TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS and NATIONAL TRAINING STRATEGIES

How to ensure the right training at the right time to the right people?

Delivering Good Governance

Tools for Local and Central Authorities

Principles of Training Needs Analysis

Research guidelines

Principles of National Training Strategies

developed by

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CENTRE OF EXPERTISE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

December 2016

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Training
Needs
Analysis

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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Table of contents

1. Principles of Training Needs Analysis

By definition, training activities are focused on achieving change: the universal goal is to make a transition from a certain specific state of knowledge (or lack thereof) and skills among a specific group of people to a state which is defined as superior, improved and more useful in the context of achieving some pre-defined goals. Therefore, a training activity in the life of an organisation means that there is a striving to achieve a different—and, by definition, better—and desirable state of its operation.

Training needs arise from deficiencies related to constraints or imperfections in human activity, primarily deficiencies in knowledge or skills. In this sense, they should be distinguished from other factors which exert influence on the functioning of organisations. **Notably, it is rare that actual developmental constraints would result from insufficient competences of people who are part of the organisation.** The condition of that organisation may deviate from the expectations due to various legal, institutional or historical considerations. This discrepancy may also be connected with the social or political context or limited availability of human or financial resources.

> Training needs are not the only token of an organisation's need to develop.

The role of a training needs analysis

The reasons which constrain effective performance of local administration obviously determine the kinds of actions which are needed to launch the institutional development process. In order for that process to be effective and efficient, **one need to conduct prior in-depth analysis of contextual background of local administration. Such analysis should focus on identifying systemic barriers to development and on assessing competencies of local government personnel and the resultant training needs**. The aspects to consider in such an analysis should include, among others, the following:

- Legal and institutional framework of local governance, in particular the degree of decentralisation of public authorities as well as legal regulations determining the scope of powers in the hands of local government;

- Consistency of the legal system, possibility for local government bodies to exercise their rights, consistency of legal supervision over the operations of local administration;

- The economic context of local government operations;

- Organisational practices prevailing at local government offices, collaboration between local government units, local governance monitoring systems, assessments of performance and the quality of services provided;

- Status quo and quality of local government personnel, human resources management practices.

Any diagnosis of the operation of local government should also incorporate the social perspective: after all, local governments perform a specific range of public tasks whereas citizens, members of

specific local communities, are the direct audience of their services. Therefore, when analysing local government operations one should also reflect on the local living conditions, the quality of services and the nature of local social needs.

Therefore, we should stress that the training needs diagnosis with respect to local government personnel should be one element in an overall analysis of the situation of a specific local government unit or a specific public administration sector in a particular country. In principle, **such a diagnosis should always be accompanied by an insightful assessment of the legal and institutional framework of local administration and an explication of the desirable model of this system and its operations.**

Therefore, in an analysis of training needs, the issue that comes to the fore is not necessarily the subject-matter of training (i.e. its content, target recipients, manner of organisation) but, rather, **the reasonability of training under the existing circumstances**. The analysis should offer an answer to the question on whether it is indeed the educational effort that will help the organisation (or the sector as a whole) to attain the desirable state of affairs. After all, it might well happen that mayors, executive secretaries or officials do have the necessary knowledge and skills to act but legal regulations or other systemic constraints prevent them from performing their tasks efficiently.

| Status quo (identified barriers to performance of local administration) | Legal / systemic changes → Training strategy → | Desirable state of things (effective and efficient performance of local government units) |
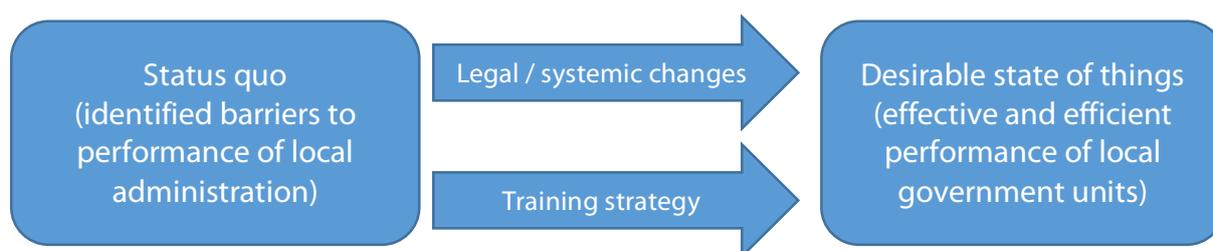
In the light of these comments, it needs to be emphasized that a **diagnosis of training needs among local government personnel should always be part of an overall analysis of the situation of a specific LGU or a particular local sector of public administration**. Overall, it should be accompanied by a summary of legal and institutional considerations in which local administration operates, and a description of the desirable model of this system. In the European context, the key document which lays down the key principles in this regard is the European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted in Strasbourg in 1985, and ratified by Poland in full (among few member states of the Council of Europe) on 26 April 1993.[1] One of the key provisions of the Charter is the principle of subsidiarity (Article 4.3): 'Public responsibilities shall generally be exercised, in preference, by those authorities which are closest to the citizen. Allocation of responsibility to another authority should weigh up the extent and nature of the task and requirements of efficiency and economy.'). Moreover, in the context of research findings presented in this document, the following provisions of the Charter are particularly noteworthy:

- 'Local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population.' (Article 3.1)

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[1] The Charter became effective on 1 March 1994.

- 'Where powers are delegated to them by a central or regional authority, local authorities shall, insofar as possible, be allowed discretion in adapting their exercise to local conditions.' (Article 4.5)

- 'The conditions of service of local government employees shall be such as to permit the recruitment of high-quality staff on the basis of merit and competence; to this end adequate training opportunities, remuneration and career prospects shall be provided.' (Article 6.2)

- 'Local authorities shall be entitled, within national economic policy, to adequate financial resources of their own, of which they may dispose freely within the framework of their powers.' (Article 9.1)

- 'Local authorities' financial resources shall be commensurate with the responsibilities provided for by the constitution and the law.' (Article 9.2)

How to define training needs?

The diagnosis of training needs helps to identify the discrepancies between the knowledge held by potential training/education participants and the knowledge which is desirable for some specific reasons. When describing the status quo, we usually refer to the realities of potential training participants (e.g. local government officials), presenting their way of working, identifying issues they grapple with, or identifying the imperfections in how their tasks are carried out. In a nutshell, we present a description of the situation, an analysis of professional practices of a specific group of people (local officials, local government leaders, councillors etc.).

This kind of analysis may produce two types of conclusions:

- it may identify beliefs relating to the training needs among the potential target audience, which sometimes are accompanied by the desire to meet those needs, or

- it may identify the desirable level of knowledge or skills among specific groups of stakeholders, i.e. indicate the extent to which educational efforts may contribute to achieving a desirable state of things.

Therefore, we can speak of **two approaches in the planning of training activities**: on the one hand, we are dealing with the **identification of training-related expectations** and, on the other hand, we can speak of a **prescriptive definition of needs related to the development of competencies.**

> Training needs analysis is an attempt to specify who should be trained and to which extent, in order to achieve the desirable status of knowledge, skills and ways of acting.

Worth remembering is that only in some cases the training expectations voiced by local officials will be identical with the development needs of their respective local government units. As mentioned earlier, the current effectiveness and efficiency of local administration may deviate from the expectations harboured by specific stakeholders, due to a large number of highly diverse external factors (such as the legal and institutional framework, historical background, economic factors etc.). It may also stem from external considerations, for

instance, it may result from weaknesses in the governance of a local government unit,[2] or from motivating factors (e.g. working for the local government may not be perceived as attractive, or the work atmosphere in the office may discourage people from being committed and performing well). Only some of those considerations may be obvious and will be noticed by the personnel of a local government unit (or, more broadly, by people representing the sector of local government administration). Therefore, we will always see a complete overlap between the training expectations and training needs in this respect.

Identification of training expectations

Such identification consists of two key steps:

1. **Identification of training postulates**, i.e. establishing training expectations among specific audiences, and describing those postulates;

2. **Identifying training possibilities**, i.e. a follow-up stage where the most suitable and efficient ways to satisfy the postulates are determined.

It is important to bear in mind that, with this approach, we may be dealing with training expectations or postulates which are not at all valid for the organisation as a whole. One can easily imagine a situation where someone wants something without needing it and vice versa: we might need something without wanting it. What plays an important role is an individual awareness of our own limitations: we do not always realise the scope and, therefore, also the consequences of our own incompetence. The moment we realise them should be viewed as the starting point of personal development. An excellent illustration of this rule comes from the competence ladder model proposed by Leslie Rae:[3]

> Identification of **training expectations** is about identifying the postulates related to training and participation in educational activities voiced by members of a specific group (e.g. officials, councillors, local government leaders, NGOs, etc.).
> It refers directly to the ideas voiced or expectations

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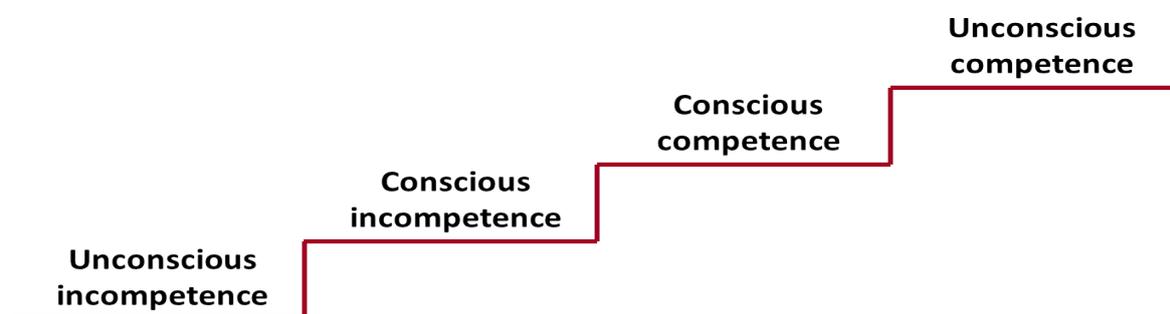
[2] For instance, inefficient organisation of work, incompetence of some local administration representatives, faulty procedures in local institutions, financial problems related to wrong resources management, limited human resources etc.

[3] L. Rae 'Planning and designing training programmes', Gower Publishing Ltd., 1997.

People can perform specific tasks or fulfil particular functions without having the right knowledge or necessary skills. The results of such practices will be presumably unsatisfactory, which does not mean, however, that they can be perceived as problematic by the individual concerned in all situations. Anyone knows individual cases of thoughtless ignorance within people's professional, social or political functions. Over time, as experience accumulates and knowledge is obtained, people develop and understanding of their job (sometimes this happens as a consequence of various attempts and failures). This may help them to become aware of the constraints resulting from insufficient knowledge or skills. If, in consequence, people begin a training and development process, we can say they have embarked on a path to personal growth. Another step on this path would be to achieve a state of conscious competence, where people have the right qualifications in a specific area, enabling them to perform their tasks properly, effectively and efficiently. And, again, experience, education and self-reflectivity may enable an individual to reach an expert level where the acquired competences are used subconsciously, and the decisions are optimal.

Worth noting are two essential aspects related to the above-mentioned model. Firstly, **people who are not aware of their incompetence just do not realise that they do now know something**. This is why it is very hard to assess that they need any educational support and, the more so, to specify the kind of support needed. **If people are not aware of their own incompetence, asking them what they should learn does not make much sense**.

This remark may be illustrated by memories of Polish reformers who were active at the time when the local government reform was introduced in Poland (early 1990s, very soon after the democratic transformation of 1989). Professor Jerzy Regulski, regarded as one of the founding fathers of the Polish territorial government, recollects other countries' efforts to identify the needs of the fledgling local administration in Poland at that time:

> '*We received enormous assistance from a variety of sources (…). A very nice [man] came and he was helping us actively for an entire year. However, one year later, another man was sent and he thought he knew everything and we knew nothing. And instead of discussing things with us and agreeing on an assistance plan, he decided that a needs assessment should be performed. He started travelling around the country and asking voits and councillors what they didn't know and would like to learn. That made no sense. At that time, our local government officials were not at the stage where they would know what they didn't know. After all, in order to answer that question you should be able to determine the scope of knowledge they should attain, and you should be able to identify what they already know, and only on this basis you can determine what those people should learn.*'[4]

On the other hand, we cannot assume that the development of competence can have a final point, especially in a situation of changing governance practices, transformations of government systems or constant evolution of the society's needs. Someone who is an expert today can easily become an ignoramus in future if they fail to notice the changes in the surrounding world in time.

Noteworthy is another threat related to situations when training needs analysis is limited to identification of expectations. **Uncritical acceptance of postulates may bring unfavourable consequences for the organisation (e.g. a local government unit).** One example would be the postulate to have foreign language training, which is sometimes mentioned by local officials in

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[4] Jerzy Regulski 'Życie splecione z historią' [*Life intertwined with history*]; Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2014; p. 496.

questionnaires[5]. It might well be that knowledge of foreign languages is not needed at all for the tasks they perform (even though the opportunity to acquire such competences may be attractive as such). Another example would be the postulate to obtain training in qualifications which will be useful mostly when seeking a job outside the public sector.

Of course, there is an institutional perspective where the focus on fulfilling the reported training expectations is valid and fully understandable. This is the perspective of a commercial training provider. As a rule, however, this perspective does not apply to strategic approaches to competence building among the personnel of a public institution. In this case, a decisive role is played by the effort to adapt educational activities to particular roles and tasks which the institution is expected to fulfil.

A prescriptive definition of competence development needs

Defining actual training needs of a specific target group should be always based on the aforementioned **detailed analysis of discrepancies between the status quo (specific competencies) and the desirable situation**. For instance, the introduction of new legal regulations may generate a need to train people who will be affected by such amendments (if we know about legislative plans in advance, we can develop a range of proposed training events earlier). The outcomes of a performance analysis at a local government office may prompt its management to implement changes to existing procedures (and, at the same time, to upgrade the staff's knowledge to match the new rules of operation). In other cases, new government reforms may generate the need to educate key stakeholders involved in local government.

In the aforementioned examples we are dealing with *ex ante* **identification of training needs**. We should notice that conscious educational postulates are usually closely connected with knowledge or skills gaps experienced in everyday activities. However, from the perspective of office management, political leaders, representatives of regional, central or international institutions it sometimes becomes essential to run a training programme aimed at changing attitudes, skills or awareness of a specific occupational or social group (for instance, local government personnel). In most cases, this means that there is a need to provide knowledge or develop attitudes and skills whenever gaps are not clearly visible in everyday activities but will become crucial in the long run.
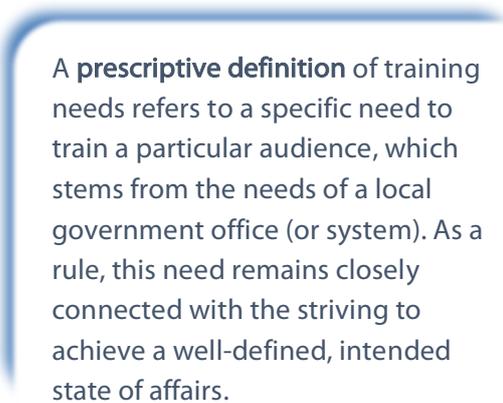
> A **prescriptive definition** of training needs refers to a specific need to train a particular audience, which stems from the needs of a local government office (or system). As a rule, this need remains closely connected with the striving to achieve a well-defined, intended state of affairs.

For instance, as many countries prepared for their EU accession, an important problem was to improve the performance of local authorities. It was necessary to train a pool of officials who would be able to use the opportunity of accession to enhance local communities. In that situation, national governments sometimes decided to organise training programmes for local government officials. In the flood of everyday problems, the development of governance skills is often not

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[5] A questionnaire is a way to arrange questions to be asked by the interviewer during a survey interview. The interviewer uses a questionnaire to record (mark) the respondent's answers. A questionnaire can be also self-administered, i.e. completed by the survey respondent by him/herself, in which case no interview takes place.

included among the priorities of local authorities. However, postponing a training programme until a moment when a need arises (i.e. until structural programmes are launched) may mean that multiple opportunities related to early EU membership may be lost.

SWOT analysis[6] is a useful tool helping us to develop a prescriptive definition of training needs. It is used to provide a detailed diagnosis of factors which enable smooth performance of an organisation. When running this kind of analysis, we take into consideration strengths and weaknesses of the status quo, opportunities related to anticipated changes and weaknesses which may emerge once changes have occurred. A SWOT analysis enables us to capture the aforementioned discrepancy between what exists and what should exist in the light of the adopted assumptions.

Factors	**Facilitating** the achievement of goals	**Obstructing** the achievement of goals
Internal (characteristics of the organisation)	Organizational strengths	Organizational weaknesses
External (characteristics of the environment)	External opportunities	External threats

Notably, the proposed training (strategy) should refer to <u>both</u> the identified attitudes and beliefs of potential training audience as well as to objective realities in which they operate. Therefore, **a reliable analysis of training needs tells us not only what kind of training should be offered and to whom, but, above all, it draws on the conclusions from the analysis of existing governance and administrative practices and the context of the organisation** (tasks performed, goals defined, performance indicators etc.). In other words, **it is based on identifying constraints in the current problem-solving practices.**

A comprehensive analysis of training needs specifies:

- the current state of knowledge and skills among potential target groups,

- the state of knowledge and skills required for effective performance of pre-defined tasks and responsibilities,

- the type of educational activities which enable the transition from the status quo to the desirable state of things, and

- factors which constrain the effectiveness of training activities (e.g. systemic problems).

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[6] SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

In this sense, **a training needs analysis goes beyond fulfilling the postulates or educational preferences**. In the case of local government institutions, this means, on the one hand, that there is a need to identify the status quo (systemic conditions) based on data from a variety of sources and an attempt to explicate the obtained results by referring to social, political, economic or cultural considerations. On the other hand, it assumes, obviously, the implementation of social research aimed at identifying priorities and expectations of local government personnel and assessing their motivation and satisfaction with the work performed.

Four steps in training needs analysis

A training needs diagnosis which leads to the implementation of a training strategy should cover four essential elements:
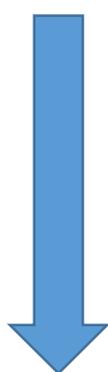
a) running a gap analysis (gaps between the status quo and the desirable state),

b) identifying the reasons behind problems, their consequences and background,

c) identifying the validity of training activities and hierarchy of their importance for the organisation,

d) identifying the scope and topics of training and possible organisational solutions.

These four steps of training needs analysis are part of a process which, in its entirety, leads from a diagnosis of an organisation's operations and performance to the development of an educational strategy.

With respect to a local government unit, if we want to **run a discrepancy (gap) analysis**, we must, above all, identify the existing governance solutions and the mandatory practices, and then identify the current knowledge and attitudes among specific groups of local government personnel. In many a case, this would entail the need to carry out social research or a benchmarking analysis. The key element in discrepancy analysis is, of course, to identify the desirable ways of operation, the proposed spheres of responsibility for the staff, and performance targets for specific tasks.

Studies and analysis should be planned in a way to make them useful for the description and analysis of the status quo, including all kinds of problems, insufficiencies and obstacles which may emerge on the way to proposed outcomes. Experience shows that studies always produce a lot of additional and interesting data, yet often relatively unrelated to researchers' original intentions.

A discrepancy analysis should **identify the causes of problems**, as well as consequences and contexts of problems. At this stage, one should make a clear distinction between institutional (procedural or systemic) sources of problems and factors related to the knowledge/skills gap among local government personnel. It may turn out that training is not the right kind of antidote against the observed problems since legal, organisational or governance-related considerations play a more important role. This step of training needs diagnosis should produce an exact list of

education-related needs, clearly separating those needs from any other essential activities. One should additionally stress, however, that in many cases such a list of educational needs will be an essential, albeit preliminary document, not fully useful for operational purposes. What happens sometimes is that identified problems can only be solved via solutions leading to systemic change.

The final step of a training needs diagnosis, which creates the bridge to National Training Strategy, is to **identify priority actions and their hierarchy of importance.** In other words, it is about exploring the relations between the list of educational needs, the existing implementation possibilities and the proposed goals of institutional change.

Before undertaking any educational activities, we should attempt to answer a number of **key questions:**[7]

- **Costs** – some changes require a long training process; sometimes it is essential to get a large group of people involved in the process. Are the required changes worth implementing large-scale educational activities and the related financial expenditures and time?

- **Legal requirements** – alongside knowledge gaps, a discrepancy analysis may also reveal an insufficiency of the legal system (e.g. legal regulations concerning local government). Is there a chance to amend the imperfect legal regulations? If so, should educational requirements take precedence before legal changes? If not, should the training, if any, be confined to the existing regulations or is it worthwhile expanding it and adding issues that go beyond the existing regulations (e.g. with the intention to build awareness of the existing limitations)?

- **Political pressure** – in some cases the proposed changes and actions may meet with stronger or weaker resistance from central authorities or political leaders; in other cases, far-reaching assistance from decision-makers is possible. Under what kind of political circumstances will training activities be implemented? Will the scope of training depend on the decisions/supervision of the authorities? And, if so, to what extent and what kinds of consequences will this entail?

- **Target audiences/stakeholders** – the identified training needs may turn out to be so broad and acute that it will be necessary to include large groups of recipients or, on the contrary, it may turn out that desirable changes may be achieved by training a narrow yet important group of people. Who will be the target audience of training? Is it possible to reduce the target group without threatening the desirable outcomes? What are the potential participants' expectations in terms of training and is it possible to satisfy those expectations?

- **Organisational opportunities** – of course, training needs identification does not need to remain in a relation with specific organisational capabilities; instead, it may be seen as an introduction to mobilise the right kinds of resources. It is, however, worthwhile asking about the existing human resources, logistic and financial resources needed for the proposed implementation of training efforts.

The decision to organise a training programme (or to establish a long-term educational strategy) should be based on answers to the aforementioned questions. Of course, one important factor may lie in the political will of central authorities to proceed with the development of a training

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[7] Cf. R.H. Rouda and M.E. Kusy 'Development of human resources, Part 2, Needs Assessment – the first step', *Tappi Journal*, 1995.

programme. The importance of this decision will often be decisive, even though a lack of reflection in the areas outlined here may render the entire implementation process highly inefficient.

If we conclude that not all identified training needs are equally important, or that we are unable to address all of them, it will be a good solution to implement actions on a smaller scale, for instance as an experience exchange programme or a training programme targeted at key stakeholders only.

Properly implemented training needs diagnosis would create a credible grounds for elaboration of National Training Strategy, which should specify the coverage and topics of training as well as the possible organisational solutions.

Of course, the aforementioned indications refer to a model situation: those are general recommendations concerning the flow and scope of training needs diagnosis. Experience shows (see examples in the appendices) that complete implementation is not always possible, needed or desirable. Under specific, and varied, institutional, legal, political, cultural etc. conditions, one should adjust the scope of analysis to the existing implementation possibilities while remembering that a training needs diagnosis should:

- clearly identify the source of the desirable state of things that should be enabled by the training strategy (e.g. international practices, legal regulations, model activities, desirable performance indices etc.),

- help to identify key barriers which constrain the possibility to achieve the desirable outcome,

- serve to develop proposed effective activities which, once implemented, will help to introduce the desirable change.

Training needs analysis as a continuous process

The approach to training needs analysis presented above assumes that the analysis is a process with a clearly specified beginning and end. However, it is worth remembering that any change entails various consequences, not only desirable ones, and is rarely a linear process. Training activities are a special case since we are dealing with a change of participants' awareness at each stage of the process. As a result, the reality may be understood in new ways (activities taken, tasks fulfilled, processes implemented, institutional goals adopted etc.), and related new needs (or expectations) may emerge. **As the training strategy is implemented, new problems and new challenges will inevitably emerge.** This is why it is desirable to ensure effective and consistent impact monitoring. This can be done by performing research, conducting benchmarking analysis, or verifying the achievement of target indicators. However, it is a good idea to try less formal methods as well, since they give us a current picture of needs and expectations of the target groups and enable us to respond adequately. To achieve this, we need to observe the reality carefully, with particular attention to the problems faced by key stakeholders.

2. Research as part of training needs analysis

As mentioned earlier, an effective analysis of training needs covers two parallel processes:

- identifying training expectations among key stakeholders in the local government sector, and
- conducting an analysis of the legal and institutional context of operation for local administration.

In the latter case, when we explore the factors which determine efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness of local government, the following key elements should be incorporated into the analysis:

- the scope and nature of decentralisation in the sphere of government,
- institutional, systemic solutions which influence the operation of local administration,
- the political context and the impact of party politics on the operations of local government, and
- social considerations which influence the condition of local government (the condition of civil society, citizens' readiness to take part in public life, participation in the elections etc.).

The nature of the factors presented above, which largely determines the outcome of the training needs analysis, indicates that two core analytical processes must be implemented, namely:

- social research among representatives of the most important groups of officials and local leaders,
- expert work covering the diagnosis of legal and institutional background for the operations of local government.

Further on, this paper discusses mainly the most important issues related to the implementation of social research.[8] Expert analysis remains a specific matter, determined by the special nature of each case (country, system) and, as such, it can be parametrised only to a very limited extent. The country reports (Malta, Poland) enclosed at the end of the text (in the annexes), however, present the scope of issues which may constitute the core focus of expert studies.

Implementation of a research project

Implementation of training needs research among the staff of local administration should begin with formulation of the key research problems which will delineate the range of questions asked in interviews with stakeholders or in questionnaires.

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[8] The comments in this part of the text have been partially taken from the work by C. Trutkowski entitled 'Planning and execution of social research in the local environment' [Planowanie i realizacja badań społecznych w środowisku lokalnym], published in 'Research on the quality of public services in local government' [Badania jakości usług publicznych w samorządzie lokalnym' (edited by C. Trutkowski), a book published by the Association of Polish Cities and Towns (2011).

Research problems can be formulated as follows:

> The research outcomes should help to:
>
> - Identify the key problems in the operation of local administration related to gaps in officials' competences/skills;
>
> - Identify the scope and nature of **expectations** related to professional knowledge and skills acquisition by local government officials, in particular, identification of **attitudes** towards participation in various kinds of educational endeavours.
>
> - Assess the usability of **existing training experience** among key groups of local government officials working for the local administration.

Of course, this is just an example of possible research problems. Worth pointing out here is that when we get down to doing research, we must clearly define its purpose. In other words, we must know what kind of information we will need in order to be able to speak validly about actual training needs among local government personnel, and, therefore, be able to formulate specific recommendations in that regard.

It is important to bear in mind that all activities related to the execution of social research are secondary versus the goals of research[9]. It is the purpose and the related research questions that determine the choice of research methods, research techniques used by the researcher and the sources of information and resources needed to achieve success.

Key methodological issues

Once the research problems have been formulated, we should think about the sources of information to be queried in order to obtain the knowledge needed for an effective and exhaustive description. Worth noting is that various research problems may entail various kinds of analytical endeavours. As the aforementioned example illustrates, a single research project may involve exploration (e.g. *identification of major problems in the operations of local administration*), description (e.g. *identifying the existing training practices*) or an attempt to explicate the existing relations (e.g. *analysis of the relationship between educational practices and the performance of administration*).

The nature of research problems usually determines the course of action in the empirical part of research. Simply put, we can assume that exploratory questions usually entail the need to use qualitative research methods which enable a more in-depth, or

> 'Success of research depends on the research question, which must be clear and distinct. The research question determines what is important (which data should be collected, which aspects of data should be analysed etc.) and, moreover, what is unimportant and should be skipped (in the research project concerned)'.
>
> (Uwe Flick
> *"Designing qualitative research"*)

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[9] See: Flick, U., (2007), „Designing qualitative research"; London: Sage Publications

reflexive, analysis whereas questions necessitating a descriptive or illustrative answer will call for quantitative research methods which can determine the commonness or frequency of specific phenomena studied.

Qualitative research methods

This range of methods include data collection techniques which help researchers to identify the nature of things rather than quantify things. Qualitative techniques can be used, for instance, to study problems which are under-researched, undefined and need an in-depth exploration of dependencies (e.g. when trying to answer why local government officers do not operate effectively or which factors determine the success of local policies implemented by local governments). The qualitative methodology assumes a focus on the observed process and the meanings contained in it, i.e. ones that cannot be quantified in terms of type, quantity, intensity or frequency.

The most common qualitative research techniques include individual in-depth interviews and focus group interviews.

Individual in-depth interview (IDI):

An individual in-depth interview is carried out by a specially trained interviewer according to a pre-prepared detailed guide which defines the objectives and the general flow of the conversation. It enables careful exploration of how the interviewees think and act, how they look at a situation, the motives behind specific activity and the extent of the interviewee's knowledge. These interviews are usually held with individuals who share similar characteristics that are important for the research. An IDI usually takes about one hour.

Focus group interview (FGI):

A focus group enables a carefully planned discussion with selected participants in a comfortable environment in order to explore their perceptions of a specific area of interest. The aim of this research technique is to reconstruct, as closely as possible, the real processes of social communication and to confront participants' varying opinions through the discussion.

Participants are invited to a focus group because they have distinctive personal characteristics that directly correspond with the objectives of the research. This research technique is especially suitable for investigating the opinion-forming processes and the problems of decision-making that are subject to peer influence and collective behaviour. Usually, a focus group interview has 6 to 10 participants.

> Framework interview guidelines are the most common research tools in the qualitative approach: on this basis the researcher conducts an interview with selected respondents. A sample research interview guides (used in the research on training needs among local government staff in Poland, 2015, and then, in a modified form, in Serbia, 2016, and in Greece, 2016) are presented in section 2.6.

It is important to bear in mind that analysis of qualitative data is largely interpretive: as such, the use of those methods requires special experience and research competence, given a high risk of error.

When making methodological decisions, one must, above all, determine the nature of the proposed study, i.e. determine whether the study should produce **in-depth analysis of the phenomena concerned** or should it result in valid generalizations – in quantitative data (aggregated responses, summary tables, statistics etc.) that can be used to describe characteristics of large populations. We need to know if we seek to describe the existing state of affairs (e.g. practices applied in local government offices) or to explore and understand why specific practices are followed.

Quantitative research methods

Such methods involve techniques which produce numerical results. They answer questions such as: How many? How frequently? etc. Quantitative methods are perfectly suited to study the dissemination of a phenomenon (e.g. to explore how many local government officials take part in short-term courses and training events or how often such participation occurs).

The most common quantitative research techniques are based on questionnaires (their types are discussed later on), and data are presented in tables and charts.

> Due to the nature of this publication, we cannot provide a detailed description of how quantitative research instruments should be developed. Further on, we present the proposed **model questionnaire for Training Needs Analysis**. This questionnaire can be used in whole, as worded, or in part, to study selected issues, of importance in a specific context.

Analysis of collected quantitative data is, by definition, objectivised, which means that the use of the right procedures should lead to identical outcomes, regardless of researcher impact. If analysis goes beyond a simple presentation of percentage distributions, it requires technical knowledge in the field of statistics.

Sampling methods

Once we have determined the scope of research techniques to be used, the next step is to identify the informants, i.e. participants who will help us to obtain the required information. If we analyse the training needs of territorial governments, those might include (depending on specific systemic solutions) councillors, mayors, executive secretaries of local units, officials (as a general category or as specific groups of local government officials), customers of local administration offices, social leaders or, finally, members of local communities.

Moreover, recruitment of research participants is a problem. In the practice of social research, usually **two main respondent recruitment methods are applied**:

- various types of **random samples**, and

- **non-random sampling** (exhaustive, purposive and quota-based).

As regards **random sampling**, the participants are drawn randomly from among the members of a specific population. The randomly drawn group is referred to as 'the sample' and its size is determined by statistical rules. One particular type of a random sample is a representative sample, which is representative of a specific population. In other words, based on that sample we can make valid inferences about the characteristics of the entire population. Put simply, the size of a representative sample depends on the size of the population studied and on the assumptions regarding the acceptable measurement error in the obtained results. Preparation of a representative sample entails many technical difficulties and requires technical knowledge. However, it is good to remember that many research problems do not require no representative results. This pertains, in particular, to exploratory research, where we want to understand a problem and get an idea of its potential causes, or explore the range of possible views among the respondents without determining which part of the population they refer to (e.g. a population of local government officials). Again, we need to emphasize that research methodology should always be determined by the purposes of the study.

Purposive sampling is a way of selecting respondents for a project which is determined by specific criteria adopted by the researcher. This sampling **stems from specific expectations towards the respondents**. For instance, if we want to hold interviews only with mayors heading officers which achieve the highest quality in social services, simple random sampling will make no sense (the likelihood of drawing such respondents would be too low). Identification of specific cases will be a much better solution.

Of course, purposive sampling (unless it is exhaustive, *see below*) does not allow us to draw conclusions about the characteristics of the entire population. However, the results of research conducted in this way can provide valuable knowledge about selected spheres of reality (e.g. explain the factors which are conducive to high quality in public services). For the sake of rigour we should add that purposive sampling may be an element of a study performed on a random sample (when we identify specific individuals in a study and ask specific questions on this basis).

At least some problems related to respondent selection can be avoided by using **exhaustive sampling**, which occurs when we study all members of a population study. For instance, those could be all local officials, all councillors in a particular local government unit etc. This sampling method has significant advantages but also very cumbersome disadvantages. On the one hand, when we use exhaustive sampling, we avoid problems related to sample drawing, assessing representativeness of the results or specifying the measurement error. On the other hand, we may expose ourselves to unnecessarily large scope of research, with unreasonably high numbers of interviews. Worth remembering is that a representative sample, i.e. a sample where the findings can be extrapolated onto an entire population, usually comprises a small number of cases from the total population. The required size of the sample depends on the size of the population and on researchers' assumptions regarding the precision of inferencing:

- **Confidence interval,** commonly referred to as 'sampling error' – in survey results presented in the media, the error is given as a band of possible deviations from the result, e.g. +/- 3%. It is assumed that the confidence interval contains, with a particular probability, the actual value of the studied parameter for the entire population.

- **Confidence level** means the degree to which we can determine whether or not our data are true i.e. the probability that the result recorded from the sample corresponds with the actual situation in the entire studied population. Theoretically, it is possible that the findings obtained

in the randomly drawn sample will not correspond with the distribution of specific phenomena, beliefs or practices among members of the population. Without going into details, which are beyond the scope of this guidebook, it is enough to say that for the needs of studies conducted in a local environment it is entirely acceptable to adopt a confidence level of 95% or recognising that there is 5% of the risk that our findings may be totally invalid. The table presents the sample size for a specific population size, assuming different confidence intervals and adopting a confidence level of 95%.[10] The figures presented in the table refer, in principle, to simple random samples.[11]

Population		Confidence interval		
		+/- 3%	+/- 4%	+/- 5%
500		341	273	217
1000		516	375	278
2000		696	462	322
3000	Sample size	787	500	341
5000		880	536	357
10 000		964	566	370
25 000		approx. 1000	approx. 600	approx. 390

And, finally, respondent selection in some studies is not based on any specific selection method. Such practice may involve, for instance, a web survey posted on a website of an institution. We can then talk about a probe rather than a solid survey. Without much hesitation, we should advise against this approach. This way to collect opinions offers no effective control over the course of the study and largely reduces the real possibility to assess the reliability of its findings.

Fieldwork execution

Regardless of the sampling procedure used, questionnaire-based surveys can be executed in many ways. Each approach has specific advantages and problems. When making decisions about such research, we should ask the following questions:

1. Will our survey be conducted by interviewers who will hold interviews with respondents (in a face-to-face encounter with the respondent, the interviewer will code the corresponding categories depending on answers given)? Or perhaps we might decide to distribute the questionnaires and the respondents will complete them by themselves.

2. How to reach the respondents once we have decided to conduct our survey via interviewers?

3. How to distribute questionnaires once we have decided to use a self-administered method?

When selecting the fieldwork method, we need to consider a number of elements: alongside specific research goals (which determine many other aspects) we should also think about fieldwork

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[10] These values refer to a simple random sample.

[11] Statistical issues were omitted for easier reading. Calculations of sample sizes are based on *Creative Research Systems* (www.surveysystem.com/index.htm). Readers may use a sample size calculator available from www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm bearing in mind that this source refers to simple random samples.

timing, costs, possibility to reach our respondents or the likelihood of getting credible answers. Further on, we present the key strengths and weaknesses of selected most popular quantitative research techniques.

Interviewer-based questionnaire surveys

**Face-to-face interview** - surveys conducted by interviewers are the most classic type of questionnaire-based studies. The interviewer's task is to reach a specific respondent and hold an interview where questions are asked in a manner strictly prescribed in the questionnaire.

Key weaknesses/problems	
High fieldwork costs	Apart from interviewers' fees, we must usually include costs of travel to the respondents (sometimes multiple trips) and of copying questionnaires and other materials; this can sometimes represent a considerable cost item in the survey budget.
Interviewer effects (undesirable influence)	The results obtained in the survey may depend a lot on the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. There is a serious danger of a conscious or subconscious influence that the interview situation may have on the interviewee's responses (direct suggestions, impact of interviewers' social characteristics, impact of various objects observed by the respondent, such as badges worn, features of interviewer's clothing and appearance). Also, negative impact on survey results may come from respondent's shyness, shame or concerns about giving true answers.
Key advantages/benefits	
High degree of control over the scope and quality of data	Interviewer-based administration offers a greater control over the scope of data achieved since the interviewer will make sure to ask all the right questions in the questionnaire, clarify doubts as to the question content or probe the respondents in case of open-end questions.[12]
Reaching the right respondents	The use of interviewers should help to survey the requested sample (to perform the required number of interviews with randomly drawn respondents). As a rule, the interviewer is obliged to make three attempts to reach the respondent (when the respondent is not at home or at another anticipated location).

