematic coordination councils and focusing on issues and service provision in the format of these councils can be the most effective mechanism between the three sectors.

According to the representatives of the civil society, it is necessary to consolidate the civil society and work in a coalition around specific issues, where the leading role will be played by an organization with specialized knowledge and experience in a given issue and other organizations will support it. This will contribute to both successful advocacy on the issue with the local self-government and gaining the support of the general public. To this end, a network of professional associations, specialized institutions, lobbyists and advocacy organizations should be developed, which will have a significant impact on decision-making processes.

Inter-Municipal Cooperation mainly takes place between the municipalities of the Adjara region on social issues, such as providing shelter for the homeless and arranging free canteens.⁶⁴ Batumi Municipality also cooperates with Tbilisi and Kutaisi municipalities on the provision of municipal services for people with special needs and on the training of municipal staff in this regard. Wider cooperation with municipalities in other regions is taking place in the format of municipal Gender Equality Councils.⁶⁵ In addition, civil society organizations, in particular the *Independent Journalists' House*, *Transparency International Georgia*, *Intellect*, and the *Civil Society Institute*, have inter-municipal cooperation projects and events. This includes cooperation between the local self-government and civil society both inside and outside the Adjara region on issues such as agricultural support, citizen participation and participatory budgeting, landscaping and protection of cultural heritage.

According to the representatives of both local self-government and civil society, it will be very useful to exchange experiences between different municipalities in the format of thematic working groups on specific issues that fall within the powers of municipalities.

64 Interview with the Deputy Mayor of Batumi, March 2, 2020.

65 Interview with the Chairwoman of the Batumi Sakrebulo faction *Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia*, March 2, 2020.

Open Governance and Citizen Participation - In the last two OGP Action Plans (2016-2017 and 2018-2019 Action Plans), Batumi Municipality has made several important commitments to promote open governance and citizen participation. In particular, the Action Plan for 2016-2017 includes a commitment to implement the electronic mechanism *Plan City Budget* [54]. In the Action Plan for 2018-2019, Batumi City Hall has undertaken to introduce an institutional mechanism of participatory budgeting, which includes the establishment of district contacts in the administrative units of the city. It also aimed to introduce five e-services, including participatory budgeting and e-petition modules [55].

In 2019, Batumi City Hall drafted special procedures for participatory budgeting and created a web platform *Your Idea to Batumi* (idea.batumi.ge), through which citizens can register their ideas / budget initiatives and vote for the desired initiative. City Hall initially allocated GEL 120,000 to fund citizens' initiatives. In 2019, citizens registered 35 initiatives on idea.batumi.ge, and selected three winning initiatives: 1) *Kite Festival*, which has already been implemented; 2) erection of a *Wishing Tree* monument in the Batumi tourist zone; and 3) installation of *Batumi* sign on Batumi hill. In 2020, the City Hall increased the budget for citizen projects from GEL 120,000 to GEL 500,000, which led to the registration of more initiatives from citizens, a total of 53, and the selection of eight winning initiatives [56]. The five of these winning initiatives were reflected in the 2021 municipal budget, namely: implementation of mobile cinema; development of street art movement; arranging an open theatrical festival; arranging colorful yards for children; and the introduction of contemporary theatrical and cinematic arts to young people, including for those with special needs [57]. In addition, district contacts were established with the participation of condominium chairmen in all 14 administrative units of Batumi and a special online portal, which provided information on ongoing infrastructural projects in the districts and weekly meetings with the Mayor.⁶⁶ Online portals have also been set up

⁶⁶ Batumi City Hall, Batumi Administrative Units Portal, <https://ubnebi.batumi.ge/>. (Portal is under renovation). Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

to plan a visit to the Mayor⁶⁷ and to provide services related to municipal property management and construction.⁶⁸ According to the Deputy Mayor of Batumi, from 2018, through the Municipal Management System (MMS), citizens are able to receive municipal electronic services on a *one-stop-shop* basis, including healthcare and social services, through the reference to service centers located in their administrative units / districts.

As for the mechanisms of citizen participation provided by the Local Self-Government Code, the General Assembly of the Settlement does not function at all in Batumi. According to the members of the local Sakrebulo, the citizens use the petition mechanism less, despite the fact that in 2018 the municipality has reduced the mandatory number of voters submitting the petition from 1 to 0.5 percent [58]. The Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors, Sakrebulo Public Council and Gender Equality Council are used more actively, but the local authorities do not take into account the initiatives and recommendations submitted by the civil society through these mechanisms, especially those initiatives that relate to urban planning and the protection of cultural heritage.⁶⁹ In addition, according to civil society representatives, citizens are restricted to attend Sakrebulo sessions, where the above-mentioned sensitive issues are discussed, while they are less interested in attending regular Sakrebulo sessions, where mainly technical issues are on the agenda. The activation of mechanisms of petition and district contacts was possible with the help of international donor and local civil society organizations, however, after the completion of specific projects of these organizations, these mechanisms are no longer actively used. In general, without the help of donors, it is very difficult to develop mechanisms for citizen participation, especially in the city of Batumi, where "society is genetically pas-

67 Batumi City Hall, <https://visit.batumi.ge/login>. (Portal is under renovation). Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

68 Batumi City Hall, <https://statistic.batumi.ge/>. (Portal is under renovation). Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

69 Interview with the Chairman of the Batumi Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement*, February 26, 2020.

sive” and prefers if someone else does its job rather than to do it on its own and be active about it. It is especially difficult to involve young people and representatives of ethnic minorities in public policy-making.⁷⁰ Added to this is the fact that many citizens do not have information about the mechanisms of participation or believe that their participation will not change anything. Further, there is no in-depth study and monitoring of the causes of low citizen participation.⁷¹

According to the members of the Supreme Council of Adjara and the representatives of the local self-government of Batumi, the citizens come to them mainly for personal issues, such as receiving social assistance, financing of treatment, employment, and improvement of road and local infrastructure. However, they are less involved in budget discussions. According to civil society representatives, some citizens are afraid of public speaking, or that their speech will offend neighbors, relatives, friends or political groups, and as a result the citizen may lose the job. Some believe that civic activism and protest make no sense. Relatively affluent citizens are less interested in community activism and democratic processes. The main interest of the citizens is still to receive economic benefits and that is why they agree to easily sell or rent their property to the construction companies for the construction of high-rise buildings. The local government is also capitalizing on that. According to their representatives, the construction is requested by the citizens in order to receive economic benefits from their property, and therefore the municipality issues construction permits to large developers, who also offer jobs to the citizens.

However, the exception was civic activism and protest against the constructions on the territory of Batumi Boulevard and the encroachment on the cultural heritage site of the *Café Octopus*, as well as against the implementation of the project *Batumi Riviera*. The latter envisages the construction of six multifunctional towers / skyscrapers for residential areas and hotels of international brands in the vicinity of Batumi Seaport.

70 Interview with the Head of the Batumi Branch of the *Civil Society Institute*, March 16, 2020.

71 Interview with the members of the society *Batomi*, March 1, 2020.

In the first two cases, civil protests resulted in the suspension of a number of construction projects on the territory of Batumi Boulevard, [59] [60] while *Café Octopus* was granted the status of a cultural heritage site [61]. In the case of the *Batumi Riviera* project, the original plan was changed and the construction of five skyscrapers was agreed upon instead of six, although this is not a final decision and the plan may be changed again [62].

According to the representatives of the civil society, the main reason for the civic activism on the mentioned issues was that the citizens felt the threat of encroachment on the public good and emotional connection with it, because the Boulevard is perceived by the local population as an integral part of Batumi identity. Citizens also saw that by making public statements on such public good issues, they did not confront their neighbors or friends and therefore their reputation and social status were not endangered. In addition, civil society organizations have applied a variety of citizen participation mechanisms on all of the above issues, and have facilitated public hearings at the Sakrebulo and City Hall levels. However, in terms of results, the civic activism around the suspension of construction on the territory of Batumi Boulevard and the granting of the status of a cultural heritage monument to *Café Octopus* turned out to be more successful than the protest against the *Batumi Riviera* project. According to the members of the society *Batomi*, the reason for this may be that, unlike the previous two cases, in the case of *Batumi Riviera*, the influence of opposition political parties on the process has increased dramatically. On the one hand, it is good for mobilizing party supporters around the issue of civic advocacy, attracting more noise and media attention, but on the other hand, for many ordinary citizens, it can be an obstacle for them to become more active in public. In addition, unlike the Boulevard, which is a symbol of Batumi, the local population does not have the same strong emotional connection to the area where the five skyscrapers envisaged by the *Batumi Riviera* project are to be built. The representative of the Batumi Sakrebulo opposition also stressed the restraint of the civil society towards cooperation with the political parties,

however, he said that on issues of public good, such as the standards of urban development and protection of cultural heritage, it is important to separate public policy and political partisanship.

According to the representative of the organization *Intellect*, the main reason for the low participation of citizens in Batumi is that the culture of democracy and self-organization is less developed in the city and people are waiting for everything to be solved according to the Soviet tradition. Citizens are not accustomed to fighting for their rights, and the practices of self-organization and participation are sought mainly by civil society organizations and political parties that adhere to Western values, with grants from international donors. However, if these efforts are not followed by initiatives from the grassroots, then it will be very difficult to develop a culture of democracy and self-organization among the local population. The *Intellect* representative also noted that, the development of such a culture requires the provision of high quality urbanization and education, as well as the emergence of economic opportunities on the ground and the accumulation of property, which should be facilitated by powerful media and information campaigns. In providing education to the younger generation, the emphasis should be on the values of democratic governance and civic and political human rights, which will motivate young people to be active in civic activism, self-organization and public policy monitoring. For their part, local self-government representatives should spend most of their time getting acquainted with the problems of their constituents on the ground, the ways to solve these problems, and conducting public opinion polls on initiatives put forward by the municipality. Civil society organizations should promote citizens' awareness, self-organization and effective implementation of participation mechanisms.⁷² All this is directly related to real decentralization and increase of municipal powers, without which community organizations and civic activism at the local level cannot develop.⁷³

72 Interview with the Chairman of the Batumi Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement*, February 26, 2020.

73 Interview with *Transparency International Georgia's* Batumi Regional Coordinator, March 1, 2020.

2.6. Zugdidi

Local Problems - According to the representatives of Zugdidi local self-government, the residents of Zugdidi are most affected by the following problems: poverty and unemployment and malfunctions of local infrastructure (e.g., roads, bridges, water and gas supply, outdoor lighting, kindergartens and outpatient clinics). According to the representatives of the civil society organizations, this is complemented by the problems related to malfunction of the municipal transport system.⁷⁴

Multisectoral Cooperation - According to the representatives of the local self-government, the most active companies in the business sector in Zugdidi are companies operating in the field of construction and inert materials and gambling business, with which the municipality often submits informal references for employment of the local population. The municipality provides certain benefits to these companies by reducing local property taxes and gambling business fees.