Telephone interviews

At present, telephone interviews are usually conducted from professional interviewing studios, equipped with interviewer terminals with access to a computer and a telephone network. A telephone interviewer has a task to read questions from the computer monitor and to enter the respondent's answers via a special computer software (database). This technique is known as CATI

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[12] A respondent may not be asked all of the questions contained in a survey questionnaire. Sometimes certain questions are skipped by the interviewer in a pre-defined way after the respondent has given specific answers. For instance, if a respondent says he/she has no children, the interviewer will skip questions about the respondent's child-rearing methods etc.

(*Computer Assisted Telephone Interview*). Of course, it is possible that an interview can be held by telephone where the interviewer will take down answers in a traditional paper questionnaire.

Key weaknesses/problems	
Limited scope of questions	Given that the interviewer has less control over the respondent (no face-to-face interaction) and the variation of interviewing situation (the interviewer in a studio, the respondent in an unknown place), a telephone interview is usually much shorter than a face-to-face interview. The nature of such questions means that only the most important issues will be covered: there is always a danger that the respondent, annoyed by the duration of the interview and the fact that she/he was in the middle of doing something, will just hang up and leave many questions unanswered. However, some interviews may be long, lasting even for more than 30 minutes. To conduct such interviews, interviewers must have special interpersonal skills and must be able to motivate the respondent. With limited means (a telephone contact), the interviewer must maintain the respondent's interest and co-operation throughout the conversation.
Difficulties in accessing telephone directories	One significant obstacle in conducting telephone surveys is the difficulty in accessing a telephone directory: people have phone numbers from various mobile operators, some only have a fixed-line phone while others only use a mobile phone. In order to conduct a CATI survey, e.g., among local government officials, it is often not sufficient to know the phone numbers of local government offices.
Key advantages/benefits	
More effective use of the survey questionnaire	The use of dedicated software for CATI surveys enables us to define detailed routing rules for specific respondent types. Routing rules define which questions are skipped, depending on the respondent' answers or characteristics. For instance, local government officials will be asked about different training topics than councillors or local government leaders. Another example is a situation where we can ask the respondent if they ever considered leaving their local government job and, depending on the answer, we will either ask or skip a set of questions about choosing an alternative job. Such automatic routing eliminates many human errors made by interviewers.
Lower fieldwork costs	An important advantage of telephone interviewing (especially for shorter interviews) is that they entail a lower cost. In this case, no travel expenses are involved, but of course the cost of telephone connections will be incurred.
Shorter fieldwork time	A telephone survey can be performed within a very short time, sometimes even within one day! This characteristic may prove important in a situation when we want to ask just a few simple questions and want our results quickly.

Self-administered questionnaires

A **postal survey** is conducted with a questionnaire which is distributed to respondents via traditional post. In a postal survey, the respondents complete the questionnaire by themselves and return it into an envelope. This technique can be considered when:

- the respondents are geographically dispersed and it is difficult to organise the right interviewer team (e.g. when the research budget is limited);

- when the issues we want to cover in our survey require that the respondents do some thinking and the questions will be more easily understood when read rather than heard, or when questions relate to a sphere where the respondents need to have a sense of privacy.

A postal survey makes sense when the list of topics to be covered is not too long (and the questionnaire will not look like a thick book which might frighten the respondent) and we can assume that the respondents are at least somewhat interested in the topic[13] (otherwise they will just discard the questionnaire).

Key weaknesses/problems	
No returned questionnaires	The most serious challenge of postal surveys is to obtain the needed number of completed questionnaires. Lack of responses may disqualify the survey as not fulfilling the essential criterion of reliability. While there is no single answer which can tell us which percentage of questionnaires returned to researchers can be viewed as high, yet 'any score above 85% can certainly be considered as excellent. In that case it is very unlikely that the results are prone to non-response error. A score of 70% to 85% of returned questionnaires is very good. If we obtain 60% to 70% of the questionnaires, this result is acceptable yet one may already count with a slight distortion of results because of the people who failed to respond. A response rate between 50% and 60% is hard to accept and in each case it must be confirmed using additional data.'[14] Of course, a rate below 50% means that more than a half of the intended respondents did not take part in the survey. One method used by researchers to boost the response rate is to send reminder letters to the respondents (as a rule, two or three such reminders are sent to those who have not returned the questionnaire). Sometimes small gifts are attached (fountain pens, mugs, discount coupons). Even small gifts engage the reciprocity rule and help to increase the response rate.
Longer duration of the survey	Another problem in postal surveys is their long duration. They usually take much longer than face-to-face or CATI surveys. Considering that reminders must sometimes be sent and that post institutions sometimes work with delay, we can assume that a postal survey with two reminders may take even up to two months.

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[13] See: T.W. Mangione, 'Mail surveys. Improving the quality', SAGE Publications 1995.

[14] Ibidem.

Lower quality of data	One problem experienced by many researchers who opted for a postal survey was the quality of data obtained via this method. The respondents might skip some difficult or troublesome questions or ones which they do not understand. Moreover, the respondents might chose answers against the researcher's intention (e.g. tick many boxes instead of one box, as required), or answer open-ended questions by providing irrelevant answers. It is important to emphasise that postal surveys conducted in homogenous occupational or social groups and concerning problems which are important for those groups usually bring better results: the response rate (percentage of returned questionnaires) is usually higher and the survey takes less time to complete.
Key advantages/benefits	
Relatively low fieldwork cost	Undoubtedly, postal surveys have an advantage of a relatively low fieldwork cost (no need to pay interviewer fees, interviewer travel or telephone calls).
No interviewer effect	In a postal survey, we also eliminate the interviewer impact on responses given by the respondents. However, it is important to bear in mind that we lose control over the situation: we do not know who actually completed the questionnaire and under what kind of conditions this was done.

Web surveys (also known as CAWI – *Computer Assisted Web Interview*) are very similar to postal surveys, with some important differences. Firstly, they are usually (but not always) much shorter (which is enforced by the nature of Internet usage). Secondly, they can only reach a limited group of the respondents (Internet users). Thirdly, their duration is much shorter than that of postal surveys (nearly zero time needed for the questionnaire to reach the respondent, which is an advantage). It should be emphasized that web surveys are very well suited to study groups which have good access to the Internet and e-mail.

Handout surveys are used when questionnaires are handed out to the respondents in specific situations, e.g. to conference participants, train passengers, students in a class etc. As such, they share the disadvantages of postal surveys (the respondents complete the questionnaire by themselves, they might skip some questions or provide an erroneous answer, and researchers have very limited influence on that. On the other hand, they allow researchers to run a survey in a relatively short time and at a low cost within a specific, limited group. Worth noting is that this kind of survey can be very useful in a limited and strictly defined communities, such as people working in one public office, or readers of a specific library. Using the exhaustive sampling method we can survey all members of the community concerned within a relatively short time.

Reliability and validity of social research

Finally, it is important to devote some attention to reliability and validity of research. **The notion of reliability is used to assess the credibility of research techniques.** Reliable techniques provide the same result each time when used for the same object. For instance, if we measure the length of the same wooden plank with the same measuring tape, we will get the same result each time, in meters or centimetres. In that case we can say our measurement is reliable. It can be also valid (which is not obvious), i.e. reflect the actual length of the plank. Our measurement will be valid of

the measuring tape we use was produced properly, i.e. the scale on the tape corresponds with the adopted pattern (in this case, the Sevres meter prototype).

Now, if the measuring tape is made from a flexible material and can be stretched, we will not consider it to be a reliable measurement tool because the result will depend on how stretched it was rather than on the actual length of the plank. In the same way, if the measuring tape is made with a non-flexible material but the metre on the tape will be, in fact, different from the Sevres prototype, the results will be completely invalid (untrue) even though the measuring tool was reliable (i.e. gave the same result each time).

How does that relate to social research? Well, firstly, **research techniques differ from one another in terms of the degree of reliability.** One can assume that the more independent of the researcher's subjectivity a technique is, the more reliable it should be. For instance, surveys on a representative sample will usually provide more reliable results than a survey based on random respondent selection, and hard official data (official statistics) will tend to be more reliable than social research. Why do we use hedging phrases such as 'tend to' or 'usually'? The answer is that there is no universal, rigid rule. One can, however, study the reliability of results by repeating the measurement. If we obtain the same result (or a very similar one) in two independent surveys, e.g. a distribution of support for political parties, we can usually assume that those measurements were reliable. If two different researchers draw similar conclusions from their data analysis, we can consider their research procedure to be reliable.

The issue of validity of results is somewhat more complicated. How can we check whether our research findings truly reflect the studied reality? Of course, social sciences have developed various ways to assess validity. Literature mentions **face validity** (when the results obtained are in line with our expectations and predictions), **criterion validity** (based on an external verifying factor) and **theoretical validity** (based on logical connections with various results). What does that mean for everyday research practice? Well, above all, **the obtained findings must always be subjected to careful reflection, in terms of their internal consistency, congruity with knowledge derived from other sources, relationships with previous measurements or even relationships with common sense beliefs**. However, one should always bear in mind that each research technique involves a risk of error and, at the same time, a risk of obtaining invalid and/or unreliable findings. We can secure oneself against that by applying **triangulation**, i.e. using research techniques which have different kinds of measurement errors (e.g. in-depth interviews and questionnaire-based surveys) and using different sources of information. With respect to training needs analysis, this postulate means, above all, a combination of all available information regarding participation in educational activities, the operations of educational service providers, using data from various benchmarking systems and results of social research. This also means that we need to juxtapose various perspectives on training needs, i.e. officials' declarations and postulates expressed by officials, councillors, local government leaders, representatives of central institutions etc.

Model TNA questionnaire

> **This questionnaire was developed and used as a tool for TNA in Poland (2015/2016).**
>
> *A web-based CAWI questionnaire (Computer Assisted Web Interview) administered via www.webankieta.pl*

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey conducted by the **Foundation in Support of Local Democracy**, in collaboration with the *Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform* of the Council of Europe.

We would like to remind you that **this survey is completely anonymous**. Your answers will only be used to prepare aggregate analyses and summaries.

- To go to the survey (and, each time, to move to the next question), please click on "**NEXT**" (bottom of the page).

- You can interrupt the survey at any time (by clicking on "**Postpone**", in the top right corner) and return to the survey at any moment to answer the remaining questions.

- In case of doubts or questions, please use the option "**Contact the author**" by clicking on the icon in the top right corner.

1. What is the PRIORITY of your local government in the current term of office?

Please choose UP TO 2 ANSWERS FROM the following list:

- ❒ Infrastructural investments
- ❒ Social issues, e.g. solving social problems, integration of residents
- ❒ Stabilisation of the municipal/town budget
- ❒ Day-to-day governance, responding to problems as they arise
- ❒ Social activation of residents
- ❒ Improving the quality of public/municipal services
- ❒ Another issue important for the locality
- ❒ *Don't know, not sure*

1a) You selected "another issue important for the locality" to describe one priority of the local government in the current term of office. Please describe this priority in brief:

✎ ………………………………………………………………………………………………….

2. In your opinion, what are the sources of the GREATEST difficulties in the day-to-day management of your local government unit?

Please choose up to 3 categories

- ❒ Instability of the law, changing regulations
- ❒ Legal limitations of decision-making for local government in some areas
- ❒ Wrong interpretation of the law by regulatory bodies
- ❒ Staff shortages in local administration

- ❒ Insufficient competencies among some officials
- ❒ Insufficient own revenues
- ❒ No adequate financing of commissioned tasks
- ❒ Passive citizens, their lack of interest in public affairs
- ❒ Excessive burdens associated with spending EU funds
- ❒ Conflicts between executive power in the local government (voit/mayor) and the Council
- ❒ Political pressure, influence of political parties on how local government works
- ❒ Unfavourable macroeconomic phenomena
- ❒ Another source of problems
- ❒ *Not sure*

2a) You mentioned "another source of problems" as one of the difficulties in day-to-day management of your local government unit. Please describe this source of problems briefly:

✎ ………………………………………………………………………………………………..

3) The law requires that the municipality/town should fulfil multiple tasks simultaneously. No task can be abandoned but some of them can be treated as more important in budget planning. Which areas do you think should be particularly SUPPORTED in the specific situation of your local government unit?

Please choose UP TO THREE most important items from the list below:
- ❒ Public safety
- ❒ School/pre-school education and care
- ❒ Extracurricular classes for children
- ❒ Activities of cultural institutions
- ❒ Support from non-governmental organisations
- ❒ Welfare services and municipal housing
- ❒ Sport and recreation
- ❒ Health care and prevention
- ❒ Greenery
- ❒ Cleanliness in the streets and public areas
- ❒ Road infrastructure
- ❒ Waterworks and sewage system
- ❒ *Another area*

3a) When asked about budgeting priorities at your local government unit, you mentioned "another area". Which area did you have in mind?

✎ ……………………………………………………………………………………………….

4) What is your overall assessment of your municipality/town AS A PLACE TO LIVE?

(Please move the slider to the position which best reflects your views on the matter.)

(OR) Enter a digit from 1 to 7 where 1 is the leftmost value and 7 is the rightmost value

very bad (1)	✎………….	(7) very good

5) Does your local government unit have an UP-TO-DATE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (or an equivalent strategic document concerning your entire local government unit)?

- ❐ Yes *(--> ask questions 5a-5c)*
- ❐ No *(--> skip to question 5d)*
- ❐ *Don't know*

5a) Please provide the DIRECT website address where this strategy document is available:

Please provide the direct link to the strategy document (you can copy the link from the browser window and paste it below):

✎ …………………………………………………………………………………………………….

5b) Were the RESIDENTS of your municipality involved in the work on the current development strategy?

Please choose one answer only

- ❐ Yes, the office worked intensively with the residents to develop the strategy
- ❐ The residents did not participate in developing the document but the draft document underwent public consultation
- ❐ No, we developed the strategy without involving the residents
- ❐ The residents were involved in some other way (*please specify*): ✎…………………………………………
- ❐ *Don't know / Not sure*

5c) Were EXTERNAL EXPERTS involved in the work to develop the development strategy?

Please choose one answer only

- ❐ Yes, an external company/external consultant developed the strategy
- ❐ Yes, we used advisory support of an external company/external consultant
- ❐ No, we did not use any external support
- ❐ Another situation (*please specify*): ✎…………………………………………
- ❐ *Don't know / Not sure*

5d) And are you currently doing any work related to the development/updating of your development strategy (or an equivalent document)?

Please choose one answer only

- ❐ Yes, we are working on updating the existing document
- ❐ Yes, we are developing a new document
- ❐ No, but we plan to develop a strategy in the coming year
- ❐ No, and we have no plans to develop such a document in the coming year
- ❐ *Don't know / Not sure*

6) Has your local government unit implemented an ISO:9001 compatible quality management system?

Please choose one answer only

- ❐ Yes *(--> ask question 6)*
- ❐ No *(--> skip to question 7)*
- ❐ *Don't know (--> skip to question 7)*

6a) Does the (ISO-compatible) quality management system at your local government unit have valid certification?

Please choose one answer only

❐ Yes

❐ No

❐ *Don't know*

6b) Has your office introduced the corruption add-on to the ISO:9001 quality management system (the so-called corruption prevention scheme)?

Please choose one answer only

❐ Yes

❐ No

❐ *Don't know*

7) Has your local government conducted self-assessment in accordance with the CAF model?

Please choose one answer only

❐ Yes *(--> ask question 7a)*

❐ No *(--> skip to question 8)*

❐ *Don't know (--> skip to question 8)*

7a) When was the last self-assessment (CAF) conducted?

Please choose one answer only

❐ Within the last 3 months

❐ Between 3 and 6 months ago

❐ Between 6 months and 1 year ago

❐ Between 1 year and 2 years ago

❐ Earlier than 2 years ago

❐ *Don't know / Not sure*

7b) Are you able to provide the aggregate results of that self-assessment?

Such results will help us to create a comparative database, which will enable you to benchmark your results with the results of other local governments on an anonymous basis

❐ Yes *(--> ask questions 7c-7k)*

❐ No *(--> skip to question 8)*

7c) Assessment in terms of LEADERSHIP

✍ ……………………………

7d) Assessment in terms of STRATEGY AND PLANNING

✍ ……………………………

7e) Assessment in terms of STAFF

✍ ……………………………

7f) Assessment in terms of PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES

> ✎ ……………………………

7g) Assessment in terms of PROCESSES

> ✎ ……………………………

7h) Assessment in terms of PERFORMANCE IN RELATIONS WITH CUSTOMERS/CITIZENS

> ✎ ……………………………

7i) Assessment in terms of PERFORMANCE IN RELATIONS WITH STAFF

> ✎ ……………………………

7j) Assessment in terms of SOCIAL OUTCOMES

> ✎ ……………………………

7k) Assessment in terms of KEY OUTCOMES

> ✎ ……………………………

8) Has your local government conducted self-assessment in accordance with the IDP model?

> *(IDP – Institutional Development Planning method)*

Please choose one answer only

- ❒ Yes *(--> ask question 8a)*
- ❒ No *(--> skip to question 9)*
- ❒ *Don't know (--> skip to question 9)*

8a) When was the last self-assessment carried out (IDP)?

Please choose one answer only

- ❒ Within the last 3 months
- ❒ Between 3 and 6 months ago
- ❒ Between 6 months and 1 year ago
- ❒ Between 1 year and 2 years ago
- ❒ Earlier than 2 years ago
- ❒ *Don't know / Not sure*

9) In the last two years, did your office conduct any self-assessments using a systematic tool other than CAF or IDP?

Please choose one answer only

- ❒ Yes *(--> ask question 9a)*
- ❒ No *(--> skip to question 10)*
- ❒ *Don't know (--> skip to question 10)*

9a) And which tool did you use for the self-assessment?

Please provide the name or describe the tool briefly:

✎ ………………………………………………………………………………………………….

10) Generally speaking, how would you assess the EFFICIENCY of local administration at your local government unit?

(Please move the slider to the position which best reflects your views on the matter.)

(OR) Enter a digit from 1 to 9 where 1 is the leftmost value and 9 is the rightmost value

very bad (1)	✎………….	(9) very good

11) In your opinion, what would be the most effective way to boost the performance of your office?

Please choose <u>up to two</u> key methods

- ❐ Improving staff's competencies
- ❐ Reorganising the work of your local government office (*please specify the purpose of such reorganisation*): ✎……………………………………………
- ❐ Increasing employment at your office
- ❐ Raising staff's salaries
- ❐ Improving the way the management manages the work of officials
- ❐ Reducing employment at your office
- ❐ Changing remuneration rules for your staff (*how?*): ✎……………………………………………
- ❐ Improving the relationships between staff members
- ❐ Some other way
- ❐ *Don't know / Not sure*

11a) You mentioned "some other way" to boost the performance of your office. Please describe briefly what such actions could involve:

✎ ……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

12) What is our overall assessment of the following at your local government office:

Please choose <u>one answer only in each row</u>

	Very good	Fairly good	Moderate	Fairly poor	Very poor	*Not sure*
Officials' knowledge of their job responsibilities	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
Quality of work provided by officials	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
Level of officials' independence within their responsibilities	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
Officials' innovative thinking in solving problems that arise	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
Officials' motivation to improve their professional qualifications	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
Staff's ability to work as a team	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
Officials' commitment and their work motivation	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
Officials' integrity in performing their work duties	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
Quality of customer service	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
Officials' effectiveness in solving problems that arise	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐

13) In your personal opinion, is a job at the local government office ATTRACTIVE or UNATTRACTIVE in comparison with other available employment opportunities?

(Please move the slider to the position which best reflects your views on the matter.)

(OR) Enter a digit from 1 to 9 where 1 is the leftmost value and 9 is the rightmost value

Definitely unattractive (1)	✎………….	(9) Definitely attractive

14) Below is a list of various issued which may make a local government job attractive. Please specify if each of them is important or unimportant TO YOU PERSONALLY in the context of working for local government?

Please choose <u>one answer only in each row</u>

	Very important	Fairly important	Fairly unimportant	Totally unimportant	Not sure
Level of remuneration	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Possibility to keep a balance between career and private life	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Interesting challenges involved in fulfilling job responsibilities	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Opportunities for career and professional advancement	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Opportunities to improve one's competencies	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Good reputation of the employer	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Job stability	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Possibility to work with interesting people	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Autonomy at work	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Varied tasks and responsibilities	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
A chance for attractive bonuses and pay rises	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Proximity between workplace and home	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Working time, working hours	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒

15) And which of those factors play the most important role for you in the context of your work for local government?

Please name <u>up to 2 most important</u> factors → (factors you described as very important have been selected)

- ❒ Level of remuneration
- ❒ Possibility to keep a balance between career and private life
- ❒ Interesting challenges involved in fulfilling job responsibilities
- ❒ Opportunities for career and professional advancement
- ❒ Opportunities to improve one's competencies
- ❒ Good reputation of the employer
- ❒ Job stability
- ❒ Possibility to work with interesting people
- ❒ Autonomy at work
- ❒ Varied tasks and responsibilities
- ❒ A chance for attractive bonuses and pay rises
- ❒ Proximity between workplace and home
- ❒ Working time, working hours

16) Is there any other issue, not mentioned here, which you find important in the context of the attractiveness of local government jobs?

Please choose one answer only

❐ Yes *(--> ask question 16a)*

❐ No *(--> skip to question 17)*

❐ *Don't know (--> skip to question 17)*

16a) Which other issue plays a particular role in the context of the attractiveness of local government jobs?

✎ …………………………………………………………………………………………….

17) Which of the factors listed do you consider to be the most important ones FOR THE STAFF at your office, making your office attractive as a place to work at?

Please name up to 3 most important factors

❐ Level of remuneration

❐ Possibility to keep a balance between career and private life

❐ Interesting challenges involved in fulfilling job responsibilities

❐ Opportunities for career and professional advancement

❐ Opportunities to improve one's competencies

❐ Good reputation of the employer

❐ Job stability

❐ Possibility to work with interesting people

❐ Autonomy at work

❐ Varied tasks and responsibilities

❐ A chance for attractive bonuses and pay rises

❐ Proximity between workplace and home

❐ Working time, working hours

❐ Something else is important (*please specify*): ✎…………………………………………

❐ *Don't know / Not sure*

18) In your opinion, is a job at your local government office SATISFACTORY for officials who are employed there?

(Please move the slider to the position which best reflects your views on the matter.)

Enter a digit from 1 to 9 where 1 is the leftmost value and 9 is the rightmost value

No, definitely not (1)	✎………….	(9) **Yes, definitely**

19) Below listed are various factors which may MOTIVATE staff to GET ENGAGED and WORK BETTER. Please name those which are most important, moderately important and least important in motivating staff.

Please group those factors, placing each of them in the corresponding window on the right, by dragging them with the mouse.

(1) Key motivating factors   (2) Important but not crucial

(3) Without much importance   (4) Difficult to describe/to classify into a group

Opportunities for personal growth and gaining experience	✎……………………
Sense of causality – having an impact on reality	✎……………………
Positive reputation of the employer	✎……………………
Good relations with supervisors	✎……………………

Being appreciated by the management of the office	✍………………………
Level of remuneration	✍………………………
Good co-operation within the office	✍………………………
A high degree of independence in performing one's tasks	✍………………………
Leader's charisma, respect for the voit/mayor	✍………………………
Supervisors being interested in their subordinates	✍………………………
Opportunities to get promoted	✍………………………
Financial and in-kind awards	✍………………………
Sense of mission of the local government	✍………………………
A good atmosphere at the office	✍………………………

20) And can you see any other factors (not mentioned above) motivating officials to be committed and work better?

☐ Yes *(--> ask question 20a)*

☐ No *(--> skip to question 21)*

☐ *Don't know (--> skip to question 21)*

20a) Which other MOTIVATING FACTORS can you see?

✍ ………………………………………………..…………………………………………………..

21) And what do you think mostly DISCOURAGES staff at your office to be committed and work better?

Please specify factors which you believe are most <u>DEMOTIVATING</u> *for the staff, discouraging them from being committed and working better*

✍ ……...………………………………………..……………………….………………………….

22) Below mentioned are various areas where local government institutions fulfil their tasks. Please provide a GENERAL ASSESSMENT of your office in terms of the FULFILMENT OF TASKS in those areas. *Please subdivided those areas into ones where:*

(1) Area where tasks are fulfilled smoothly	(2) Fulfilling tasks is somewhat problematic
(3) Major difficulties in fulfilling tasks	(4) Not sure / No experience

Audit, internal audit, management audit	✍
Building relationships with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.	✍
Activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy	✍
Activities of the registrar office and vital statistics	✍
Implementation of e-administration and computerisation of the office	✍
Ethics and prevention of corruption threats	✍
Services to customers of the office, organisation of the secretarial office, customer service centre etc.	✍
Protection of classified information and personal data	✍
Environment protection	✍
Work organisation at the office	✍
Organisation of sports events, activities of institutions dealing with sports and recreation	✍
Planning and implementation of infrastructural investments	✍
Urban/spatial planning and management of real property	✍
Educational policy of the local government	✍
Social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions	✍

Administrative proceedings, procedures, decision-making etc.	✎
Raising, servicing and management of external funding	✎
Strategic management of the local government unit	✎
Computer/IT training, use of IT tools	✎
Public transport and roads	✎
Collaboration with non-governmental organisations	✎
Operations of the Council, councillors' fulfilment of their tasks	✎
Public procurement and tender procedures	✎
Managing officials' working time	✎
Managing the finances of the local government unit, local taxes and fees, financial and accounting issues	✎
HR management, HR policy	✎
Crisis management	✎
Managing human teams, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.	✎

23) Can you see any problems in the work of your office caused primarily by insufficient knowledge or insufficient skills of officials at your local government unit?

Please choose one answer only

☐ Yes, definitely *(--> ask question 23a)*

☐ Yes, probably *(--> ask question 23a)*

☐ No, probably not *(--> skip to question 24)*

☐ No, definitely not *(--> skip to question 24)*

☐ *Not sure (--> skip to question 24)*

23a) Please describe those problems briefly:

✎ ……………………………………………………..……………………………………………………….

24) Are the officials at your local government formally required to improve their professional qualifications?

Please choose one answer only

☐ Yes, all of them are

☐ Yes, some of them are (please specify the categories of officials):

☐ No

☐ *Don't know / Not sure*

24a) How is this requirement formulated?

More than one answer allowed

☐ It is regulated in special clauses of employment contracts

☐ It is regulated in a special clause in the work rules

☐ It is laid down in the provisions of the act on local government officials

☐ It is regulated by a special ordinance issued by the management of the office

☐ Other (please specify): ✎…………………………………………

☐ *Don't know/ Not sure*

25) What is your view on the idea to develop staff's competencies THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN TRAINING EVENTS?

Please describe the need to train your staff in the context of the performance of your office. Write in a number from 1 to 9 where 1 is the value on the leftmost end of the scale and 9 is the value on the rightmost end

The staff of our office do not need training (1) ✍············	**(9) Training for the staff is essential to improve the performance of our office**

26) Which of the areas of training listed below would you consider to be MOST NEEDED for your STAFF in the current situation?

Please indicate up to 5 areas of training which would most help to improve the performance of your office:

- ❒ Audit, internal audit, management audit
- ❒ Building relationships with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.
- ❒ Activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy
- ❒ Activities of the registrar office and vital statistics
- ❒ Implementation of e-administration and computerisation of the office
- ❒ Ethics and prevention of corruption threats
- ❒ Services to customers of the office, organisation of the secretarial office, customer service centre etc.
- ❒ Protection of classified information and personal data
- ❒ Environment protection
- ❒ Work organisation at the office
- ❒ Organisation of sports events, activities of institutions dealing with sports and recreation
- ❒ Planning and implementation of infrastructural investments
- ❒ Urban/spatial planning and management of real property
- ❒ Educational policy of the local government
- ❒ Social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions
- ❒ Administrative proceedings, procedures, decision-making etc.
- ❒ Raising, servicing and management of external funding
- ❒ Strategic management of the local government unit
- ❒ Language training, selected foreign languages
- ❒ Computer/IT training, use of IT tools
- ❒ Public transport and roads
- ❒ Collaboration with non-governmental organisations
- ❒ Councillors' tasks and responsibilities, activities of the Council office
- ❒ Public procurement and tender procedures
- ❒ Work time management
- ❒ Managing the finances of the local government unit, local taxes and fees, financial and accounting issues
- ❒ HR management, HR policy
- ❒ Crisis management
- ❒ Managing human teams, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.
- ❒ Our staff members do not need training
- ❒ *Not sure / hard to say*

27) Do you see any other training needs regarding the staff of your office which have not been mentioned above?

- ❒ Yes *(--> ask question 27a)*
- ❒ No *(--> skip to question 28)*
- ❒ *Don't know (--> skip to question 28)*

27a) Please provide a short description of those training needs:

✎ ……………………………………………………………..…………………………………………………………..

28) And would training in any of the listed areas allow YOU PERSONALLY to be more effective in fulfilling the tasks you are entrusted with?

Please indicate up to 3 areas of training you would most need (Indicate at least 1 and no more than 3 answers)

- ❒ Audit, internal audit, management audit
- ❒ Building relationships with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.
- ❒ Activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy
- ❒ Activities of the registrar office and vital statistics
- ❒ Implementation of e-administration and computerisation of the office
- ❒ Ethics and prevention of corruption threats
- ❒ Services to customers of the office, organisation of the secretarial office, customer service centre etc.
- ❒ Protection of classified information and personal data
- ❒ Environment protection
- ❒ Work organisation at the office
- ❒ Organisation of sports events, activities of institutions dealing with sports and recreation
- ❒ Planning and implementation of infrastructural investments
- ❒ Urban/spatial planning and management of real property
- ❒ Educational policy of the local government
- ❒ Social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions
- ❒ Administrative proceedings, procedures, decision-making etc.
- ❒ Raising, servicing and management of external funding
- ❒ Strategic management of the local government unit
- ❒ Language training, selected foreign languages
- ❒ Computer/IT training, use of IT tools
- ❒ Public transport and roads
- ❒ Collaboration with non-governmental organisations
- ❒ Councillors' tasks and responsibilities, activities of the Council office
- ❒ Public procurement and tender procedures
- ❒ Work time management
- ❒ Managing the finances of the local government unit, local taxes and fees, financial and accounting issues
- ❒ HR management, HR policy
- ❒ Crisis management
- ❒ Managing human teams, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.
- ❒ Another area (*please specify*): ✎…………………………………………
- ❒ At the current moment I do not need any particular training
- ❒ Not sure / hard to say

29) How often do staff members of your office take part in external training?

Please choose one answer only

- ❒ Very often
- ❒ Quite often
- ❒ Quite rarely
- ❒ Very rarely
- ❒ *Not sure*

30) Thinking of the last year, did the staff of your office take part in any EXTERNAL short-term training events or courses?

By short-term training we mean events lasting between 1 and 5 days

- ❑   Yes *(--> ask questions 31-33)*
- ❑   No *(--> skip to question 34)*
- ❑   *Don't know (--> skip to question 34)*

31) What kind of (external) training events were those?

More than one answer allowed

- ❑   Open paid training for staff of various public offices, organised by an external provider, with participation financed by your office
- ❑   Training organised specifically for the staff of your office by an external provider, financed by your office
- ❑   Free-of-charge training organised by an external provider under a project where your office was not an immediate beneficiary
- ❑   Free-of-charge training organised under project(s) where your office was an immediate beneficiary
- ❑   Training paid by the staff who participated in it upon the consent of the office
- ❑   Other training (*please specify*): ✍…………………………………………
- ❑   *Don't know / Not sure*

32) Who was the organiser or those training events?

More than one answer allowed

- ❑   A local government institution/organisation (*--> ask question 32a*)
- ❑   A university/higher education institution (*--> ask question 32b*)
- ❑   Another public institution unrelated to local government, not a school or university (*--> ask question 32c*)
- ❑   A non-governmental organisation (*--> ask question 32d*)
- ❑   An international organisation (*please specify*): ✍…………………………………………
- ❑   A private provider, a company (*--> ask question 32e*)
- ❑   Another provider (*please specify*): ✍…………………………………………
- ❑   *Don't know*/Not sure (*--> skip to question 33*)

32a) Which institution (organisation) organised the training events which your staff participated in?

More than one answer allowed

- ❑   Marshal office or its agencies
- ❑   Office of the starost at the poviat level
- ❑   Association of Rural Municipalities
- ❑   Association of Polish Towns and Cities
- ❑   Association of Polish Poviats
- ❑   Another local government institution/organisation (*please specify*): ✍…………………………………………

32b) Please specify the name of the UNIVERSITY/SCHOOL OF HIGHER EDUCATION which organised the training events your staff participated in.

✍ …………………………………………………………..……………………………………………….

32c) Which OTHER PUBLIC INSTITUTION (not related to local government, not a university) organised the training your staff participated in?

✍ …………………………….…………………………………..…………………………………….…………………..

32d) What is the name of the NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION which organised the training your staff participated in?

✎ ……………………………………………………..………………………………………………….

32e) What is the name of the PRIVATE COMPANY which organised the training your staff participated in?

✎ ……………………………………………………..………………………………………………….

33) What were the areas of training that your staff participated in throughout 2015?

Please select all applicable areas; More than one answer allowed

- ❐ Audit, internal audit, management audit
- ❐ Building relationships with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.
- ❐ Activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy
- ❐ Activities of the registrar office and vital statistics
- ❐ Implementation of e-administration and computerisation of the office
- ❐ Ethics and prevention of corruption threats
- ❐ Services to customers of the office, organisation of the secretarial office, customer service centre etc.
- ❐ Protection of classified information and personal data
- ❐ Environment protection
- ❐ Work organisation at the office
- ❐ Organisation of sports events, activities of institutions dealing with sports and recreation
- ❐ Planning and implementation of infrastructural investments
- ❐ Urban/spatial planning and management of real property
- ❐ Educational policy of the local government
- ❐ Social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions
- ❐ Administrative proceedings, procedures, decision-making etc.
- ❐ Raising, servicing and management of external funding
- ❐ Strategic management of the local government unit
- ❐ Language training, selected foreign languages
- ❐ Computer/IT training, use of IT tools
- ❐ Public transport and roads
- ❐ Collaboration with non-governmental organisations
- ❐ Councillors' tasks and responsibilities, activities of the Council office
- ❐ Public procurement and tender procedures
- ❐ Work time management
- ❐ Managing the finances of the local government unit, local taxes and fees, financial and accounting issues
- ❐ HR management, HR policy
- ❐ Crisis management
- ❐ Managing human teams, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.
- ❐ Our staff members do not need training
- ❐ Another area of training (--> *ask question 33a*)
- ❐ *Not sure / hard to say*

33a) You mentioned "another area of training" which your staff participated in earlier this year. Which area was that?

✎ ……………………………………………………..………………………………………………….

34) How often (in general) do the following take part in EXTERNAL training events:

This question refers to your local government unit; Please choose <u>one answer only for each row</u>

	Very often	Quite often	Quite rarely	Very rarely	*Not sure*
Members of top management of your office	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Heads of departments/organisational units	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Rank-and-file staff members	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
Councillors	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒

35) The decision to send a staff member to training may be influenced by a variety of factors. Below given are some of them. Please rank them from the most important to the least important one when it comes to making your decisions about participation in training.

Enter numbers from 1 to 7 in the cells. Each number can be used only once.

Trust in the organiser of the training: ✎…………..

Belief that the training facilitator(s) is/are competent: ✎…………..

Cost of training: ✎…………..

Duration of training: ✎…………..

Distance between the place of training and your municipality: ✎…………..

Staff's interest in the topic of the training: ✎…………..

Relevance of training topics for the current needs of the office: ✎…………..

36) Apart from the factors mentioned above, are there any other factors influencing how you make decisions about your participation in training and selection of training events?

❒ Yes *(--> ask question 36a)*

❒ No *(--> skip to question 37)*

❒ *Don't know / Not sure (--> skip to question 37)*

36a) Which other factors influence the decisions made at your office with regard to participation in training?

✎ …………………………………………………..……………………………………………………..

37) How many officials are employed at your local government office?

Please specify the number of FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS for officials

✎ …………………………………………………..……………………………………………………..

38) How much money did your office allocate this year (2015) FROM ITS OWN BUDGET for the training of its staff? Please specify the entire cost (in Polish zloty) of staff training during this year, excluding internal training, if any.

✎ …………………………………………………..……………………………………………………..

39) Do you consider the financing of staff's training to be adequate?

❒ No, more funding is needed

❒ Yes, it is sufficient

❒ I think we spend too much

❒ *Don't know / Not sure*

40) Did you finance the participation of councillors in external training events this year?

Please choose <u>one answer only</u>

❒ Yes, very often

    ❐   Yes, quite often

    ❐   Yes, a few times

    ❐   Yes, once

    ❐   No

    ❐   *Don't know / Not sure*

41) What is the budget of your municipality/town (in PLN for 2015, as of the day when this questionnaire is completed)?

Please enter the VALUE IN POLISH ZLOTY without commas, points etc.

✎ …………………………………………………………..……………………………………………………….

42) Were any internal training events organised at your office during the last year?

Please choose one answer only

    ❐   Yes, very often *(--> ask question 42a)*

    ❐   Yes, quite often *(--> ask question 42a)*

    ❐   Yes, a few times *(--> ask question 42a)*

    ❐   Yes, once *(--> ask question 42a)*

    ❐   No *(--> skip to question 43)*

    ❐   *Don't know / Not sure (--> skip to question 43)*

42a) Who facilitated those internal training events?

More than one answer allowed

    ❐   A staff member of the office

    ❐   A staff member of an organisational unit of the office

    ❐   A hired external trainer

    ❐   A representative of another local government institution or organisation

    ❐   A representative of another public institution, unrelated to local government

    ❐   Someone else (*please specify*): ✎…………………………………………

    ❐   *Don't know / Not sure*

43) In which other forms of training did your staff participate in during the last year?

Please choose all applicable categories

    ❐   Additional study programmes, e.g. post-graduate programmes (*please specify the topics*): ✎…………………

    ❐   Distance learning formats

    ❐   Study visits (please specify the topics of those visits): ✎…………………………………………

    ❐   Exchange of experience in occupational groups, e.g. club meetings, forums etc.

    ❐   Conferences on local government issues

    ❐   Other forms of training (*please specify*): ✎…………………………………………

44) Were any study visits organised at your municipality/town with officials from other local government units taking part?

    ❐   Yes *(--> ask question 34a)*

    ❐   No *(--> skip to question 45)*

    ❐   *Don't know / Not sure (--> skip to question 45)*

44a) What was the focus of those study visits?

✎ ………………………………………………………..……………………………………………………..

45) Does your office develop a training plan for its staff?

❒ Yes *(--> ask question 45a)*

❒ No *(--> skip to question 46)*

❒ *Don't know / Not sure (--> skip to question 46)*

45a) What is the usual time frame of such a training plan?

Please choose one answer only

❒ Three months or less

❒ Six months

❒ One year

❒ More than one year

❒ *Don't know / Not sure*

46) Does your office analyse the training needs of its staff?

Please choose one answer only

❒ Yes *(--> ask questions 46a-46c)*

❒ No *(--> skip to question 47)*

❒ *Don't know / Not sure (--> skip to question 47)*

46a) Is there a procedure, a ordinance or a rule which defines how training needs should be analysed?

Please choose one answer only

❒ Yes

❒ No

❒ *Don't know / Not sure*

46b) How often are staff's training needs analysed?

❒ Once in three months or more often

❒ Once in six months

❒ Once a year

❒ Once in two years

❒ Less often than once in two years

❒ Irregularly, depending on the situation

❒ *Don't know / Not sure*

46c) How are staff's training needs analysed?

More than one answer allowed

❒ A sheet used to report training needs

❒ Interviews/individual conversations with staff members

❒ Discussions/group meetings with staff members

❒ Surveys

❒ Other methods (*please specify*): ✎……………………………………………

❒ *Don't know / Not sure*

47) What kinds of methods to motivate and reward staff are used at your office?

More than one answer allowed

- ❒ Commendation, recorded in the personal file
- ❒ Commendation which is officially published
- ❒ Financial bonus
- ❒ In-kind prizes
- ❒ Additional days off
- ❒ Study programmes, courses and training events financed by the office
- ❒ Other (please specify): ✎…………………………………………
- ❒ *Don't know / Not sure*

48) Does your office analyse staff's satisfaction with their work and terms of employment?

- ❒ Yes, regularly *(--> ask question 48a)*
- ❒ Yes, but not regularly *(--> ask question 48a)*
- ❒ No *(--> skip to question 49)*
- ❒ *Don't know / Not sure (--> skip to question 49)*

48a) How is staff's satisfaction analysed?

More than one answer allowed

- ❒ Survey/staff's satisfaction assessment sheet
- ❒ Opinions gathered when talking to supervisors
- ❒ Opinions gathered during meetings with staff members
- ❒ Opinions collected during periodic assessment
- ❒ Recommendations from internal audits/control exercises
- ❒ Recommendations from external audits/control exercises
- ❒ Other methods (please specify): ✎…………………………………………
- ❒ *Don't know / Not sure*

49) Are you familiar with the activities of the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (FSLD)?

- ❒ Yes, very familiar
- ❒ Yes, quite familiar
- ❒ Moderately familiar
- ❒ No, not really *(--> skip to question 50)*
- ❒ No, I don't know it *(--> skip to question 50)*

49a) We will appreciate any comments from you about the activities of the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy.

Your comments will help us guide the activities of the Foundation. If you do not wish to answer this question, please click on 'Next'.

✎ ……………………………………………………..……………………………………………………..

50) In the last four years, did your local government unit participate in any project (projects) operated by the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (or in partnership with the Foundation)?

- ❒ Yes *(--> ask question 50a)*
- ❒ No *(--> skip to question 50)*
- ❒ *Don't know / Not sure (--> skip to question 50)*

50a) What is your overall assessment of the collaboration with the FSLD under that project (those projects)?

Enter a digit from 1 to 9 where 1 is the leftmost value and 9 is the rightmost value

Very bad (1)	✍.............	**(9) Very good**

51) Thinking of the last year, did any staff member from your office take part in any training organised by the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy?

❒ Yes *(--> ask question 51a)*

❒ No *(--> skip to question 52)*

❒ *Don't know / Not sure (--> skip to question 52)*

51a) What is your overall assessment of training events organised by the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy?

Please choose one answer only

❒ Very good

❒ Fairly good

❒ Moderate, it depends

❒ Fairly poor

❒ Very poor

❒ *Don't know / Not sure*

52) In case you needed to train a staff member from your office, would the offering of the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy be:

Please choose one answer only

❒ Your first choice

❒ Not your first choice but you would not rule it out

❒ Definitely not your choice

❒ *Don't know / Not sure*

Finally, we would like to ask a few questions for statistical purposes. We would like to remind you that THIS SURVEY IS COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS. Information from specific, individual questionnaires will not be made available anywhere and in any manner, and your local government unit could not be identified in any way.

Sex

❒ Female   ❒ Male

Age

✍ …………………………………………………………..……………………………………………………..

Education

Please choose one answer only

❒ Incomplete primary	❒ Post-secondary (not tertiary)
❒ Primary	❒ Tertiary, 1st cycle (bachelor, engineer)
❒ Gymnasium (lower secondary)	❒ Tertiary, 2nd cycle (master, medical doctor)
❒ Basic vocational	❒ Post-graduate
❒ Secondary	

Do you currently live in the same municipality/town which is the responsibility of the local government office you work for?

        ❐   Yes   ❐   No

Position

Pease select a category corresponding with your position:

- ❐   Voit/mayor
- ❐   Deputy voit/deputy mayor
- ❐   Municipality/town secretary
- ❐   Head of department
- ❐   Specialist at a department
- ❐   Staff member at a lower level
- ❐   Other (please specify): ✍…………………………………………

Service length at local government

Please provide the number of years worked at the local government, rounded up to full numbers:

✍ ………………………………………………………..…………………………………………………….

Have you ever served as a voit or mayor?

(--> Skip if currently a mayor)

        ❐   Yes   ❐   No

Type of local government unit

Please choose one answer only

- ❐   Rural municipality
- ❐   Urban-and rural municipality
- ❐   Urban municipality
- ❐   Town with poviat rights
- ❐   District of a city with poviat rights
- ❐   Starost office at the poviat level

Size of your local government unit

Please choose one answer only

- ❐   Up to 5,000 residents
- ❐   Over 5,000, up to 20,000 residents
- ❐   Over 20,000, up to 100,000 residents
- ❐   Over 100,000, up to 500,000 residents
- ❐   Over 500,000 residents

Voivodship (province)

✍ ………………………………………………………..…………………………………………………….

Thank You for completing the questionnaire!

Model guidelines for individual in-depth interviews

Guidelines used as a tool for TNA in Poland (2015/2016).

INTERVIEW GUIDE – Training Needs Assessment

The research findings should help to:

- ✋ *Identify the key problems in the activity of local administration associated with the competence gaps/kills gaps among local government officials*

- ✋ *Outline the scope and type of **needs** related to the acquisition of knowledge and skills by local government officials, and explore the **attitudes** towards participation in training*

- ✋ *Assess the usability of **previous training experience** among main groups of local government officials working for municipal administration*

Assessment of the operations of local government at the municipal level and residents' expectations

- How would you assess the current operation of local government in Poland? How would you summarise the 25 years of local governance in Poland? What is a success and what is a failure? Why? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the local government and its operation? Why? What is most missing and most needed for local government to operate seamlessly?

- Would there be a need for any reform of local government that would improve its performance? What would such a reform involve? (*probe about reasons for postulated reforms!*)

- What is your overall assessment of the 25 years of local governance <u>in this municipality</u>? What has been achieved and what hasn't? What is your overall perception of the *activities of the local government* in this municipality? How is the performance of the local government reflected in public opinion? To what extent can the local government take credit for successes (if any)? To what extent have the failures (problems) been caused by the activity of the local government?

- What are the residents' expectations towards local government? How do you view those expectations? Are they justified? Do local authorities take those expectations into consideration when planning their activities?

- What are the key intentions and key goals of the local government? What are the priorities in local government operations in the next few years?

Management of the local government unit

- Are there any spheres in the operations of local government which pose particular problems for the <u>management of the local government unit</u> *(the entire unit, not just the local government office)*? Which spheres are those? What do the problems consist in? What are the consequences of those problems? Has anything changed in this respect in recent years? If so, what has changed and when?

- Where do these problems stem from? What are their sources and causes? (*probe in detail about local/translocal causes of problems*)

- How do the authorities of the local government unit address those problems? How successful are they in overcoming those problem? What is the outcome?

External collaboration

- What is the picture of collaboration between local government authorities and the residents? To what extent are residents involved in the local governance affairs/public affairs? Do residents show interest in the affairs of the municipality? How is that interest manifested?

- Who are the most important external partners of the local government? What determines their role/importance? What does the collaboration with those partners look like? How would you assess this collaboration? What kind of postulates can be formulated with respect to this collaboration?

- What is the picture of the collaboration between the local government and external institutions/other local government units? What does that collaboration involve? What are the purposes and drivers of this collaboration? How would you assess it?

- Are there any practices to co-ordinate the activities/implement the policies with the neighbouring local government units? What do those practices involve? What are the practical aspects of this co-ordination? How is this collaboration carried out on a daily basis?

- What is the picture of collaboration between the local government and the region (regional authorities)? What does this collaboration involve? Should any changes be introduced in this respect? Why?

Assessment of the performance of the local government office

- What are the strongest obstacles in the management of the local government office? What do those difficulties consist in? What are their sources?

- How would you assess the performance of the municipality office (*as a unit/office of public administration*)? Is the office <u>efficient</u> in fulfilling the tasks within its area of responsibility? What kind of factors influence this performance? Which elements enhance/constrain the performance of the office?

- Is the office effective in fulfilling the tasks and plans formulated by local authorities? Which factors play a role here/influence the effectiveness?

- Is the performance of the office assessed/monitored in any formal way? How is this done? (*probe in detail*)

- How do local authorities identify problems related to the operations of the office? What kinds of methods (*formal/informal*) are used for such identification?

- How do the municipal authorities cope with the difficulties in managing the office? Are they able to overcome those difficulties? Why? What kinds of factors determine the success/failure of those measures? What kind of factors influence the effectiveness of local authorities in solving those problems?

- Have there been any significant changes in the operations of the office? If so, what did they involve? Why were they introduced? What were the outcomes of those changes?

- Do you see the need for any changes in the operations of the office? What would such changes involve? What would be the purpose of those changes? Are/will those changes be introduced? (*if not, why not?*)

- Are there any problems in the supervision over the operations of the organisational units? What kind of problems are those? What are their causes? How are those problems solved? How would you assess the effectiveness of local government in addressing those problems?

- Does your municipality have a current development strategy? Does the strategy cover the performance of local administration or effectiveness of its activities? (*If so, probe on how this is included in the strategy, what specific provisions there are and whether they are executed.*)

Staff's motivation and engagement – capacity building factors at the LGU

- What is your view on the motivation of the staff at the local government office and their engagement in their work? What kinds of factors most strongly influence the level of motivation and engagement and how?

- Does the management of the office take any actions aimed to improve the staff's motivation and engagement? What kinds of activities are those? Why are those activities undertaken (or why are no activities undertaken)?

- Is there any monitoring of the staff's needs related to the tasks they fulfil (*If not, why not? Is there perhaps no need to do so?*)? How does the office obtain information about the staff's needs related to their job responsibilities? Is there a systematic approach to identification of staff's needs related to their work? (*If so, what does it consist in*?) How is the information used?

Previous experience of training and attitudes related to training

- How would you assess the competencies of the staff at your local government office? Are there any knowledge gaps and/or skills gaps? What are they? What is the importance of those gaps? How do they affect the performance of the office?

- What is the staff's attitude towards participation in external training? What kinds of training are more appreciated than others? Why is that? Are there any examples of training that the staff do not want to undertake? What are those?

- How would you describe the benefits of staff's participation in training? What is the most important element for local administration management? What is crucial for the management of the local government office?

- Does the participation of staff in training really translate into improved performance of the office? Does the staff training translate into improved quality of services offered by the office? How? What are the tangible benefits for the operations of the office?

- Are there any disadvantages/problems related to staff's participation in training? What are they? How bothersome are they? Can they be prevented in any way? How does your office address them?

Guidelines used as a tool for TNA in Serbia (2016).

INTERVIEW GUIDE – Training Needs Assessment

The research findings should help to:

- ✧ *Identify the key problems in the activity of local administration associated with the competence gaps/skills gaps among local government officials*

- ✧ *Outline the scope and type of **needs** related to the acquisition of knowledge and skills by local government officials, and explore the **attitudes** towards participation in training*

- ✧ *Assess the usability of **previous training experience** among main groups of local government officials working for municipal administration*

The organization

Ask the interviewee to describe the organization he/she represents: mission, vision, expertise, legal personality, structure, main activities, etc.

Assessment of the operations of local government at the municipal level

- How would you assess the current operation of local government in Serbia? What is a success and what is a failure? Why? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the local government and its operation? What is most missing and most needed for local government to operate seamlessly?

- Are there any spheres in the operations of local governments which pose particular problems for the management of the local government units? Which spheres are those? What do the problems consist in? What are the consequences of those problems? Has anything changed in this respect in recent years? If so, what has changed and when?

- Where do these problems stem from? What are their sources and causes? (*probe in detail about local/translocal causes of problems*)

- How do the authorities of the local government units address those problems? How successful are they in overcoming those problem? What is the outcome?

- What are the strongest obstacles in the management of the local government offices? What do those difficulties consist in? What are their sources?

- How would you assess the performance of the local administration? Is this administration efficient in fulfilling the tasks within their area of responsibility? What kind of factors influence this performance? Which elements enhance/constrain their performance?

- How do the municipal authorities cope with the difficulties in managing local affairs? Are they able to overcome those difficulties? Why? What kinds of factors determine the success/failure of those measures? What kind of factors influence the effectiveness of local authorities in solving those problems?

Attitudes related to training

- How would you assess the competencies of municipal staff? Are there any knowledge gaps and/or skills gaps? What are they? What is the importance of those gaps? How do they affect the performance of local administration?

- How would you describe the attitudes of municipal employees toward participation in external training? What kinds of training are more appreciated than others? Why is that? Are there any examples of training that the staff do not want to undertake? What are those?

- Does the participation in training really translate into improved performance of the local administration? Does it translate into improved quality of services offered by the office? How? What are the tangible benefits for the operations of local administration?

- Are there any disadvantages/problems related to staff's participation in training? What are they? How bothersome are they? Can they be prevented in any way? How does your office address them?

Training activities organized by the stakeholder

- What kind of training for local governments have your organization provided over last three years? What kind of training (identify thematic areas of training programmes)?

- Who delivered the programme (e.g. international and local experts, peers, government officials, civil servants, etc.)

- How have you selected training topics? Why have you provided this particular scope of training?

- How were the training needs identified? Have you consulted local governments over the training content? Have you discussed / consulted the content of training with other training providers? How such consultations were organized?

- How these training activities were founded?

- WHO took part in this training? How were the target groups identified? What were the reasons behind involvement of trained groups?

- Have you cooperated with other organization / institution over the provision of training? What institution? How do you evaluate this cooperation?

- What were the outcomes of the training programs? Have you assessed results in any way? What were the results of such assessment?

Perception of training needs

- What kind of training is needed in terms to improve performance of local administration in Serbia? Who should be trained and what should be the scope of training? How would you describe the expected results of such training activities?

- What training for local governments would be the most valuable in terms of using the acquired knowledge to improve local government management?

After the interview inform the respondent that CoE will collect more structured information about training provision to local governments by different stakeholders. Make arrangements related to exchange of such information.

TNA step-ladder

(approach used in TNA in Serbia, 2016)[15]

STEP 1 – Monitoring of Implemented Training by various stakeholders

1. Stakeholder analysis

    a. Identifying institutional actors involved in (general and specific) training definition

    b. Identifying training providers

2. Dissemination of *Training Data Collection Tool*

    a. On-line

    b. E-mail

3. Support of the Dissemination

    a. Recalls

    b. Info-desk (i.e. dedicated contact-point brokering the activity to respondents and facilitating replies with interviews or phone/email contacts)

    c. Meetings

4. Periodic data collection

5. Data Analysis

    a. General Report

        -   The results of this phase should be presented in a form of a Report that makes use of graphs and tables, as well as examples, to present the data and sets out an interpretation of that data identifying patterns and emerging trends.

    b. Specific Training Good practices

        -   According to the main training clusters identified, a number of representative training should be selected and described in details identifying their success factors with a focus on "lessons learnt" and replicability

STEP 2 – Training Need Assessment

Quantitative survey

1. Preparatory phase

    -   prepare (and upgrade) a database with emails of all municipalities Mayors and Heads of Administration

    -   identify which municipalities would not be reachable by e-mail.

    -   Review and (if necessary) upgrade the *TNA questionnaire*

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[15] Developed by Cezary Trutkowski and Daniele del Bianco

- prepare plan for data coding and inputting
- Send high level invitation to Mayors and Heads of Administration to answer the TNA questionnaire
    - Identify most accredited sender
    - Identify most efficient communication mean
    - Identify info contact-point

2. Send questionnaires to Mayors and Heads of Administration
    - E-mail with link to On-line questionnaire (*survey monkey- free online survey*) or
    - E-mail with attachment, or
    - Ordinary mail

3. Collect responses
    - Set adequate response time and perform recalling

4. Systematise data

5. Analyse data according to the TNA report analysis scheme

Qualitative interviews

The results of the qualitative research should be presented in a form of a summary report and transcripts of the interviews. Expert assistance is required to manage a robust TNA.

1. Prepare interview guidelines

2. Identify key stakeholders / interviewees to conduct in-depth interviews

3. Conduct interviews

4. Prepare transcripts

5. Analyse data and prepare the report

STEP 3 – Data Analysis

1. Cross-data on Training collected in Step 1 with TNA results (Step 2);

2. Perform GAP analysis highlighting emerging trends and correlation between trainings performed, training attended and changing training needs;

3. Validate data through focus group discussions with identified stakeholders;

4. Formulate recommendations.

3. National Training Strategies for local governments

To begin with, we should note that the degree of decentralisation of public governance and the nature of tasks performed by local government units in various parts of the world are far from uniform. In the member states of the Council of Europe which, in principle, should comply with the European Charter of Local Self-Government, we can identify many models of local government operation. Among the 40 countries in the table prepared by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR),[16] only seven have a three-level division of power in local administration and the second level (the intermediate level, in some cases) is found in 13 countries. France has nearly 37,000 local government units at the basic level whereas the United Kingdom, for instance, has only 433 such units, with the average population size per a local government unit in that country exceeding 140 thousand inhabitants. The respective size in France is more than 80 times smaller (merely 1768 people on average). In some countries, the competencies of basic local government units are very broad (for instance in Scandinavia), whereas they remain relatively limited elsewhere (e.g. Malta, Montenegro or Ireland). Devolution is the preferred arrangement in Spain and the UK. The status or indeed survival of sub-national parliaments is not constitutionally guaranteed in either country and their central parliaments retain supreme authority in all areas. Italy, Belgium and Germany have opted for federal arrangements. There is no hierarchy between levels of government in these countries, and the existence and competencies of state or regional parliaments are constitutionally guaranteed.[17]

Therefore, the organisation of local authorities in Europe remains diversified. At the same time, it is determined by various factors, including historical, cultural, social and, naturally, economic circumstances. In recent years, as a result of the economic crisis which spread across Western democracies, many countries implemented various reforms and austerity measures in order to boost the economic performance of local governments. The main aim was 'to adjust the functioning of local and regional authorities to the budgetary and operational restrictions imposed by the central governments.'[18] Analyses conducted by the CEMR indicate that reforms in some countries (e.g. Ireland, Hungary or Moldova) have led to decentralisation of management of some public services.

Some local administration reforms involved efforts to reduce the number of local government units. Such changes were introduced in quite a spectacular way in Greece (the Kallikratis reform), even though, importantly, those changes were not necessarily connected with an increased scope of responsibility for local administration.[19] In a few other countries the reforms had a somewhat smaller scale (e.g. Switzerland, Ukraine), whereas other countries have seriously discussed such reforms. In efforts to reduce the costs of local administration, steps were taken to reduce employment in that sector (e.g. in Greece, Turkey, Portugal or Ireland).

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[16] 'Decentralisation at a crossroads. Territorial reforms in Europe in times of crisis'; CEMR 2013.

[17] Stuart, Ch., 'Comparative political decentralization in Europe'; The Scottish Parliament, SPICe briefing, 09/19, 2009; p. 41.

[18] 'Decentralisation at a crossroads. Territorial reforms in Europe in Times of crisis'; Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), 2013, p. 6.

[19] Cf. Hlepas, N.K. (2015), 'Is it the twilight of decentralization? Testing the limits of functional reforms in the era of austerity', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 82(2), pp.273–290.

At this point it is worth stressing that the reasons behind reforming efforts are not always based on a solid performance assessment of the local administration. A diagnosis of local government performance is sometimes replaced with political assessments. Systemic changes are not always implemented in response to the identified development barriers faced by the local government but, instead, are driven by a specific prevalent political programme or are enforced by the situation which the dominant political forces must grapple with. Such and other practices were highlighted by the European Union's Committee of the Regions (in April 2013), stressing that 'merging municipalities is very often presented as a way to achieve cost savings in the context of the financial and debt crises, based on economic arguments but without always being based on adequate studies or analyses.'[20]

Reliable analysis of the performance of local administration, the execution of public tasks entrusted to it or the outcomes of its developmental activities is not a guarantee that a relevant, appropriate and effective programme of changes or reforms will be developed. Nevertheless, the absence of such analysis and a relevant, well-founded diagnosis of the situation usually makes reforming decisions more disputable and susceptible to criticism. This does not mean, of course, that even well-founded analysis will always lead to the development of adequate reform programmes. One limitation here lies in the **ambiguity of the effectiveness of various organisational, legal or systemic solutions** undertaken under various social, economic and cultural conditions. For this reason, all analyses and the related strategic planning should be locally anchored since it is not possible to develop universal solutions which will be equally relevant for various systemic solutions.

In this very context it is worth remembering that, firstly, the direction of development of local administration is not a non-debatable matter and it stems from specific systemic political decisions. This means that progress can be defined as 'such directional changes of (…) a domain of reality which, with respect to some of their characteristics, are important to the observer, and at the same time receive positive evaluations, evaluation criteria or evaluation standards are applied to them. With respect to the social domain, the assessment of 'progress' involves both the assessment of the directional change of some 'social objects' with respect to certain characteristics, and the positive evaluation of these directional changes.'[21] Therefore, it is worth bearing in mind that any reforms being implemented will always have both supporters and opponents, and the assessment will be usually based on the assessing person's expectations and interests. On other words, it will be politically motivated.

Secondly, a question arises whether development must always be intentional and planned. After all, the operations of local administration in many countries are primarily dictated by the everyday challenges and not defined in any strategic framework. There are many systems where local administration operates at least moderately efficiently and its activities are not co-ordinated at the national level in any way (except where the legal framework and supervision are limited to this dimension, for instance in Poland). In such cases, the need to adopt national development strategies or to implement top-down processes to build the competence of local government

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[20] 'OPINION: Devolution in the European Union and the place for local and regional self government in EU policy making and delivery'; 100th plenary session, 11-12 April 2013, p. 5.http://www.toad.cor.europa.eu/AgendaDocuments.aspx?pmi=ha5jDW%2bOWSFeW6t%2bIviEiYu4LoYBLu tpoJJ4tL7WYIw%3d&ViewDoc=true

[21] S. Nowak, *Models of directional change and human values; the theory of progress as an applied social science*, in: J.C. Alexander, P. Sztompka (ed.), *Rethinking progress: movements, forces and ideas at the end of the 20th century*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990, p. 230.

personnel is not only disputable but sometimes even undesirable (as a token of centralisation of at least some responsibilities and public tasks).

Each case where work is undertaken to develop a national training strategy for local government should, therefore, refer to **an identified need to develop such a strategy** (a need stemming from identified knowledge gaps or skills gaps among local government personnel, where such gaps undermine their performance and efficiency). On the other hand, it should follow from broad-ranging discussions and arrangements between local government stakeholders (e.g. central authorities, local government unions, non-governmental organisations or, in some cases, also international organisations). A strategy involving the implementation of certain measures (e.g. training activities) may be the right response to problems identified in the operations of local governments if key systemic stakeholders share the will to introduce changes within the recommended framework.

From the analysis of training needs to the National Training Strategy

As mentioned earlier, effective strategic planning should be based on a reliable diagnosis of the initial situation. In the case of the national training strategy for local government (hereinafter referred to as the 'NTS'), this role is usually played by the training needs assessment exercise ('TNA'). Such a diagnosis should help to identify problems in the operations of local governments (governance, implementation) which have knowledge gaps or skills gaps as their root causes. The accompanying recommendations should, however, go somewhat further, and refer to a clear distinction between competence-based problems (on the part of local government officials) and systemic problems (legal, political etc.), which should be identified on the basis of a broad analysis referring to the construction of the local government system. In the light of the previous deliberations, it should be stressed that a systemic analysis is only possible if the desirable organisation model for public authorities is determined for the given country context. Member states of the Council of Europe should refer to the European Charter of Local Self-Government as the key guiding document. The relationship between a systematic analysis of training needs and the need to establish a national training strategy for local government is presented in the diagram below.
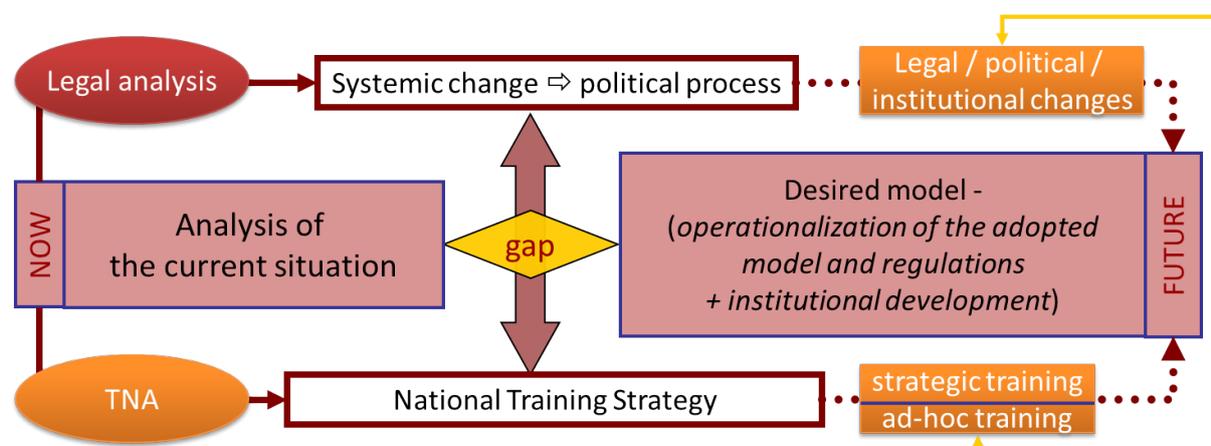
At this point, it is important to highlight the crucial importance of the difference between the systemic reasons behind the limited performance of local authorities and their causes, linked to the

administration itself. When officials lack competence, this may, of course, lead to incorrect, faulty or ineffective delivery of public services. However, even the best competencies are not enough if the responsibility for those tasks is reduced or blurred due to the centralisation of public governance. It should be highlighted that **a wrong identification of causes behind the observable problems may lead to the adoption of ineffective reform efforts**. For this reason, attempts at reforms should be always preceded by a solid analysis of training needs and a reflection on the sources and context of those needs.

A National Training Strategy is, above all, an attempt to systematise or streamline the catalogue of factors that should help the effective performance of public tasks in the local environment. This, in turn, should generate a set of policy recommendations on how the institutional capacity of local administration should be strengthened. In an optimal case, the proposed recommendations should be reflected in a specific strategy implementation plan, containing sets of well-defined indices, defined responsibilities for the implementation of tasks, and a specific implementation schedule (the structure of the plan is discussed later on in this chapter).

What plays a crucial role for the success of the development, reconciliation and, above all, adoption of a National Training Strategy, is the **legitimacy of the work** performed on that document and the issue of its **ownership**. Any attempts to impose a strategy without building relevant, bottom-up local support and without convincing the stakeholders that the solutions would be valid in the specific country context should be seen as ineffective and simply wrong. Only such legitimisation of the strategy (where stakeholders are committed to its development and co-responsible for the implementation) will enable the actual introduction of changes set out in the adopted document.

The principles of a National Training Strategy[22]	
Ownership	A National Training Strategy belongs to local government itself. • **Local authorities** are the main beneficiaries. They, and the **Associations** that represent their interests, are the principal owners. But local authorities are not the only stakeholders. • **The Government** itself wants local government to be efficient, effective, accessible to local people and financially accountable. • **NGOs** and **private companies** work with local authorities to provide services or to offer training and support. • **Donors** have provided, and will continue to provide, significant investment in local government. • **Other organisations** provide relevant academic training or other kinds of support. • **Local people** and local organisations expect public services to be managed and delivered by competent staff. There should therefore be a widespread sense of ownership of the National Training Strategy.

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[22] Adopted from: 'TOOLKIT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMMES'; Council of Europe, 2005

Cooperation between stakeholders	Each stakeholder has some relevant experience. Between them they have developed good training materials and programmes. Some of this, for example, can form the basis of standardised training materials and programmes.
Learning from best practice	There is best practice both within any country and outside. There is much to learn from best practice. This can lead to better training methodologies and more relevant training content. Using best practice as a training vehicle can be more motivating and effective than purely theoretical courses
Career development of staff	Staff need to be motivated to be trained. They need to see the benefit that they will receive from the investment of their time and effort in training. Training should both improve their competence and promote their careers.
Sustainability	In the longer term training provision must be funded by central and local government, with help from external sources, if necessary, in the medium term. Local authorities must develop the capacity to identify local sources of funding to support their own training needs as far as possible

Participatory approach to strategic planning

In accordance with the key principles set out above, which should delineate the work on the National Training Strategy, one crucial issue is the participatory process of developing that document i.e. involving various stakeholders.

It should be stressed that such a process **is not intended to undermine the decision-making capacity or responsibility of any of the partners.** Instead, the idea is to make sure that various entities and their representatives feel suitably co-responsible for developing strategic activities and for participation in the co-ordination of strategy implementation. Of course, nobody can be forced to adopt such co-responsibility. However, one can take actions and seek opportunities to co-ordinate dispersed activities implemented by specific stakeholders and formulate principles of collaboration which will encourage parties to assume responsibility for the outcomes of such co-ordinated activities. It should be remembered that the National Training Strategy is not merely a document that defines the scope and character of possible and desirable training activities but, instead, it should serve as **a plan to develop the institutional capacity for the entire local administration**. This entails the need to reach a local consensus around the strategy provisions and to agree on how a broad group of stakeholders will be included in strategy implementation.

Participatory approach to the development of a National Training Strategy means:

- Engaging **a broad representation of groups interested in effective performance of local government** to work on the strategy document (central government, central institutions, local government associations, non-governmental organisations, local government leaders, experts supporting the activities of local administration);

- Supporting the planning process with the **results of solid training needs analysis** and recommendations following from such analysis;

- **Obtaining information** on plans and strategies of action for entities engaging in institutional support of local government and enhancement of the HR capacity in the local government;

- Verifying the developed strategic solutions (goals and proposed activities) in the course of **actual and effective consultations** with interested parties;

- **Close collaboration** between local (national) stakeholders, representatives of the Council of Europe and international experts.

Under the National Training Strategy, it is assumed that **close collaboration** will take place between representatives of central government, local government units and the Council of Europe. Importantly, the strategy document is developed with the participation of all parties engaged in its creation:

- The initiating and co-ordinating role in the development of the National Training Strategy should be played by a **Steering Committee (SC)**, which would also have a supervisory and monitoring role. Members should include representatives of the central government at the appropriate rank and international organisations (as a rule, those engaged in financing strategy preparation). Also representatives of local government associations may take part in the work of the Steering Committee.

- People directly engaged in the work on the strategy would establish a **Working Group (WG)**. The WG should include representatives of stakeholders who may be affected by the provisions of the strategy. Their task will be to take an active role in meetings, engage in developing solutions, work on specific parts of the document and take part in organising sectoral consultations, if needed.

- **The international expert normally plays the role of a substantive advisor** – the expert presents methodological solutions and actively helps to implement them, oversees the proper course of work on the strategy, verifies the results of the analysis and insights, edits specific parts of the document, ensures high quality of the outcomes of the entire process.

- **The local expert** is responsible for technical support for the process (organisation of bilateral meetings, sourcing information), co-chairing of the WG meetings and substantive work on selected sections of the document.

- Participation of the **central authorities and local government associations** in the work on the strategy is one of the elements which determine the success of the entire process. The experience of the Council of Europe indicates that direct involvement of a central government representative of the appropriate rank in the work of the Steering Group has a positive effect on process efficiency, participant engagement and the socially perceived significance of measures undertaken. Visible engagement of central authorities in the work on the strategy adds credibility and boosts the importance of activities taken.

The FRAMEWORK process of development of a National Training Strategy[23]	
Stage 1	Make political decisions; establish Steering Committee
Stage 2	Organise a roundtable of stakeholders to agree the concept and the approach; prepare an Action Plan.
Stage 3	Establish a national Working Group of stakeholders, chaired by the senior representative of the central government, with agreed Terms of Reference
Stage 4	Appoint a local consultant supported by an international expert to carry out the work on behalf of the Working Group.
Stage 5	Plan and carry out a comprehensive Training Needs Analysis
Stage 6	Draft and seek consensus on the National Training Strategy (including arrangements for its implementation), based on the findings of the Training Needs Analysis and the views and experience of stakeholders.
Stage 7	Where necessary, prepare a detailed project proposal for the implementing body, i.e. facility; seek funding commitments in principle.
Stage 8	Seek formal approval, as appropriate, for the National Training Strategy and the implementing body.
Stage 9	Launch the National Training Strategy; establish the implementing body as an organisation in law, as necessary; begin operations.

Worth stressing is that the National Training Strategy may assume that the implementation of tasks included in the implementation plan (or the overall co-ordination thereof) may be entrusted to a specific organisational structure. This role may be played by an existing entity or a dedicated, newly established unit (e.g. with a profile of a training unit). The scope of roles related to the preparation and implementation of the National Training Strategy is presented in the diagram below. It should be remembered, however, that the **detailed distribution of tasks depends on the local conditions** and expectations of project stakeholders.

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[23] Adopted from: 'TOOLKIT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMMES'; Council of Europe, 2005.

Coordinatory and monitoring function — Steering Group

Strategic planning — Working Group, International & local experts

Implementation — Local government units, Other stakeholders, Training unit (facility), Organizational support

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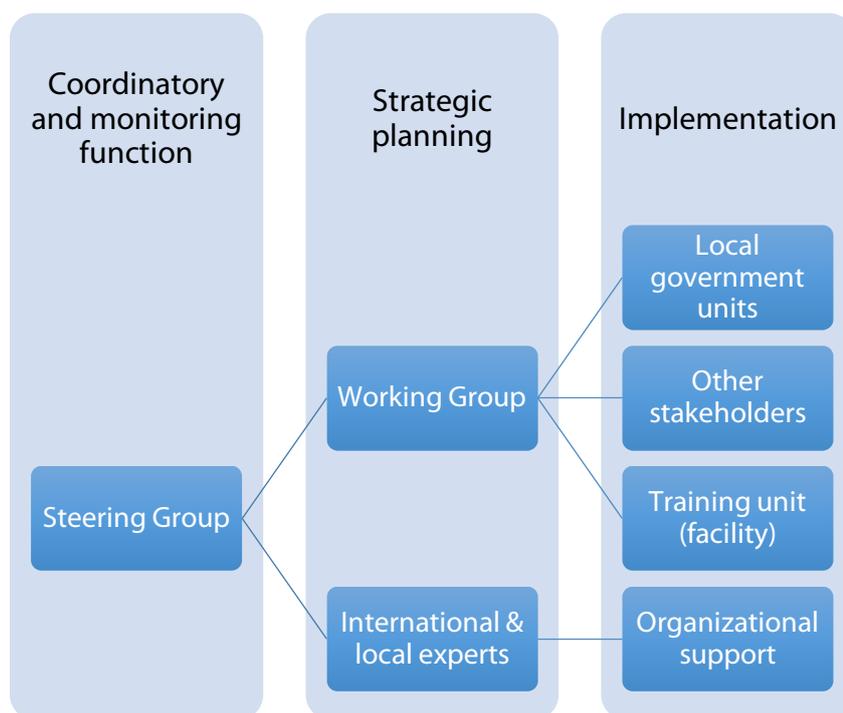
<u>Example:</u> Terms of reference for the Working Group

The Working Group would be formally responsible for:

1. commissioning and agreeing a Training Needs Analysis;
2. designing, commissioning and agreeing the National Training Strategy in the light of the Training Needs Analysis and any other assessments;
3. securing the agreement to the National Training Strategy of the responsible Ministry and the National Association(s);
4. drawing up an associated Implementation Plan and Budget, and identifying the required resources;
5. launching the National Training Strategy in ways that secure maximum impact;

The Working Group would identify, and secure agreement to, the institutional roles and responsibilities for the implementation of the National Training Strategy. The Working Group would provide regular progress reports to the responsible central and local authorities

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The flow of the strategy development process

The work on the National Training Strategy usually involves the organisation of a few **Working Group meetings** (minimum three) and a number of steps and activities to be taken between those meetings. As a rule, the process takes between three and six months, and its duration depends on the local needs, partners' willingness to collaborate and specific possibilities to activate various resources (mostly human but also material resources) and communities.