The municipality also cooperates with the *Georgian Hazelnut Growers Association* on issues related to the fight against stink bugs and fungal diseases as well as with entrepreneurs and individuals interested in growing berry crops. According to the Zugdidi Sakrebulo opposition representative, business companies mainly finance charitable projects, but they are very little involved in the provision of municipal services because they do not see any benefit in this regard. For its part, the municipality does not have a strategy and vision of what exactly it wants from the business and how it envisions working with it.

⁷⁴ Interviews with the Chairman of Zugdidi Sakrebulo, the Chairman of the *United National Movement* faction of the Zugdidi Sakrebulo and the Deputy Mayor of Zugdidi were conducted on October 3 and 11, 2019 and March 25, 2020, respectively. Interviews with the Head of the Zugdidi office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* and with the *Transparency International Georgia* Zugdidi Regional Coordinator were conducted on March 18, 2020.

Table 8. Zugdidi - Social and Open Government Data

| <i>Area and Population</i> | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|--|----------------------|
| Area (km.2) | Population | Population in Urban Settlement | Population in Rural Settlement | Ethnic Minorities | Number of Emigrants | Number of Immigrants |
| 692.04 | 105,509 | 42,998 | 62,511 | 389 | 2,922 | 5,416 |
| | 2.8% | 40.8% | 59.2% | 0.4% | 2.8% | 5.1% |
| <i>Level of Education Achieved</i> | | | | | | |
| Higher | Professional | Secondary | Basic | Elementary | Without elementary education, but literate | Illiterate |
| 19,422 | 16,790 | 41,007 | 7,215 | 4,466 | 2,360 | 243 |
| 18.4% | 15.9% | 38.9% | 6.8% | 4.2% | 2.2% | 0.2% |
| <i>Employment and Economic Activity Status</i> | | | | | | |
| Employed | Hired Worker | Employer | Working in their Own Farm | Auxiliary Member of the Family | Unemployed | |
| 45,343 | 14,101 | 523 | 27,253 | 3,456 | 7,782 | |
| 43% | 13.4% | 0.5% | 25.8% | 3.3% | 7.8% | |
| <i>Open Governance</i> | | | | | | |
| Proactive Disclosure of Public Information | Electronic Governance | Citizen Participation | Accountability | Final Evaluation | | |
| 57% | 49% | 51% | 75% | 55% | | |
| <i>Functioning of Citizen Participation Mechanisms</i> | | | | | | |
| General Assembly of the Settlement | Petition | Council of Civil Advisors | Ensuring Participation in Sakrebulo Sessions | Hearing the Reports of Sakrebulo Members | Hearing the Mayor's Reports | |
| 100 | 60 | 0 | 60% | 60% | 30 | |

This is hampered by the lack of decentralization and the fact that the main property of the municipality is under the ownership of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, which prevents the local self-government from seeking business investments independently and from encouraging private companies to be actively involved in public policy development and implementation.

Business companies do not cooperate with civil society on public

policy issues either. They are mostly profit-oriented and often turn to civil society organizations for legal assistance when they have problems registering property with the public registry, for example. According to civil society representatives, it is important for the municipality to involve businesses in the delivery of municipal services, such as cleaning, cemetery maintenance, transportation and parking services, and to show specific benefits in this regard, including in terms of public relations and advertising their products. Transferring the function of providing certain municipal services to businesses will ensure the quality of these services and save public expenditures. The initiative for such cooperation should come from the City Hall and the Sakrebulo, with the help of civil society organizations. However, civil society representatives believe that the local government is more comfortable when citizens depend on it, which it uses for elections. The municipality also needs business companies mainly for donations in favor of the ruling party in the elections, in return for which these companies win municipal tenders.⁷⁵

As for civil society organizations, the local self-government cooperates with them mainly in the formats of working groups and various thematic councils, including the Gender Equality Council, the Citizen Budget Council, the Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors and the Council for Persons with Special Needs.⁷⁶ In addition, the Zugdidi Sakrebulo opposition cooperates with civil society organizations, such as *Transparency International Georgia* and the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, in providing legal assistance to citizens. The opposition combines the recommendations of these organizations with its own factional recommendations for local self-government and uses them for joint advocacy.⁷⁷

The Zugdidi office of *Transparency International Georgia* is cooperating particularly successfully with the local self-government within

75 Interviews with the Head of the Zugdidi office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* and the Regional Coordinator of the Zugdidi office of *Transparency International Georgia*, March 18, 2020.

76 Interview with the Chairman of Zugdidi Sakrebulo, October 3, 2019.

77 Interview with the Chairwoman of the Zugdidi Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement*, October 11, 2019.

the framework of the project *Committees of Concerned Citizens*. With this project, the representatives of the organization receive information on local needs from the active citizens united in the village assemblies and then address the City Hall with letters and budget initiatives. For example, the City Hall has taken into account the initiatives concerning the building of a kindergarten in one of the villages and increasing the municipal transport schedule. The Zugdidi office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* has a similar type of cooperation with the local self-government. As part of their project, which covers all nine municipalities in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region, representatives of the organization visit the villages on a monthly basis together with the village trustees of the mayors to identify the needs of the local population. One year later, the organization makes repeat visits to the same villages with village trustees to find out how the problems raised during previous visits have been resolved. Such a format of cooperation increases both the visibility of the organization and the accountability of local self-government.

As for the cooperation of civil society organizations with each other, it is worth mentioning the monthly meetings organized by the Zugdidi office of the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) with local civil society organizations, which is mainly informative. Also, the Zugdidi *Center for Civic Engagement* often invites local organizations to various thematic meetings, although there is no regular format of cooperation between these organizations.⁷⁸

According to civil society representatives, there is a lack of solidarity in the entire sector. This is mainly due to the fact that some organizations that are engaged in the provision of services and receive state funding for this, have a lot to lose and therefore prefer not to cooperate with organizations that actively monitor the government's performance on politically sensitive issues and are publicly critical of government activities during their advocacy around those issues. On the other hand, sectoral civil society organizations are underrepresented in Zugdidi.

⁷⁸ Interviews with the Head of the Zugdidi office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* and the Regional Coordinator of the Zugdidi office of *Transparency International Georgia*, March 18, 2020.

Consequently, existing organizations have to work together on all topics, which reduces their effectiveness and efficiency.⁷⁹

In response to these challenges, it is important to have regular meetings between local civil society organizations, where they would report to each other on their activities and share information about the local needs of their beneficiaries. Civil society organizations should also be active in business relations. They should consider the business sector as an alternative source of funding and show them the benefits of corporate social responsibility. For its part, Zugdidi Municipality is well able to use the resources of civil society organizations to research local issues, monitor municipal programs, and reach out to vulnerable groups.⁸⁰ The abundance of co-financing projects are crucial for successful tripartite cooperation between local self-government, civil society and business, in which civil society organizations and business companies will work jointly with the local self-government to solve local problems and share responsibility for the final results.⁸¹

Inter-Municipal Cooperation - Zugdidi Municipality cooperates with other municipalities mainly in the formats of inter-municipal conferences and forums organized by the NALAG and the Parliamentary Committee on Regional Policy and Self-Government. In addition, like Kakheti, all the municipalities of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region are united by the NNLE Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Destination Management Organization (abbreviated as *DMO Visit Samegrelo*) promoting tourism and economic development of the region. This entity is funded by the municipalities themselves. Also, like Kakheti, with the support of the Municipal Development Fund (MDF), it is planned to build an inter-municipal shelter for stray animals in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region. Zugdidi Municipality has successfully implemented a *Citizen Budget*

79 Interview with the Chairwoman of the Zugdidi Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement*, October 11, 2019.

80 Interviews with the Head of the Zugdidi office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* and the Regional Coordinator of the Zugdidi office of *Transparency International Georgia*, March 18, 2020.

81 Interview with the Chairman of Zugdidi Sakrebulo, October 3, 2019.

Project imported from Marneuli and Gori. It is also cooperating with Tbilisi and Ozurgeti municipalities in the direction of OGP commitments (e.g., SMS-INFO service and *Your Idea to the Zugdidi Mayor*). Zugdidi also signed a memorandum of bilateral cooperation with Ozurgeti Municipality.⁸²

As mentioned above, civil society organizations also have inter-municipal projects aimed at identifying and advocating for the needs of citizens, as well as ensuring citizen participation. According to civil society representatives, inter-municipal cooperation, especially between municipalities in one region, is important on issues such as the development of an effective social assistance system, funding and treatment programs for different diseases, and the development of unified databases of patients, as well as waste cleaning services. In their opinion, the initiator of inter-municipal cooperation on such issues should be the State Trustee of the region.

Open Governance and Citizen Participation - Zugdidi Municipality has made several important commitments in the last two OGP Action Plans to promote open governance and citizen participation. In particular, the Action Plan for 2016-2017 included a commitment to introduce the electronic portal of petitions and *Zugdidi-INFO* SMS service. In the Action Plan for 2018-2019, Zugdidi Municipality has undertaken to create an online portal *Your Idea to the Mayor of Zugdidi*, through which the residents of Zugdidi will be able to offer a specific idea / initiative to the Mayor of the city. The municipality has also undertaken to create a mobile application *I.Gov.Zugdidi*. The application will allow Zugdidi residents to receive information about municipal programs and events, to provide information about their needs to the municipality and to receive feedback from municipal bodies. *Zugdidi-INFO* was launched in 2016. Through it, the interested citizens mainly receive information about the sessions and presentations of the Zugdidi Sakrebulo, as well as about the planned concerts, infrastructural works and the news of the Public Service Hall. In 2019, the *I.Gov.Zugdidi* mobile application was launched,

⁸² Interview with the Chairman of Zugdidi Sakrebulo, October 3, 2019.

which provides information about the municipal calendar, programs, services and tourist places. It also contains a *contact* field, but does not have a feedback mechanism. The e-petitions module is available on the website of Zugdidi Municipality. However, as of August 2021, this electronic database was empty and it did not provide information about any of the registered petitions. It is therefore difficult to assess its consumption and effectiveness. At the same time, there is no legal framework for registering electronic petitions and citizens have little information about this mechanism. The electronic portal *Your Idea to the Mayor of Zugdidi*, which was first launched by the Tbilisi Municipality, was created in 2020 for all municipalities of Georgia. However, as of August 2021, the electronic database of all municipalities except Tbilisi, including Zugdidi Municipality, was empty.⁸³

According to the representatives of the local self-government and the civil society, the most successful participatory mechanism in Zugdidi is the *Citizen Budget Project*, within the framework of which each administrative unit / zone of Zugdidi has been allocated with GEL 200,000, which is GEL 1 million in total for five zones. This project gave a strong incentive to increase citizen participation. Citizens are particularly active in infrastructural issues, and their initiatives to build sports and children's playgrounds and improve drainage canals are reflected in the 2020 municipal budget. The government's *Village Development Program* is also working successfully. Under this program, each village has been allocated with GEL 25,000 for infrastructural projects (e.g., construction of bridges, sports fields and squares, improvement of water supply and landscaping systems), which are being discussed in the format of village assemblies. In 2020, more than GEL 1 million was allocated from the state and local budgets for the implementation of the winning projects [63]. However, according to the Zugdidi Sakrebulo opposition representative, the meetings held within the framework of the *Citizen Budget Project* and the *Village Development Program* are mainly attended by

83 Portal *Your Idea to the Mayor*, Zugdidi Municipality, <https://bit.ly/3csJfK9>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

supporters and activists of the ruling party, and ensuring broad public representation in these meetings remains a challenge. This challenge was also highlighted by a representative of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association*, who noted that citizens did not have full information about which administrative unit and which district could vote for the various infrastructural projects. For example, one of the young people wanted to build a stadium and he mobilized supporters for this initiative. However, it turned out that the area selected for the stadium and the district where the project was to be voted on were located in different administrative units, which caused the person who initiated the project to lose the votes of the supporters.