The first Working Group meeting plays both an **organisational** and a substantive **role**. The participants become familiar with the goals and the flow of the strategic planning process. In the course of the meeting, subsequent steps of strategy development are discussed, and tasks of individual Working Group members are agreed upon. **Stakeholder analysis** should be an important element of this meeting, i.e. identification of additional institutions, organisations or leaders whose participation in strategy development is potentially significant for the adequate composition of the document and its social and systemic legitimacy.

The range of topics to be covered during the meeting depends on when it is organised:

- If the WG meeting is held before the training needs analysis has started, the concept of social research is presented, together with accompanying methodological solutions (methodology and schedule, research tools, e.g. a survey questionnaire). The team makes decisions (and commitments) on how to support the research fieldwork.

- If the WG meeting is organised after the completion of the TNA, the results of the research as well as conclusions and recommendations from the research are presented. The presentation should be followed by a discussion on the proposed recommendations because the agreed scope of recommendations will guide further work on the strategy. A list of strategic goals is a desirable outcome of the meeting. It will comprise the most important, long-term axes for the organisation of activities included in the strategy.

On the basis of the arrangements made during the WG meeting, participating experts will develop a draft document, containing the following:

- A summary of the most crucial elements to diagnose the situation (based on the training needs analysis);
- Recommendations from the analyses already conducted (as agreed during the WG meeting);
- A set of strategic goals (primary, general courses of action);
- Proposed operational goals (to operationalise strategic goals, i.e. generalised tasks leading to the achievement of strategic goals) and possible accompanying specific activities.

Worth stressing is that the operational goals to be included in the strategy should be **SMART**, i.e. they should be:

<div align="center">

Specific   **M**easurable   **A**ttainable   **R**elevant   **T**ime-bound

</div>

The second WG meeting should encompass a discussion on the draft document and, in particular, work to agree on the final wording of specific goals and accompanying activities. During the WG meeting, its participants will:

- discuss comments to the draft document (the part comprising TNA conclusions, key strategic and operational goals);

- agree on specific goals of the strategy;

- develop impact indicators (referring to specific goals);

- identify and agree on activities associated with specific goals (short-term perspective of three to four years);

- develop product and outcome indicators (referring to activities);

- allocate the responsibility for the implementation of specific activities and their schedule.

Therefore, the structure of the strategic document should be hierarchical: subsequent elements of the strategy are subordinated to higher-level elements and are closely linked with them. The overarching role is played by the structure of strategic goals agreed during Working Group discussions.
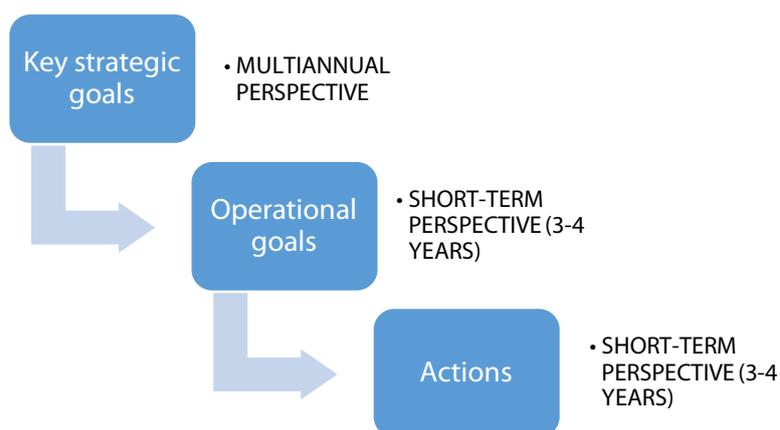
Progress indicators play an important role in the strategy document. They enable actual monitoring of strategy implementation and assessment of outcomes of any activities that have been undertaken. Those progress indicators are defined with reference to the final outcomes of strategy implementation (**impact** assessment), and with reference to specific activities undertaken within it (assessment of delivered/developed **products** and their **outcomes**).

> STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION INDICATORS include measures referring to the impact of the strategy, its products, outcomes and inputs. They are monitored in the course of implementation in order to assess progress towards the goals. They are also used to assess the achieved outcomes. The indicators organise information by indicating the interdependence between impact, outcomes, products and inputs, and enable identification of problems emerging during strategy implementation: problems which may pose a threat to the achievement of strategic goals.
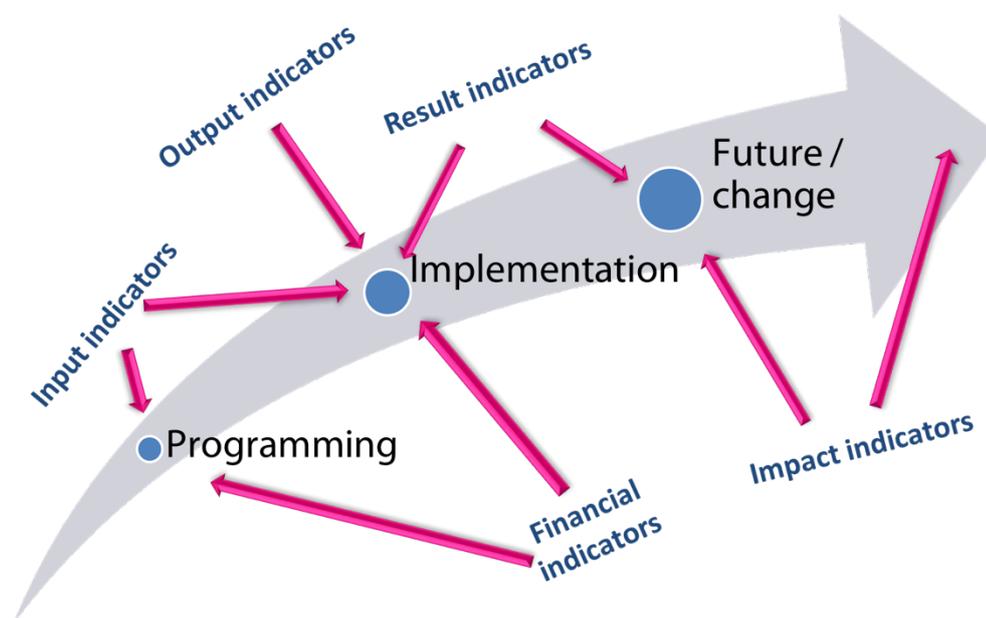
- *Input indicators* – they relate to resources (organisational, material, human and other) needed to implement the proposed activities.

- *Financial indicators* – they serve to monitor the utilisation of financial resources related to strategy implementation.

- *Output indicators* – they relate to direct outcomes of the activities; they are measured in human units (e.g. the number of people trained), material units (e.g. the number of training sessions held, the number of training materials prepared), time units (e.g. the number of support hours, duration of training) and others.

- *Result indicators* – they relate to direct and immediate outcomes of the programme for direct beneficiaries (they may be material or financial) – for instance, reduced time needed to issue an administrative decision, boosted officials' motivation to undertake non-standard actions, or improved efficiency in the delivery of a service.

- *Impact indicators* – they relate to long-term outcomes of strategy implementation, going beyond the immediate effects. Above all, they include indicators which help to measure improvements in the living conditions in the local community, economic growth of a local government unit or overall improvement in its performance.

A short-term action plan should be an autonomous element of the strategy document. Within this plan, each strategic goal should be linked with specific goals and the latter should be connected with actions provided for implementation in the next three or four years. Below presented is a section of an action plan table which should accompany the strategy. The entire table should cover all tasks scheduled for implementation. Each of them should be accompanied by key indicators (output and result indicators), identification of sources, clear allocation of responsibilities and the timeline for implementation.

Strategic goal 1: ……………………………..

Operational goal 1.1.: ……………………………..

Action	Progress (output) indicator	Result of the action	Sources	Responsibility for implementation	Timeline for implementation
Action 1					
Action 2					
…….					

After the second Strategic Team meeting, the strategy document would be consolidated, edited and finalised in respect of substantive issues. As a result, the draft version of the entire strategy is prepared and then communicated to Working Group members for consultation.

Between the second and the third Working Group meeting, a recommended practice is to organise information meetings for local governments, leaders and local government experts, in order to discuss the proposed actions and organisational solutions. Such meetings help to expand the perspective on specific provisions in the strategy document and facilitate subsequent engagement of target recipients of actions covered by the strategy.

The discussion during the **third Working Group meeting** should end with the adoption of the final version of the strategy document. WG members should also develop and agree on a **strategy management plan,** defining how the strategy will be implemented, how related work will be co-ordinated, and how the outcomes will be monitored. The plan will normally indicate the co-ordinating entity (e.g. institution, co-ordinator or team), indicate reporting procedures and rules for updating the document.

After the meeting, the final version of the document should be sent to the body which is empowered to authorise (i.e. officially adopt) the strategy.

Example: WORKING GROUP ACTION PLAN – ARMENIA (2003 / 2004)

TIME-SCALE	TASK	IMPLICATIONS	PROGRESS
Roundtable 2-3 July 03	Consider and agree proposal to develop a National Training Strategy (NTS).	- Representative Working Group (WG) to be established with Terms of Reference - Action Plan to be prepared - CoE to appoint local consultant and international expert	✓ Note of Roundtable, Terms of Reference and Action Plan issued to WG (18 July). ✓ Meeting of Working Group to consider interim Report of Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and outline NTS ✓ Local consultant appointed
July-Aug 03	CoE to appoint a local consultant	The task will be to support the Working Group in carrying out TNA and prepare NTS over next 12 months in consultation with local government stakeholders	✓ Local consultant appointed
July-Aug 03	CoE to appoint an international expert	The task will be to support the local consultant in his/her task, e.g. in designing tools for the TNA	✓ International expert appointed
Aug-Oct 03	Undertake the TNA	- prepare a plan for the TNA - meet each of the main training providers to consider current programmes, any local training assessments, gaps in provision. - prepare tools (surveys, questionnaires etc.) for assessing training needs in selected areas - complete assessments and analyse results from selected areas - prepare draft report on TNA for consideration by WG	In hand by local expert; support from international expert delayed; will present interim report to November WG meeting
Oct 03	Organise 3-4 local seminars to assist with the assessment of training needs	- Makes the assessment of training needs more robust and the NTS more acceptable - Can follow up issues identified in questionnaires and surveys	In hand
Oct 03	Prepare plan for NTS	- To seek WG agreement to the way forward, based on draft TNA report	Outline proposal being prepared for brainstorming at November WG meeting
20 Nov 03	First meeting of WG	- Consider the draft TNA Report and advise - Agree outline proposal for the NTS	See agenda for 20 November meeting

Feb 04	Second meeting of WG	- Consider TNA report and advise / agree - Consider first draft of NTS and advise - Consider institutional arrangements for supporting the implementation of the NTS and commission project proposal as required	Institutional arrangements will depend on the NTS, current capacity of stakeholders and whether additional capacity is required.
Mar-April 04	Organise 4 local seminars to consider draft NTS	- Makes the NTS more robust and acceptable; involves municipalities	
April 04	Organise national conference to consider draft NTS	- To make all stakeholders aware of the NTS and how they might use it and contribute to its implementation. - To seek commitment from all local government stakeholders - To seek political and donor commitment in particular	
April 04	Third meeting of WG	- Agree final draft of NTS - Consider proposed institutional arrangements for NTS and advise - Agree launch and implementation plans of NTS	A further WG meeting may be necessary to consider final proposal for institutional arrangements
June 04	Fourth meeting of WG	- Hand NTS over to implementing bodies	This should reflect the completion by the WG of its mandate;

Example: WORKING GROUP ACTION PLAN – MONTENEGRO (2006 / 2007)

Council of Europe
European Commission

Conseil de l'Europe
Commission européenne

JOINT PROGRAMME
BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
BUILDING THE CAPACITIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN MONTENEGRO
NATIONAL TRAINING STRATEGY Action Plan (2006-2007)

Timetable	Task	Responsible
	Identify local consultant / expert in accordance with a Job Description provided by the CoE	Union of Municipalities (SNV) with CoE
1 Nov 2006	Organise a Round Table for Stakeholders and LG experts to discuss NTS approach and draft Action Plan, and to agree Steering Group (ToR) **Outcomes:** (1) agreement in principle of the approach of the NTS; (2) understanding of the process and environment of the NTS; (3) agreed ToR of the SG	Union, Ministries, and international partners CoE / SNV experts
2-3 Nov 2006	Bilateral meetings with the SG members to discuss NTS Action Plan **Outcome:** agreed Action Plan	CoE and SNV experts
14 Nov – 17 Nov 06	**TNA tools and draft outline of TNA report** Bilateral meetings; Identify research organisation to act as partner Complete task force of local and international consultants Visit to 1 municipality Draft in-depth interview scenario Prepare a detailed TNA plan **Outcomes: (1)** detailed TNA plan; (2) draft in-depth interview scenario; (2) interviewers identified	CoE expert and SNV experts
Dec 06	Board of Union informed of the NTS Mayors asked to participate in personal interview	SNV

Timetable	Task	Responsible
22 December 06	CoE and SNV attendance at the Assembly of the Union on 22 December to explain the NTS to the Mayors and to seek support their support	CoE and SNV
mid Jan 07	Provide status report and TNA plan to SG members Agree arrangements, plan with CEED, UoM and Local Consultant	CoE and SNV experts
25-26 Jan 07	Meet CEED Train interviewers	Local consultant, CoE, SNV
29 Jan – 10 March 07	Interviewers conduct in-depth interviews with Mayors	Local consultants, interviewers, project manager of UoM, SNV local experts
20 Feb – 15 March 07	Preparation of transcripts and summary (latter also in English) of in-depth interviews	Local consultants, CEED
Feb – March 07 (By 22 March)	Bilateral meetings Visit to municipalities FGI conducted Development of questionnaires for the survey taking account of the in-depth interviews	CoE and SNV experts, local consultant
5th April, 07	Organise a SG meeting to: brief new members of SG take note of the results of interviews with Mayors accept the survey questionnaire Train interviewers to carry out TNA exercise, using TNA tools Make arrangements for interviews and survey Bilateral meetings Visit to municipalities	CoE and SNV experts, local consultants
April, 07 (by 5th May)	Interviewers carry out interviews and survey with support of local consultants Collecting and systemising TNA data Prepare structure of the TNA report Draft TNA report	Local consultants and interviewers, CoE and SNV experts

Timetable	Task	Responsible
17th May, 07	Organise a SG meeting to: - discuss draft TNA report - identify objectives and structure of the NTS and options for implementation Bilateral meetings	Local consultants with support from CoE and SNV experts
8th June, 07	Organise a SG meeting to: agree final TNA report consider Draft 1 of NTS and make recommendations for implementation	Local consultants with support from CoE and SNV experts
	NTS	
June – August, 07	Prepare Draft 2 of NTS and Implementation Action Plan and consult SG by email Organize roundtable for stakeholders	Local consultants with support from CoE and SNV experts
September, 07	SG meeting to consider and agree draft 3 of NTS and Implementation Action Plan Agree plans for NTS official approval and launch Seminar for Mayors and heads of HR/training to explain NTS Publish and disseminate NTS; translate into English Set up 'national platform' (e.g. National Training Council) to take responsibility for implementation of NTS Completion of work of Steering Group	SG, Union , CoE and SNV

The 'National Platform' (its nature will depend on the recommendations of the NTS) will take responsibility for the implementation of the NTS from this point on.

The scope of the National Training Strategy

The following should be highlighted among the most important overall reasons for undertaking work to develop national training strategies for local government:

- Striving to improve the performance of local government: to boost the effectiveness and efficiency of its operations to make sure it can really improve the quality of life for local residents,

- Efforts to motivate local government staff to get involved in solving local problems, to make local government jobs more attractive and desirable,

- The need to rationalise the use of existing material and human resources (incl. the need to co-ordinate dispersed assistance measures).

In order for these goals to be achieved, the document must have an appropriate, usability-oriented structure. **A training strategy has to be as specific as possible about the following:**

- **legitimacy of the document** – the strategy should be a specific action plan, officially approved by the competent institution (usually the competent government agency in charge of capacity building in local administration). Transparency and consensual development process are important elements which enhance the legitimacy of the strategy. A strategy cannot be imposed onto institutions that will be responsible for its implementation (unless those are central government agencies).

- **stakeholders of the training strategy** – the document should clearly define the allocation of tasks and responsibilities related to the actions incorporated in the strategy; it should clearly define the agreed roles for each stakeholder in order to respect their separate status, empowerment and the right to shape their own policies.

- **the topics to be covered in the training**, the areas to be covered and the expected outcomes of the education process – as mentioned earlier in the TNA chapter, training needs do not always overlap with the social expectations associated with training. Nevertheless, the scope of educational activities should be understandable for potential recipients, i.e. training participants. In its descriptive part, the strategy should explain the reasons behind the choice of educational priorities (selected at the planning stage) and the action plan should specify the anticipated results of activities.

- **the format of educational activities** (face-to-face vs. distance learning; one-off events vs. a training cycle, lectures vs. active learning methods) – the selected training methods should match the special characteristics and capacities of local administration.

- **organisational/institutional solutions** covering the specification of tasks and responsibilities related to the implementation of the strategy.

The idea that lies behind the proposition outlined in training strategies reflects the need for creation of a comprehensive and consistent framework for assuring quality of training for local government within a national context.

For many years now, the CoE has proposed several tools for increasing the quality, comprehensiveness and sustainability of LG development in the countries of SE Europe and Caucasus. Among these tools one can enumerate: TNA, NTS, best practice programs, and benchmarking. All of them constitute elements of a quality improvement orientated approach. It seems that all these different tools/elements can be put into a consistent framework that would constitute guidelines for policy actions related to capacity building of local governments in individual countries. Such combination of elements constitutes a set of possible solutions to be embedded in the National Training Strategy.

Below presented is a framework[24] (matrix) that summarizes the most important elements, grouping them into six broad categories related to: training environment, training expertise and training delivery at both local authority level as well as within the national framework.

Several important issues may influence the understanding of the proposed framework. At this stage it is important to stress the following:

1. The set of elements proposed within the matrix is not exhaustive. Also, it is not intended to be introduced all at the same time by a single activity or programme. Rather, it constitutes a framework that assures quality-controlled training delivery system.

2. The proposed framework is a general quality model to be used after the necessary adaptation to local conditions. It proposes several provisions that may, but also may not, be relevant to particular legal conditions, administrative arrangements, historical environment, etc. One of those preconditions is an existence of a free market of training delivery for local governments. The inclusion of this element in the matrix should not be seen as an attempt to put any regulations on such a market or to re-introduce any kind of centralised system. The matrix itself just enlists several requirements for an effective, efficient and sustainable system of LG training.

3. TNA is a precondition of any quality-based approach to training delivery. It is important to remember that TNA relates to all those activities and changes that can be achieved through training and therefore needs to set apart all non-training issues (like policy changes, institutional rearrangements, etc.). Accordingly, the proposed framework for quality assurance relates to all educational activities, but does not tackle all possibly necessary activities related to the introduction of an effective LG system.

4. The validity of the proposed framework starts with the <u>relevance</u> of training activities. The framework summarises the elements necessary to assure good quality training for LG when training is relevant and necessary.

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[24] The presented matrix developed by myself was used, in a slightly different form, in a publication prepared by the Council of Europe and the UNDP (2005), entitled: 'Approach to quality assurance in local government training'.

	Factors influencing **training environment** *(environment)*	Factors influencing **training providers / trainers / methods** *(expertise and delivery)*	Factors influencing **training effectiveness** *(effectiveness)*
National Framework	- Legal and policy framework for local government training - National Training Strategy - Training market - Coordination of national and international organisations' activities	- National Association of local authorities - Coordinating body for standards - Accreditation and certification process - National database of trainers - National library of training resources - Training curricula in line with NTS	- Updated curricula/ methods/ materials - Update of TNA / NTS - Training programme evaluation
Local Authority	- Performance (self)-assessment - HR function - In-house training policy	- TNA approach (content and method) - Standard selection criteria (trainers / providers) - Post-training support	- Standard training impact assessment system - Internal (in-house) knowledge sharing

The elements listed in the table above should be included when drafting the training strategy. This does not mean, of course, that each of them must be directly translated into strategy goals. Those elements, however, are crucial for building an effective system to support the development of local government personnel – a system which supports development and offers development potential. Therefore, it is worthwhile taking a closer look at the aforementioned elements at the country level as they become particularly important when a strategy is formulated.

Training environment – the national framework

1. The legal and policy framework for local government training should invoke international documents (European Charter of Local Self-Government) and national regulations (National Constitution; Laws on local government, civil servants & others). The provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government represent the key benchmark to describe the local government system in the country. As such, they should be used as the basis to plan any activities concerning local administration in CoE member states. In this context, two dimensions are important for the planning of training activities: (1) tasks and competencies of local authorities laid down in those regulations, and (2) the identified training needs.

2. The development of a National Training Strategy enables the co-ordination of dispersed training efforts, better use of resources, planning the development of local government personnel in the context of national and local development goals. The training needs

analysis which accompanies strategy development helps to identify and monitor problems impacting the performance of local administration.

3. The free market of training services enables flexible response to the changing needs of local government units, and allows knowledge gaps to be filled fast in case of changing regulations. Moreover, if suitable (financial) resources are available, it ensures permanent support for clerical staff.

4. Coordination of national and international organizations' activities in the context of limited resources is crucial: it helps to optimise the efforts undertaken by various entities and, through synergies, helps to boost the impact of various initiatives. Donors' resources may also largely contribute to the success of NTS implementation.

Training providers / trainers / methods – the national framework

1. **An active role of LG associations and the existence of a coordinating body for training standards** – this issue is emphasised in order to highlight the essential role of associations in co-ordinating the NTS implementation. In many cases (and we are speaking here of territorial government in the sense of decentralised public governance), this is the entity which should be entrusted with a special role in the monitoring of the NTS implementation and often also with direct supervision over the implementation of proposed activities, in line with local needs.

2. The situation looks somewhat different when it comes to the **development of an accreditation and certification system of training providers and training resources**. This task requires a considerably institutionalised approach. Various forms of training and substantive support for trainers may be required (coaching, mentoring, national training of trainers, forums of experts, etc.), and transparent recruitment and certification rules may need to be defined (including introduction of some kind of an appraisal system for certificate renewal). An institutionalised format will help to mobilise the resources for systematic capacity building of training providers (various capacity building programmes).

Training effectiveness – the national framework

And, finally, it is very important to ensure the assessment of outcomes achieved through the implementation of a training strategy. On the one hand, such assessment refers to the results of the monitoring where implementation is checked versus the plan, and, on the other hand, it refers to the evaluation of the strategy as such and the initiatives implemented within its framework. The results of the evaluation should serve as an important input for document updates. Even though monitoring and evaluation assume somewhat different perspectives on the activities which have been implemented, these two categories are closely interrelated. Monitoring is an essential element of an overall project evaluation.

Monitoring generally involves comparing the actual outcomes against the assumptions and expectations. In practice, the project implementation monitoring involves regular, systematic measurements or observations of actions related to implementation and of the outcomes. This process should be based on precisely defined **indicators**.

Evaluation entails a **judgement** on the value of the project. In practice, it involves asking questions, gathering information and formulating conclusions, mostly referring to the **effectiveness, efficiency, usability** and the **impact** of activities conducted under the project. The essence of evaluation usually lies in its practical orientation, i.e. the focus on modifications and improvements, the need to apply the outcomes in order to avoid repeating past mistakes and to improve actions taken.

The evaluation efforts adopted in the context of the implementation of a National Training Strategy should comprise and consolidate three important components:

1. **Formative evaluation** (proactive evaluation), expected to help in project implementation and, consequently, used for ongoing decision-making;

2. **Psychological evaluation**, used to shape the project contractors' knowledge and awareness of various activities and to stimulate desirable behaviours;

3. **Conclusive evaluation** (retroactive evaluation), used for ongoing reporting and for the overall assessment of project outcomes and results.

The set of elements proposed above should be viewed as a benchmark for verification, assessment and reflection on the provisions laid down in the strategy. In no way does it determine any specific provisions of a nationally agreed document. However, it should help to guide the discussion on the solutions adopted in the strategy.

Below listed is an optimum set of elements for a National Training Strategy. However, it should be stressed that the final shape of the strategy will depend on many specific, locally determined factors. They will include the flow of the document development at the national level, local political and legal framework, experience in building local democracy, degree of decentralisation of public governance, relations between key stakeholders, economic situation, social relations and many others.

In the optimal scenario, the final strategy document would normally include the following:

- A concise analysis of the key considerations guiding decentralised public governance, and some reflections on the national situation of local democracy in the light of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, based on the existing documents, available reports and other sources.

- Key conclusions and recommendations from the completed training needs analysis.

- Presentation of strategic development goals in a multi-annual perspective.

- A set of impact indicators for the strategy.

- A short-term action plan (for three to four years) containing specific activities, output and result indicators, responsibilities for their implementation as well as an implementation schedule.

- Strategy management plan (covering the implementation monitoring procedures and strategy update procedures).

Final remarks

As it is frequently demonstrated by the research conducted under the Training Needs Assessment, the nature of the reasons which constrain capacity development of local governments is varied.

The will to improve the situation, which translates into efforts to boost the effectiveness and efficiency of local administration and, in consequence, to improve the quality of life in local communities, may call for varied efforts.

Sometimes it is necessary, on the one hand, to undertake efforts to change the organisational and legal conditions under which local administration is operating. On the other hand, development of competences among local government staff can, by itself, pose a significant challenge.

It is worth emphasising that any National Training Strategy should not be limited to identifying only the necessary training activities but, rather, it should point to the core directions of systemic support for local administration in the process which aims to enhance local governance.

Any strategy should be based on a number of key assumptions underlying the European Charter of Local Self Government:

- Local development cannot be approached in a dispersed way. Instead, it should be understood as a whole set of actions aimed to improve the quality of life of people living in a specific local community.

- Local development should largely rely on local resources. This means that the centralisation of resources for further redistribution is hardly ever an efficient solution. Such resources should be separated and managed in a way that allows local governments to enjoy relative autonomy in building their core public policies.

- However, when it comes to local development, there are generally no universally adequate solutions, applicable to all countries, political backgrounds, and historical experiences. This stems from the fact that each country and, further on, each territorial unit faces its specific problems of local character (alongside universal human needs). In accordance with the sustainable development principles, local development policies should take account of specific social, economic and environmental considerations.

For this reason, the organisation of work on the National Training Strategy, the range of related tasks, the flow of strategy development as well as the detailed structure of the strategy document should always be determined locally. In some cases, it will be reasonable to develop the aforementioned detailed action plan and define all elements of the aforesaid optimum set. In other cases, the challenge might lie in developing a list of possible activities or, more generally, agreeing on the scope of operational goals. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that regardless of the final outcome the successful adoption of a strategy document is as important as the enlightening discussion on local democracy problems among key national stakeholders.

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APPENDIX 1

Case study: Training Needs Assessment of Local Councils in Malta (2014)[25]

Background of the Project implemented in Malta

'A Partnership for Creative Governance', of the Norway Grants 2009-2014, is a capacity-building project for local government implemented by the Department for Local Government, Malta as Project Promoter and the Council of Europe Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, the Local Councils Association of Malta and Association of Local Municipalities (KS) of Norway as Project Partners and supported by a grant from Norway through Norway Grants 2009 – 2014, Programme Area 25.

It consisted of the following components – a Training Needs Assessment, a National Training Strategy, a Performance Management Programme, a Leadership Academy, the Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance and European Label of Governance Excellence.

The Training Needs Assessment was conducted during spring-summer 2014 and resulted in the report presented below, as well as in the National Training Strategy for Local Councils in Malta that was elaborated subsequently.

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[25] This report was prepared by Cezary Trutkowski under the project MT04/1 "A Partnership for Creative Governance" implemented by the Department for Local Government of the Ministry For Justice, Culture and Local Government, Malta, supported by a grant from Norway through the Norway Grants 2009-2014, with assistance of the Council of Europe Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform

TNA FINAL REPORT (Malta, 2014)

Competence Building among Local Government Officials as an Element of Decentralisation of Public Authorities

1. Executive summary

Deconcentration of public authorities in Malta

Research findings clearly indicate that one can hardly talk about the implementation of the subsidiarity principle in Malta. The main reason is, firstly, the limited range of responsibilities vested in the Local Councils and, secondly, the low degree of autonomy in decision-making at the lowest level of public administration, even within their competences.

In the course of twenty years since the introduction of Local Councils, it has proven impossible to carry out genuine decentralisation of public authorities and to hand over the broad responsibility for public services and local development to local governments. In accordance with statements made by participants of qualitative research, the vast majority of public governance continues to be in the hands of national politicians and officials who work in central government agencies. In the Maltese system, therefore, we can talk about deconcentration of certain tasks performed by central institutions rather than of actual decentralisation of power.

In the light of numerous statements made by research participants, the future of local administration in Malta is by no means obvious. Many of them challenged the sense of having Local Councils within the current legal framework.

Leaders of local public administration and their mutual relations

What is enormously important for the efficient work of Local Councils are the relations between councillors and members of the local administration and, in particular, the relations between councillors, mayors and executive secretaries. As one might guess, the nature of those relations is affected by a variety of factors, starting with personality aspects up to political plans made by individual councillors. One condition for constructive collaboration, however, is the awareness of mutual powers and competences as well as the proper understanding of roles played by specific individuals in local government bodies.

The interviews held under the present study generally indicate that secretaries and mayors have a fairly diverging perspective on their roles in local administration structures. The respondents' statements leave no doubt that the missing element is a clear-cut and commonly accepted separation of competences between executive and legislative powers at the local level, and the relations between secretaries and mayors are an important hotbed of potential problems in this regard.

What was often emphasised in interviews was the politicisation of Local Councils. In the eyes of executive secretaries and officials, councillors are fairly often seen as politicians who pursue their own interests or party interests, often neglecting the developmental challenges faced by the entire community or general systemic constraints.

An important problem related to the operation of Local Councils is that councillors are often insufficiently prepared to perform their function within the legally defined prerogatives of local representative bodies.

In the current legal framework, executive secretaries are employed by the LG Department which is part of the central government administration. In other words, the Department is the employer of executive secretaries.

Statements made by secretaries indicate that they have an excessive range of responsibilities. In the light of the study, this does not indicate that their formal responsibilities are particularly vast but that they are concentrated within one position. In the case of Local Councils one can talk about an insufficiency of human resources and a distribution of responsibilities which is not entirely clear.

Perception of Local Councils by citizens

The vast majority of Maltese citizens perceive their place of permanent residence in very positive light. In total, as many as 82.5% of the National Survey respondents considered their locality to be a good (45.7%) or a very good (36.8%) place to live.

In the light of responses given by National Survey participants one should conclude that the majority of Maltese citizens think they are familiar with the scope of Local Councils' responsibilities. At the same time, the majority of those polled believe that the competences of the councils should be expanded.

Both the general assessment of the performance of Local Councils by citizens and the assessment of most services provided by the councils is positive. Among universal public services the best ratings were given to 'waste collection from home', 'public order' and 'cleanliness of public places'. Negative opinions were expressed about 'the quality, maintenance and condition of public roads and pavements'.

According to the opinions of most research participants, the quality of public services has improved in recent years.

Performance of public services at the local level

At present, major responsibilities of Local Councils include the care of cleanliness and maintenance of public spaces (street cleaning, collection of municipal waste, park maintenance), conservation of greenery in towns and maintenance of selected elements of the local infrastructure, predominantly roads.

Representatives of local government believe that the areas which give rise to most problems in day-to-day local governance include: law enforcement, road infrastructure, the cleanliness of streets and public places and waste management.

The greatest obstacles to efficient and effective provision of public services stem from the limited autonomy of local governments, inadequate financing for their tasks and staff shortages. However, one should note that local governments have very restricted freedom in shaping their own HR policies, which is also the case in many other areas.

Worth noting is that regardless of problems that have been identified, the vast majority of interviewed officials and elected representatives tend to give a positive assessment of the performance of Local Councils. Slightly higher ratings in self-assessment were recorded in the case of officials and executive secretaries in comparison with councillors.

External collaboration

The collaboration between Local Councils and external public bodies in Malta was, for the most part, rated negatively. The relations between local and central bodies are all-too-often distant from the ideas of partnership and equal rights of parties. Many secretaries believe that they tend to be clients of various institutions rather than partners within public administration. This is related, above all, to the constrained autonomy of Local Councils and their lack of decision-making powers in many areas.

In many contacts between Local Councils and external bodies the former act as intermediaries for citizens who encounter various problems in their place of residence and wish to contact central institutions for a binding decision that may help to solve those problems.

Training needs

While there exists a range of training options targeted at local government personnel in general, there is no comprehensive system for local administration staff to improve their professional competences.

The respondents were nearly unanimous in indicating the need for officials to be trained. The needs in this regard are so vast that executive secretaries admitted in unison during a group discussion that, basically, '*any training is welcome'*.

Based on the research work performed, it seems justified to recommend the following thematic areas for training to be offered to Local Councils' personnel:

- Awareness-raising activities – any activities aimed at explaining the systemic and legal framework of the competences of various stakeholders in the local government system, and familiarising the participants with general principles of decentralisation and operation of local governments in the European context.

- Training for elected representatives – activities in this regard should aim at raising awareness and expanding councillors' the knowledge of the competences of local representative bodies.

- Training for staff of central institutions – such training should focus on the rules of operation of the Local Councils in Malta and build awareness of central officials with regard to the desirable patterns of performance among public administration.

Additionally, the report had identified a few areas of training related to more specific issues, such as administrative law, tendering procedures, customer care, strategic management, accounting / finances, performance management, social relations (team work, professional communication), and European funds.

The institutional back-up for the organisation of training activities remains an open question. The scope of training needs revealed in the study indicates, however, that there is a definite need for systematic action while not dispersing the efforts, as this might lead to problems with co-ordination of training support.

2. Assessment of training needs – Preliminary remarks

By definition, training activities are focused on achieving change: the universal goal is to make a transition from a certain specific state of knowledge (or lack thereof) and skills among a specific group of people to a state which is defined as superior, improved and more useful in the context of achieving some pre-defined goals. Therefore, a training activity in the life of an organisation means that there is a striving to achieve a different—and, by definition, better—and desirable state of its operation.

Training needs arise from deficiencies related to constraints or imperfections in human activity, primarily deficiencies in knowledge or skills. In this sense, they should be distinguished from other factors which exert influence on the functioning of organisations. Notably, it is rare that actual developmental constraints would result from insufficient competences of people who are part of the organisation. The condition of that organisation may deviate from the expectations due to various legal, institutional or historical considerations. This discrepancy may also be connected with the social or political context or limited availability of human or financial resources.

Therefore, in an assessment of training needs, the issue that comes to the fore is not the subject-matter of training (i.e. its content, target recipients, manner of organisation) but, rather, the reasonability of training under the existing circumstances. The analysis should offer an answer to the question on whether it is indeed the educational effort that will help the organisation to attain the desirable state of affairs. After all, it might well happen that mayors, executive secretaries or officials do have the necessary knowledge and skills to act but legal regulations or other systemic constraints prevent them from performing their tasks efficiently.

In consequence, before making any decisions regarding the any new training structures or the execution of a specific training programme, it is essential to define the guidelines that would indicate a desirable manner of operation for the organisation (or administration system) concerned. Such a definition should be based on internal considerations (What kind of tasks should be performed? How should they be performed? What should be the outcomes?) as well as external systemic considerations (Which tasks are, and which ones should be, undertaken by the organisation? What are the external effects of the organisation's performance and what kinds of outcomes are expected from the tasks?). It is important to realise that specific training needs always correspond with specific institutional challenges. With a minimalist definition of expectations, the required skills will be different versus a situation where goals are defined comprehensively and broadly.

Therefore, the assessment of training needs helps to identify the discrepancies between the knowledge held by potential targets of educational efforts and the knowledge which, for some reason, is required or desirable. Moreover, when describing the status quo we always refer to direct experience of specific people, i.e. to the reality which has become familiar to the target users of training, whereas definition of the desired situation usually calls for extended reflection on possible yet non-existent ways in which the organisation could operate. In other words, it calls for the realisation that things may look different in the first place! In this spirit, we can talk about two ways to identify training needs:

- description of training-related expectations (or desires), OR

- identifying the required competences (or, in other words, providing a prescriptive definition of training needs).

In the former case we are dealing primarily with training-related wishes (desires) of specific individuals whereas in the latter case we are talking about a systemic necessity of (need for) training. The key challenge is to know how to separate desires from needs. In the case of public administration system, officials' training-related wishes are constrained by their awareness levels and their motivation for personal growth whereas needs stem mostly from the way the system is organised and from reform programmes developed by political leaders.

3. *Implementation of the research process – Notes on methodology*

This document is based on the results of the training needs assessment (TNA) conducted among Maltese Local Councils between April and September 2014. The assessment was performed under the project entitled '*A Partnership for Creative Governance'* supported by a grant from Norway through the Norway Grants 2009–2014. The training needs assessment was intended as an input for the development of the National Training Strategy for Local Governments.

TNA: Key assumptions

The most important premise behind the implementation of the **National Training Strategy (NTS)** in Malta is that it should constitute a key factor promoting change in the institutional and operational framework of Local Councils. The introduction of the NTS should bring about development in municipalities based on the existing needs for training and the legal parameters of local government.

Therefore, the NTS will be based on a **Training Needs Analysis (TNA)**, comprising:

- independent and reliable **field research** into Local Councils training that will allow training to be developed in response to the needs and expectations of municipal staff and elected members,

- a **legal analysis** that will identify the training necessary for municipalities to properly fulfil their obligations.

This research and analysis will be complemented by bilateral meetings with stakeholders in local government to take account of their experience and perceptions and to build on current and recent initiatives.

The TNA should present a **solid and credible foundation to plan training programmes**. The results should enable a **precise** identification of the level of interest in a specific training topic and

identification of target groups. The TNA should ensure relevance of the proposed training content to existing needs of Maltese local administration.

TNA: Objectives

The key objective of the TNA was to identify training-related expectations of local administration staff as well as the needs with regard to further strategic training of local government personnel in Malta.

The research which has been performed aimed to identify:

✓ the existing status of knowledge and previous experience of key groups of local government staff and elected representatives;

✓ the need for improved knowledge and professional skills;

✓ attitudes towards training;

✓ councils' willingness to participate in training and the affordability of training;

✓ constraints that may threaten a successful implementation of NTS.

Additionally, the following elements should be indicated among the goals of the research which has been conducted:

✓ identify the scope of the training and the different training methodologies experienced so far by key groups of municipal staff and politicians;

✓ determine the training content, scope and methodologies to be covered by new training and development programs;

✓ analyze the capacity of municipalities to organize their own internal training system on a sustainable basis;

✓ define the most appropriate institutional framework for implementing the NTS.

TNA: Implementation method

The aforementioned objectives of the TNA necessitate the implementation of a relatively **extensive research endeavour** that should consist of three components:

✓ Explorative **qualitative investigation** based on a series of individual in-depth interviews with LG representatives;

✓ A verifying **survey** to be conducted in all (68) Local Councils in Malta;

✓ A representative survey of the general public (Maltese citizens) – app. sample size N=400.
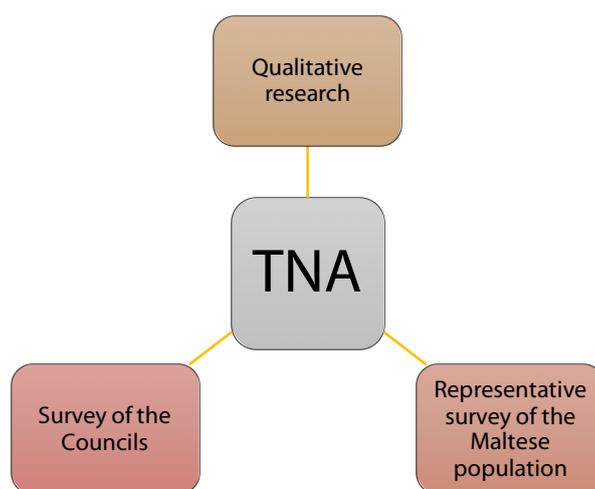
In parallel to the collection and examination of the TNA field research data, an institutional and legal framework of the LC system has been investigated in order to determine its influence on possible training activities

Qualitative Research

The main argument for the use of qualitative research techniques is the need to develop an <u>in-depth</u> understanding of both the scope and the kind of knowledge needed by key officers of municipalities so that training can be developed to respond to their personal needs and expectations.

The findings of qualitative interviews are usually not representative of the entire population. However, they do provide a better understanding of the interviewees' positions as well as their thoughts and attitudes. They enable researchers to understand the issues in question.

The application of qualitative research methods within the TNA allowed us to:

✓ recognize the most problematic areas in everyday operations of Local Councils in Malta;

✓ describe existing practices of dealing with these problems;

✓ identify important areas of training in relation to existing problems and practices;

✓ identify the most common attitudes toward local governance and citizen participation as well as attitudes toward personal development and participation in training;

✓ determine and specify approaches to the evaluation of training activities;

✓ learn about key sources of information relevant to implementing the priorities of local government.

As part of the qualitative study, a total of 18 interviews were held with mayors, executive secretaries and officials (incl. 14 individual in-depth interviews and 4 group interviews). In total, 33 individuals took part in the interviews.

> *Individual in-depth interview (IDI):*
>
> *An individual in-depth interview is carried out by a specially trained interviewer according to a prepared and detailed scenario that defines the objectives and general guidelines for the conversation. It allows a careful examination of the way the interviewee thinks and acts, of how he/she looks at a situation, the motives behind specific activity and the extent of his/her knowledge. These interviews are usually held with individuals with similar characteristics that are important for the research; they usually take about one hour each.*

> *Focus group interview (FGI):*
>
> *A focus group enables a carefully planned discussion with selected participants in a comfortable environment in order to explore their perceptions of a specific area of interest. The aim of this research technique is to reconstruct, as closely as possible, the real processes of social communication and to confront participants' different opinions through the discussion.*
>
> *Participants are invited to a focus group because they have distinctive personal characteristics that directly correspond with the objectives of the research. This research technique is especially suitable for investigating the processes of forming opinions and the problems of decision-making that are subject to peer influence and collective behaviour.*
>
> *Usually 6 to 10 people participate in one focus group interview.*

Table 1: Number of qualitative interviews

Research method	Number of interviews	Respondents
Individual in-depth interviews (14)	6	Mayors
	4	Executive secretaries – LC
	1	Executive secretary – Region
	2	Members of staff
	1	President of AKL
Focus group interviews (4)	1	Members of staff
	2	Executive secretaries
	1	Mayors

Quantitative Research

The main argument supporting the use of quantitative research methods is the need to obtain credible, solid and verifiable results. The NTS requires the use of appropriate tools that can guarantee the 'fine-tuning' of the final product to the needs and expectations of municipal staff and elected representatives as well to the legal and institutional requirements of local government.

Survey of the Local Councils

The quantitative research has been implemented:

- ✓ among **all Local Councils in Malta**;

- ✓ with representatives of various types of positions in the local government:

  - ▪ mayors

  - ▪ executive secretaries

  - ▪ councillors

  - ▪ municipal staff
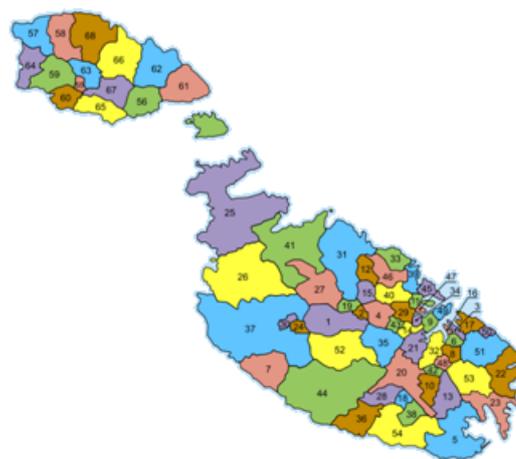
The purpose behind the survey conducted among all local council offices was to:

- ✓ verify the findings of the qualitative interviews;

- ✓ learn about previous training experience of Maltese local government staff and elected representatives;

- ✓ obtain representative, credible data on the demand for training courses and their content;

- ✓ assess the need for the personal development of municipal staff and elected representatives.

The survey conducted among Local Councils enabled us to obtain:

✓ objective and verifiable knowledge of the needs, problems and training expectations of the local government community;

✓ representative data on the interest in specific training programs and topics.

The study was co-ordinated by the Department for Local Government. Survey questionnaires were distributed among all local council offices. In the course of the research process the staff of the Department initiated multiple contacts with the respondents, encouraging them to take part in the study.

As a result, the following outputs were obtained:

- 30 survey questionnaires completed by mayors,

- 86 survey questionnaires completed by councillors,

- 53 survey questionnaires completed by executive secretaries,

- 131 survey questionnaires completed by municipal staff.

Table 2: LC SURVEY – distribution of respondents by gender, age and level of education

% of respondents in specific categories		MAYORS	OTHERS ELECTED	EXECUTIVE SECRETARY	STAFF
gender	female	20	23	43	**82**
	male	**80**	**77**	**57**	18
age	29 years and under	7	18	21	**34**
	30-39 years	17	15	**34**	**38**
	40-49 years	23	24	**30**	11
	50-59 years	**30**	10	11	14
	60 years and over	23	**34**	4	3
level of education	primary school	4	7	---	---
	secondary school	**36**	**34**	6	25
	post-secondary school	25	19	34	**59**
	higher: university	**36**	**40**	**53**	15
	other	---	1	8	1

Representative survey of the population of Maltese citizens

The main purpose of local government is to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs. Operations of local administration should serve the general public and the citizens' satisfaction should be the ultimate goal. To learn how the local government is performing and, by the way, to identify the drawbacks of local administration's everyday practice one has to address the recipients of the services. Governance indicators are now used across Europe (and in developed countries in other parts of the world) to monitor performance of local service providers, including public entities. They are widely used as tools for strategic planning, conducting development

dialogue, allocating external assistance, and influencing foreign direct investment. Having identified problems related to performance one can decide upon appropriate solutions – including improvement of competences of those responsible.

It is an option to broaden the TNA in Malta with the implementation of the survey of citizens' satisfaction with local services delivery. Good practice for such activity can be found in Norway – the 'Norwegian Citizens Survey' was initiated there in 2007 and has been implemented since, with positive results. It measures the satisfaction of the country's citizens with governmental, regional and municipal services.

Implementation of the National Survey

A Stratified Random sampling process was employed for this survey. This probability sampling method entails partitioning the population into mutually exclusive sub-groups, and selecting an independent (Simple) random sample from each of these sub-groups to ensure a uniform distribution of the sample relative to a number of pre-selected characteristics of the population. In this case, sub-groups were constructed relative to different combinations of sex, age group and district.

In addition to this, quotas were used throughout the data collection phase to ensure that the required number of individuals from each sub-group was obtained. The main advantage of using quotas is to ensure that an adequate number of units is sampled from every sub-group, even in very small ones for which the probability of selection is relatively small compared to other groups. Since the mechanism of selecting persons was made in a random manner, no significant bias was introduced by applying such quotas.

'The Citizen Survey provides important knowledge for managers in municipal, regional and government administration. We need surveys like this to get information on where the shoe pinches so that we may target our efforts and improve services for our users.'
 - Rigmor Aasrud; Norwegian minister for government administration, reform and church affairs.

The original gross sample consisted of 1,200 individuals, of whom 407 participated in the survey whilst 540 were not considered for various reasons including reached quotas, wrong telephone numbers, never contacted etc. This resulted in an effective net response rate of 61,7%. Table 3 below displays the distribution of the gross sample by type of response and table 4 shows the distribution of the net sample by sex and age group.

Table 3: NATIONAL SURVEY – distribution of effective gross sample by type of response

Description	No.	%	No. (Effective)	% (Effective)
a) Good responses	407	43.8	407	61.7
b) Refusals	26	2.8	26	3.9
c) Other *(no reply etc.)*	227	24.4	227	34.4
d) Ineligibles *(Reached quotas, wrong telephone numbers, never contacted etc.)*	540	29.0	-	-
Total	1,200	100.0	660	100.0

Table 4: NATIONAL SURVEY – distribution of net sample by sex and age group

	Sex					
	Male		**Female**		**Total**	
Age Group	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	Count	%
16-24	29	14.2	24	11.8	53	13.0
25-44	69	33.8	64	31.5	133	32.7
45-64	66	32.4	65	32.0	131	32.2
65+	40	19.6	50	24.6	90	22.1
Total	**204**	**100.0**	**203**	**100.0**	**407**	**100.0**

Survey data was weighted to align and gross-up sample estimates with the benchmark distribution in terms of sex, age group and district of individuals. In addition to this, sampling weights served to correct for biases and discrepancies present in the final sample of participating units arising from different response rates observed in different categories. Post-stratification weights were also used to match the net sample with the target population.

Data were collected by means of Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) between 2 and 8 July 2014. In CATI, although respondents are contacted by telephone, computers are used to enter the data obtained from respondents during the interview. Another important aspect of CATI surveys is that each sampling unit is randomly assigned among interviewers, and hence reduces interviewer bias to a bare minimum.

Presentation of research results in this report

The results of quantitative surveys are presented graphically in charts and tables. In each case, detailed characteristics of the presented data are provided. The body of the report contains selected charts and summary tables. Further data and a complete presentation of distributions of answers to questions contained in survey questionnaires can be found in the Appendix.

When reading information from the charts, it is important to bear in mind that the survey among local council offices was a census-type survey by definition, i.e. the questionnaire was sent to all representatives of four occupational groups (mayors, councillors, executive secretaries and municipal officials). Despite multiple attempts, achieving a 100% response rate turned out to be impossible. For this reason, the results of this survey are burdened with an error which cannot be precisely estimated due to the unavailability of relevant data. However, it should be stressed that the findings from this study are consistent with the results of qualitative interviews and, moreover, are internally coherent.

The report presents selected excerpts from respondents' statements made during qualitative interviews. The selection of those verbatim statements was made purposefully, to be intertwined into the body of the report rather than to provide a random selection of quotations. This means that the opinions quoted here are typical of the themes which emerged from the interviews. One should note, however, that the verbatim statements quoted here are illustrative: they represent various perspectives and were selected in order to demonstrate various points of view presented in the study.

The analysis presented in this report is based on statements and views expressed by all research participants. However, this does not mean that we have attempted to provide some 'averaged' opinions. Conclusions were preceded by critical analysis and are based on a juxtaposition of opinions and beliefs presented in the study. Therefore, many conclusions contained in this report are of analytical nature and do not necessarily correspond with any particular statement made by any specific interviewee.

In order to maximise respondent anonymity, verbatim quotes have not been numbered. The quotes are only accompanied with the respondent's function and interview type (FGI: Focus Group Interview; IDI: Individual In-Depth Interview).

4. Perception of living conditions and the quality of public services

To begin with, it is worth stressing that the vast majority of Maltese citizens have a very positive perception of their place of permanent residence. In total, as many as 82.5% of the National Survey Respondents considered their locality to be either a good (45.7%) or a very good (36.8%) place to live.

Figure 1: NATIONAL SURVEY - evaluation of the locality as a place to live
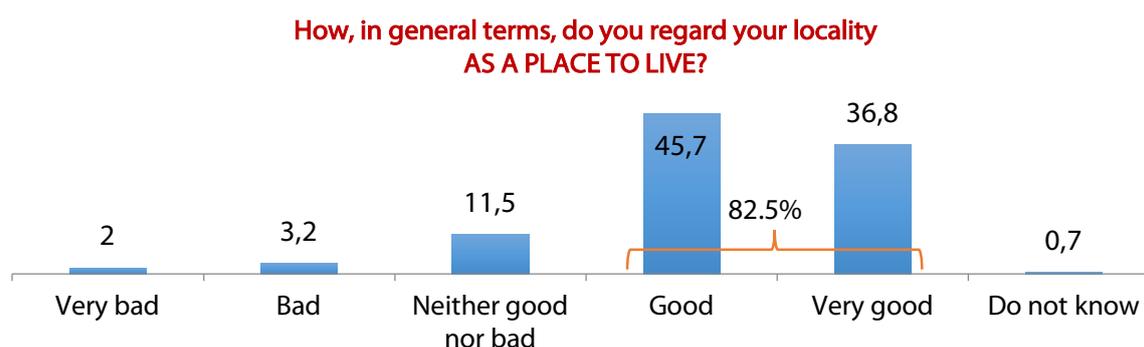
As regards public services which were assessed for quality in the National Survey, by far the best ratings were given to 'waste collection from home' – 84.3% of the respondents in total selected a positive answer in this case ('very good': 27.8% and 'good': 55.6%).

Positive ratings were also given to aspects such as 'public order' (53.9% of positive ratings in total) and 'cleanliness of public places' (52.8% of positive ratings in total). Fairly polarised opinions were revealed in the case of 'the quality, maintenance and condition of public roads and pavements' – a total of 33% of the respondents rated this aspect negatively, 36.6% assessed it positively and 30.5% did not express a firm opinion on the matter.

Many respondents were unable to give an opinion on services targeted at specific groups, such as "the interest shown by Local Councils in the needs of senior citizens", "the needs of young residents", or "availability of recreational or cultural activities in the locality". In those cases, considerable percentages of the respondents selected the answer option 'don't know', indicating their lack of knowledge and experience in those spheres of public services (e.g. 54.7% of the respondents were unable to give a rating for the Local Councils' interest in the needs of young people, and 50.5% did not know how to assess the Local Councils' interest in the needs of senior citizens). However, we should stress that the majority of those respondents who did express a view gave a positive assessment of those aspects.

Figure 2: NATIONAL SURVEY – assessment of the quality of selected public services

■ Negative ■ Positive

- waste collection from home
  - Negative: 5,9
  - Positive: 84,3
- the interest shown by the local council in the needs of SENIOR residents
  - Negative: 9,8
  - Positive: 72,1
- availability of recreational or cultural activities in the locality
  - Negative: 12,6
  - Positive: 67,7
- the interest shown by the local council in the needs of YOUTH residents
  - Negative: 17,7
  - Positive: 65,6
- public order
  - Negative: 13,5
  - Positive: 60,9
- the cleanliness of public places
  - Negative: 17,8
  - Positive: 53,5
- the quality, maintenance and condition of public roads and pavements
  - Negative: 33,1
  - Positive: 36,8

% of respondents

The respondents were also asked about their view on changes in the quality of public services over the last three years. According to survey results, merely 10.2% of the population said that the quality of those services had generally deteriorated. The strongest impact on those opinions was exerted by negative ratings for 'the maintenance and condition of public roads and pavements' whereas positive opinions on 'waste collection from home' mitigated the negative picture.

Figure 3: NATIONAL SURVEY - perception of the quality of public services

Assessment of change in the quality of public services over last three years

Improved	Remained the same	Worsened	Do not know
36,4	40,5	10,2	12,9

% of respondents

■ Improved ■ Remained the same
■ Worsened ■ Do not know
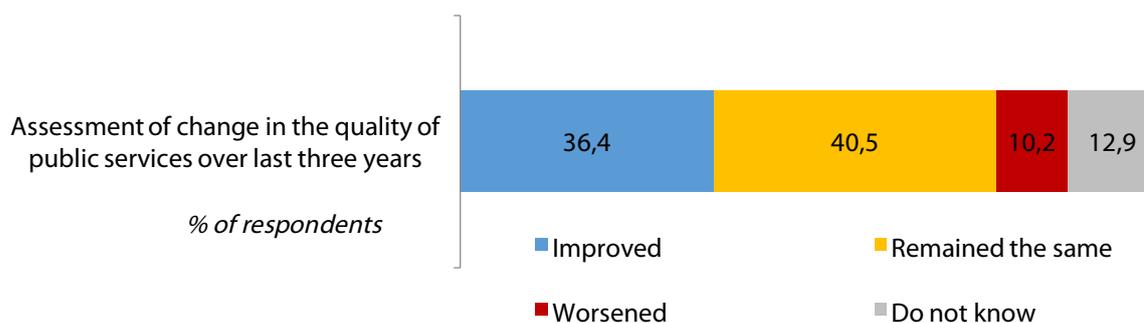
The overall assessment of changes in the quality of public services in the National Survey is congruent with the ratings given by councillors. Executive secretaries and municipal officials expressed just slightly more critical opinions on the matter.

Figure 4: LC SURVEY – assessment of change in the quality of public services[26]

In your opinion, in the last three years, the overall quality of public services in the territory of the Local Council has:

	increased	remained the same	worsened	hard to say	n.a.
ELECTED	32	43	12	8	6
EMPLOYED	38	48	3	6	4

% of respondents in selected categories
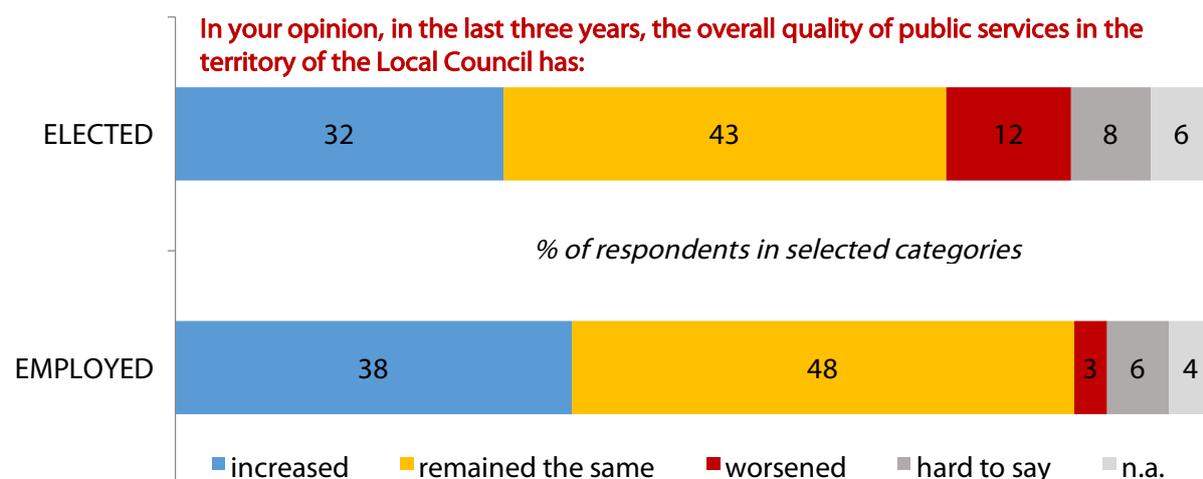
At the same time, it is worth noting that the majority of local administrators believe that the overall quality of life in many localities in Malta has improved in the course of recent years (with councillors being somewhat more critical in their views).

Figure 5: LC SURVEY – assessment of change in the quality of life in recent years

In the last three years, the overall quality of life of the people living in the territory of the Local Council has:

	increased	remained the same	worsened	hard to say	n.a.
ELECTED	28	50	10	10	
EMPLOYED	27	51	5	13	

% of respondents in selected categories
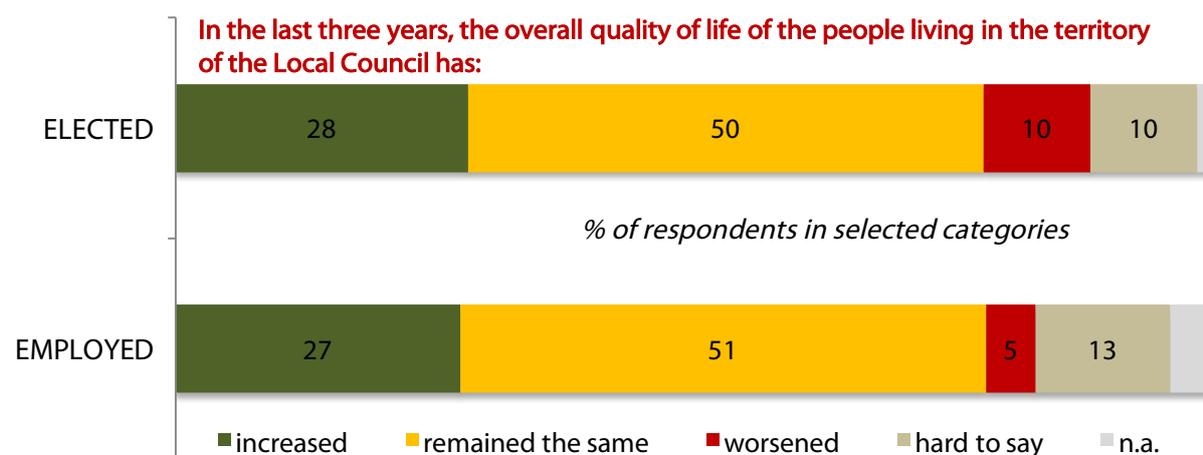
5. Perception of the role and responsibilities of local councils

Currently, when talking about the most important responsibilities of Local Councils, one should mention the care of cleanliness and maintenance of public places (street cleaning, collection of municipal waste, maintenance of parks), conservation of municipal greenery and maintenance of selected elements of the local infrastructure, notably roads.

> '*In general, the biggest management that we do is the cleaning of the city. It takes most of our budget – I would imagine, some 60% of our budget, which is quite a lot, and the thing*

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[26] ELECTED – Mayors, Vice-Mayors, Councilors; EMPLOYED – Executive Secretaries and staff members

> *is that contracts keep on going up but our allocation stays the same or sometimes goes down as well. So we can't manage with the funds we are given.'* – Mayor (IDI)

Another field where the local administration is involved is the issuance of various permits, e.g. for construction or organisation of various events in public places. In the latter case many steps are needed to co-ordinate efforts with the services responsible for public order or to co-ordinate the organisation between various entities in case of overlapping events.

> *'It doesn't mean that everything falls under our responsibility, even though it should.'* – Mayor (IDI)

Worth noting is that Local Councils only act as an intermediary in the issuance of certain permits, such as those for construction works.

> *'For example, you have things like MEPA, the permit granting body, authority, which we don't have any influence on. They don't even ask for our advice.'* – Mayor

Local Councils may issue various types of orders to regulate important local issues. One example are orders concerning the rules of maintenance and upkeep of facades of buildings, the rules of using horse-driven vehicles in public roads, the terms of using local recreation grounds etc. As in many other cases, an important problem with such orders is that Local Councils do not enjoy complete autonomy in implementation of such instruments. In fact, Local Councils develop proposals for such regulations which are then reviewed and approved by central administration bodies, mostly by the Territorial Government Department.

> *'We send them to the Department of Local Government, and then they have their own procedure – they check with other ministries, and staff.'* – Mayor (IDI)

Local authorities in Malta have not been granted the local ownership of property (except for some administration buildings) in a systemic manner. If a need arises to obtain some real property for public purposes (e.g. to build a parking garage, a cultural centre or for other undertakings) representatives of Local Councils must, each time, apply to the central government asking for the transfer of relevant rights. If such an application is granted, a temporary right of usage is given.

> *'We have to first get the land from central government and then we can build.'* – Mayor (IDI)

> *'We own one property (…). No land (…). [If you want to build something] you have to get that land devolved to you from the central government, and the central government gives it to you for 15 years, renewable for another 15 years. It is a standard procedure. Land in Malta is always maintained by the Land Department.'* – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Another important area of activity for local administration is the organisation of cultural events and support for community initiatives. The range of such activities is rather broad: from the support of local clubs and societies to the organisation of major celebrations of local holidays or local celebrations of national events. Some respondents perceived this kind of activity as the raison d'être of Local Councils.

> *'For me cultural events are important for the community like any other infrastructure. Because you bring community more closer. It is an imperative that the Local Councils work on these issues – because sometimes I feel that, in our case, there is no sense of belonging.'*
> – Executive Secretary (FGI)

It is difficult to confirm to what extent this opinion may reflect the problem of disappearing local social identity (an important issue for Malta) or deteriorated social trust – quantitative research has not revealed any particular issues with regard to the development of social capital or the status of relations between members of local communities.

Figure 6: NATIONAL SURVEY – level of social trust

Do you trust other people living in the same locality?

% of respondents
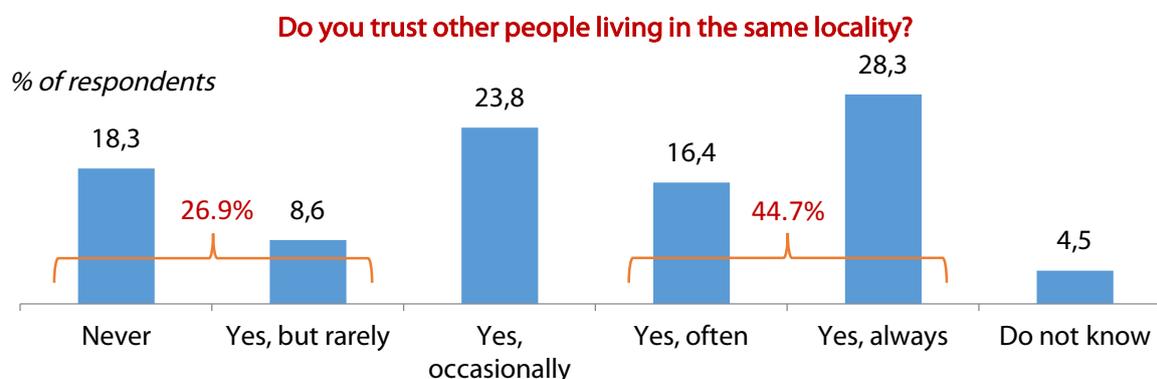
One should also stress that collaboration between the local administration and non-governmental organisations is mostly informal and often depends on personal relations between local council members and community leaders.

> '*We try to help as much as we can, obviously given our limitations (…). If they have an activity we try to support them, even with just small things – for example, if they want to make use of the garden we don't charge them with rent, just to cover our expenses and that's all.*' - Mayor

International collaboration is another field of activity for representatives of local administration, and it is particularly important given the importance of Malta for history and tourism.

> '*And then I have other duties – like international cooperation (…) I say that I have three areas where I work – the local, the national mostly with the central government and obviously at the European level.*' - Mayor (IDI)

Perception of Local Councils by citizens

In the light of answers given by the National Survey respondents it seems that most Maltese citizens feel they are familiar with the scope of responsibilities vested in the Local Councils: only 9.2% of the respondents decided to select an answer indicating their lack of awareness when it comes to responsibilities of local government.

Figure 7: NATIONAL SURVEY – declared awareness of competences held by Local Councils

Are you aware of the responsibilities of your Local Council – do you know what your Local Council does on everyday basis?

% of respondents

Yes, very aware	Yes, aware	Not aware
9,2	61,1	29,8
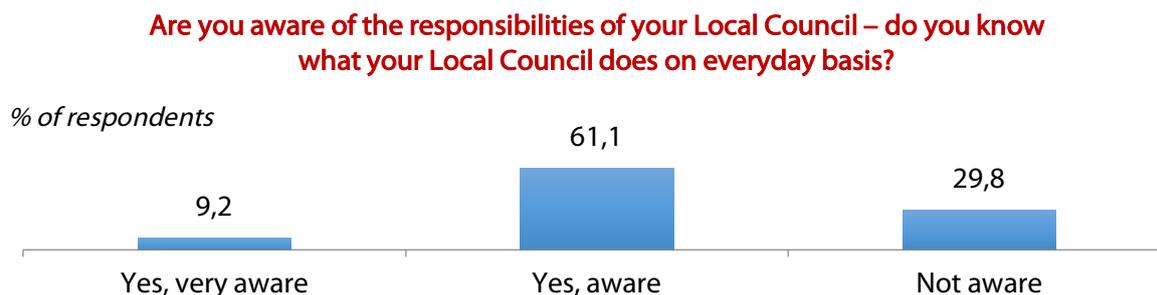
At the same time, a small minority of the respondents believed that Local Councils should have less responsibilities than they currently have (merely 2.9%) or, at most, the same extent of competences as they have now (19.2%). The vast majority of the respondents think that the competences of Local Councils should be expanded, with 8.4% of the respondents opting for a radical expansion and 33.8% for a moderate move in this direction.

Figure 8: NATIONAL SURVEY – respondents' attitudes towards the idea to expand the competences of Local Councils

Do you think that the LC should have more or less responsibilities?

% of respondents

Yes, they should have much more	Yes, they should have more	No, they should have the same responsibilities	No, they should have less	No, they should have much less	Do not know
8,4	33,8	19,2	2,9	,3	5,8
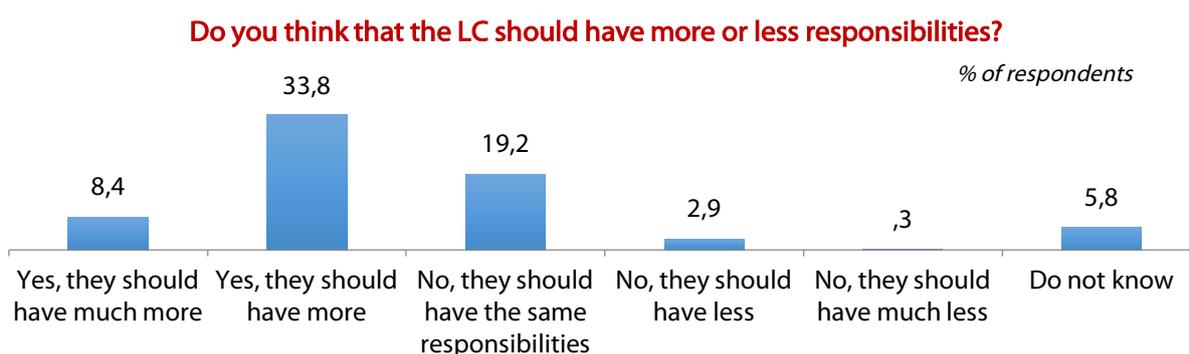
Worth noting is that the support for the expansion of local government's competences is slightly higher among the respondents who believe that the overall quality of public services has deteriorated in recent years. This could be viewed as indicating some citizens' awareness of the fact that local governments have a fairly restricted scope of responsibilities in the Maltese system. The results of qualitative research indicate, however, that such a conclusion should be approached with caution. According to some representatives of local governments, citizens often demonstrate their lack of awareness as to the framework which restricts the operations of local governments.

> '*Citizens are aware [of the competences of LC] because they demand. However, they are not aware about the costs. They are not aware of what funding we have and what the costs are. (…) The demands are greater that what we can supply*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Citizens' overall assessment of the performance of Local Councils is positive: 44.8% of the National Survey respondents confirmed their satisfaction with the performance of the councils whereas 21.1% of the respondents held the opposite view.

Figure 9: NATIONAL SURVEY – assessment of the performance of Local Councils

To what extent are you satisfied with the performance of your Local Council?

% of respondents

12,3	32,5	27,4	10,9	10,2	6,7
Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Do not know
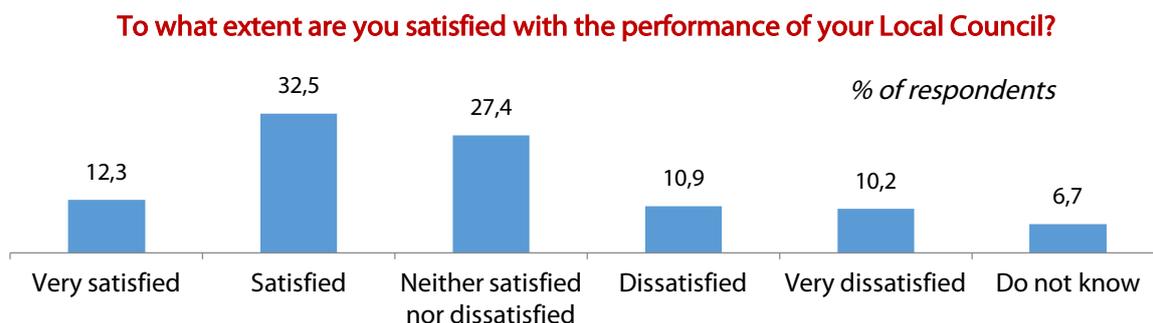
The broad support for the activities of Local Councils, as revealed in the National Survey, is not always backed up with real-life experience of contacts with this level of public administration. Only less than a half of all citizens had any personal encounters with representatives of local government in the past year. This is presumably why slightly more than a third of the respondents were unable to provide an opinion on the work of local government officials (incl. the executive secretary) and their attitude towards residents who arrange various matters at the local government office.

Figure 10: NATIONAL SURVEY – assessment of the performance of local council office staff

In general terms, how do you assess the WORK of the executive secretaries and clerks employed at the Local Council Office?

% of respondents

2,2	1,8	10,6	36,8	11,5	37,1
Very bad	Bad	Neither good nor bad	Good	Very good	Do not know
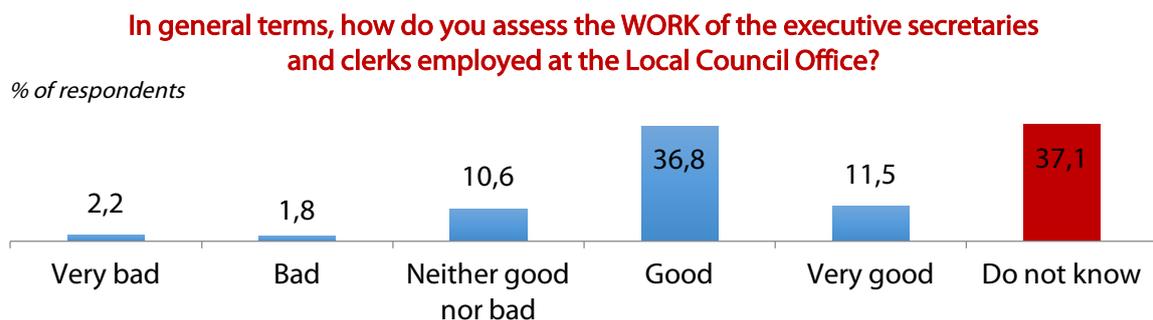
The respondents who provided an assessment of local administration staff tended to express positive opinions about the work performed and about their attitudes towards residents who visit the local council office to arrange something.

The survey conducted among representatives of local administration also contained a question about citizens' satisfaction with the performance of Local Councils: people working for the local government were asked how they thought the performance of councils was viewed by citizens. The findings reveal a relatively high self-assessment among representatives of Local Councils.

Figure 11: Comparison of assessments given for the performance of Local Councils

Satisfaction with the performance of the LC's by types of respondents
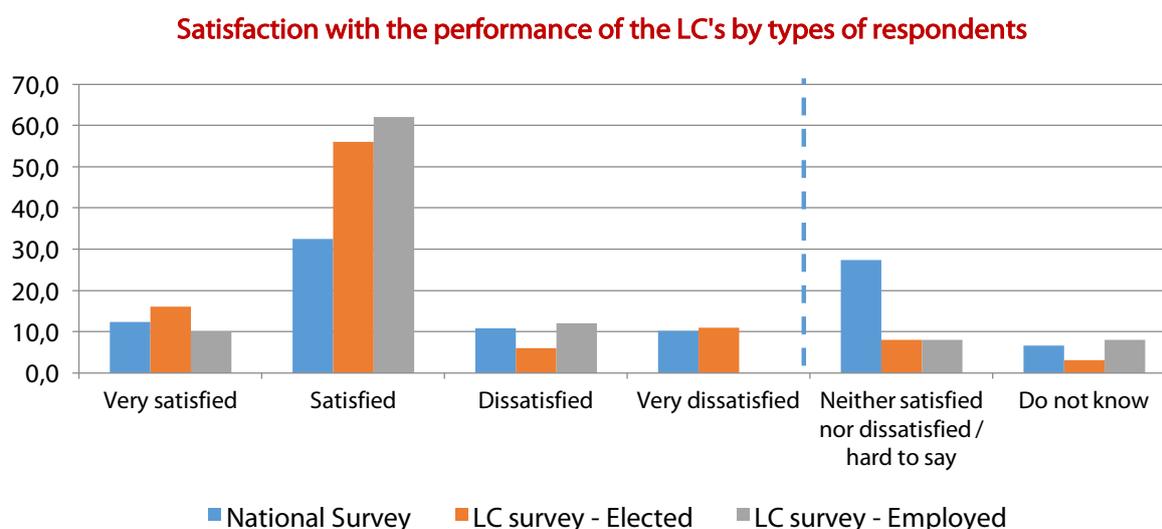
Somewhat in opposition to declarations made in surveys, the respondents in qualitative interviews were often more negative when talking about the public perception of local government: it was indicated that there is a visible lack of bottom-up support for decentralisation and the respondents also believed that the activities undertaken by local government are not recognised or respected by citizens. It was claimed that this state of affairs resulted, at least partly, from citizens' negative experience with the oppressive actions of the local law enforcement system.