Another challenge similar to other municipalities is that the citizen participation mechanisms provided for in the Local Self-Government Code are not implemented effectively in Zugdidi either, although for example Zugdidi, like Batumi and Ozurgeti, has also lowered the mandatory threshold for petition supporters from 1 to 0.5 percent of registered voters in the municipality. Citizens lack information about legal mechanisms for participation and municipal powers, and they often ask questions that are not within the mandate of the local self-governance, such as providing IDPs with housing. As in other municipalities, in Zugdidi, citizens mainly go to local self-government representatives for personal issues, in particular for social assistance, and they are less interested in community issues. The culture and experience of self-organization is scarce in Zugdidi as well. It is especially difficult for Sakrebulo members to deal with socially vulnerable groups and people with special needs below the poverty line, as they are severely criticizing the local self-government for their difficult living conditions, which the municipality does not have the resources to fully address. Low interest of young people and their low participation in local self-government activities is also problematic.⁸⁴ In addition, according to *Transparency International Georgia*, Roma living in Zugdidi have virtually no involvement in local self-gov-

84 Interview with the Chairman of Zugdidi Sakrebulo and the Chairwoman of the Zugdidi Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement*, October 3 and 11, 2019.

ernment and do not feel part of local communities. They also rarely participate in elections.

According to civil society representatives, the main reason why the *Citizen Budget Project* and the *Village Development Program* work well is that state and municipal bodies have a responsibility to implement projects chosen by the people through these mechanisms. Citizens see the real benefits of these mechanisms, as each of them has a specific budget, which should be spent only on priority projects for citizens. In contrast, all mechanisms of citizen participation provided by the Local Self-Government Code are only of a recommendatory nature and no separate budget has been allocated for the functioning of any of them. Consequently, the population does not see the real benefits of their use. It is important to instill in the citizens through the *Citizen Budget Project* and similar mechanisms that their initiatives and opinions are taken into account by the local self-government. The more the initiatives from the grassroots are taken into account by the municipality, the more the citizens' interest and desire to actively use the mechanisms of participation will increase and thus contribute to the development of local self-government. To achieve this goal, the municipality should provide more information to the public about the existing participation mechanisms and the procedures for their use. It should also allocate a separate budget for the effective implementation of each mechanism, and in the event that such a budget has already been allocated (e.g., a *Citizen Budget Project*), increase the amount of this budget. The *Citizen Budget Project* is the most tangible democratic mechanism through which cooperation between the local self-government and civil society actually work out well. To encourage the widespread use of this mechanism, the local government should develop a detailed program budget and its evaluation indicators, which will be broken down by each administrative unit of the municipality.

2.7. Ozurgeti

Local Problems - According to the representatives of Ozurgeti local self-government, the residents of Ozurgeti are most affected by the following problems: poverty and unemployment, lack of vocational education and *brain drain*, malfunction of local infrastructure (e.g., roads, water and gas supply, outdoor lighting). According to the representatives of the civil society organizations, this is compounded by the problems related to the uncontrolled extraction of inert material from the rivers, stray animals, the malfunction of the sewage system in the city and of the municipal transport.⁸⁵

Multisectoral Cooperation - The civil society and business sector in Ozurgeti is quite active. Consequently, local self-government has many opportunities to work closely with these sectors to solve local problems. This cooperation is also implemented in practice. According to the representatives of the local self-government and the civil society, the largest enterprise operating in Ozurgeti is LLC *Askangel Alliance*, which produces and exports bentonite clay. Ozurgeti Municipality also has a bread factory, hazelnut, blueberry and vodka factories, tea mini factories, a garment factory, a furniture factory and a fish farm. With these enterprises and companies, the municipal officials mainly make informal references in the direction of employment of the local population. There is also cooperation in the field of tourism, when the relevant business companies provide the municipality with statistics on international visitors and ask it to disseminate information about these companies as attractive tourist destinations.

⁸⁵ Interviews with the Chairman of Ozurgeti Sakrebulo, the Mayor of Ozurgeti and the Chairman of the faction *United National Movement* of Ozurgeti Sakrebulo were conducted on October 1 and December 17, 2019, respectively. The interviews with the representative of the *Institute for Change and Innovation (former Guria Youth Resource Center)* and the Coordinator of the *Ozurgeti Center for Civic Engagement* were conducted on March 17 and 19, 2020.

Table 9. Ozurgeti - Social and Open Governance Data

| <i>Area and Population</i> | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|--|----------------------|
| Area (km.2) | Population | Population in Urban Settlement | Population in Rural Settlement | Ethnic Minorities | Number of Emigrants | Number of Immigrants |
| 675 | 62,863 | 23,694 | 39,169 | 1,733 | 956 | 2,320 |
| | 1.7% | 37.7% | 62.3% | 2.8% | 1.5% | 3.7% |
| <i>Level of Education Achieved</i> | | | | | | |
| Higher | Professional | Secondary | Basic | Elementary | Without elementary education, but literate | Illiterate |
| 9,054 | 11,915 | 23,224 | 5,391 | 3,458 | 1,538 | 205 |
| 14.4% | 19% | 36.9% | 8.6% | 5.5% | 2.4% | 0.3% |
| <i>Employment and Economic Activity Status</i> | | | | | | |
| Employed | Hired Worker | Employer | Working in their Own Farm | Auxiliary Member of the Family | Unemployed | |
| 34,452 | 9,160 | 307 | 24,805 | 166 | 2,776 | |
| 54.8% | 14.6% | 0.5% | 39.5% | 0.2% | 4.4% | |
| <i>Open Governance</i> | | | | | | |
| Proactive Disclosure of Public Information | Electronic Governance | Citizen Participation | Accountability | Final Evaluation | | |
| 51% | 58% | 36% | 61% | 51% | | |
| <i>Functioning of Citizen Participation Mechanisms</i> | | | | | | |
| General Assembly of the Settlement | Petition | Council of Civil Advisors | Ensuring Participation in Sakrebulo Sessions | Hearing the Reports of Sakrebulo Members | Hearing the Mayor's Reports | |
| 0 | 100% | 0 | 100% | 0 | 30% | |

The above-mentioned enterprises and companies also set various prizes for citizens for sports and intellectual activities. It is noteworthy the cooperation of the local self-government with the internet service provider company LLC *Airnet*, which, for example, installed a free WiFi system in two municipal parks. This company implemented the same system in several villages with the co-financing of the municipality. Business companies also carry out charitable projects and give one-time

gifts to socially vulnerable groups.⁸⁶

According to the representatives of the civil society, the business companies operating in Ozurgeti mainly cooperate with the local authorities and raise their priority issues directly with the Mayor or the leadership of the Sakrebulo. Often they have more cooperation with the central government because many of the issues they are interested in do not fall within the limited mandate of the local self-government. Business companies are less cooperative with civil society organizations, especially those critical of local government, and try to distance themselves from the opposition in general. They also do not use the existing participation mechanisms in the municipality, such as the Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors, of which they are formal members, although they are very passive or do not attend the Council meetings at all.

Ozurgeti City Hall and Sakrebulo have quite active cooperation with local civil society organizations using various formats (e.g., Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors, Sakrebulo Public Council, thematic working group meetings). This has yielded some tangible results. For example, within the framework of the co-financing project with *Institute for Change and Innovation (former Guria Youth Resource Center)*, Ozurgeti Municipality introduced the project *Manage from Home*. This project, which is also part of the OGP commitments, involves the live streaming of Sakrebulo sessions online and the remote participation of the rural population in these sessions in order for the local self-government to better understand the rural priorities. In cooperation with the *House of Progress*, the municipality has introduced a system of short text messages (SMS), through which locals regularly receive information about the dates and issues of Sakrebulo sessions, as well as attendance procedures, decisions made and other important local issues. Civil society organizations also actively participate in the Public Council at the Ozurgeti Sakrebulo, which meets once a month.⁸⁷ Ozurgeti City Hall cooperates with local civil society organizations in the format of the Council of Civil

86 Interview with the Coordinator of the Ozurgeti Office of the *Center for Civic Engagement*, March 19, 2020.

87 Interview with the Chairman of Ozurgeti Sakrebulo, October 1, 2019.

Advisors with the Mayor, and according to the Mayor himself, these organizations are quite active in this Council as well.

Civil society organizations operating in Ozurgeti cooperate quite actively with each other, both in coalition and individually, and through thematic forums and meetings. Depending on the complexity of the issue, they come together and run joint advocacy campaigns. For example, in Guria, Adjara and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti regions, such joint advocacy campaigns of civil society organizations have launched an e-petition mechanism in the respective municipalities, and the mandatory number of petitioners has been reduced from 1 to 0.5 per cent of registered voters in the municipality. In addition, the electronic budget planning mechanism with the participation of citizens *Be a Co-Manager* was launched in Ozurgeti. Also, in 2019, under the NDI program, seven local civil society organizations united and submitted a budget initiative to the City Hall for the renovation of municipal parks. The Ozurgeti *Center for Civic Engagement* regularly holds thematic meetings, which are attended by representatives of civil society organizations, the media and local self-government, as well as community / opinion leaders. At these meetings, civil society organizations raise priority issues for them and their beneficiaries, which are then covered by the local media.⁸⁸

Despite the above-mentioned successful examples, there are also challenges to civil society and local self-government cooperation. Civil society representatives noted the lack of decentralization, which prevents the local self-government, despite its willingness, from cooperating openly with the local civil society, as it is unable to resolve many issues independently and depends on central government directives. It is also noteworthy that civil society organizations operating in Ozurgeti have a similar profile and therefore become competitors when applying for grants from international donor organizations. There are practically no new organizations in the municipality, especially sectoral organizations, which would specialize in the fields of transport or healthcare and social

88 Interviews with the representative of the *Institute for Change and Innovation* and the Coordinator of the Ozurgeti Office of the *Center for Civic Engagement*, March 17 and 19, 2020.

services, for example, and would submit expert opinions and recommendations to the local self-government in these fields.⁸⁹

According to the respondents of this study, cooperation between local self-government, civil society and business should be more systemic. The municipality should develop a common vision of what it needs to do with business and civil society and involve these sectors more in the development and implementation of municipal programs, especially social programs. In this regard, it is also necessary to create a municipal database of local vulnerable groups and their needs. Such a database should be created in collaboration with local self-government and civil society and then shared with business companies, and a joint response to the needs of citizens should be provided through a co-financing mechanism. In turn, civil society should provide a constant stimulus for cooperation between the three sectors and in this regard should offer innovative and effective mechanisms to both local self-government and businesses.