> 'The problem is how people perceive Local Councils out there. I believe that parties in government don't want the electorate to see them funding a lot the local government sector. Because people perceive Local Councils as inefficient. (…) I believe basically because we used to be responsible for the local enforcement system, and the way that our Maltese culture is, and because the way the wardens took care of that system, councils were labelled heavily negatively, and then people used to see everything wrong.' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

The principle of subsidiarity in the Maltese system

The subsidiarity principle is among the most important European canons setting the standards of operation for territorial government. According to that principle, each level of government should execute only those tasks which cannot be effectively executed by a lower level. Moreover, according to that principle, institutions should be established and should act only when necessary, i.e. when they help to take actions and solve problems that an individual cannot handle. This principle derives from the Old Testament and is commonly adopted, for instance, across the EU member states. In keeping with the spirit of subsidiarity, Local Councils in the Maltese system should handle all matters which go beyond the capability of an individual, regions should undertake actions which go beyond the capability of a single local council, whereas central authorities should solve problems which cannot be solved at the regional level.

Meanwhile, research results clearly indicate that one cannot really talk about the principle of subsidiarity being operational in Malta. This situation is caused, firstly, by the limited scope of tasks

performed by Local Councils, and, secondly, by the low degree of autonomy in decision-making among the lowest-level administration bodies, even within their actual competences.

'*You can come up with any idea you want but usually it is not within your competence to decide, to take a final decision. You have to go through all the departments (…) And even if Transport Malta wants to implement something in your locality they won't tell you a thing.'*
– Executive Secretary (FGI)

'*Most of the things we do, we have to depend on other entities.'* – Mayor (IDI)

'*People blame us on the issue of parking but we have no influence (…) But the most frustrating thing is that we have solutions that we have given to government but nothing happens.'* – Mayor (IDI)

Even though Local Councils have existed for twenty years, no actual decentralisation of government happened and local government bodies have not been vested with broad responsibilities for public services or local development. Comments made by participants of qualitative interviews indicate that public governance remains largely in the hands of national politicians and officials working in central government agencies. On the one hand, the respondents tried to provide arguments to justify this state of affairs (referring to 'limited' experience in building the local government system) but, on the other, they demonstrated impatience about this situation, based on their own experience and on citizens' opinions on the work of Local Councils.

'*I think Local Councils in Malta, in general, are quite young. So I think that all governments sort of kept back from devolving responsibilities to local governments, they kept back a lot of their powers, and they didn't devolve enough to local governments.'* – Mayor (IDI)

'*The Local Councils gets the blame [by citizens]. And actually the blame now is: 'listen – the Local Councils have been there for 20 years. We do not expect you to just take care for sweeping. Those are basics. Are you just good for basics? They are demanding that the issues are tackled, where we do not have competence.'* – Executive Secretary (IDI)

During the interviews, the respondents unanimously stressed that many tasks related to everyday problems and strategic development of local communities do not fall within the sphere of Local Councils' responsibilities. This relates to a number of issues, from technical ones, such as road signs, to matters which significantly impact the quality of local life, such as plans to develop public services (e.g. in connection with new private investments) or general strategic planning of local development.

'*The fact is that it is not within our competences as a local council. We have MEPA, we have Transport Malta… You know what? We are not even allowed to paint a road sign unless we have a specific permit from Transport Malta. Not even basic things. It is very centralized. Obviously you send your comments, your objectives, but it is beyond your control.'* – Executive Secretary (FGI)

As a result of those constraints, Local Councils do not have systemic motivation to support local economic growth. In fact, any investments carried out in their area of responsibility may potentially become a source of problems rather than benefits.

'*Imagine that somebody gets the permit from MEPA and builds in a valley, in a water catchment area. After they build they insist that you fix the road, do the alterations, because that is a problematic area.'* – Executive Secretary (FGI)

A telling example of the apparent autonomy of the Maltese local government is the way some public services are financed, for instance waste management issues. Local Councils incur cyclical monthly fees for services rendered by the state-owned company WasteServ, which is responsible for 'organising, managing and operating integrated systems for waste management' in Malta and has a monopoly in this sphere. The fees are paid in a pre-defined, flat amount. The idea of this circular money transfer system (from the central budget via local budgets to the pockets of a state-owned enterprise) may arouse doubts as to whether this bureaucratic system is really efficient. It is difficult to understand the logic behind this money transfer system and it was presumably introduced in the name of some obscure idea to empower the local administration.

> '*I just write a check of the same amount every month for them to accept our waste (…) we have to pay, that's it. (…) And every local council does that (…).There was a system which, as usually happens here, was stopped, where if you collect more recycled waste, the bill will start to be reduced, as an incentive for the Local Councils to take on an initiative to collect more recycled waste rather than to collect mixed waste – which is positive from an environmental point of view. After five months they stopped that, and they just send the same bill every month (…) It would make sense us [the Local Council] paying if the system is still in place.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

As a result, it seems understandable that many respondents voiced doubts and often struggled when asked to define the role of Local Councils in the Maltese system of public administration. When asked about the overall purpose of having Local Councils, the respondents usually talked about '*basic maintenance*' or '*taking care of basic needs.*'

Opinions about the future of the local government in Malta

In the light of numerous comments made by the research participants, the future of local administration in Malta is by no means obvious. Many respondents questioned the sense of Local Councils within the current legal framework.

> '*To be honest, I am questioning it recently [the purpose of existence of Local Councils in Malta]. I do not want to be misinterpreted but it's not worth it really, when you think that you would like to do so much but it's always that either you're hitting a brick wall or your hands are tied. And the thing is that when you go to central government or other departments, they just don't want to change. That's frustrating. (…) I want to be responsible but I don't have the powers to be.*' – Mayor (IDI)

> '*The future of Local Councils – it's not looking nice at the moment. Because when you consider - 60% is off for the cleaning, 50 to 60 percent of what remains is the administration, and what's left? Nothing! I cannot even do a resurfacing of the road here because I don't have the money.*' – Mayor (IDI)

The reasons behind this state of affairs should be sought, as indicated by the respondents' statements, in at least a few sources. The most important ones of them are as follows:

- Overall politicisation of public life:

> '*Unfortunately, everything evolves around parties and politics, that is a problem.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

- No trust in local institutions among central-level politicians and lack of political will to carry out changes:

  '*I think that the biggest problem is trust, to be honest.*' – Mayor (IDI)

  This is highly surprising given that the vast majority of Members of Parliament have previous experience of working in local government. The respondents were unable to provide a consistent explanation why their way of looking at the needs and constraints of the local government changed so much after the transition from local to national politics.

- Attitudes displayed by officials in central agencies: non-cooperative attitude, willingness to act as a supervisory body towards the local government.

  In the light of beliefs expressed by the participants we should make a clear distinction between the political perspective and the ministerial/departmental perspective represented by staff of central governments. Many respondents emphasised that the willingness to retain ministerial governance is the main reason behind the limited degree of decentralisation in Malta.

  '*I think that we can do much more and most of the time my biggest frustration is that I would like to do much more but I can't. (…) We would like more empowering but we are held back by central government.*' – Mayor (IDI)

- No sense of common interests at the local level among various public stakeholders.

In the light of information collected during the interviews, this list should probably be expanded: we should add administrative fragmentation leading to economic fragility of various administrative units and a particular kind of dualism of power at the local level (the distribution of competences between the administration and representative bodies is not entirely clear for everyone), an issue which will be addressed later on in this report.

Considering the aforementioned comments, a question may arise about the sense of activities undertaken by Local Councils: in fact, their tasks do not require extensive administration or numerous representative bodies.

  '*There is no really enough funds to do something extra, which the community expects. Because, let's face it, in the end they don't vote for someone to take care of basic things. I could do that without councillors.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

  '*Before, the citizens used to go to the ministries and departments of the government. Nowadays, they [the central authorities] are having their relaxing time and all the problems go to the Local Councils. (…) And one fine day when the Ministry wants to do new lighting, whether the council approves it or not, the lights will still be done.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

  '*It is a cultural thing – before Local Councils the main point of reference was the minister, they go to the minister for the telephone, for the television, for a pothole… And then when the Local Councils were created people were told to go to Local Councils.*' – Mayor (IDI)

Such statements indicate a deeply anchored belief which can be reformulated as follows: the main reason why local government exists in Malta is that central agencies strive to limit their bothersome encounters with citizens and to devolve the intermediary duties in such contacts upon territorial administration.

'Most of the time we have to receive people to solve problems that are not under our control. (…) The man in the street would hold us responsible because they report to us. So we are responsible for these things while in reality it is other entities that hold these responsibilities, but sort of we are a front desk of the government in most cases. So I think that causes a lot of problems for us, because people expect a lot of things from Local Councils, than they think that we didn't deliver, when in fact we are actually waiting for others.' – Mayor (IDI)

6. Leaders of local public administration and their mutual relations

What is immensely important for the efficient functioning of local councils are the relations between councillors and members of the local administration and, in particular, the relations between councillors and executive secretaries. As may be expected, the nature of those relations is influenced by various factors, from personality traits to political plans of specific councillors. However, an important precondition for constructive collaboration is the mutual awareness of powers and competences and the proper understanding of roles played by each individual in local government bodies.

'They are not really in touch with the demands of the locality and the budgetary framework, or how are we going financially, etc. So yes – I do expect that they consult me. But then the decision is theirs and I will abide by that decision, as long as it is lawful. And when you gaining that sort of respect things get moving on!' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Considering the limited experience of newly elected councillors, a need often arises in practice to build their competences with the help of secretaries. In the vast majority of cases this takes the form of advisory support or ongoing information provision and, less commonly, formalised teaching/learning or imposition of ready-made solutions.

'*Most of us [executive secretaries] have more experience that recently elected councillors. So yes – we should do that. Not teach them, but guide them, I would say. But leave the decision to them.'* – Executive Secretary (IDI)

The interviews generally indicate that secretaries and mayors take a fairly different perspective on their roles in structures of local government administration. The respondents' statements leave no doubt that in practice there is no clear and universally acceptable division of competences between the executive and legislative power at the local level. The relationships between secretaries and mayors are an important hotbed of potential problems in this respect. It is worth noting, however, that while the current systemic solutions and the subdivision of roles build certain security mechanism on the one hand (in the form of secretary's prerogatives) yet they also give rise to a serious threat of dualism of power. A particular problem arises in the situation when strong personalities clash:

'*If there is a clash of personalities, or the situation is such that he cannot accept that he has an executive secretary whose job is to administer, and his job is a political one, then it is a very difficult situation.'* – Executive Secretary (FGI)

It seems that the main issue is the proper and consensual definition of roles and tasks related to the two functions. The conflicts which emerge every now and then usually stem from differences in opinions about on the scope of tasks and responsibilities – we can venture to say that cases of

fighting for power at the local level are not uncommon. The reason lies in the lack of understanding between the key stakeholders with regard to actual superiority, decision-making powers and accountability. Such lack of understanding emerges as a result of recurring misunderstandings and conflicts around specific issues.

> '*They are partners which have to be really good in working with each other (…). If there is a good synergy, the Local Council works. If there is none, it doesn't really work well: decisions are not taken, decisions are postponed, and it's not efficient* (…). *There has to be trust, first of all.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

The belief about the superior role of mayors manifests itself in behaviours of some mayors who tend to directly manage the work of other officials. In the opinion of secretaries, such attitudes are inappropriate and stem from poor understanding of roles and legally circumscribed competences of mayors and executive secretaries. Some mayors tend to assume superiority and full liability for local affairs (of course, within competences vested in the Local Councils under the system). This is reflected in the frequently expressed belief that mayors should have freedom in decision-making when hiring and dismissing executive secretaries.

> '*I think that when a mayor is elected I think he should choose his executive secretary (…). I was lucky because our relationships* [with the executive secretary] *are good. But I know a lot of councils where the relationships are not good. That's why I think that the executive secretary should change if the mayor changes (…).*' – Mayor (IDI)

In some specific situations, the mayor has no other official duties and may spend all of his/her time to deal with local affairs. Such a situation was described in a few localities as proper and desirable. It seems that time constraints arising from mayors' normal employment outside the government administration (which means that they are less frequently present in the office) often give rise to conflicts and undermine the efficiency of public administration.

> '*A Mayor has to devote time to the Local Council. I am happy here because our Mayor is a pensioner, so till two o'clock he is here every day, he is like an employee. If you have a mayor who is working, like many other councils have, you won't get that level of efficiency (…) Here we are very efficient because the Mayor is always here, and if I have to take a decision, he is sitting there, I go there (…) I do not have to wait to meet him at the end of the week.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Framework for the activities of Councillors

A problem that was frequently stressed in interviews was the politicisation of local councils. Executive secretaries and officials often see councillors as politicians who pursue their own political goals and the goals of their parties. According to the majority of interviewed executive secretaries, the essential perspective of councillors is that of their political orientation, sometimes manifesting itself in the propensity to represent the interests of specific voter groups, while neglecting developmental challenges of the entire community or general systemic constraints.

> '*They are using it as a stepping stone for Parliament. That is a thing that we are doing wrong here in Malta. It shouldn't be a stepping stone.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

> '*The councillors, they are politicians, when the council organizes such an event, they become popular. After all, they are there for the votes (…). But then you have to deal with*

repercussions. We have received a grant of 1000 euros to organize an event which cost the council 7000 euros.' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Political orientations sometimes influence the operation of local councils: the internal disputes that sometimes arise depend on the current distribution of votes in representative bodies and on the personalities and political plans of individual councillors. There are some local councils where collaboration is smooth and a compromise can generally be reached whereas in some other councils heated debates are commonplace. An important role in the organisation of local councils' work is played by mayors, who may exert influence on councillors in order to mitigate disputes. In extreme cases, the political party would act as an important body of appeal.

'*It really depends on the individuals that are elected. I had cases in the past when some people had different agenda, and they more tried to damage your work than to help you out. But we've tried. (…). Obviously from your party it is more controllable, because you can always refer to the party, and then sole the internal issues. From the other party it's more difficult.*' – Mayor (IDI)

Another problem related to the work of local councils is that many councillors are insufficiently prepared to perform their functions within the legal prerogatives of local representative bodies. Based on comments from executive secretaries and municipal officials, many misunderstandings and conflicts are caused by the fact that elected councillors have very different ideas about their role in comparison with the actual scope of their rights and responsibilities laid out in the law.

'*During the meetings they talk about anything but the agenda (…) Sometimes they are like a class of students.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

'*The only thing that is important to them is to have their name on the minutes. This is important – like 'write it down that I have said it!' - so the residents would know that I've said it.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

According to estimates given by executive secretaries during the interviews, approx. 60% of councillors hold the office for the first time in their life. Many respondents think that those people are usually unprepared to perform their mandate and, as a rule, perceive their role in political terms, i.e. taking care of interests of narrowly defined constituencies. This creates a serious obstacle for the work of secretaries, who are responsible, among others, for the legality of actions undertaken by local councils.

'*Inexperience of councillors in matters regarding local council's work. Most councillors are voted into a local council with no experience in management. And I personally believe that they should have it because they do manage the budget through their decisions.*' – Executive Secretary

'*Ideologically speaking, they are the representatives of the people, so they should have knowledge on the demands of the people. (…) However, most of them are not really active. I saw that everywhere. Most of them are active the year following the elections, and maybe sometimes before the next elections (…). But most of them just pass on the complaints they receive from residents via e-mail.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Another source of problems associated with the role of councillors in local structures is the fact that they are vested with decision-making competences in matters they have no knowledge of. This relates mostly to the operation of local administrative structures. For instance, it is the councillors

who decide about the annual bonuses for municipal staff and they often neglect the recommendations proposed by secretaries and have no sufficient information on the subject-matter of their decisions.

> '*Most of them don't have a clue about the actual work that goes on in here.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Worth adding is that councillors quite rarely show up in local council offices, and this has been established on multiple occasions. They have little knowledge of day-to-day operations of municipal staff and, in a sense, are unaware of the 'daily toil' of public administration.

Framework for the activities of Executive Secretaries

Under the current legal framework, executive secretaries are hired by the LG Department, which is part of the central government administration. In other words, the Department is the employer of executive secretaries. Executive secretaries are employed upon a decision made by a director of the Department and it is the director who receives critical comments, if any, regarding the performance of executive secretaries.

Comments made by the respondents indicate, however, that in this case one can hardly talk about any bonds between the employer and its employees. Worse still, executive secretaries feel they often do not receive the much needed support from the Department. Decisions made by the Department officials are often interpreted in terms of political interests and duties rather than in terms of their essence.

> '*Most probably, the decision of the Department always backs up the position of the Mayor and the councillors, not the executive secretary.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

However, this does not change the fact that executive secretaries demonstrate reluctance and considerable distance when talking about the times when they were employed by local councils.

> '*There was a time when the executive secretary was employed directly by the council. They hired and they fired (…) Nowadays we are employed directly from the Department, from the government and we report to the Department, not to the council as such. That is the best thing ever done when the law was amended.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Presumably, this formal systemic change of employer is the foundation of executive secretaries' belief that they are independent of political representatives. Furthermore, executive secretaries often emphasise the essential/technical rather than political profile of their position and draw attention to their competencies as a determinant of their actions (which is in contrast with politicians who, as mentioned earlier, are seen by executive secretaries as ones who are mainly guided by voters' preferences).

> '*Our position is called 'executive secretary'. Now, in Malta most people understand that if you are a secretary, you are the secretary to someone else. Most people think that we are the secretary to the Mayor. And it happens every day – 'can you ask your secretary to do this, can you ask your secretary to do that' (…) In my case also the mayor thinks that! (…) All Mayors say: 'my secretary, my secretary'.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Worth noting is that the comments made by the interviewed executive secretaries indicate the existence of discordant interests between local administration staff (officials and executive

secretaries) and local political authorities (councillors, including mayors). While the former stress the need to keep a legalist approach in performing the tasks and the need to maintain budgetary discipline, and they also appreciate the importance of investing in quality human resources, politicians seem to prefer actions which may have a political impact, i.e. will win them positive attitudes among the electorate. In some localities, such publicly popular activities will boil down to investments in infrastructure whereas in others they will involve spending money on community activities.

> '*That is the mentality of our politicians, unfortunately. They prefer to invest in capital projects, doing resurfacing works instead of investing in human resources.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

> '*In my locality, in my case, activities are more important than doing capital jobs – for example helping clubs, Mothers' Day, organizing motocross.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Based on statements made by executive secretaries, the regulation introduced some time ago which defines their status as those who hold 'positions of trust' is very problematic for their function.

> '*It means that if a new Mayor will be elected and would say – 'look I have no trust in the executive secretary' you would be no longer an executive secretary, or else the director of the Local Government Department can take you to the Local Government Department.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

The executive secretaries who participated in the interviews repeatedly stressed the need for direct, personal supervision of day-to-day administrative work in local councils while solving any problems that may arise.

> '*Basically, the biggest problem I see is that our work as an executive secretary is devoted to crisis management mostly.*' – Executive Secretary

It follows from executive secretaries' statements that they carry an excessive burden of responsibilities. This does not seem to indicate that their formal responsibilities are particularly vast but that they are concentrated within one position. In the case of Local Councils one can talk about an insufficiency of human resources and a distribution of responsibilities which is not entirely clear. With very limited clerical staff and the political formatting of the position of the mayor one should talk about the concentration of responsibilities and tasks within the position of the executive secretary.

> '*Our job is everything under the sun. The work in the local council hinges mainly on the executive secretary and the mayor. And you have to deal with everything: starting from refuse collection, legal matters up to EU legislation, which is quite a difficult job.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Executive secretaries unanimously admitted that their job was highly absorbing and demanding. Considering the tasks they perform, it is unrealistic for them to reduce their involvement in terms of time spent, for instance by limiting their work to office hours only.

> '*For me, it is a 24-hour job. I go home, and with the laptop on my lap, just sitting by my wife in order to show that I am at home, doing homework – doing all the e-mails. I receive on average let's say 70, 80 emails every day – they are about everything: complaints from citizens, but also e-mails from the department. Last week it happened twice – you receive*

an e-mail at 4:30, which is after office hours – not for me but it is – and you have to give a reply by 10 am next morning.' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Relations in local offices

The relations in local offices are usually rated as good or very good. In the vast majority of cases, this refers to the relations between all actors who are active in the offices on a daily basis. Generally speaking, relations between secretaries and officials are rated as good (when describing his attitude towards municipal staff, one secretary even said: '*sometimes I treat them like my kids*'), and the same applies to relations between executive secretaries and mayors, and between the latter and municipal officials.

The usually good relations in local administration offices seem to result from the pragmatic approach adopted by most stakeholders in the performance of their work duties. With such an approach, politics is pushed to the background whereas effective completion of tasks and responsibilities takes a priority.

Figure 12: LC SURVEY – assessment of relations in the local office

How would you describe social relations that prevail in the Local Council's office? Are they:

ELECTED	35	29	29	4
EMPLOYED	33	31	27	4 3

■ full of trust and supportive (2) ■ 1 ■ fair ■ -1 ■ full of distrust and frustrating (-2) ▫ no answer
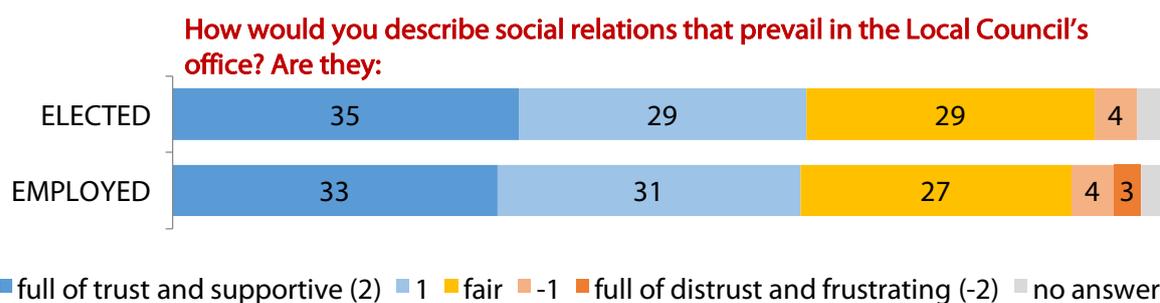
How the question was formulated?

20. How would you describe social relations that prevail in the Local Council's office? Are they:

	-2	-1	fair	1	2	
full of distrust and frustrating	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒	full of trust and supportive

7. Management of the administration of local councils

Representatives of local government believe that the following spheres are particularly likely to give rise to problems in day-to-day management of local affairs: law enforcement, roads infrastructure, the cleanliness of streets and public places and waste management.

Figure 13: LC SURVEY – difficulties in local governance

The Local Council is delivering different services to citizens. Please name up to three areas that are, in your personal opinion, particularly difficult to manage:
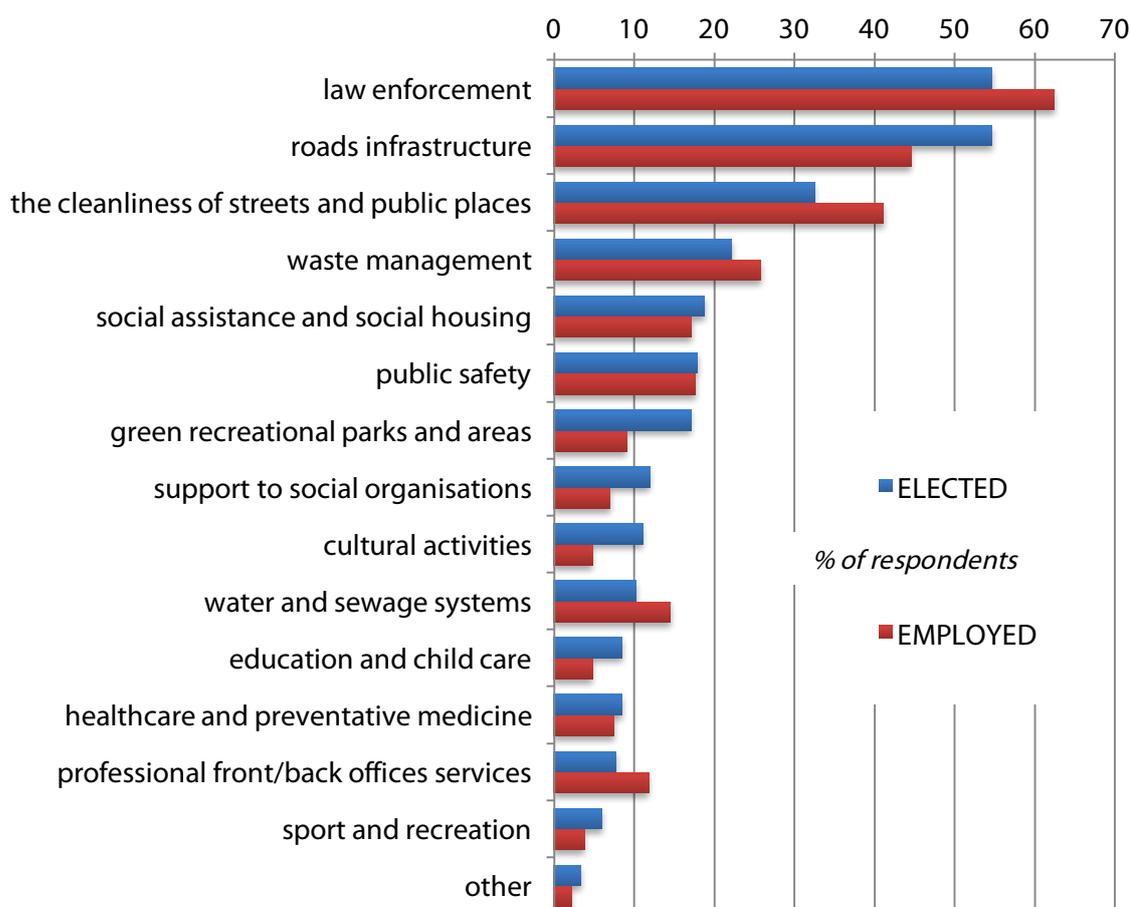
In qualitative interviews, the respondents also indicated other problem areas for the execution of local administration tasks. Some of them are discussed later in this report. At this point, it is worth noting that the respondents often talked about problems with road traffic and insufficiency of parking spaces as factors which have a significant negative impact on the quality of life in urban areas.

> '*If you ask me what is the biggest problem in my locality I have to say that the biggest problem is traffic and parking.*' – Mayor (IDI)

The greatest problem in effective and efficient delivery of public services lies in the aforementioned limited autonomy of local governments as well as in other issues (which will be discussed below), namely: underfunding (inadequate financing for the tasks vested in local administration) and understaffing. Apart from those three areas, the respondents generally did not

mention any other common and particularly acute problems related to the direct execution of tasks by local councils.

Another issue that was often mentioned in interviews concerned the limitations and difficulties arising from inefficient performance of tasks by central government agencies. Notably, those tasks could be potentially fulfilled by local institutions (in keeping with the aforementioned subsidiarity principle). For instance, attention was drawn to issues related to public transport which, at some point, was taken away from the set of local governments' responsibilities.

> '*Problem is – public transport [which is not our responsibility]. They do coordinate with us but on petty matters (…) initially it was the responsibility (…) but then it was stopped by the central government because it gave the monopoly to Arriva for public transport services.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Another area of activity where the role of local councils is limited is the management of lighting in streets and other public places. The distribution of responsibilities in this field is quite hard to comprehend: lamp posts attached to walls of buildings are managed by the local administration whereas stand-alone lamp posts in the streets are the responsibility of EneMalta, a state-owned company.

> '*And that's where another problem is created. Because they do not respond immediately to faults, however we do that in four days. Then people start perceiving things wrongly. We tell them – 'listen, that is the responsibility of EneMalta.' – 'No! You did the other one because you wanted to make a favour to that person who lives over there.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Worth noting is that regardless of the problems that were mentioned, the vast majority of the interviewed municipal staff and elected representatives nevertheless gave a positive assessment of the performance of local councils. Slightly higher scores for self-assessment were recorded in the case of municipal officials and executive secretaries than among councillors.

Figure 14: LC SURVEY – assessment of the performance of local councils by their representatives

In general terms, how do you assess the overall PERFORMANCE of your LOCAL COUNCIL?
% of respondents

	very good	good	fair	poor	very poor	n.a.
MAYORS	37	43	17	3		
OTHERS ELECTED	29	32	25	9	3	1
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY	26	59	9	6		
STAFF	33	42	17	2		6
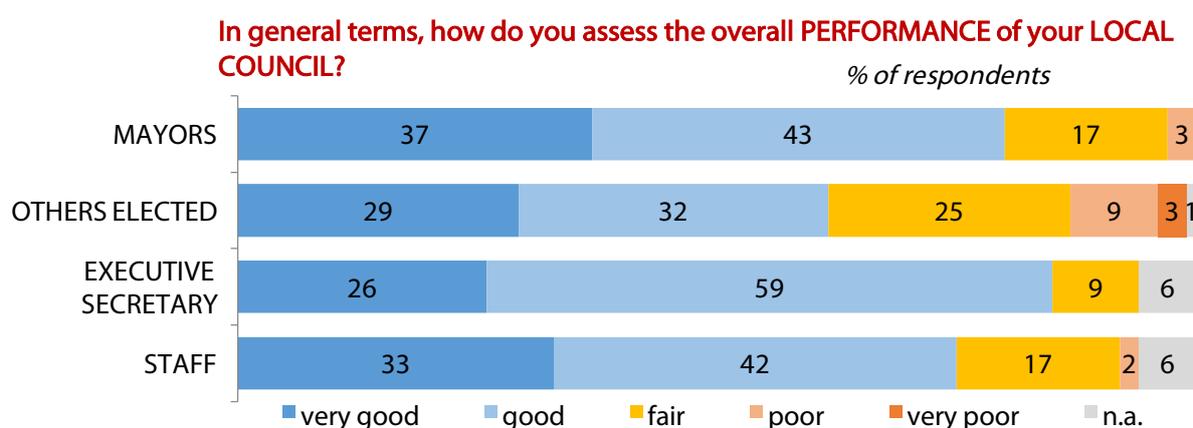
Moreover, the respondents were quite unanimous in giving positive ratings to municipal staff for their activity in spheres specified in the study. Only a handful of mayors and executive secretaries talked about problems in the following areas of responsibility of municipal staff: '**knowledge of job:** procedures, methods, responsibilities', '**teamwork:** quality and efficiency of work with colleagues',

'**volume of work** done compared with the job requirements', '**communication:** ability to communicate both verbally and in writing', '**quality of work:** accuracy and presentation of work' or '**dependability:** the degree to which staff members can be counted upon to do what is required.' Slightly more negative ratings were given for staff's motivation to engage in professional development and innovativeness in performing their duties.

Public services quality monitoring

Based on the interviews conducted for the study we can conclude that the local administration system lacks comprehensive, efficient, formalised mechanisms to monitor and improve the quality of services provided. In fact, one should assume that there are no mechanisms that would ensure comprehensive assessment of the quality of activities undertaken by local administration, except the surveillance of legality of undertakings, the annual financial audit and the fairly unsystematic and limited supervision by the Local Government Department.

> '*Legally speaking, there is the annual audit and then there is the performance audit. But the latter has been conducted only once in twenty years.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

For the sake of a balanced picture we should also point out that at least some local councils employ (on the outsourcing basis) contract managers responsible for overseeing certain commissioned tasks.

> '*It's a person who basically knows, I give him a number of environmentally related contracts – like garbage, sweeping, refuse collection, the gardens and the maintenance of public conveniences, most of the problems which residents and tourists alike… are of concern to them, that matters mostly. I give him specific conditions that the contractors abide by, and he has to monitor them – basically has to monitor that the contractor does the work.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Studies did not identify benchmarking practices that would help to assess the effectiveness of specific local governments in rendering their services. Likewise, there are no practices involving the exchange of experience or best practices among various local governments.

Another problem is the absence of effective, formalised auditing and motivating tools for personnel management. Performance monitoring and appraisal practices are, in real life, largely limited to the subjective assessment of municipal staff's work by the secretary.

> '*Performance monitoring is daily. If someone of them does something wrong, I get him in the office and explain to them how it should be done.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Theoretically, there is a mechanism with a potentially motivating effect, i.e. the performance bonus. However, as many respondents stressed in the study, its actual impact is questionable. In principle, the secretary presents his/her conclusions annually, on the basis of performance appraisal of municipal staff. Alongside, the secretary presents his/her recommendations in this regard for councillors to consider and act upon. Councillors are free in their decision-making regarding annual performance bonuses. Such bonuses may be granted in the amount of up to 6% of the employee's annual salary (with 3% being an automatic and mandatory bonus, and the other 3% being a discretionary component). However, councillors quite rarely follow the recommendations made by the executive secretary and often make their own decisions, unrelated to the actual results of performance appraisal.

'*When it comes to performance and the bonus, they do not even let you, at the council level, when you are at the meeting, they don't even ask you for your report, they don't want to hear about your report, and they just give everyone full bonus, no matter what you say. I have been insisting that at least we deduct, like they try to do in the Parliament, one euro from the bonus, just as a message – no way.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

'*As far as I know, almost everyone gets full marks in Malta, because of our closed culture.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

'*I would like to structure the bonus mechanism, because so far it is just the executive secretary who makes the proposal to the council, but I would like to tie it to the performance of the individual.*' – Mayor (IDI)

Despite such opinions, the declarations obtained in the study with regard to the efficiency of performance appraisal of municipal staff are not negative. More than a half of those interviewed believed that those procedures were relatively useful, with executive secretaries being more critical than others in this respect.

Figure 15: LC SURVEY – perceived usefulness of performance appraisal procedures applied to municipal staff

How do you evaluate the usefulness of the performance appraisal procedure in your Local Council as a diagnostic tool aimed at organisational improvement?

	very useful and supportive (2)	(1)	average (0)	(-1)	not useful and counterproductive (-2)	no answer
MAYORS	30	20	47			3
OTHERS ELECTED	29	23	38	2	5	3
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY	9	32	43	8	6	2
STAFF	30	29	31	2	2	5
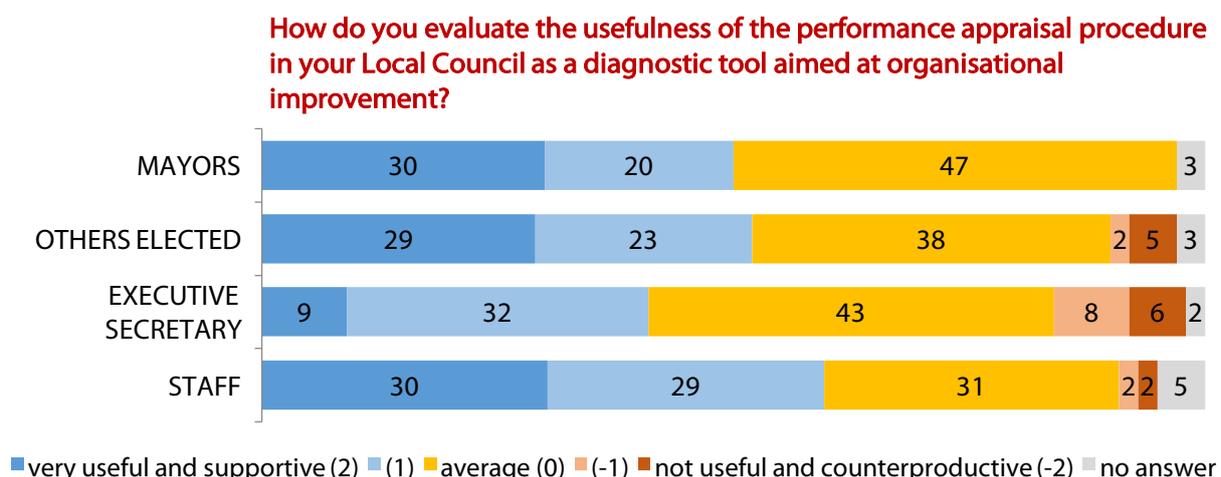
How the question was formulated?

14. There are performance appraisals conducted in all Local Councils on annual basis. How do you evaluate the usefulness of this procedure in your Local Council as a <u>diagnostic tool aimed at organizational improvement</u>? Do you think that it is:

not useful and counterproductive	-2 ☐	-1 ☐	fair ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	very useful and supportive

Regardless of the actual value of the performance bonus mechanism, the main factor which does influence the behaviour of staff is the authority of the mayor and the executive secretary: their personal charisma and commitment. It should also be stressed that the performance appraisal at this level is often non-binding. Consequently, problematic cases are not always followed up with reparatory actions or motivating measures.

Financial inadequacy versus the tasks vested in Local Councils

The key problem reported in unison by participants of qualitative interviews lies in the inadequate funding received by local councils vis-à-vis the tasks that have been vested in them. The respondents pointed out that the financing of local administration activities is set at an overly low level and it enables local administration bodies only to cover the necessary day-to-day expenses.

> '*Recurrent expenditures take almost 90%, as I've calculated lately – streets sweeping, garbage collection, gardens….*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

The amount of government financing transferred to cover the costs of tasks performed by local councils is defined on the basis of two indices: the territory covered and the population of the administrative unit concerned. As some respondents indicated, this solution is highly inefficient in Maltese circumstances: some territories have a small area and a limited, stable population size but they nevertheless attract heavy tourist traffic and/or business traffic. This entails major financial burdens which are not compensated in any way by the central budget. Moreover, the value of allocations from the central budget earmarked for some specific tasks (e.g. waste collection) is calculated on the basis of obsolete data whereas the fees incurred by local councils correspond with the status quo, i.e. the volumes of waste actually collected.

> '*The funding allocated for us to collect waste (…) let's just call it 'collection and transportation to the landfill', is calculated on the number of households registered in the locality. The allocation is still done on 1995 data – twenty years ago. A new city has been created from that day onwards.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Figure 16: LC SURVEY – perceived adequacy of financing for the activities performed by local councils

Do you think that your Local Council receives enough funds to deliver its services and other obligations? Is your Local Council, in your opinion:

	highly overfunded	somehow overfunded	medium	somehow underfunded	highly underfunded	no answer
MAYORS	3	7		30	60	
OTHERS ELECTED	1	5	18	29	45	2
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY	2	2	6	40	49	2
STAFF	5	5	17	30	37	6
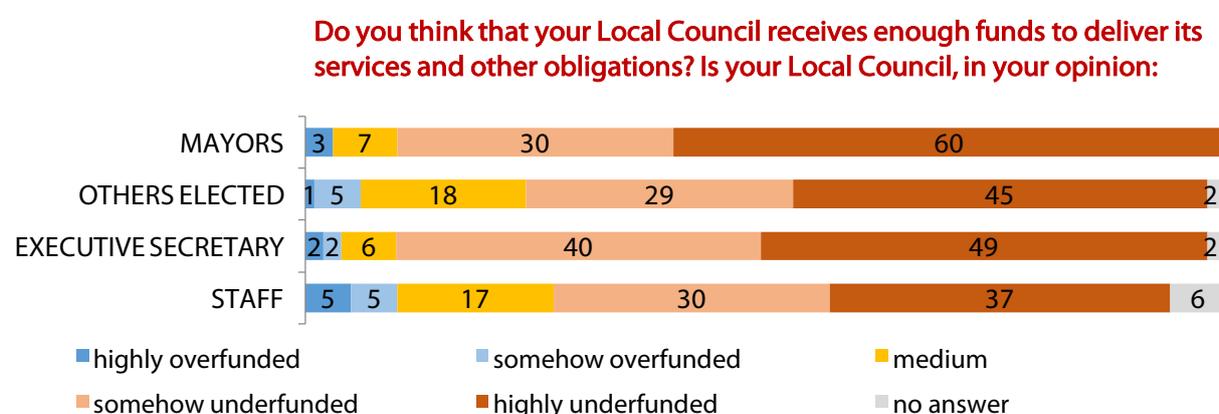
Another important problem in the financing of local councils is that portions of the budget are formally and strictly attached to specific categories. This creates a situation where, first of all, local authorities have no financial flexibility (specific sums must be spent on specific tasks) and, secondly, this constrains the local councils' decision-making powers and their ability to solve local problems.

> '*We manage [the financial resources] precisely, but the problem is that needed works are not done.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Based on information obtained in the course of interviews, the only technical opportunity to earmark funds for some specific local needs is to reduce administrative expenses. It should be

stressed, however, that flexibility in managing such funds is seriously restricted since local government must ensure efficient operation of its offices.

Local governments are required to prepare three-year financial plans. However, those plans consists merely in the calculation of financial inflows and outflows. In that sense, those plans are not tools that would help local governments to shape their multiannual financial policies. Another reason why such multiannual policies are hardly possible is that central funding is fairly unpredictable. The respondents stressed that inflows and outflows cannot always be effectively and fully predicted despite the fact that budget planning is required under the existing system.

> '*I do not know whether you are aware of the fact that when you have a council, a locality that is growing in population and they add two councillors, you know what happens? They deduct from all the councils that amount to increase the budget of that council. Because the central government allocation of funds remains the same.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Therefore, the budget of a local council may be reduced only because the population in another region of Malta has expanded, entailing an administrative increase of the budget of that region. It should be emphasised that such cases do happen, albeit not commonly, while the range of local expenditures remain unchanged.

The issue of co-financing of EU projects is an important problem that reflects the local councils' financial dependence on central administration.

> '*Even when it comes to EU projects – you have to co-finance sometimes. And if you have a big project, you have to co-finance. What if you don't get the co-financing from the government as well, which is another burden, which is not provided? (…) They are insisting that we apply for European projects, that is fine, but how can you make good for the co-financing?*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

European projects are implemented in many localities. In such cases, co-financing is provided from central subsidies. However, local councils have no autonomy in deciding about their participation in selected undertakings. Some respondents defined the role of local government in raising EU funds as that of an intermediary between responsible institutions and local NGOs. In that case, the local government plays an advisory role without directly using public funds at its disposal.

> '*We don't have the money. But it's once again to be an intermediary. So what I do I try to get various NGOs to tap the EU funding. Because for them sometimes it's hard to do the paperwork, and the administration, and whatever. So I try to bring them together and to get them to get the EU funding.*' – Mayor (IDI)

The vast majority of investment activities undertaken by local councils depend on central administration, in the financial sense and also often in terms of decision-making powers. While such an approach may be understandable with regard to infrastructure, it may raise eyebrows in the case of small-scale local activities focused on public benefit. Even though the respondents are used to this state of affairs, they nevertheless often expressed disapproval for the idea that they need to apply for a central subsidy if they want to organise a celebration of a local coverage and nature.

Telling examples of how the central government devolves tasks upon local administration without ensuring adequate funding can be seen, for instance, in the implementation of infrastructural

projects. Such projects, initiated by ministries or other trans-local institutions often generate costs which local budgets cannot handle.

> '*A huge amount of money was spent on infrastructural projects [in our locality], in the last, let's say, 10 years. Once the projects were completed, after a year, the projects were dumped to the local council. For instance: a garden which costs two hundred thousand euros to maintain, every year. And the local council didn't receive one cent from central government to take care of it. And we are now about to take a decision that if central government doesn't help in this we are going to stop taking care of it.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

The current legal framework provides for extra financing opportunities for certain non-standard activities. However, the respondents assure that very often those opportunities are purely theoretical.

> '*The law basically states that a council can make a request to the finance minister for extra allocation as long as this is justified. So I will give you an example of how it works in Malta: I've made this request, the Minister forwarded it to the Permanent Secretary and they never acted upon it.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Human resources policy

Nearly all participants mentioned the problem of understaffing in local administration, yet it should be noted that the local governments' freedom in shaping their own personnel policy is heavily limited, much like their freedom in many other spheres. The organisational framework of operation for Local Councils with regard to clerical services is defined fairly precisely: one person per 2,500 citizens may be employed in a clerical position at a local administration office. This means that the population size is the main determinant of the budget allocation which covers labour costs. Since local government units in Malta are relatively small, it often happens that the entire staffing of a local office is limited to two or three people. Considering the range of the daily duties, this level of staffing often turns out to be absolutely insufficient (particularly if we additionally consider various force majeure events which cause absenteeism or the statutory leave that each employee is entitled to).

The constraints related to employment levels quite frequently lead to excessive accumulation of tasks in the hands of individual people, thus preventing them from providing proper customer service and, as a result, at least partially cause a deterioration of the quality of services offered by local administration.

> '*The law is quite ridiculous when it comes to staffing. (…) Because it is one employee for 2,500 citizens. So technically in such a big city we can have three employees, which is ridiculous obviously.*' – Mayor (IDI)

Staffing shortages may be replenished in accordance with the existing regulations yet it is problematic to find candidates who would be at least relatively well qualified. According to the existing rules, staff must be recruited via The Employment and Training Corporation. In the opinion of many executive secretaries, people who are registered by that institution are not prepared to take up a job in local administration. As a rule, they only have general education and demonstrate complete lack of knowledge about the local government in Malta.

> '*To employ someone I would have to start from scratch. Because we are getting some people from ETC, from the lists, but they have no clue about the work of Local Councils, I have to train them (…) Some of them don't even have experience in work.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

The constraints arising from centrally implemented recruitment procedures concern not only low-level staff but also candidates for executive secretaries. There have been cases where endeavours to employ a secretary, particularly in less attractive locations, remained fruitless for many months. There are presumably many reasons behind this state of affairs but one should certainly mention the fairly unattractive salaries offered in public administration, or low prestige of some locations as a place of employment (which additionally undermines the already low chances for career development). What frequently causes misunderstandings is that candidates lack understanding of the various constraints related to the job of a secretary. Moreover, many are not aware of the constraints imposed on their work in this position, e.g. with regard to options to earn more (for instance, by working overtime).

> '*One of the persons was saying: how much overtime do you have? And I said – it depends on the volume of the workload, but I cannot guarantee you that every week you will be doing something like 20 hours extra (…). So the individual was more looking for a job which is paid higher, but at the same time he can work overtime so he can get extra money.*' – Mayor (IDI)

Other factors which undermine candidates' motivation to take up jobs in local administration also include limited promotion opportunities. In the occupational practice of municipal staff, promotion opportunities are limited to the position of an executive secretary (and it is important to remember that executive secretaries are employed by the central, not local government). As regards executive secretaries, they may be promoted to a locality which is more attractive in financial terms (being transferred to another locality, usually a bigger one). People employed in a clerical position at a local government office have very limited opportunities for professional advancement, mostly because employment structures in local offices are limited and flat.

> '*What are the prospects, if you are a clerk? You can have the ambition of becoming – what?*' – Mayor (IDI)

Many interviewees raised an important problem related to local government personnel i.e. their generally poor preparedness to work in public administration. It was noted that employment in the public sector was not appealing enough to attract people with high qualifications.

> '*Obviously there is a problem of the quality of the staff. It is very difficult to find good people. (…) Because of the salary but also shortage of good people.*' – Mayor (IDI)

> '*Pay is established, just goes up according to the yearly governmental increase – by [according to the] cost of living increase, then after three years if I add some more responsibilities, they go up to fifteen, thirteen, eleven, but this is hardly an incentive.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Interestingly enough, the majority of the respondents in the survey conducted among Local Council offices expressed the view that work for local government administration was attractive and satisfactory.

Generally speaking, to what extent are you happy or unhappy to be engaged with (to work for) the Local Council?

	very happy	happy	averagely	unhappy	very unhappy	n.a.
MAYORS	40	37	23			
OTHERS ELECTED	37	33	17	5	5	
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY	28	47	25			
STAFF	33	36	30			

Our research identified various ways of coping with shortages of skilled personnel. The most important ones are as follows:

- outsourcing of certain tasks, especially bookkeeping or supervision over services delivered by external providers,

- using trainees: their skills might be low but they can nevertheless be asked to perform simple tasks:

'*We don't really have people to do the maintenance. We have one person who is a full-timer and then there is a scheme by the Employment and Training Corporation which gives us two or three people to help him out, but they are very limited, they are not skilled, so it is very limited what they can do – maybe they can paint a line on the floor but not more than that.*' – Mayor

Strategic planning

Strategic management at the local level is largely non-existent. Strategic planning is not used, analyses concerning long-term effects of implemented solutions, investments, planning decisions etc. are not developed. In fact, one can claim that management at local government units is largely based on day-to-day problem solving. One secretary admitted: '*sometimes it is management by crisis.*'

'*There is no in-depth knowledge, no in-depth study, no in-depth forecasting by the councillors. That is the problem. They come for the meeting, they take what you put on the table, or you put on the agenda, and that's it. Rarely there is an initiative on their side.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

'*The concept of strategic planning is from Mars. Unfortunately it's not the way things are done.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Absence of well-established strategic planning practices does not necessarily mean that local administration has no action plans at all. Candidates to the position of mayors present their plans during the election campaign and are bound by those promises, at least to some extent. Nevertheless, it is commonly known that electoral promises are not always easy to follow through.

One obvious constraint is the aforementioned governance exercised by central institutions, which means that mayors have limited opportunities to act. However, at this point one must ask about the rationale behind designing electoral programmes in a situation where most decisions depend on ministerial officials, who do not run in the elections anyway.

> '*Roughly you would know what you would like to achieve in your three-to-four years. After all, keep in mind that there is an electoral programme as well. But it is hard to achieve it. (…) As I said – we have solutions but then we are tied by the government and we cannot implement all solutions. So we are doing our best to implement our programme but most of the time it is difficult.*' – Mayor (IDI)

Nevertheless, with enough determination one can try and achieve at least some of the adopted goals. Regretfully, when trying to achieve those goals one does not necessarily grapple with local problems and implement local initiatives (e.g. organisational, investment-related or community-based activities) but, rather, one endeavours to change attitudes or actions undertaken by ministerial officials.

> '*You can present these promises, let's call them promises, but then not do anything about them as well. But if you're pressuring government to go a certain direction, even though it doesn't fall under our responsibility, but at least we are trying to do something about it (…) We try to explore the different avenues. Sometimes unfortunately we can't pass through the door, but we try to get there through the window.*' – Mayor (FGI)

Relations with citizens

As indicated by research findings, problems which citizens report to local administration relate to a broad range of matters. Above all, they refer to cleanliness in public places, proper maintenance of municipal infrastructure and the condition of public roads.

> '*That is our main problem – the contact with the residents. We are trying to set up a database, with all the e-mail addresses but we are still very short of the goal. Even to reach it costs you money because we still have the door-to-door distribution.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Public consultations with residents on a variety of issues related to decisions made by the Local Councils are held only occasionally. Sometimes such consultations take place as part of organised public meetings whereas they take other forms on other occasions (e.g. correspondence, direct mailings to households). The respondents also pointed out that citizens usually show moderate interest in taking part in such consultations.

> '*Yes, on certain matters – for instance we just did one on traffic management. We do a yearly one – a yearly locality meeting.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

It was established during the interviews that practices regarding the organisation of public consultations and meetings vary considerably and, in fact, depend on locally developed ideas and practices (as one secretary remarked: '*common practice depends on the mindset of the councillors'*). Some local governments undertake active steps to involve residents more actively and more broadly in discussions on local affairs, whereas others take a passive and distanced stance on public participation.

'The locality meeting was split into five meetings. So it was done to increase participation. We did a meeting in every area of our locality. And we had increased participation – before, we used to have three citizens for locality meeting, and when we've made it for every area, we had a hundred persons for every meeting.' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Regardless of the scale and effectiveness of such practices, representatives of local government believe that the information policy pursued by Local Councils should be viewed positively. The best communication channels include community newsletters and official websites.

Figure 18: LS SURVEY – assessment of Local Councils' information policy

Do you believe that the LOCAL COUNCIL keeps its residents INFORMED of its DUTIES or does it NOT INFORM them?

	keeps residents well informed	1	averagely	-1	does not inform at all	no answer
ELECTED	36	29	26	6	3	
EMPLOYED	38	30	26	3	2	
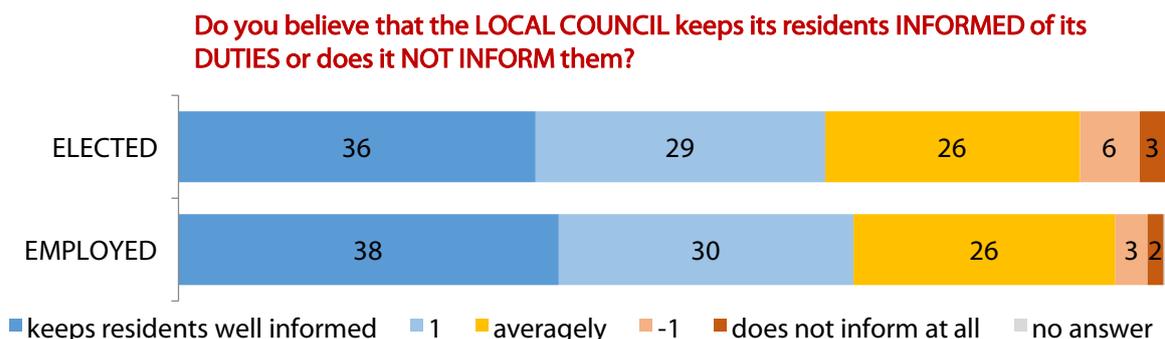
How the question was formulated?

27. Do you believe that the LOCAL COUNCIL keeps its residents INFORMED of its DUTIES or does it NOT INFORM them?						
	-2	-1	averagely	1	2	keeps residents well informed
does not inform at all	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

The degree of residents' influence on decisions made by local government was assessed in the same spirit: as many as 70% of mayors participating in the study (and 59% of executive secretaries) claimed that residents' influence was either high or very high.

Figure 19: LC SURVEY – assessment of residents' influence on decisions made by Local Councils

Do you believe that the residents of the LOCAL COUNCIL have any REAL INFLUENCE on the important decisions taken by the LOCAL COUNCIL or that they have no influence?

	have huge influence	1	moderate	-1	have no influence at all	no answer
MAYORS	33	37	30			
OTHERS ELECTED	14	35	36	6	8	1
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY	32	26	34	8		
STAFF	14	34	41	5	2	4
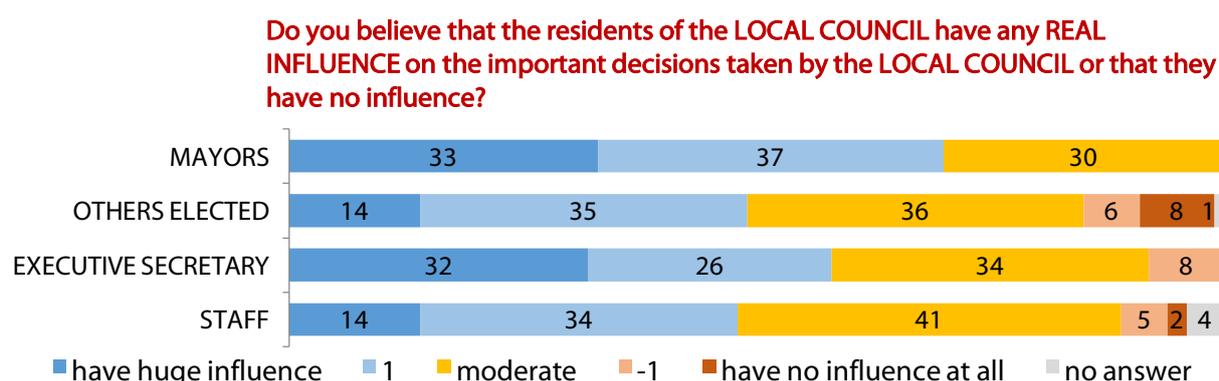
How the question was formulated?

29. Do you believe that the residents of the LOCAL COUNCIL have any REAL INFLUENCE on the <u>important decisions</u> taken by the LOCAL COUNCIL or that they have no influence?						
	-2	-1	averagely	1	2	have huge influence
have no influence at all	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Regretfully, the beliefs held by representatives of local government in this regard do not overlap with voters' opinions. The latter think than residents' influence on decisions made by Local Councils is moderate at most.

Do you believe that the residents of our community have any REAL INFLUENCE on the important decisions taken by the LOCAL COUNCIL or that they have no influence?

Yes, always	Yes, often	Yes, occasionally	Yes, but rarely	Never	Do not know
11,7	14,8	26,4	6,3	12,0	28,7

% of respondents
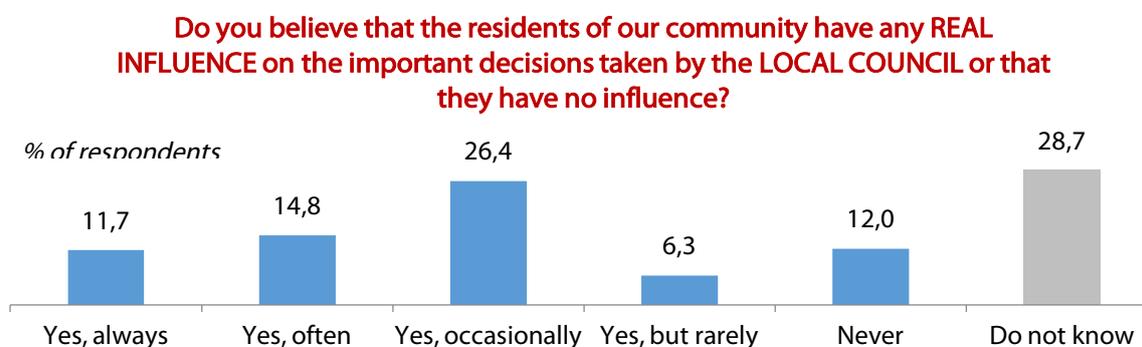
External collaboration

The interviews have shown that dissatisfaction with the collaboration with other public entities is quite common (all groups of stakeholders do so, executive secretaries and municipal staff alike). Many executive secretaries believe that they are seen as clients of various institutions rather than partners within public administration. This stems mostly from the aforementioned constrains in the autonomy of Local Councils and their restricted decision-making powers in many fields.

> 'If there is a housing issue that obviously there is the Housing Department and I try to intervene with the Housing Department.' – Mayor (IDI)

> 'We are represented obviously on a number of committees (…) But some of them haven't met for months.' – Mayor (FGI)

> 'We've just received a list of applications [for building permits]. But what if I would like to see the details? I have to pay. Why should I pay to see the applications?.' – Mayor (IDI)

Many contacts between Local Councils and external entities involve an intermediary role between citizens reporting various problems at their place of residence and central institutions which take binding decisions that may help to address those problems.

> 'Citizens sometimes are very demanding in the sense that what they expect from us is something which we 'should give them'. Not necessarily as a council but as the government – all tiers of government. It could be something small, as a pothole, which is something we solve quite easily. But then, for example, this weekend, there was an issue with a street, where there was a blackout. So they called us about the blackout which we reported. But we are dependent on EneMalta. So we have to follow it up with them (…) But if someone calls, he calls us, not EneMalta, and he expects us to give them a solution.' – Mayor (IDI)

Moreover, it should be noted that the relations between local and central institutions are quite often far from the idea of partnership or collaboration on equal footing. Worse still, consultations between central agencies and Local Councils are not systematic and happen only when central decision makers express such will.

'*Right now it has become a trend to consult (…) But it all depends on the Minister if he wants to consult on a subject or not.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Likewise, the collaboration between Local Councils and the private sector is largely dependent on decisions adopted at the central level.

'*We have to ask the ministry. That is what we are doing (…) It is in the law that if we would like to have a commercial venture then we have to seek permission from the ministry (…) It takes time and depends on a lot of things.*' – Mayor (IDI)

Relations with the Department for Local Government

Comments made by executive secretaries indicate that Local Councils are highly dependent on decisions made by officials of the Department. The situation where one secretary decided to send complaints about his employee to the Department may be seen as symptomatic here. This indicates that either secretaries' independence in making staffing decisions is highly constrained (which seems to be a crucial factor that determines their actual influence on productivity and efficiency of the subordinate staff) or, if the first option is invalid, this particular secretary's might be lacking managerial skills.

'*I have one employee who doesn't know how to do things, or else, he does not want to do things. (…) The fact is I teach him, I repeat things constantly, and he still does most of what I tell him wrong, he does the opposite of what I request, and so it is very hard. And the problem is that whenever I ask the council to lower his performance bonus, they always link his bonus with mine (…). They are counting votes… I have spoken to the LG Department, I have sent letters, but they didn't bother.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

A belief was expressed very frequently in the study that the Department should be responsible for technical and substantive assistance for Local Councils in performing their duties. It was even postulated that a certain kind of an advisory group should be set up at the Department to provide substantive support for executive secretaries in case they have problems or doubts related to their work.

'*There should be a focus group in the Department – a team of experts in different fields, where the executive secretary can refer to in certain matters in which he is not an expert.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Many executive secretaries are of the opinion that the Department does not provide such substantive support for them. Some secretaries even seemed somewhat irritated that the Department showed little interest in the substantive aspects of their work. Among others, the secretaries emphasised that there was no systematic interest in improving professional qualifications of this occupational group.

'*I do believe that the Department should treat Executive Secretaries as their employees. I mean, not only train them when they get into the job but constant training, even for their own satisfaction, even if it's just not just job-related, should happen.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

8. The role of regions

The respondents struggled to define the role of regions in the Maltese system of public administration. They admitted nearly unanimously that the role of regions was unclear and the need for their existence was highly debatable.

> '*Zero, up to now (…). For me the regions are a waste of money (…) They were supposed to take over the lighting system, which they didn't… They are just collecting the contraventions….*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

In the light of respondents' statements, the role played by the regions is indeed hard to justify in the system: it does not seem that regions do play an important role for the decentralisation of the Maltese public administration system. Rather, regardless of any systemically formulated intentions, regions are superfluous, additional levels of administration which deal with marginal or, at best, auxiliary activities.

> '*The only contact we have with the regions is when they send an agenda [of the meetings] to the Mayor and the minutes.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

> '*In our case they are doing some incentives – for example, they are giving one thousand euro for every council to buy books for the libraries, and so on.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

An issue which arouses numerous controversies is the reform which introduced changes in the operation of traffic wardens supervising parking in public places (the so-called local wardens reform). Before the reform, financial proceeds from parking fines went to the budgets of Local Councils. After the amendments, which were introduced a few years ago, the supervision over the system was given to the regions, which also took over the financial proceeds. This deprived the lowest levels of public administration of an important source of income.

> '*The local wardens reform which happened two or three years ago – in my opinion it was a big mistake. They took the local wardens from the Local Councils and they gave them to the regions. It goes against the principle of subsidiarity because you are taking away the local power and you are giving it to someone else. What is the effect? Today, we have lost all control over local wardens. So, once again – people blame us for the wrongdoings of these local wardens but in actual effect that's the regions who is controlling them, not us.*' – Mayor (IDI)

> '*The last reform was plain and simple: listen – let's centralise power, and take it out of the hands of Local Councils by taking the funding that comes from contraventions.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

9. Training needs

Executive secretaries admitted that while there are generally some occasional training offers that Local Councils staff could use, there is no comprehensive system to improve professional competences among local administration personnel. The training offers which exist nowadays partly come from the market (on commercial terms) and are partly initiated, on an irregular basis, by the Association of Local Councils or the Association of Executive Secretaries. While the market offering could presumably satisfy the existing training needs, as long as participation of municipal staff in commercial training programmes is ensured (especially if systemic legal requirements are introduced in parallel, requiring mandatory improvement of professional qualifications). However, the main problem in the current situation is the insufficiency of financial resources to carry out such initiatives: an important obstacle to systematic training lies in the limited pool of resources that could be used to pay for training.

> '*If I have funding to do some training, I could perfectly be in a position to get people and lead my staff into training. But it should also come from the Department.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

At the same time, the respondents were nearly unanimous in saying that there was a need to train clerical staff. The needs in this regard are very high: during the group discussion executive secretaries admitted in unison that, basically, '*any training is welcome.*'

> '*[Training] could drastically improve the efficiency of Local Councils (…). I am looking at the staff basically, because we do work here.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

Moreover, the respondents in the interviews highlighted the organisational problems related to municipal staff's participation in training programmes: when employees are sent to training, this often disrupts the day-to-day work of local offices given their limited staffing levels.

> '*I can't afford to send somebody for a long course, for example - because of the workload and the shortage of staff.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

> '*They [the staff] wouldn't attend the courses that are out of the office hours, first of all (…). But if they do one course, and you have like two members of staff, you can't send them both, you only send one, and the other one remains untrained.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Therefore, the current training practices in the Maltese local administration sector do not reveal a systematic approach to the improvement of staff's professional qualifications. Even newly appointed executive secretaries do not undergo induction courses, which is quite symptomatic and illustrates the aforementioned claim.

> '*The induction course wasn't done within last three years (…). There is no formal training. (…) It is not consistent. (…) You have to learn by practice, by your own experience, by your mistakes.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Worth recalling here are the practices of executive secretaries who engage in day-to-day supervision over the work of municipal staff employed in local administration offices (those practices were mentioned earlier in the report). In order for such supervision to be effective, and for on-the-job training to bring fruit, executive secretaries must have sufficient work experience.

However, if such experience is missing or insufficient, and if it is not at least partially supplemented with relevant formal preparation, supervision and training may be highly unproductive.

Under the current circumstances, we cannot really talk about an efficient approach to training that would help the local administration staff to fulfil their responsibilities. Rather, we are dealing with a situation where knowledge is shared in hands-on situations, learning happens by trial and error, and a lot depends on the local experience accumulated by municipal staff. In consequence, we should talk about a lack of consistency in execution of public responsibilities and, consequently, about significant disproportions in the quality of performance.

Some Local Councils organise internal training on a limited scale, sometimes for individuals and, at other times, for groups of staff. Those practices, however, are not systematic and are undertaken on as-needed basis.

> '*We organize customer care training because I think that our biggest weakness is always how we relate to customers. It's quite a big issue because we have a lot of people coming over (…). Sometimes you get hot-tempered people, so it's not always an easy task to deal with people. Above that then we have obviously the telephone which is constantly ringing over here, so we have to deal with that, and obviously social media, which are constantly bombarding us with issues.*' – Mayor (IDI)

The lack of systematic approach in building the competencies of local government staff may also be illustrated by the existing practices of disseminating information on changes in the legal and organisational environment. According to respondents' declarations, there are no formalised practices of sharing important information or knowledge.

> '*- What happens when there is a change in the law? How do you learn about it?*
>
> *- We send an e-mail (…) They send the manual and that's it. You have to read the manual.*
>
> *- But it is information sharing, it is not training.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

What happens occasionally is that employees approach their supervisors with initiatives regarding their participation in training or postulates concerning educational activities.

> '*I think some of them appreciate it but, to be honest, I have to say that probably they are the few (…) Very few have motivation to develop themselves.*' – Mayor (IDI)

Expectations regarding the scope of training activities

Executive secretaries believe that the lack of competences among local politicians who establish Local Councils after successful elections is an important source of problems for local administration. This general belief (with recognition that there are also some exceptions) extends onto councillors as well as some mayors.

> '*When they are elected, they are presented with the code of ethics. But they don't read it! The Mayors – they have no idea what the code of ethics says, and not even what the law says! They would not read it, they have no idea.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Those opinions are confirmed by statements made by some mayors, who admit that there are no formalised, structured actions that would help mayors to acquire substantive knowledge needed to perform their duties.

> '*Unfortunately, at least it has happened to me, when I got elected – you know, I was a councillor – nobody ever gave me this sort of training, so I had to read through local council law, financial regulations (…). So I would like councillors to be more knowledgeable about what we can and what we cannot do, what are the restrictions (…). I think it would also help the quality of the discussions, because sometimes councillors propose something which you can't do.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Not surprisingly, many executive secretaries believe that training and broadly understood education about Local Councils should be primarily targeted at councillors and mayors. In many cases, successful performance of tasks and responsibilities depends on how well councillors and mayors understand the challenges associated with the work of Local Councils.

> '*First and foremost, we should educate not the executive secretaries, but the mayors and the councillors – let them know what their role is.*' – Executive Secretary (FGI)

Executive secretaries postulated that pre-election courses for councillors should be introduced.

In the survey among local government staff and councillors the following areas of training were identified as most important and most useful for local administration staff:

- accounting
- administrative law / procedures
- financial procedures
- procurement regulations

Additionally, executive secretaries mentioned the need to organise training in 'general legal framework.'

Figure 21: LC SURVEY – training needs reported in the survey

Please select up to 5 training subjects most important for your professional development
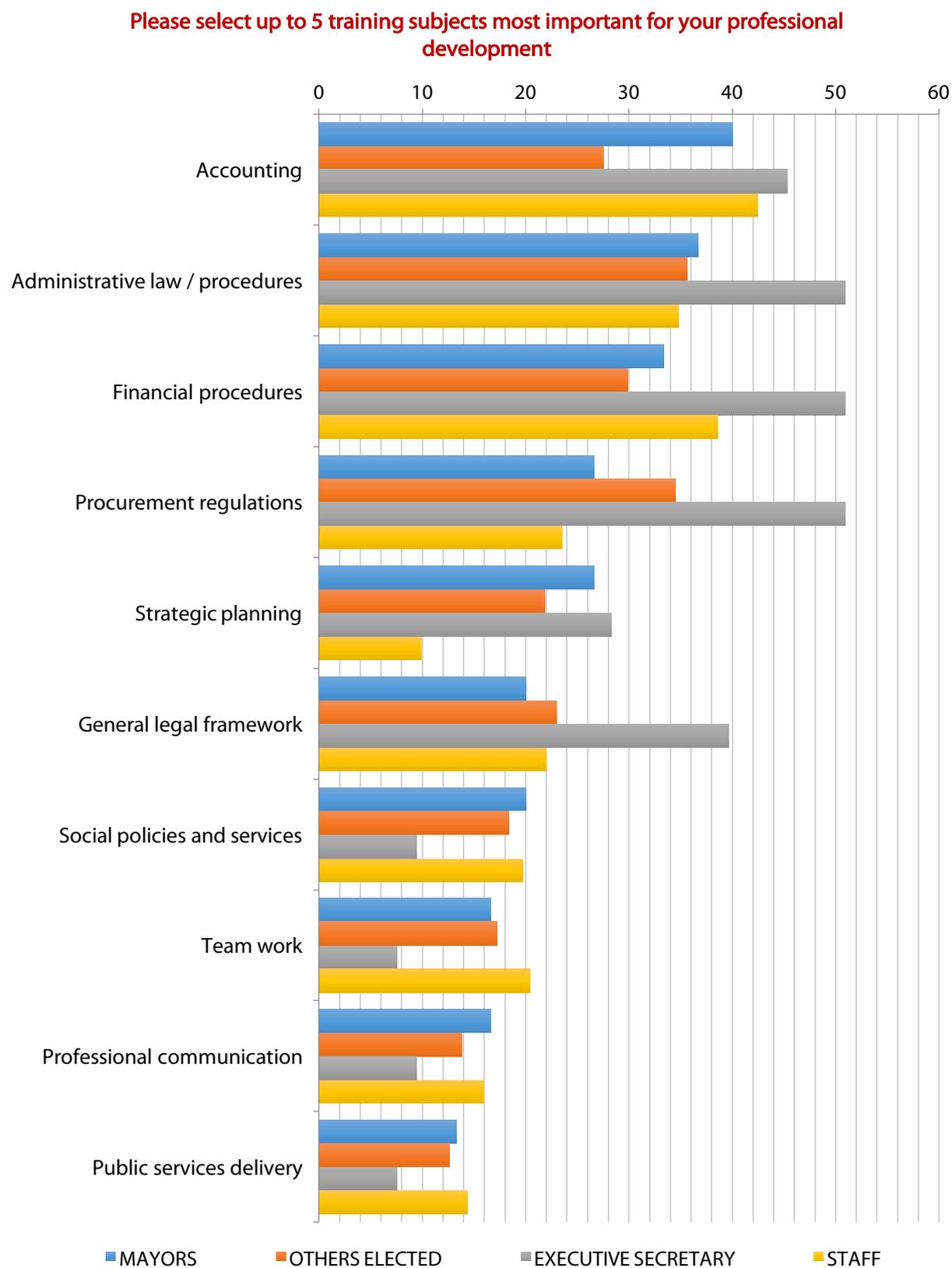
Figure 22: LC SURVEY – training needs reported in the survey, contd.

Please select up to 5 training subjects most important for your professional development
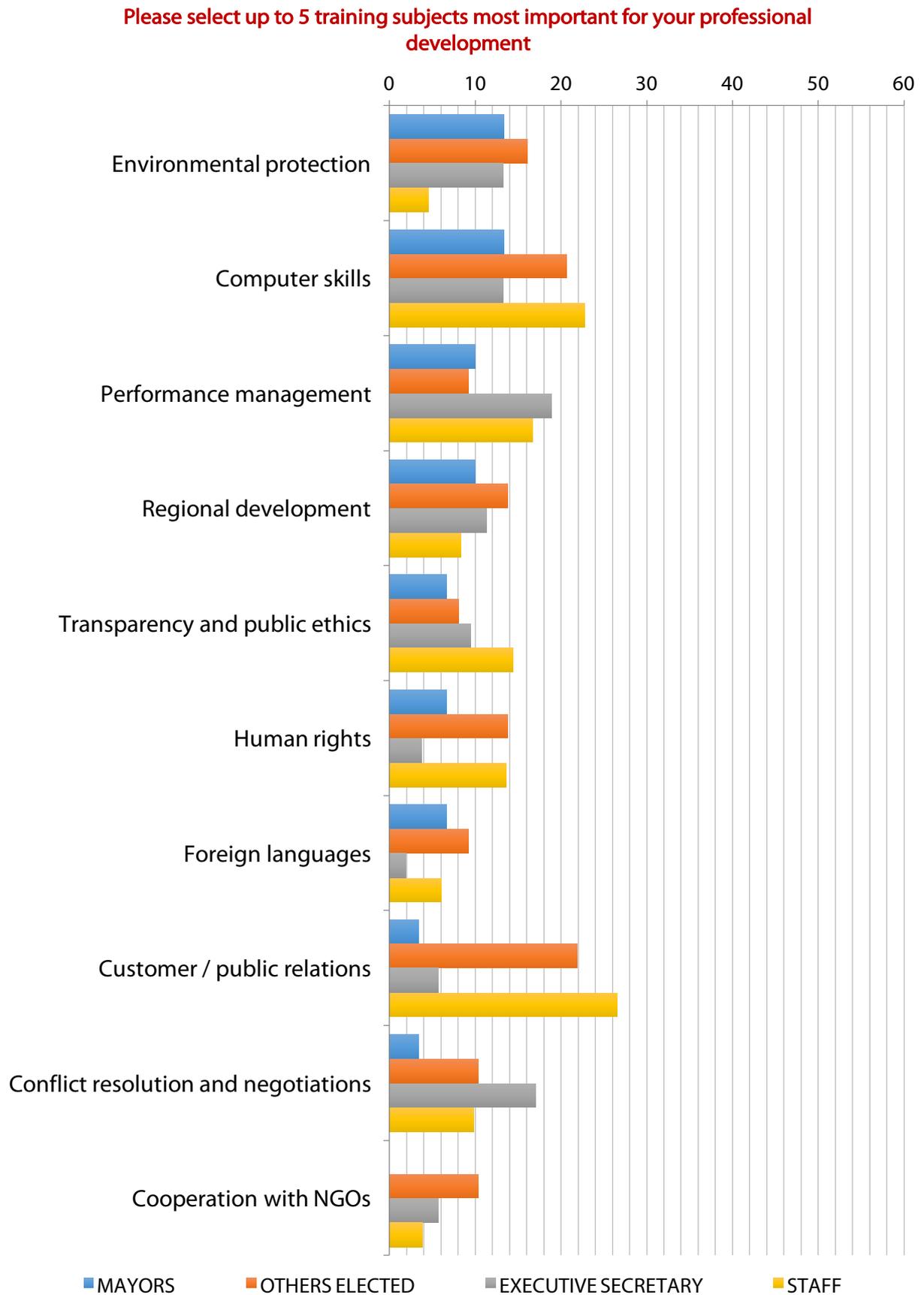
During qualitative interviews, the interviewees mentioned the following training needs:

- **customer care training** – customer service is the key responsibility of local administration offices, performed on a daily basis. At the same time, it is one of the most difficult areas of everyday work since the issues reported and problems raised by residents are highly diversified, residents present various attitudes towards municipal staff and, last but not least, those relations are potentially sensitive in the political context.