Inter-Municipal Cooperation - Ozurgeti Municipality cooperates with other municipalities mainly on open governance issues and shares its successful examples through meetings and conferences organized by international donors. For example, the municipalities of Batumi and Rustavi are interested in importing the electronic participation mechanisms of Ozurgeti and integrating them with their own electronic systems of municipal services. For its part, the central government also promotes the good practices of the OGP in Ozurgeti to other municipalities through inter-municipal forums. As mentioned above, Ozurgeti has a separate memorandum of cooperation with Zugdidi Municipality and these two municipalities actively share their successful experience in open governance and integrity.⁹⁰ Ozurgeti is also actively cooperating with other municipalities in the Guria region.⁹¹

In addition, civil society organizations implement inter-municipal

89 Interviews with the representative of the *Institute for Change and Innovation* and the Coordinator of the Ozurgeti Office of the *Center for Civic Engagement*, March 17 and 19, 2020.

90 Interview with the Chairman of Ozurgeti Sakrebulo, October 1, 2019

91 Interview with the Mayor of Ozurgeti, December 17, 2019.

projects, mainly around citizen participation mechanisms. Of these, the above-mentioned joint advocacy campaign to introduce an electronic system of petitions in Guria, Adjara and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and the reduction of the mandatory number of petition supporters is noteworthy. The *Institute for Change and Innovation* is particularly active in this regard, advocating for exporting the mechanism of the e-petition and the project *Manage from Home* to Poti and Abasha municipalities, and for this purpose also provides grants to local community groups.⁹²

Open Governance and Citizen Participation - Like Batumi and Zugdidi, Ozurgeti Municipality has made significant commitments in its last two OGP Action Plans. In particular, the Action Plan for 2016-2017 includes the above-mentioned project *Manage from Home*, as well as the commitment to introduce an electronic mechanism for local budget planning *Plan City Budget*. In the 2018-2019 Action Plan, Ozurgeti Municipality has undertaken to develop a strategy and action plan for enhancing transparency and integrity, as well as evaluating municipal services and introducing a system for measuring the level of citizen satisfaction. The project *Manage from Home* was fully implemented in five villages of Ozurgeti Municipality (Konchkati, Melekeduri, Likhauri, Tkhinvali and Bakhvi). Special community centers have been set up in these villages, from where locals can participate in Sakrebulo sessions remotely. According to the Chairman of Ozurgeti Sakrebulo, each session has about 1,000 views, which shows the high interest of the population and also the fact that the local government views the citizens as partners. In addition, the municipality has introduced an electronic survey service on its website, which allows citizens to register three problems that are important to them. The Sakrebulo introduced an SMS service to inform citizens about its sessions and various news, which according to 2018 data had 2,000 subscribers [64]. In 2019, Ozurgeti Municipality developed a strategy and action plan to increase its transparency and integrity and a methodology for monitoring and evaluating their implementation. The latter in-

92 Interview with the representative of *Institute for Change and Innovation*, March 17, 2020.

cludes the commitment of local self-government to involve civil society organizations in this process and to provide feedback on their evaluation, which is the first precedent in Georgia. Ozurgeti has also developed a system for evaluating municipal services and measuring citizens' satisfaction, and involving local youth in the data collection process. These achievements contributed significantly to the fact that in 2020 the Ozurgeti Municipality, together with Akhaltsikhe and Khoni municipalities, was elected as a member of the local OGP program.

It should also be noted that the above-mentioned platform *Be a Co-Manager* allows citizens living in the city of Ozurgeti to present and vote for their priority budget initiatives. The municipality is committed to funding the winning initiatives from the local budget.⁹³ Such initiatives were funded by the local budgets of Ozurgeti Municipality for 2020 and 2021 [65]. For this platform, Ozurgeti Municipality was awarded a special certificate at the 2019-2020 *Best Practice Program* conference organized by the NALAG [66].

In 2020, Ozurgeti Municipality, with the help of NDI, launched a new project *Local Self-Government for Education*. This project aims to inform young people about local government competencies and citizen participation mechanisms and to fund their initiatives. The winning initiatives are revealed by a joint commission consisting of representatives of the municipality and civil society [67].

Compared to other municipalities, the citizen participation mechanisms provided by the Local Self-Government Code also work better in Ozurgeti. For example, the petition mechanism is actively used to implement infrastructural projects such as improvement of roads and kindergartens' services. The mobilization of supporters of the petitions is actively facilitated by local civil society organizations.⁹⁴ Citizens often go to the local government for personal matters, although they often raise community issues as well, such as the renovation of municipal squares

93 Portal *Be a Co-Manager*, Ozurgeti Municipality, <https://votes.oz.gov.ge/>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

94 Interview with the Chairman of Ozurgeti Sakrebulo, October 1, 2019.

and bridges.⁹⁵

Despite the aforementioned successful examples, local self-government and civil society representatives also identified significant challenges for citizen participation in Ozurgeti. First of all, they say, the locals lack information about the powers of the municipality and therefore they mainly put only infrastructural and social issues on the agenda. At this time, their personal, pragmatic interests also prevail and they are mainly focused on solving all the issues that are important to them. If the citizen does not see anything tangible specifically for him or her and cannot resolve the private issue with the help of the municipality, then s/he loses interest in participating.

According to the respondents, young people lack interest in participating in local self-government activities. This is mainly due to the fact that there is no university in the municipality and local young people go to other larger university cities to study and work, leaving the villages of Ozurgeti empty of them.⁹⁶ The lack of people in the villages also prevents the convening of a General Assembly of the Settlement, and as a result this legal mechanism of participation is practically dysfunctional. In response to this challenge, the *Institute for Change and Innovation* is actively working to reduce the threshold required for convening the General Assembly (not less than 20 percent of the members of the Assembly) to five percent and to develop an electronic mechanism for convening an Assembly meeting, which will be the first precedent in Georgia.⁹⁷

According to the representative of the Ozurgeti *Center for Civic Engagement*, for the better functioning of the citizen participation mechanisms, it is necessary for the municipality to have a commitment to develop a specific mechanism and timely fulfill the issues raised by the citizens using this mechanism. Violation of this obligation should impose a sanction on the municipality, which may be reflected, for example, in the reduction of budget transfers from the central government. In ad-

95 Interview with the Mayor of Ozurgeti, December 17, 2019.

96 Interview with the Chairman of the Ozurgeti Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement*, October 1, 2019.

97 Interview with the representative of *Institute for Change and Innovation*, March 17, 2019.

dition, the municipality should have a clear vision of what it needs the active participation of citizens for and what perspectives it offers to the local population so that it does not leave the municipality. Along with opportunities for economic development, good examples of open and accountable governance, and innovative methods of communication and providing information to the population, especially young people, can provide such perspectives.

Summary of Chapter 2

In Georgia, an in-depth analysis of the above seven municipalities in relation to the implementation of the open governance model at the local level revealed the following trends. The general problems of the municipalities are homogeneous and are mainly related to the poor infrastructure and the difficult socio-economic conditions of the local population, which in turn has a negative impact on the degree of citizen participation in public policy-making. Citizens are driven more by personal interests than by community interests. Lack of decentralization prevents the full implementation of the open governance model at the local level, as solving numerous problems faced by citizens is not within the mandate of municipalities and it is difficult for citizens to see the benefits of participating in local self-government activities. The successful functioning of open governance mechanisms at the local level is largely conditioned by the support from international donor organizations. It should be noted that these mechanisms work more successfully in the municipalities of Western Georgia than in the municipalities of Eastern Georgia, which can be explained by the different temperaments of the local population and the tradition of self-government. The local self-government established in Ozurgeti Mazra in 1905, the Social-Democratic Republic of Guria, which was abolished by force by the Russian Empire, is one of the proofs of this [68]. However, the mechanisms of participation provided by the Local Self-Government Code generally do not work well in all municipalities. This is also explained by the fact that municipalities are not obliged to take into account the civic initiatives proposed through

these mechanisms and no special budget has been allocated for the functioning of any of the mechanisms. Mechanisms beyond the Code, such as the *Citizen Budget Project* and the *Village Development Program*, are more successful because of the government's obligation to consider civic initiatives and the special funding allocated.

The business sector uses little or no open governance mechanisms and generally has limited involvement in local self-government. Corporate social responsibility is not developed in this sector. Business companies avoid publicity. They prefer to work directly with the government, largely the central government, and avoid cooperation with representatives of civil society and opposition parties, as in this way it is much easier for them to agree on the terms of the tenders they want.

Cooperation between local self-government and civil society is relatively successful in municipalities where local government is more open to social change and new initiatives (e.g., Ozurgeti and Zugdidi). However, this cooperation is less successful in Tbilisi and Batumi, especially around sensitive issues where major political and business interests dominate. These include regulating chaotic construction in these cities, improving the ecological environment, landscaping green spaces, protecting cultural heritage sites, and raising municipal transparency and integrity standards. Lack of solidarity and prevalence of competition in civil society itself to obtain grants from international donor organizations is another noteworthy pattern. This is also due to the fact that the number of sectoral civil society organizations in municipalities is small and the existing organizations are mainly engaged in one and the same field. Finally, there is a lack of thematic inter-municipal cooperation in both local self-government and civil society, something that both sectors raised as a priority for improvement.

Chapter 3. Prospects for the Implementation of Open Governance and Decentralization Reforms in Georgia

Most of the issues highlighted at the municipal level in the previous chapter require a central level response. This is mainly linked to the development of decentralization in the country and the transfer of more powers and resources to local governments, so that municipalities have more opportunities to cooperate with each other, and with civil society and the business sector, and citizens show more interest in local policy processes. This requires the political will of the central government.

According to the government representative, it is planned to identify the additional powers that should be given to the local self-governments from the central government, for example in the field of issuing licenses and permits. It is also planned to harmonize the existing powers of municipalities with sectoral laws (e.g., in the areas of street vending and transport regulation) and to involve municipalities more actively in the OGP process. The municipalities themselves are most interested in issues related to finances, property, local taxes and fees. He also noted that an investment profile should be created for all municipalities, which will enable them to cooperate more actively with the business sector. Due to the fact that legal mechanisms for citizen participation are not successfully implemented in practice at the local level, the government plans to revise these mechanisms and amend them if necessary or introduce new mechanisms in the Code that are more successful in practice, such as the *Citizen Budget Project*. The role of the National Association of Local Authorities in Georgia (NALAG) is particularly important in the development of multisectoral cooperation and open governance in municipalities. The NALAG can introduce new mechanisms for cooperation and participation and take responsibility for their implementation.⁹⁸

98 Interview with the representative of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, March 26, 2020.

According to the Executive Director of the NALAG, municipalities suffer from a lack of human resources and e-government infrastructure, which prevents them from introducing innovative e-government platforms in administrative proceedings. Neither the legislative nor the institutional framework is regulated in this regard, as for example the procedures of such innovative mechanisms as live streaming of Sakrebulo sessions and government on a smartphone are not specified in the relevant regulations. Municipalities are still largely dependent on central government initiatives, leading to a lack of multilevel and multisectoral cooperation and governance approaches at the local level.⁹⁹

According to the representative of the Parliamentary Committee on Regional Policy and Self-Government, the current system does not stimulate the municipalities to increase their income through their economic activities and thus ensure even partial financing of their powers. Municipalities need to have the opportunity to create resources through their own economic development. In order to create these resources, the central government should timely register the municipal property (e.g., water, forest, land) under the ownership of the municipalities, which will help the latter gain fiscal independence. In addition to the transfer of powers and funding, it is also important to equip municipalities with adequate human resources. Thus, the strengthened local self-government will be able to solve important issues for the citizens on the spot, which in turn will contribute to the establishment and functioning of effective institutional mechanisms for citizen participation.¹⁰⁰

According to local self-government experts, real decentralization in Georgia, which is primarily related to leaving local revenues to municipalities, transferring property to them and increasing their powers, requires the political will of the central government. Providing important services to citizens, such as fire and rescue services and police services, should be done at the local self-government level, as is the case in the US, because mobilizing one's own resources on the ground is more

99 Interview with the NALAG Executive Director, March 26, 2020.

100 Electronic correspondence with the representative of the Parliamentary Committee on Regional Policy and Self-Government, 7 April 2020.

effective. The concept of *smart cities* should be introduced in municipalities, which means simplifying the life of citizens and improving the quality of life through data analysis, smart technologies, applications and communication. The main goal is to save energy, move smoothly, reduce air pollution and provide high quality healthcare and public services. In this regard, there should be a wrestling of ideas and healthy competition between municipalities that should focus more on developing cost-effective and goal-oriented policies. They can also implement joint inter-municipal projects on topics such as solid waste management, transport, water supply, shelter for stray animals, vouchers for kindergartens, and the operation of agricultural cooperatives. However, the introduction of this multilevel and multi-sectoral concept requires a broad dialogue between government, civil society and business, and the transfer of certain public and municipal services or their audit powers to the civil and business sectors. The current cooperation between different sectors in Georgia lacks sustainability and far-reaching vision. Added to this is the lack of decentralization, over-politicization of processes, nihilism of citizens, lack of information and distrust, which hinders the implementation of principles of democracy and open governance.¹⁰¹

According to field experts, inter-municipal cooperation should be based on an agreement / memorandum and joint regional projects should be financed from municipal budgets, as is the case with regional NNLEs promoting tourism and the economy in Kakheti and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti regions. However, these NNLEs were established at the initiative of the central government and work with the assistance of international donor organizations. No research has been conducted on the real need for their creation at the local level and what specific benefits each municipality receives from their activities. The NALAG should further promote both formal and informal cooperation between municipalities by promoting the grassroots initiatives. For example, the management of regional projects, such as the provision of shelter for stray animals,

101 Interview with the Head of the *Center of Local Democracy Network*, March 27, 2020

should be given to the municipalities themselves. It is in this case that more real inter-municipal cooperation will emerge, which will be initiated and implemented from the grassroots level and not from the center. However, the central government, especially the line ministries, is less enthusiastic about handing over more powers, property and finances to the municipalities (e.g., leaving the income tax locally and directly reflecting it in the municipal budget). According to the central government narrative, the reason for this is the lack of readiness of local self-government and population for more democracy, risks of corruption, threats of ethnic conflicts and foreign, geopolitical factors. According to experts, in recent years, certain steps taken by the central government towards decentralization reform, such as the development of a strategy and action plan, have been done out of consideration for the EU and the Council of Europe rather than with real political will. However, it is due to this lack of will that the substantial implementation of this reform in practice is delayed.¹⁰²

The experts also noted that the local self-government should determine exactly at what level of public policy planning and development and how it envisions citizen participation. To this end, municipalities should normally write down which specific citizen participation mechanism will be used in the planning of long-term (e.g., 5-10 year socio-economic development plan), medium-term (e.g., 3-year priority document) and short-term (e.g., annual municipal budget) policy documents. In the development of long-term and medium-term policies, it would be more appropriate to use participatory mechanisms such as the Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors, the Sakrebulo's Public Council and other consultative bodies (e.g., thematic councils, commissions and working groups) consisting of both public and private sector representatives. The members of such consultative bodies should be selected through open competition to ensure their active participation in the policy under consideration and to increase the effectiveness and credibility of these bodies. In the

102 Interviews with the *Center for Training and Consultancy* expert and the Executive Director of the *Management Systems Development Center*, March 27 and April 6, 2020.

development of short-term policies, the General Assembly of the Settlement, village assemblies and the *Citizen Budget Project* will be the most appropriate mechanisms, as they are focused on specific infrastructural projects and budgetary programs.¹⁰³

Local self-government and civil society should offer citizens a variety of mechanisms for participation and, through joint consultation, select the best mechanism for developing, implementing and monitoring specific policies. In addition to allocating a special budget for each mechanism, the public will be motivated by the fact that, for example, the City Hall will be obliged by law to obtain the opinion of the above-mentioned consultative bodies before submitting the draft budget or other strategic policy document to the Sakrebulo. The second important motivator will be the breakdown of participation mechanisms according to settlement levels. For example, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Active Citizens' Local Unions (AMAGs) established with the support of the EU European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) at the municipal and community level work well. LAGs and AMAGs are voluntary, membership-based NNLEs that include elected representatives from the civil, private and public sectors. Their main goal is to support the socio-economic development processes of local communities. The Georgian Association of Local Action Groups (GALAG), which unites representatives of eight LAGs, is also established as a NNLE.¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵

As of August 2021, LAGs were established in 12 municipalities of Georgia.¹⁰⁶ It should be noted that the number of private sector representatives in LAGs should be at least one percent higher than the number of public sector representatives. The functions of LAGs include approving and implementing local development strategies; defining non-dis-

103 Interview with the Executive Director of the *Management Systems Development Center*, April 6, 2020.

104 GALAG Georgia, <http://www.galag.ge/>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

105 These LAGs represent Borjomi, Lagodekhi, Kazbegi, Dedoplistskaro, Tetrtskaro, Akhalkalaki, Keda and Khulo municipalities.

106 These municipalities are: Lagodekhi, Borjomi, Kazbegi, Tetrtskaro, Dedoplistskaro, Akhalkalaki, Keda, Khulo, Mestia, Tskaltubo, Akhmeta and Tsalka.

criminary and transparent procedures for the evaluation and selection of sub-projects; determining the amount of funding for the selected sub-project and submitting it to the responsible state body for approval; and monitoring of local development strategies and selected sub-projects to assess their effectiveness and benefits.¹⁰⁷

As for the AMAGs, they were first established in the Adjara region in 2016 with the help of the civil society organizations *Intellect* and the *Institute of Democracy*. As of May 2021, AMAGs were established only in five municipalities of Adjara, namely Kobuleti, Khulo, Shuakhevi, Keda and Khelvachauri municipalities. A total of 46 AMAGs were created, with up to 700 members. At least 30 percent of AMAG members should be women, 20 percent - young people and 20 percent - public sector representatives. Each AMAG consists of 12-18 members representing several villages (community) together. The number of members depends on the number of people living in these several villages. AMAG members are elected for a term of four years.¹⁰⁸ Elections are conducted by polling method, according to which the residents of the respective villages must nominate three candidates they want. Based on the summarized results, the ratings of the candidates and the composition of the AMAG members are determined taking into account the above criteria. The LAG elections are held on a similar principle at the municipal level, which is preceded by an information campaign about the ENPARD program. The election process for AMAGs and LAGs is administered by the *Institute of Democracy* with the help of their municipal coordinators and community mobilizers. It is noteworthy that the representatives elected by the AMAGs from among their members participate in the LAGs of Keda and Khulo, while the chairpersons of the AMAGs are already represented on the Steering Committee of the LAGs. AMAG complements the LAG by providing information at the community level, identifying

107 Georgian Rural Development Network, *Local Action Groups*, <https://bit.ly/3b69yFs>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

108 Georgian Rural Development Network, *AMAGs in Georgia*, <https://bit.ly/3uHDIqn>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

community issues and presenting initiatives based on them.¹⁰⁹ The members of the AMAG elect by a simple majority the chairperson, his or her two deputies (one from the private sector and one from the public sector) and the chairperson of four committees. The remaining members are redistributed to the committees according to their areas of employment and / or interests. AMAGs identify the needs of the local population in four areas: agriculture; rural economy; education and infrastructure and environment. These issues are discussed in the AMAGs' councils and the minutes of the council meetings are drawn up, which are then submitted to the relevant ministries and state institutions for response in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture of Adjara.¹¹⁰ Funds for AMAGs may include volunteer work, donations, national and international grants, membership fees, and ancillary economic activities [69].

However, according to the representative of the *Institute of Democracy*, within a few years of their creation, the existence of some AMAGs was under threat as their members lost interest in AMAG activities due to a lack of support from local and central government. Adjara AMAGs are practically not connected with municipal bodies and they mainly participate in the programs of the Ministry of Agriculture of Adjara. AMAGs are operated at the expense of its active members / community leaders who are concerned with community issues. However, some members who were expecting personal benefits or monetary compensation from the Ministry of Agriculture lost interest in participating in the group after learning that AMAG members were working on a voluntary basis and on community issues. AMAGs currently rely heavily on grants and institutional support from the EU and other international donor organizations, although they are unable to fully utilize this support due to limited capacity and resources. For their part, state agencies use AMAGs mainly for the purposes of their own information and election campaigns and do not provide them with institutional and material support. At the same time,

109 Interview with the Head of the Executive Board of the *Institute of Democracy*, March 11, 2021.

110 Georgian Rural Development Network, *AMAGs in Georgia*, <https://bit.ly/3uHDIqn>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

it is difficult to find people in the villages who can systematically be involved in the activities of the AMAGs on a voluntary basis.¹¹¹ The population is mainly interested in receiving financial and economic benefits. For example, the initial enthusiasm of the local population for the establishment of the first AMAG in the Riketi Community of Khulo Municipality was conditioned by the fact that *Intellect* received a grant of more than GEL 300,000 from the EU and the *United Nations Development Program (UNDP)*. At the request of the population, a sports palace and a community house were built with the money, and schools were provided with ski and wrestling equipment. However, after the funds from the received grant were fully exhausted and this project was completed, the interest of the Riketi Community in the AMAG's work gradually diminished. A similar challenge was faced by the AMAGs established afterwards. As a result, the AMAGs have not yet developed strategies and programs for the socio-economic development of the local community as envisaged in the original plan.¹¹²

It should be noted that Keda and Khulo LAGs operating in Adjara work more actively than AMAGs, which is conditioned by the fact that they receive more support from the EU ENPARD program. Keda LAG also won two independent grants with the support of the *Institute of Democracy*. After receiving these grants, certain LAG members also received remuneration for their work, which doubles their motivation to work more actively on community issues within the LAG mandate. In addition, LAG members are people who have an independent income from their own businesses or other activities and for whom LAG membership is not related to financial interests. There was a case when, in the framework of international cooperation, the LAG of the Austrian municipality signed a contract for the services of Keda LAG for the planning and logistics of their visit to Keda, and this contract also became a source of independent income for Keda LAG. The same LAG is also actively considering social entrepreneurship as an additional source of income.

111 Interview with the Head of the Executive Board of the *Institute of Democracy*, March 11, 2021.

112 Interview with a former employee of the organization *Intellect*, March 12, 2021.

The activities of Keda LAG have yielded some results. For example, their project provided for the cultivation of greenhouses for berry crops, and 80 percent of the costs of this project were funded by the Ministry of Agriculture of Adjara. The second project of Keda LAG envisaged the introduction of modern energy efficient and renewable energy systems in all schools of Keda Municipality and improving heating systems based on them. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of Adjara took responsibility for the installation of these systems and allocated up to GEL 100,000 for this purpose.¹¹³

According to experts, the establishment of LAGs and AMAGs at different levels of settlement will improve the quality of open governance and decentralization in Georgia. Such associations also promote cross-sectoral cooperation, corporate social responsibility, volunteering, and civic advocacy on public policy issues. They will also enhance inter-municipal cooperation and improve the quality of public services, as the municipal services and budget programs created with their help will directly respond to the real needs identified by the population.¹¹⁴

However, at this stage LAGs and AMAGs are established in only a small number of Georgian municipalities, and only at the municipal and community level and not at other levels of territorial units. In addition, they have limited powers and mandate. In particular, they work mainly on agriculture and are less involved in other areas of local public policy. Further, cooperation between LAGs and AMAGs is characterized by the lack of institutionalization and intensity. These associations are also less involved in the implementation of open governance and citizen participation mechanisms in the respective municipalities. Finally, they have limited capabilities and resources, especially AMAGs, which negatively affects the motivation of their members and hinders the institutional sustainability of these groups. The next Chapter presents a way to solve these difficulties.

113 Interview with the Head of the Executive Board of the *Institute of Democracy*, March 11, 2021.

114 Interview with the Executive Director of the *Management Systems Development Center*, April 6, 2020.

Chapter 4. A New Model of Multisectoral Collaboration and Its Importance for the Development of Multilevel Open Governance

Based on the theoretical and empirical research presented in previous chapters, the new model of social change and governance proposed by this study is as follows: **Establishing *epistemic communities* at different levels of territorial-administrative units, starting from the level of rural and urban micro-district and ending at the municipal and regional level, delegating some of the powers and resources of the municipality to them, and creating an institutionalized platform for cooperation between these communities, would increase public participation and influence in public policy-making. It will also increase the accountability of local and central governments to the citizens, facilitate the full implementation of open governance and decentralization reforms in Georgia, and bring the country closer to Euro-Atlantic integration.** The introduction of this model in practice involves the implementation of complex reforms, which are provided below.

In the first stage, a pilot municipality should be selected. It is desirable that this be a municipality where community associations already exist in some form and their activities have brought some tangible results as well. An example of this is Keda Municipality, where community associations operate in the organizational form of AMAGs and LAGs at the community and municipal level. However, these associations are not set up at the level of each village within the community. In order to save the costs of the pilot project, in this case it would be reasonable to select the Dologani Community of Keda Municipality, which includes the smallest number of villages (three - Dologani, Chalakmela and Chinkadzebi) as compared to other communities.¹¹⁵

Like the community-level AMAG elections and organizational model, each village in the Dologani Community should be allowed to

115 Keda Municipality, <https://bit.ly/3ctegfS>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

elect their own representatives for a period of four years to their village council / AMAG, which should be registered as NNLE. AMAG membership should be a voluntary activity, although members may be remunerated to cover their representation expenses. The composition of the village-level AMAG should be determined by six members (two from the civil, two private and two public sectors) and a gender, age, ethnic and professional balance should be maintained between the candidates to ensure maximum representation of the AMAG. As in the model of parish councils in England and Wales, a candidate for membership of a village-level AMAG must meet at least one of the following criteria: be a registered voter in the village; must have lived within a radius of five km from the village or within its boundaries for the last one year; and his or her main activity or work should be related to the village. The village AMAG should elect a chairperson and the deputy from among its members. The AMAG should also have a separate secretary-moderator who will be responsible for the financial, administrative, communication and coordination matters of the AMAG, prepare the agenda, minutes and reports of the AMAG meetings and act as the moderator during the meetings. Given the scope of this work, the secretary-moderator should be a paid position. The village-level AMAG should be allocated a separate budget (conditionally GEL 10,000 per year), which will be provided at the initial stage from the municipal budget and donor funding. Within this budget, the main function of the AMAG should be to identify the needs of the village population, analyze them and identify priority needs, according to which the AMAG should then develop and implement relevant project(s). The project(s) should be monitored by a small group consisting of direct beneficiaries of a particular project and independent of AMAG. This will be the real participation and distribution of power according to the above mentioned Arnstein's *Ladder of Citizen Participation*. If the project is successfully implemented, it should be possible to increase the AMAG budget for next year and thus increase the motivation of its members to be more effectively involved in solving village problems. In case of identification of bigger problems, for

which the authority and budget of the village-level AMAG will not be enough, the AMAG should be able to present the initiatives developed on such issues to the larger AMAG already existing at the community level (uniting several villages together), i.e., at the Dologani Community level. The number of members of Dologani AMAG should be set at 10. It should include the chairpersons of the three village AMAGs in the community and the seven members elected by all members of the three AMAGs (or the General Assembly). The General Assembly should select the members of the community-level AMAG from among the candidates nominated by more than half of the total number of households in each village, taking into account gender, age, ethnicity and occupational balance. The Dologani Community AMAG should also have a separate secretary-moderator as well as a separate budget to exercise its powers. In this regard, it should be noted that in 2020, the Keda Municipality implemented a pilot project of participatory budgeting in the communities / administrative units of Dologani and Daba Keda with the support of the *German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ)*. The project budget was set at GEL 300,000 (GEL 150,000 for each community) and was also reflected in the 2021 municipal budget.¹¹⁶ If the participatory budgeting project continues in the coming years, it would be logical to delegate the authority to administer and implement this project to the relevant community AMAG, in this case the Dologani Community AMAG. The community-level AMAG will legally and financially evaluate the project applications submitted by the village-level AMAGs, identify the winning projects (which will be funded from the municipal budget) and take responsibility for the implementation of these projects. In this case, too, the direct beneficiaries should monitor and evaluate the projects. In addition, the Dologani Community AMAG should submit to the LAG at the Keda Municipality level those citizen-initiated project applications, which cannot be funded from the participatory budgeting project. Keda LAG currently has funding from the EU ENPARD project and other in-

¹¹⁶ Keda Municipality, Participatory Budgeting, <https://bit.ly/30EbvmG>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

ternational donor organizations and therefore has more resources to fund the additional needs of village and community AMAGs. The LAG Steering Committee consists of 15 members from different sectors.¹¹⁷ They are elected by secret ballot by a 300-member General Assembly consisting of members of the AMAGs in Keda and other interested members of the local population.¹¹⁸ In the future, it would be more appropriate for 10 of the 15 members of the Keda LAG Steering Committee to be recruited from the chairpersons of all 10 community-level AMAGs operating in the municipality, and for the remaining five to be selected by the General Assembly.

The pilot project for the establishment of AMAGs in the three villages of the Dologani Community should also include the pre-training of AMAG members and equipping them with appropriate skills to perform their functions properly. In particular, the capacity of village and community AMAGs should be built in a way that they are able to independently seek funding sources and to submit project applications to donors. The AMAGs should also be supported in opening social enterprises,¹¹⁹ cooperating with local businesses, and seeking corporate philanthropy, which can be a source of additional funding for AMAGs. This training component should initially be implemented with the assistance of Keda Municipality and international donors. In the future, a group of trained AMAG members should be established to share their knowledge and experience with future elected AMAG members, thus initiating the formation of multi-sectoral *epistemic communities*. Volunteer groups of local

117 Keda LAG, Steering Committee, <https://bit.ly/38dMgLU>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021.

118 Interview with Keda LAG Representative, March 12, 2021.

119 Social entrepreneurship is a creative and innovative business that has a social mission and is focused on solving social, cultural or environmental issues. Social entrepreneurship aims to make a profit. However, part of this profit should be spent on solving social or environmental problems in the community (see Social Entrepreneurship Guide: <https://bit.ly/3cuzQRo>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021). This could include opening an inclusive café-library, art house and workshops, a training center, shared workspaces or other facilities at the village, community and municipality level (see examples of social enterprises in Georgian municipalities: <https://bit.ly/3rPC1oO>. Last viewed - August 31, 2021).

youth can also be set up to support the activities of AMAGs as well as LAGs. Young people tend to be more motivated and willing to engage in civic activism without pay and thus make a positive difference in their local community.

In the second phase of the pilot project, the municipality of the neighboring region should be selected, which has significant success in introducing open governance mechanisms and where local self-government is open to innovation, as in this case a favorable environment will be created to implement the model described above. According to the findings of this study, such is the municipality of Ozurgeti. In one of the five villages of Ozurgeti (Konchkati, Melekeduri, Likhauri, Tkhinvali and Bakhvi), where the project *Manage from Home* was introduced, it is possible to establish village and community AMAGs on the exact same principle as in the Dologani Community of Keda Municipality. It is also possible to test this model in the city of Ozurgeti. In the latter case, the equivalent of a village-level AMAG would be the unions elected by the condominiums living in each apartment block of the urban micro-district (similar to the Batumi district contacts), and the equivalent of the community-level AMAG would be the district council elected by these micro-district unions at the district level. In the next step, it is possible to form a municipal LAG similar to the Keda LAG model. Following the establishment of AMAGs and LAGs in Ozurgeti, inter-municipal meetings should be held with Keda AMAGs and LAGs to exchange information and good practice that could positively impact the motivation and efficiency of each AMAG and LAG.

After the successful implementation of the above model in practice in Keda and Ozurgeti municipalities, it can be spread throughout Georgia. To this end, the central government should carry out appropriate legal, institutional and practical reforms that will facilitate the institutionalization and sustainability of the proposed model of multilevel, multisectoral collaboration.

First of all, in order to ensure the financial sustainability of AMAGs and LAGs, as well as municipal bodies and to increase their account-

ability to the local population, it is advisable to transfer the local income tax directly to the municipal budget instead of the state budget. This will increase the interest of citizens and motivate them to be more actively involved in the activities of AMAGs and LAGs, as well as municipal bodies. Citizens will know that part of the income from their work will be directly spent on the activities of the groups and bodies chosen by them and closest to them, and therefore they will demand more quality implementation of locally developed programs and services. At the same time, the process of registering the property and natural resources located in the municipalities under the ownership of respective municipalities should be accelerated, which will allow the municipalities to increase the budget of AMAGs and LAGs with the additional funding received as a result of the sale or rent of their properties and resources.

The second important change should be the acceleration of the identification of additional powers that the central government should delegate to municipalities as envisaged by the Decentralization Strategy. At the same time, the municipalities themselves should consider transferring some of their powers to AMAGs and LAGs, as these groups can provide more efficient delivery of municipal programs and services at the village, community and urban micro-district / district levels. In Germany, for example, social services are mainly provided by private, independent and / or non-profit organizations [70]. In addition, like the parish council model in England, AMAGs and LAGs may be empowered to manage village, community and urban infrastructure (e.g., conference and exhibition spaces, squares, playgrounds, cemeteries) [71]. With this change, the activities of AMAGs and LAGs will be directly linked to the activities of municipal bodies, logically linking one whole chain of local self-government at all levels of the settlement.

This model also involves linking AMAGs and LAGs to citizen participation mechanisms under the Local Self-Government Code. As this study has shown, these legal mechanisms do not work effectively in practice and need to be changed. For example, a General Assembly of the Settlement should be convened by an AMAG registered in the respective

settlement, which should be able to decide on its own the threshold of participation in the Assembly based on the number of registered voters actually residing in each settlement. The AMAG should also establish its own procedures for convening an Assembly meeting, taking into account the local context. This will change the existing complex, ineffective and somewhat restrictive mechanism of convening an Assembly meeting and encourage its more regular and easy use. In this case, it would be logical for the AMAGs to set the mandatory threshold for the supporters of the petition at the level of the relevant village and community and not at the level of the municipality as a whole as it is now established. The AMAGs and LAGs should be able to decide for themselves who represents their members on the Mayor's Council of Civil Advisors in accordance with the above criteria, which ensures equal representation of different sectors and social groups on the Council. At the same time, the Mayor should be obliged to consider the initiatives and opinions of the Council of Civil Advisors and give a reasoned answer to their authors. These changes will give a significant boost to the improvement of the existing mechanisms of the General Assembly, the petition and the Council of Civil Advisors and their more effective implementation in practice. Finally, the *Citizen Budget Project* described above, which is successfully implemented in Gori and Zugdidi municipalities, should be enshrined in the Local Self-Government Code and its implementation should become mandatory for all municipalities. The authority to administer and implement this mechanism should be delegated to the AMAG of the relevant administrative unit / community, which should also include the authority to implement the winning projects in the respective settlement.

To increase the motivation of AMAG and LAG members, it would be appropriate to link these groups to important policy-making cyclical processes such as the drafting of the municipal budget and the priority document and the implementation of the OGP National Action Plan. The municipality should be obliged to conduct public consultations during the development of the draft municipal budget, the priority document and the OGP commitments, and to invite representatives of AMAGs and

LAGs to these consultations. The municipality should also ensure that the comments received from public consultations are collected, analyzed and returned to their authors outlining the extent to which the submitted opinions will be taken into account in the final version of the relevant documents. The more the AMAG and LAG initiatives are reflected in the municipal budget and OGP Action Plans, the greater the interest of these groups in becoming more actively involved in these processes. The author of this study introduced this approach at the municipal level in 2019, as part of the NDI *Local Government Program*. In agreement with the program partner municipalities (Gori, Zugdidi, Telavi, Marneuli and Ozurgeti), he involved all key stakeholders in the budgetary process from the very beginning, including the Mayor and City Hall department heads, Sakrebulo leadership and faction heads (including heads of opposition factions), municipal Gender Equality Councils, and local civil society organizations. Both joint and individual consultations and meetings were held with these actors to determine budgetary priorities for the municipality. They were assisted in drafting budget initiatives tailored to the needs of the population and submitting them to the City Hall. The program then helped the City Hall to properly formulate budget programs and sub-programs and to correctly define their evaluation indicators. At the end of the budget year, public hearings on all the initiatives developed and the draft budget were held to obtain additional feedback from the population. As a result of this process, many of the above actors for the first time managed to develop technically sound budget initiatives and submit them to the City Hall, most of which were reflected in the 2020 municipal budgets. It also helped to bring these actors closer to the local population and to introduce new methods of research and communication into their activities. Finally, program participants from all partner municipalities met to exchange experiences and knowledge gained during the process. This has doubled the interest of all participants to continue similar practices in the future and to ensure the institutionalization of this model of cooperation. The limited scale of the program at that time could not ensure the inclusion of business in the inclusive budgeting

process and the introduction of a multisectoral model of cooperation at the village and community level, however, the need for this was identified and in the future donors should work in this direction.

In parallel with the development of AMAGs and LAGs within one municipality, the government should also facilitate the collaboration of AMAGs and LAGs from other municipalities to exchange knowledge, good practice and experience at both regional and interregional and cross-border levels. On the NALAG model, an AMAG Association should be established and the existing LAG Association should be expanded to include AMAGs and LAGs registered in all municipalities. In addition to promoting good practice and cooperation at the national level, AMAGs and LAGs should work closely with similar associations in other countries and plan exchange visits with them, attracting international knowledge, experience and investment at the village, community and municipality levels.

Finally, in order to develop civic responsibility and solidarity among the local population and to develop their proper skills for active participation in public policy-making, the central government, in close cooperation with local authorities, should strengthen the civic education component in public school and university curricula. This should also include the introduction of a practical component that will allow students to volunteer with AMAGs and LAGs as well as with municipal bodies. Students' volunteer resources will be especially important in identifying the problems of the people living in their settlements, mobilizing the community around these problems, conducting thematic research, developing initiatives and submitting these initiatives to responsible AMAGs, LAGs and municipal bodies. For such voluntary civic activities, students should be given additional academic credit and certification, which will increase their motivation and their chances of finding a paid job. In addition, AMAGs, LAGs and municipal bodies can enter into memoranda of understanding with relevant schools and universities and involve students in their internship programs.

Conclusion

“A lot can also be done with a small shovel and it is very possible to let a big deal come out little by little”¹²⁰

Ilia Chavchavadze

Demand for representative democracy in the world remains high. Open governance complements democracy because it implies joint governance of the state and society, or *co-creation* of public policy, and is committed to increasing the influence of society on the decision-making process. Demand for this model is higher in economically developed countries, where the intellectual mass of society, modern high technologies and diverse social structures lead to self-organization, democratic competition of ideas, multisectoral cooperation, and *bottom-up* governance.

Open governance is especially relevant at the local self-government level, where the community has a more direct and regular connection with state institutions, where addressing the day-to-day needs of the local population is a priority, and where there are better opportunities for citizen participation in public policy-making. For the full development of this concept, local self-government must have the appropriate powers and resources. This is especially difficult to achieve in post-communist countries, where command-based *top-down* governance and suppressed civic activism were the norm for years and was firmly entrenched in those countries' governance systems and civic culture. Added to this after the collapse of the Soviet Union were the bloody civil and ethnic conflicts in its former members and the disintegration of state structures and economic systems, which seriously damaged the democratic and socio-economic development of the post-Soviet countries. Consequently, they still find it difficult to move to new models of decentralization and open governance, which envisage the strengthening of local self-government, community self-organization and *bottom-up* governance. In this

¹²⁰ Translated by the author.

study, this opinion was confirmed on the example of Georgia.

The analysis of seven municipalities of Georgia, including the capital, clearly identified the challenges related to the development of decentralization and open governance in the country. Low levels of economic development at both the central and local levels, poverty, unemployment and poor infrastructure negatively affect the public interest in engaging in public policy and local self-government. Citizens are driven more by private interests than by community interests, and they are reluctant to use mechanisms of participation in which they see no particular benefit. Consequently, the mechanisms of participation defined by the Local Self-Government Code do not work well, while the mechanisms that work relatively more effectively are largely thanks to the projects of international donor organizations. Business companies use little or no open government mechanisms and cooperate less with civil society organizations and representatives of opposition parties. They generally do not have developed corporate social responsibility. Cooperation between local self-government and civil society is relatively successful in municipalities where local government is more open to social change and new initiatives. However, this cooperation is less successful in large cities, especially on issues where major political and business interests dominate. There is a lack of solidarity in the civil society organizations themselves. They are in competition with each other for international donor grants and are more focused on implementing their own individual projects than on joint projects. Finally, the lack of decentralization in Georgia hinders multisectoral cooperation and the full implementation of the open governance model within the municipalities. The local self-government, in some cases despite its desire, is unable to cooperate effectively with the civil society and the business sector, as it is unable to resolve many important issues independently and depends on the directives of the central government. The main property of the municipalities is registered under the ownership of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, which prevents local governments from increasing their revenues and resources from the sale or rent of this property, independently seek-

ing business investments and encouraging private companies to be actively involved in public policy development and implementation. Lack of decentralization also hinders the increase of public participation in local policy-making, as solving numerous problems faced by citizens is not within the powers of municipalities and therefore citizens find it difficult to see the benefits of participating in local self-government activities. This, in turn, leads to a lack of thematic inter-municipal cooperation between the state, civil and business sectors, which thwarts the widespread dissemination of knowledge and experience accumulated at the grassroots level and the creation of a common good based on it.

In response to these challenges, this study introduced a new model of multilevel, cross-sectoral collaboration and governance. This model stems from the private interest of an individual, which is the main driving force of his or her behavior. Private interest can be better served by interacting with other people with similar interests who share a common settlement and environment. In this case, private interest, which largely involves receiving financial and economic benefits, may gradually become more closely linked to the collective, community interest, and evoke in people a sense of civic responsibility, solidarity, and activism. However, these feelings will soon disappear if the individual is unable to satisfy either private or community interest through relationships with other people. To prevent this from happening, it is important to turn the human relations process into an organizational form, to instill in its participants a culture of self-organization, and to equip them with certain finances and powers. The lower the level of this process and the smaller but more representative the composition of self-organized and empowered social groups, the greater the chance that the private and community interests of the members of these groups as well as the residents of the respective settlement will be satisfied. The use of unusual and innovative approaches and practices in small social groups is also highly likely to increase, which can provide a solution to a specific problem and become a source of inspiration for other similar groups. Discussions and decisions on ways to solve local problem (s) among the civil, private and

public sector members of the group enrich them with sectoral expertise and experience, forming this small group as a unique *epistemic community*. The larger the scale of the problem, the larger the settlement area to which the problem relates. The lowest level of settlement may include the village and then the union of villages, or community, and the city level - the micro-districts and districts of the city. Larger levels may include the municipality, the group of municipalities within or outside a region, and the transboundary level outside the country. However, the enlarged settlement / territorial unit itself should not increase the number of members of the group representing the settlement or only slightly increase, as the decision-making process will become more complicated in large groups. A social group created in an enlarged area should have more authority and resources to solve relatively large problems. Such a group should consist of the leaders of the groups created at the lower level of the settlement, who will have more responsibility to convincingly present the problem identified by their own group and to convince other groups of the priority of solving that problem. In order to ensure the sustainability of small social groups, it is also important to link the activities of these groups to cyclical processes such as the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local budgets, OGP Action Plans or other policy documents.

Discussing common problems and ways of solving them between social groups of similar territorial units and composition ensures democratic competition of ideas and increases the degree of self-organization, socialization and sectoral expertise of group members. Such self-organized, small social groups equipped with appropriate knowledge, powers and resources at different levels of territorial units and an institutionalized platform for their cooperation with each other will increase the public interest in engaging in public policy-making. It will also facilitate the full implementation of decentralization and open governance reforms in Georgia and bring the country closer to the EU and the US, where democratic governance based on subsidiarity is a role model.

The introduction of a new model of multisectoral collaboration and

multilevel open governance at the municipal level in Georgia, developed within the framework of this study, requires the strong political will of the central government and its timely, effective steps. At this stage, achieving this strong will and implementing certain reforms in this direction is possible through the constant efforts of international donor organizations and local civil society. However, the full implementation, institutionalization and further development of the aforementioned model will also significantly depend on the degree of civic solidarity, responsibility, and initiativeness of each member of society.

Open governance and local self-government is like a clay pot. The making of the pot from the vital minerals of the clay starts from the bottom and moves gradually and dynamically upwards, while the head of the pot is open and inside it a variety of information, knowledge and experience is stored. “Clay is singing”!¹²¹

121 A quote taken from the Georgian movie *Young One from Sabudara*, 1958.

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Annex I

Questionnaire for local self-government representatives

1. Please identify the three main problems in your municipality that locals are most concerned with?
2. What is your strategy for solving these problems and who are your main partners in this regard?
3. Would you like to work with another municipality (ies) on addressing these problems? If so, in what format and specifically with which actors?
4. What type of enterprises are there in your municipality and how do you cooperate with them? Can you give successful examples of this collaboration? What was the concrete result and what has changed for the better as a result of this collaboration in your municipality?
5. What type of civil society organizations are there in your municipality and how do you work with them? What concrete results have been achieved and what has changed for the better as a result of this collaboration in your municipality?
6. How would you assess the participation of citizens in the development of local policy? Can you give some successful examples? Were these successful examples the result of donor projects or was it implemented independently by the municipality? What are the key challenges in this regard and how would you address these challenges?
7. Apart from personal household issues, what issues of community importance do citizens ask for cooperation with you?
8. What are the main benefits of cooperating with citizens and civil society organizations? What negative aspects can this process have for you?
9. Are there any civic groups that are most difficult to work with? If so, what is the reason for this?
10. In terms of dialogue and cooperation with citizens, what format and mechanism can be most effective?

11. In terms of cooperation with civil society and business, what format and mechanism might be most effective?
12. Who should be the initiator and who should manage the mechanisms of citizen participation and multisectoral collaboration?

Questionnaire for civil society representatives

1. Please identify the three main problems in your municipality that locals are most concerned with. How do you work on these problems and who are your key partners?
2. Would you like to cooperate with civil society organizations in other municipalities on addressing these problems? If so, in what format and who else would you involve in this process?
3. On what issues and in what format do you cooperate with local self-government bodies? Can you give successful examples of this collaboration? What concrete results have been achieved and what has changed for the better as a result of this collaboration in your municipality? What challenges do you face in terms of cooperation with the local government and how do you address these challenges?
4. Do you have any kind of cooperation with local businesses? If so, can you cite successful examples of this collaboration? What concrete results have been achieved and what has changed for the better as a result of this collaboration in your municipality?
5. What mechanisms of cooperation with each other do civil society organizations have in your municipality? Do you have experience working together and advocating on thematic issues? If so, what was the concrete result and what has changed for the better as a result of working together in your municipality?
6. How would you assess the participation of citizens in the development of local policy? Can you give some successful examples? Were these successful examples the result of donor projects or was it implemented independently by the municipality? What are the key challenges in this regard and how would you address these challenges?

7. How do you work with citizens and what difficulties do you face in this direction? Are there any civic groups that are most difficult to work with? If so, what is the reason for this?
8. Apart from personal household issues, what issues of community importance are citizens active in?
9. What might be the main incentive for citizens to become more actively involved in local policy-making?
10. In terms of dialogue and cooperation with citizens, what format and mechanism can be most effective?
11. In terms of cooperation with local self-government and business, what format and mechanism can be most effective?
12. Who should be the initiator and who should manage the mechanisms of citizen participation and multilateral cooperation?

Questionnaire for government, parliament and NALAG representatives and field experts

1. To what extent does the new decentralization strategy and action plan of Georgia respond to the existing challenges in the process of implementing decentralization and open governance reforms?
2. What are the main challenges you see in the implementation of the strategy and how do you address these challenges?
3. At the national level, what coordination mechanism exists in the implementation of decentralization reform?
4. In what format do you cooperate with municipalities and what challenges do you face in terms of cooperation with them? How would you address these challenges?
5. How do you promote inter-municipal cooperation? Can you give successful examples of this collaboration? What concrete results have been achieved and what has changed for the better in the respective municipalities?

6. Do you have any cooperation with the business sector in the implementation of decentralization and open governance reforms? If so, can you cite successful examples of this collaboration? What was the concrete result and what has changed for the better?
7. In what format do you collaborate with civil society organizations? Can you give successful examples of this collaboration? What was the concrete result and what has changed for the better?
8. Were successful examples of cooperation with different sectors the result of donor projects, or were they implemented by the government and local actors independently?
9. How would you assess the participation of citizens in the development of local policy? What are the challenges in implementing the citizen participation mechanisms defined by the Local Self-Government Code and how would you address these challenges?
10. In terms of dialogue and cooperation with citizens, what format and mechanism can be most effective?
11. In terms of cooperation with local governments, civil society and business, what format and mechanism do you think would be most effective?
12. Who should be the initiator and who should manage the mechanisms of citizen participation and multisectoral cooperation?

Annex II

Interviews:

1. Interview with the Chairman of Tbilisi Sakrebulo - September 10, 2019.
2. Interview with the Chairman of the faction *United National Movement* of Tbilisi Sakrebulo - September 20, 2019.
3. Interview with the OGP contact person of Tbilisi City Hall - September 11, 2019.
4. Interview with a local self-government expert - May 4, 2020.
5. Interview with the representative of the *Institute for Development of Freedom of Information* - June 30, 2020.
6. Interview with the representative of *Transparency International Georgia* - July 8, 2020.
7. Interview with the Mayor of Telavi - September 23, 2019.
8. Interview with the Chairman of Telavi Sakrebulo - September 24, 2019.
9. Interview with the members of the Telavi Sakrebulo faction *Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia* - September 22, 2019.
10. Interview with the Chairman of the Telavi Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement* - September 24, 2019.
11. Interview with the Head of the Telavi Office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* - March 20, 2020.
12. Interview with the Director of the *Media Center Kakheti* - March 20, 2020.
13. Interview with the Mayor of Gori - September 19, 2019.
14. Interview with the Chairman of Gori Sakrebulo - October 21, 2019.
15. Interview with the Chairman of the Gori Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement* - September 10, 2019.
16. Interview with the Head of the Gori Office of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* - March 18, 2020.
17. Interview with the Head of the Gori Branch of the *Civil Society Institute* - March 17, 2020.

18. Interview with the Mayor of Marneuli - October 23, 2019.
19. Interview with the Deputy Chairman of Marneuli Sakrebulo - March 9, 2020.
20. Interview with Sakrebulo member from the party *European Georgia* - March 12, 2020.
21. Interview with the Director of the *Community Radio Marneuli* - March 11, 2020.
22. Interview with the Coordinator of the *Center for Civic Engagement* in Marneuli - March 19, 2020.
23. Interview with a member of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara from the party *Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia* - March 2, 2020.
24. Interview with a member of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara from the party *United National Movement* - February 28, 2020.
25. Interview with the Deputy Mayor of Batumi - March 2, 2020.
26. Interview with the Chairwoman of the faction *Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia* of the Batumi Sakrebulo - March 2, 2020.
27. Interview with the Chairman of the faction *United National Movement* of Batumi Sakrebulo - February 26, 2020.
28. Interview with the members of the society *Batomi* - March 1, 2020.
29. Interview with the journalist of the newspaper *Batumelebi* - March 1, 2020.
30. Interview with the Head of the Batumi Branch of the *Civil Society Institute* - March 16, 2020.
31. Interview with the Head of the *Independent Journalists' House* - February 28, 2020.
32. Interview with *Transparency International Georgia's* Batumi Regional Coordinator - March 1, 2020.
33. Interview with the Chairman of the Board of the organization *Intellect* - March 2, 2020.
34. Interview with the Deputy Mayor of Zugdidi - March 25, 2020.
35. Interview with the Chairman of Zugdidi Sakrebulo - October 3, 2019.

36. Interview with the Chairman of the Zugdidi Sakrebulo faction *United National Movement* - October 11, 2019.
37. Interview with *Transparency International Georgia's* Zugdidi Regional Coordinator - March 18, 2020.
38. Interview with the Head of the Zugdidi Office of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association - March 18, 2020.
39. Interview with the Mayor of Ozurgeti - December 17, 2019.
40. Interview with the Chairman of Ozurgeti Sakrebulo - October 1, 2019.
41. Interview with the Chairman of the faction *United National Movement* of Ozurgeti Sakrebulo - October 1, 2019.
42. Interview with the Coordinator of the Ozurgeti *Center for Civic Engagement* - March 19, 2020.
43. Interview with the representative of *Guria Youth Resource Center* - March 17, 2020.
44. Interview with the representative of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure - March 26, 2020.
45. Interview with Executive Director of the NALAG, March 26, 2020.
46. Electronic correspondence with the representative of the Parliamentary Committee on Regional Policy and Self-Government - April 7, 2020.
47. Interview with the Head of the *Center of Local Democracy Network* - March 27, 2020.
48. Interview with an expert from the *Center for Training and Consultancy* - March 27, 2020.
49. Interview with the Executive Director of the *Management Systems Development Center* - April 6, 2020.
50. Interview with the Chairman of the Executive Board of the *Institute of Democracy* - March 11, 2021.
51. Interview with a former employee of the organization *Intellect* - March 12, 2021.
52. Interview with the representative of Keda LAG - March 12, 2021.

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