  '*The biggest issue is that they have to face people, and sometimes it can be a little bit rough.*' – Mayor (IDI)

- **training in accounting and financial management** – it was postulated that such training should be organised for office staff, even if at the very basic level:

  '*I want them to have a mindset that we do work in a budgetary framework.*' – Executive Secretary (IDI)

- **training in the competences of Local Councils and procedures applied in public administration**:

  '*Unfortunately, it's something they get on the job. When we get someone new they don't know the system. So it's something we have to teach them.*' – Mayor (IDI)

- tendering procedures related to EU funding.

10. Recommendations for training

Our research seems to justify the following recommendations as to areas of training for the staff of Local Councils:

General needs:

- **Awareness raising activities** – any activities aimed at explaining the systemic and legal framework defining the competences of various stakeholders in the local government system and familiarising participants with general rules of decentralisation and the functioning of local government in the European context. Such activities should not be limited to the training-oriented efforts (courses, lectures, workshops etc.) but, rather, take the form of experience sharing and presentation of best practices and international experience.

- **Training for elected representatives** – as mentioned earlier, activities in this sphere should aim at raising councillors' awareness and broadening their knowledge about the competences of local representative bodies, the tasks to be executed by Local Councils and the overall framework in which local governments operate.

- **Training for staff of central institutions** – such training programmes should cover the functioning of Local Councils in Malta, build awareness with regard to desirable patterns of operation in public administration and shape attitudes that would be conducive to efficient collaboration between local and central agencies.

- **Induction courses** – they should be introduced as a necessary and mandatory element for all newly-hired employees at all positions in local administration.

Additionally, a few areas of training related to narrowly defined issues should be mentioned here. If conducted on a systematic basis, they should help to improve the efficiency of Local Councils. The most important topics of such training programmes would include:

- legal framework of the LC system in Malta (administrative law, tendering procedures),

- customer care,

- strategic management,

- accounting / finances,

- performance management,

- social relations (team work, professional communication),

- European funds (structural programs, financial regulations, tendering procedures, projects' management).

Finally, it is worth noting that executive secretaries positively responded to the idea presented during the study, namely that of a mandatory training programme for local government staff. However, such a programme may only be successful if courses are organised on a cyclical and systematic basis so that individual staff members can be sent to training at various dates in order to avoid disruptions in the work of local offices.

The institutional back-up in the organisation of training remains an open question. Research findings indicate that some institutions enjoy particular recognition among local government staff. Preferences vary depending on the position/function held but universities should be certainly indicated as organisations that enjoy trust. Also, an important role could be played by the Department for Local Government and the two local government associations. The scope of training needs revealed in the study indicates, however, that there is a strong need to undertake systematic actions and make sure that efforts are not dispersed, as this could generate problems with the co-ordination of training support.

TNA questionnaire used in Malta (2014)

LOCAL COUNCILS SURVEY -- Questionnaire for Executive Secretaries (Public Officers) and Local Council Employees

The aim of this training needs analysis is to provide a solid and credible basis for elaborating the National Training Strategy for Local Councils in Malta.

This questionnaire is anonymous. *We guarantee you to keep confidential the information that you will provide. In the final report we will refer only to generalized results. We will never quote data provided by particular respondent.*

The final report on the training need assessment will be publicly available.

The term "Local Council" in this survey refers to the Local Council you are employed with.

We thank you in advance for your support!

REGION: ❑ - Northern (Malta) ❑ - Central (Malta) ❑ - Gozo

❑ - South Eastern (Malta) ❑ - Southern (Malta)

Name of the Council: ✎

A. General information about the respondent

Please give us some information about yourself. This information is needed for statistical purposes only:

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1) Gender: ❑ - Female ❑ - Male

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2) Age: ✎ years

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3) Position in the Local Council: ❑ - Executive Secretary ❑ - Member of the Local Council's staff

---

4) How many years have you held the present position? ✎ years

---

5) How many years have you been working for local councils? ✎ years

---

6) What is your level of education?

❑ - Primary school ❑ - Secondary school ❑ - post-secondary school ❑ - higher: University ❑ - other

---

7) What is your present designation and salary scale : ✎

---

8) Place of residence: do you live on a permanent basis in the city/town/village of the local council you are working for? ❑ - yes ❑ - no

B. Operations and performance of the Local Council

---

9. The Local Council is delivering different services to citizens. Please name up to three areas that are, in your personal opinion, particularly difficult to manage. *Please select NOT MORE THAN THREE areas from the list below:*

❑ - public safety ❑ - professional front/back offices services ❑ - the cleanliness of streets and public places

❑ - education and child care ❑ - support to social organisations ❑ - roads infrastructure

❑ - cultural activities ❑ - healthcare and preventative medicine ❑ - water and sewage systems

❑ - sport and recreation ❑ - social assistance and social housing ❑ - waste management

❑ - law enforcement ❑ - green recreational parks and areas ❑ - other (*please tell what kind of services?*)

✎……………………………………………………

---

10. Generally speaking, to what extent are you happy or unhappy that you work for the Local Council?

	-2	-1	averagely	1	2	
very unhappy	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	very happy

---

11. If you had the opportunity would you like to MOVE to some other place of employment?

	-2	-1	averagely	1	2	
definitely no	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	definitely yes

12. If you had a choice would you prefer to work in public or in private sector?   ❐ - public   ❐ - private   ❐ - *hard to say*

13. How would you assess the efficiency of communication between staff in the office of the local council?

	-2	-1	fair	1	2		
very inefficient and problematic	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	very efficient and supportive	❐ - *hard to say*

14. Please mark procedures / documents that are prepared and formally introduced (in written form) in your Local Council:

❐ - formal job descriptions for staff positions   ❐ - recruitment procedure for new staff

❐ - performance appraisal procedure for staff   ❐ - training plan for the staff

❐ - declarations of the conflict of interest   ❐ - code of ethical conduct (specific regulations in your office)

15. There are performance appraisals conducted in all Local Councils on annual basis. How do you evaluate the usefulness of this procedure in your Local Council as a <u>diagnostic tool aimed at organizational improvement</u>? Do you think that it is:

	-2	-1	fair	1	2	
not useful and counterproductive	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	very useful and supportive

16. Please assess to what extend the factors listed below influence staff members' promotion:

(1 = not important at all | 5 = very important)

	1	2	3	4	5	*Hard to say*
results of periodically undertaken, formal assessment of work	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
professional experience (length of service)	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
good performance in everyday duties (informal appraisal)	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
participation in training and other form of professional development	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
good computer skills	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
knowledge of foreign languages	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
affiliation to political party	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
formal education level	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
good team work – good relations with co-workers	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
Other (please specify) ✎	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐

17. Can you evaluate the employment practices in the local council in terms of their transparency? Would you say that these practices are:

	-2	-1	fair	1	2	
completely unclear and not transparent	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	completely clear and transparent

18. How does the Local Council issue calls for procurement?

❐ - announcement published in the public media   ❐ - announcement published on the council's web site

❐ - announcement posted in the council office   ❐ - announcement published in the Government Gazette

❐ Other way (please specify): ✎……………………………………………………………………

19. Can you evaluate the practices related to tenders in your local council? Would you say that these practices are:

	-2	-1	fair	1	2	
completely unclear and not transparent	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	completely clear and transparent

20. To what extent, in your opinion, the current organizational structure of the office supports an efficient performance of THE LOCAL COUNCIL?

	-2	-1	averagely	1	2	
does not support at all	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	supports very strongly

21. How would you describe social relations that prevail in the Local Council's office? Are they:

full of distrust	-2	-1	fair	1	2	full of trust
and frustrating	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	and supportive

22. Considering that Local Councils are funded mainly by the central government's allocation, do you think that your Local Council receives enough funds to deliver its services and other obligations? Is your Local Council, in your opinion:

	-2	-1	fair	1	2	
highly <u>under</u>funded	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	much <u>over</u>funded

23. In your opinion, in the last three years, the overall quality of public services in the territory of the Local Council has:

❐ - increased   ❐ - remained the same   ❐ - worsened   ❐ - *hard to say*

24. In the last three years, the overall quality of life of the people living in the territory of the Local Council has: *(consider job availability, safety and security, environment, housing, etc.)*

❐ - increased   ❐ - remained the same   ❐ - worsened   ❐ - *hard to say*

25. To what extent, in your opinion, current organizational structure of the office supports efficient performance of THE LOCAL COUNCIL?

	-2	-1	averagely	1	2	
does not support at all	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	supports very strongly

26. The level of cooperation between different stakeholders can influence the actual performance of Local Councils. How would you describe the relationships between the following parties / actors in your Local Council? *(please make an assessment in each line presented below)*

cooperation between the mayor and the executive secretary

❐ - very poor   ❐ - rather poor   ❐ - fair   ❐ - rather good   ❐ - very good   ❐ - *hard to say*

cooperation between the mayor and the councillors

❐ - very poor   ❐ - rather poor   ❐ - fair   ❐ - rather good   ❐ - very good   ❐ - *hard to say*

cooperation between the executive secretary and the councillors

❐ - very poor   ❐ - rather poor   ❐ - fair   ❐ - rather good   ❐ - very good   ❐ - *hard to say*

cooperation between members of the staff and the councillors

❐ - very poor   ❐ - rather poor   ❐ - fair   ❐ - rather good   ❐ - very good   ❐ - *hard to say*

cooperation between members of the staff and the mayor

❐ - very poor   ❐ - rather poor   ❐ - fair   ❐ - rather good   ❐ - very good   ❐ - *hard to say*

cooperation between members of the staff and the executive secretary

❐ - very poor   ❐ - rather poor   ❐ - fair   ❐ - rather good   ❐ - very good   ❐ - *hard to say*

cooperation between the mayor and the president of the council

❐ - very poor   ❐ - rather poor   ❐ - fair   ❐ - rather good   ❐ - very good   ❐ - *hard to say*

cooperation between the executive secretary and the president of the council

❐ - very poor   ❐ - rather poor   ❐ - fair   ❐ - rather good   ❐ - very good   ❐ - *hard to say*

27. How often conflicts between the staff happen in your Local Council?

❐ – very often, almost everyday   ❐ - quite often, at least once a week   ❐ – sometimes, several times a month   ❐ - rarely, once or twice a month   ❐ - very rarely, on exceptional basis   ❐ - *hard to say*

28. Do you believe that the LOCAL COUNCIL keeps its residents INFORMED of its DUTIES or does it NOT INFORM them?

	-2	-1	averagely	1	2	
does not inform at all	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	keeps residents well informed

29. Which of the methods described below do you believe to be the best for keeping the residents informed? *(please tick most important methods)*

    ❐ - meetings with the local council's staff   ❐ - announcement boards   ❐ - community newsletter   ❐ - local media

    ❐ - some independent web site   ❐ - meetings with the mayor   ❐ - local council's web site   ❐ - other

30. Do you believe that the residents of the LOCAL COUNCIL have any REAL INFLUENCE on the <u>important decisions</u> taken by the LOCAL COUNCIL or that they have no influence?

	-2	-1	averagely	1	2	
have no influence at all	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	have huge influence

31. In general terms, how would you assess the way in which THE LOCAL COUNCIL works with local social groups and NGOs? Is this cooperation:

    ❐ - excellent   ❐ - good ❐ - mean ❐ - poor ❐ - very poor   ❐ - *hard to say*

32. How do you assess the satisfaction of citizens with the performance of your Local Council office? Do you think that citizens in your Local Council are:

    ❐ - very satisfied   ❐ - rather satisfied   ❐ - rather unsatisfied   ❐ - very unsatisfied   ❐ - *hard to say*

32. Please assess, to what extent, in your opinion, the members of the staff in your LOCAL COUNCIL should improve their competencies in the following areas:

(1 = "improvement is very much needed"   5 = "no improvement is needed"):

	1	2	3	4	5	Hard to say
• Administrative law / procedures	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Procurement regulations	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Financial procedures	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Accounting	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• General legal framework	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Customer / public relations	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Team work	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Conflict resolution and negotiations	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Performance management	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Public services delivery	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Regional development	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Environmental protection	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Transparency and public ethics	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Strategic planning	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Human rights	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Professional communication	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Computer skills	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Foreign languages	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Cooperation with NGOs	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• Social policies and services	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐
• other area - ✎	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐	❐

33. How would you personally asses the overall performance of the staff of the Local Council according to the following criteria? *(Please use a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means NOT ACCEPTABLE and 5 means VERY HIGH)*

	not acceptable			very high		*Hard to say*
	1	2	3	4	5	
volume of work done compared with the job requirements	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
quality of work: Accuracy and presentation of work	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
knowledge of job: procedures, methods , responsibilities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
dependability: the degree to which staff members can be counted upon to do what is required	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
innovation: making improvements in methods of work and policies	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
professional development: consideration for improvement of qualifications	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
communication: ability to communicate both verbally and in writing	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
teamwork: quality and efficiency of work with colleagues	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

34. How would you assess the need for training in your Local Council?

❑ – at present training is essential for the improvement of our performance

❑ – some training might be useful, but it is not a priority

❑ – at present training is not really needed   ❑ - Hard to say / no opinion

35. How often, on average, does it happen that the employees in the Local Council have to work overtime?

❑ – very often, almost everyday	❑ - quite often, at least once a week	❑ – sometimes, several times a month	❑ - rarely, once or twice a month	❑ - very rarely, on exceptional basis	❑ - *hard to say*

36. In general terms, how do you assess the overall PERFORMANCE OF your LOCAL COUNCIL?

	-2	-1	fair	1	2	
very poor	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	**very good**

37. Did you receive performance bonus within last three years? (please mark all appropriate answers)

❑ - yes, last year   ❑ - yes, two years ago   ❑ - yes, three years ago   ❑ - no

C. Approach to training

38. Did you participate in ANY FORMAL EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY *(like training courses, study visits, post-graduate studies and alike)* **during last year?**

❑ – Yes, intensely, regularly   ❑ - Yes, several times   ❑ – Yes, once or twice   ❑ - Not at all

39. IF YOU PARTICIPATED: Please assess, generally speaking, how useful were these activities FOR IMPROVEMENT OF YOUR EVERYDAY WORK in the Local Council? *Use the scale from 1 (not useful at all) to 5 (very useful)*

	-2	-1	Averagely	1	2	
not useful at all	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	very useful

40. Please assess how much are you satisfied with the availability of training for Local Councils in Malta?

	-2	-1	Averagely	1	2	
not satisfied at all	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	very satisfied

41. Can you please evaluate how important can be professional training for the improvement of your everyday work in this local council?

❑ - at present training is essential for the improvement of my performance	❑ - some training might be useful, but it is not a priority	❑ - at present training is not really needed	❑ - *hard to say*

42. Having in mind your professional duties, what is the possible length of the external training course that you could participate in *(out of everyday work)*?

❑ - less than 1 day   ❑ - 1 day   ❑ - 2-3 days   ❑ - up to one week   ❑ - more than one week   ❑ - *hard to say*

43. Generally speaking, how effective, in your opinion, can the following activities / methods be as a means of supporting professional development of the staff of Local Councils in Malta?

Please evaluate their effectiveness on scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicate that the activity / method is not effective at all and 5 means that activity is very effective

	not effective 1	2	3	4	very effective 5	hard to say
Participation in seminars and conferences	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Participation in workshops	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Long-term qualification courses	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Receiving manuals and other printed information / materials	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Sharing experience with colleagues from other localities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Sharing experience with colleagues from other countries	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Direct consultations with an expert on specific issues	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Learning from best practices	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Participation in open meetings / discussions with other professionals	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Other please specify ✎	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

44. Please think about YOUR professional COMPETENCIES and honestly try to evaluate them in relation to the following areas using the scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = lack of competence in a given field and 5 = profound competence (expert knowledge).

(1 = "lack of competence"   5 = "profound competence"):

	1	2	3	4	5	Hard to say
1. Administrative law / procedures	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
2. Procurement regulations	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
3. Financial procedures	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
4. Accounting	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
5. General legal framework	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
6. Customer / public relations	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
7. Team work	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
8. Conflict resolution and negotiations	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
9. Performance management	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
10. Public services delivery	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
11. Regional development	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
12. Environmental protection	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
13. Transparency and public ethics	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
14. Strategic planning	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
15. Human rights	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
16. Professional communication	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
17. Computer skills	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
18. Foreign languages	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
19. Cooperation with NGOs	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
20. Social policies and services	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

45. Considering the list of competence areas presented above, please select up to 5 training subjects most important for your professional development. *Please enter the relevant number code according to subject, ex: 4 for "accounting":*

    1) ✎   2) ✎   3) ✎   4) ✎   5) ✎

46. If there is any other important training area, that in your opinion should be considered in the national training strategy for Local Councils in Malta please describe it below:

    ✎ ….

47. If the training would be offered to you, how much would you trust the following institutions?

Please indicate your level of trust using scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = no trust at all and 5 = complete trust in that training provider:

	no trust at all				complete trust	
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	*hard to say*
University	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Local Councils' Association	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Association of Executive Secretaries	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
International organizations / companies	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Maltese private companies (training providers)	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Department for Local Government	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
NGOs	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Individual consultants	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Other institution - please specify: ✎	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE!

TNA interviews guidelines used in Malta (2014)

1. **Description of problems associated with management in a local councils and of the ways in which they may be overcome** (35-45 minutes)

   - What are the major problems the local councils are facing? (IDI: this particular council)

   - Which of these problems are the most important from the perspective of residents' everyday life and which of them are mainly a problem to local authorities?

   - How do local councils try to solve these problems? What efforts have already been made and what actions are planned?

   - Which of the above problems may be resolved through actions taken by local councils and which problems are solved with little or no influence of local councils?

   - What is the main factor of local councils' effectiveness in resolving the problems mentioned above? (*Note! Ask also how possible efforts are perceived in the context of <u>feeling responsible for the residents</u> (regardless of the legislation) and in the context of <u>thinking in terms of effective management</u>*)

   - (*Analysis of local councils' actions in the context of planning)* How do local authorities approach the resolution of the most critical problems? Have they defined any clear and specific objectives for their actions? Do they have a plan of these activities? *(ad-hoc vs. planned activities)*

   - Is there a local councils development strategy (vision) available? If so, how was it developed? What groups participated in its development (executive board, councilors, residents)? What are the main objectives of this strategy? *If the respondent has not given spontaneous answers:* What was the residents' role in the preparation of the development strategy?

   - Have the objectives of the development strategy been translated into work plans? What are the areas targeted in these plans and in what areas are they being implemented? Are these plans, and to what extent, reflected in the gmina budget?

   - Does the local government use multi-year financial and capital investment planning? If so, what does it consist in?

   - What management mechanisms (procedures) are used by the local government with respect to the property, human resources, social services and municipal services?

   - Do the local authorities have any and what kind of information on the state of business activity in their jurisdiction?

   - Do the local authorities support business activity? How do they do it? Have they taken any actions to support the establishment of new business entities? What were the most serious problems encountered?

   - Do local authorities make any efforts to attract potential inward and local investors? Who coordinates these activities? Who designs them? What do they consist in?

   - Does the respondent think it is possible to enhance the effectiveness of the management and financing of public services? How can it be achieved?

   - What are the major problems in the work of the local council office? What kind of problems are they and how are they tackled?

- Does the local council have procedures for contacts with the residents? What are these procedures? Do the local authorities, in what way and how often, use the opinions of local community representatives when making decisions (*what decisions?*)

2. The existing training experiences and attitudes to learning (15-20 minutes)

- Have the staff of the local council office and councilors participated in any training over the past year? What was the subject of this training? How did they join that training? Whose initiative was it, what was the source of information on training and the main reason for participation?

- What kind of training do the local government staff and council members most often participate in?

- WHO takes part in this training?

- Is the training of local council employees and council members in any way planned in advance? If so, who prepares such a plan? Who approves the training plan?

- Where do the employees find information on training? Are these sources of information satisfactory?

- Why do the employees and council members participate in training *(if they do! ASK ALSO about their real motivation!!)*

- Does the employees' and council members' participation in training really contribute to improved operation of the local government office and consequently to better living standards in (place name)?

3. Perception of training needs

- What kind of training is needed in terms to improve performance of local council? Who should be trained and what should be the scope of training?

- What training for local government employees and council members is the most valuable in terms of using the acquired knowledge to improve local government management?

- What are the most important training needs of the local council – what kind of knowledge it lacks for effective management?

- Have special funds been set aside in the local council budget for training the employees? What is the amount of these funds? Is it sufficient?

APPENDIX 2

Case study: Training Needs Assessment of Local Administration in Poland (2016)[27]

TNA FINAL REPORT (Poland, 2016)

An Effective Local Government Office

Developing personnel competence to build efficient local administration

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1. Introductory comments

The nature of factors which constrain the effective performance of local administration obviously determines the scope and type of efforts which are required to propel institutional development. In order for this process to be effective and efficient, we need prior in-depth analysis of the context in which local administration operates. This kind of analysis should focus on identifying systemic barriers to development, and on assessing the competencies of local government personnel and the resultant training needs.

Among others, this kind of analysis should include the following aspects:

- Legal and institutional framework of local governance, in particular the degree of decentralisation of public authorities as well as legal regulations determining the scope of powers in the hands of local government;

- Consistency of the legal system, possibility for local government bodies to exercise their rights, consistency of legal supervision over the operations of local administration;

- Economic context of the operation of local government;

- Organisational practices applied in local government offices, collaboration between local government units, systems to monitor local governance, to assess efficacy and quality of services provided;

- Status and quality of local government personnel as well as human resources management practices applied.

Any diagnosis of the operation of local government should also incorporate the social perspective: local governments perform a specific range of public tasks, with citizens (members of specific local communities) being their direct addressees. When analysing the operation of local administration, one should not neglect the reflection on the local living conditions, the quality of services provided or the nature of local social needs.

This document attempts to diagnose some of the aforementioned elements. It presents **selected research findings** concerning the context of day-to-day operations of local government offices at the municipal level (Polish: *gmina*). In the survey and interviews conducted with local government leaders considerable attention was paid to the management of competence development among local government personnel, the existing quality assessment tools and factors which determine training needs of local government personnel.

It should be stressed that the research was conducted with the belief that the needs related to development of competencies among local government personnel are not necessarily identical with the training postulates expressed by the respondents. The needs of an organisation (a local government office) as a whole may go beyond the expectations harboured by individual officials because officials do not always realise the context of specific problems or even the existence of certain problems. This phenomenon was aptly illustrated by Jerzy Regulski in his memoirs:

> '[At the start of the local government reform] *we had a lot of assistance from various sources (…). A very nice man came and helped us actively throughout the year. However, after one year, another man was sent to us and he thought he knew everything but we knew nothing. Instead of discussing things with us and agreeing on an assistance plan, he*

decided to run a needs assessment. He started travelling around Poland, asking voits and councillors what they didn't know and would like to learn. But, at that time, the people at our local government had not yet reached a level where they knew what they didn't know. That made no sense. If you want to answer that kind of question, you need to be able to determine the scope of knowledge to be acquired, assess what you already know and only then determine what should be learnt.'[28]

Obviously, the situation looks different at present, more than 25 years later, where the reborn local government has a track record of its work. Leaders have expanded their awareness, officials' competencies have improved and challenges faced by local administration have changed. The development of training services for local government clearly shows that there are training needs and that they are often addressed and met. Nevertheless, training expectations expressed by local government officials do not always correspond with the developmental challenges faced by local government units (LGUs). The efficiency and performance of local administration may deviate from stakeholders' expectations due to many varied external factors (such as the legal and institutional framework, historical background, economic factors etc.) or it may be connected with external considerations such as weaknesses in management of a local government unit[29] or motivating factors (for instance, local government jobs may not be perceived as attractive, or the atmosphere at the office would discourage people from being committed and efficient). Only some of those considerations may be obvious and noticed by the staff of LGUs (or, more broadly, by representatives of local administration). For this reason, we cannot always speak of complete overlap between training expectations and training needs.

In the light of these comments we should point out that a diagnosis of training needs among local government personnel should always be part of an overall analysis of the situation of a specific LGU or a particular local sector of public administration. Overall, it should be accompanied by a summary of legal and institutional considerations in which local administration operates, and a description of the desirable model of this system. In the European context, the key document which lays down the key principles in this regard is the European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted in Strasbourg in 1985, and ratified by Poland in full (among few member states of the Council of Europe) on 26 April 1993.[30] One of the key provisions of the Charter is the principle of subsidiarity (Article 4.3): 'Public responsibilities shall generally be exercised, in preference, by those authorities which are closest to the citizen. Allocation of responsibility to another authority should weigh up the extent and nature of the task and requirements of efficiency and economy.'). Moreover, in the context of research findings presented in this document, the following provisions of the Charter are particularly noteworthy:

- 'Local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population.' (Article 3.1)

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[28] Jerzy Regulski 'Życie splecione z historią' [Life intertwined with History]; Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2014; p. 496.

[29] For instance, wrong work organisation, incompetence of some members of local administration, faulty procedures in local institutions, financial problems related to mismanagement of resources, limited human resources etc.

[30] The Charter became effective on 1 March 1994.

- 'Where powers are delegated to them by a central or regional authority, local authorities shall, insofar as possible, be allowed discretion in adapting their exercise to local conditions.' (Article 4.5)

- 'The conditions of service of local government employees shall be such as to permit the recruitment of high-quality staff on the basis of merit and competence; to this end adequate training opportunities, remuneration and career prospects shall be provided.' (Article 6.2)

- 'Local authorities shall be entitled, within national economic policy, to adequate financial resources of their own, of which they may dispose freely within the framework of their powers.' (Article 9.1)

- 'Local authorities' financial resources shall be commensurate with the responsibilities provided for by the constitution and the law.' (Article 9.2)

2. Information about the research performed

The research comprised two components:

- A survey among secretaries of local government units at the municipality (*gmina*) level;

- Individual in-depth interviews with local government leaders.

The survey and the interviews were conducted in late 2015 and early 2016 by the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (FRDL) in collaboration with the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform at the Council of Europe. The research methodology and research instruments were developed by Cezary Trutkowski.

A survey among LGU secretaries

The survey was performed using the CAWI technique (*Computer Assisted Web Interviews*), with a questionnaire sent to secretaries of local government units. Invitations to take part in the survey were sent to all municipalities in Poland (a total of 2,479). The questionnaires were opened in 1,914 local offices but not all of them proceeded to complete the survey. Following multiple reminders and an intensive promotional campaign co-ordinated by regional FRDL centres, the following were returned:

- 1,557 fully completed questionnaires, and

- 309 questionnaires at different stages of progress towards completion.

Finally, 1,703 questionnaires were classified for analysis, which represents 68.7% of the population of municipal LGUs in Poland.

fully completed questionnaires

partially completed questionnaires

no response
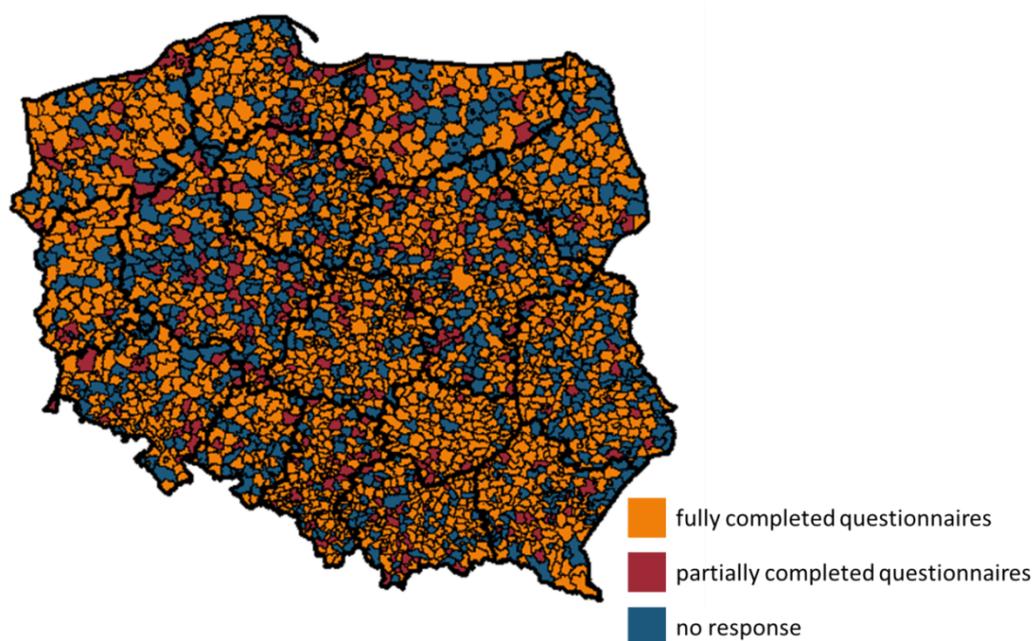
The survey was mostly completed by secretaries of local offices but also a small number of other members of LGU staff were among the respondents, e.g. heads of departments and deputy heads of LGUs.

In-depth interviews with local government leaders

The qualitative component consisted of 15 individual in-depth interviews with local government leaders: voits and mayors (Polish: *wójt, burmistrz/prezydent miasta*). The respondents were selected on the basis of their activities outside their respective units. Therefore, this group included activists of local government organisations, winners of various contests and rankings, and well-known figures of the local government community.

The respondents manage small rural municipalities, medium-sized towns and major urban agglomerations. While working under a similar legal framework, they operate on a various scale, which of course, may influence their perception and assessment of various phenomena. Significant differences in opinions arising from the profile of LGUs headed by the respondents were highlighted in the analytical part of the present document.

Obviously, respondents' comments quoted below are not representative for the entire population of local government leaders in Poland. Nevertheless, this does not undermine the value of these research findings since in-depth interviews do not aim at collecting representative opinions but, rather, at reconstructing assessments, ways of thinking and views existing among a specific social group. Some of the presented statements may seem controversial. However, it is important to bear in mind that their authors have considerable local government experience and high managerial competencies.

The respondents' statements have been anonymised as a precondition to hold open, sincere and truly in-depth interviews.

3. The summary of 25 years – overall assessment of local government activities

Local government leaders who took part in the study expressed **very high opinions on the development of local government, which experienced a revival after 1990**. They believe that the local government reforms are among the most successful and most important reforms introduced in the so-called 'Third Polish Republic' (a term used to refer to post-communist Poland after 1989).

> *'Poland underwent many important economic and political transformations, and changes to the political and social system but I have no doubts that most changes occurred thanks to local government, when we look at things that surround any citizen of Poland in any city or town.' (Mayor of a city)*

> *'Let me repeat it with force, this was a wise reform and today it has reached the peak of its effectiveness. (…) You can argue that more could have been done, in better ways. However, I think that people's potential and legal possibilities have been used very well in the course of those 25 years.'* (Voit).

The respondents who have worked for the local government for at least a few terms of office get somewhat sentimental when recalling the pioneering 1990s, when local government operated on the basis of a relatively small pool of regulations (especially in contrast with today's situation) and the central government gave a lot of leeway to local authorities in many aspects of life.

> *'Actually, really dynamic growth of local government took place in the first three terms of office, starting from 1990. Back then, those central governments perhaps didn't offer an awful lot of money but at least they didn't require us to do tasks without any funds. And this is when a huge leap happened. Later on, poor times followed, but then the EU funds came so people who got ready for it were able to move forward and achieve growth.' (Mayor).*

3.1. Strengths – successes of local government

The respondents mentioned a number of activities, reforms and achievements to justify the opinion that the local government reform was among the most effective changes in the last quarter of a century. In particular, they highlighted the following facts:

- **Local government units propelled Poland's economic and social growth**: as one voit said, *'they were an important flywheel and generated fantastic results for the central budget, and they performed really well.'* Firstly, local government units managed the social and economic development process by creating conducive conditions. Secondly, they stimulated growth via economic investments based on funds they raised. And they also stimulated social development by executing tasks under various public policies. In most cases, they turned out to be effective and efficient.

- The local government reform **empowered the residents**, who *'began to feel like hosts and they could indeed have some influence on developing the local community.'* (Voit). When the corset of central administration and party-operated control was lifted and replaced with democratically elected authorities, residents gained a sense of influence and responsibility for their place of residence. Decisions about citizens' immediate environment

were no longer made by officials from Warsaw or by local party activists. Instead, matters were decided by residents and their elected representatives. As a result, *'towns and villages got a host, someone who genuinely takes care of them and is interested. Someone who could go to any lengths to succeed. Those things had not existed before that time.' (Mayor of a city).*

At this point, it is interesting to invoke the results of nation-wide surveys conducted by CBOS for many years. The respondents believe that proximity of local government boosts civic activity and shapes a sense of citizenship in people. The residents have a stronger sense of influence in activities at the local level, which is why they are more willing to vote in elections and get involved in the life of local communities. Since the very start of the transformation, Poles developed an ever stronger sense of influence on local affairs. According to CBOS data,[31] in recent years, the number of people certain of their possibility to influence the affairs of their city/town or municipality became equal to the number of people who do not see such opportunities (in 1992, only 16% of positive answers to this question were recorded).

Chart 2: Social sense of influence on local affairs (CBOS data)

'Do people like yourself have an influence on the affairs of their city/town or municipality?'
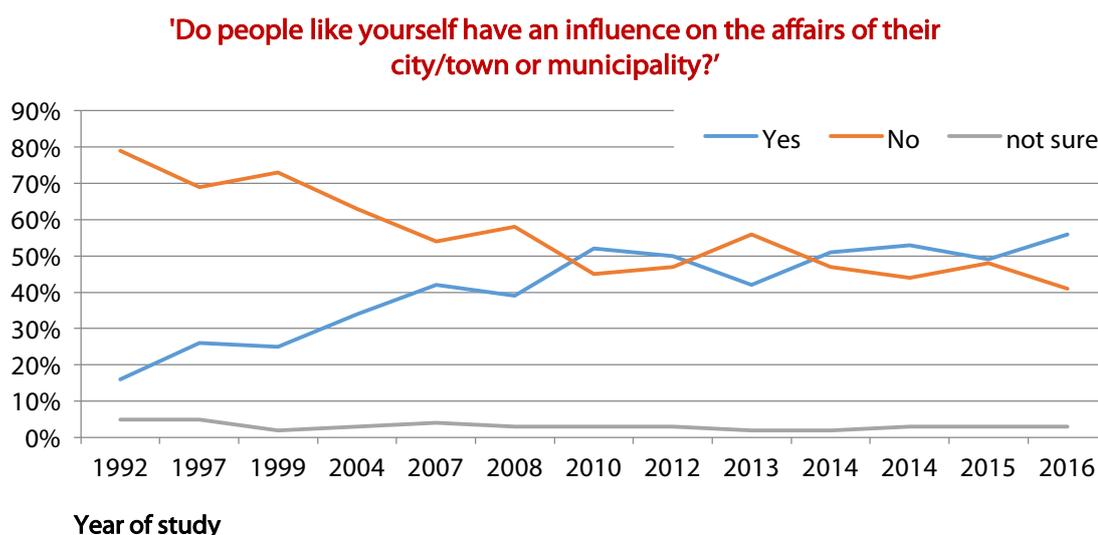
- Local government institutions enabled **more rational management, better suited to residents' expectations**. Local authorities, which became closer to citizens, were able to recognise local needs and identify opportunities, thus ensuring more efficient management of social and economic change.

    'Financial resources are spent better in this way, in comparison with central steering. Local needs are diagnosed in a better way.' (Voit).

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[31] Of course, there are discrepancies between findings from research conducted by various providers (CBOS, Pracownia Stocznia, Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland). One possible interpretation (especially with regard to the link between a sense of influence and the size of domicile) is related with the local policy of openness to citizens' initiatives and the tradition of citizens' participation prevalent in particular local government units.

- **Local government has become a key investor**: local government raises funding for local communities. As one respondent said: *'the vast majority of investments, perhaps four fifths, are the ones which have been made by local government'* (Mayor of a city). Firstly, this involved efforts to attract investors and create a friendly atmosphere for entrepreneurs. After Poland's EU accession, EU funding became crucial an it equipped local government with tools to carry out major infrastructural and social investments.

    'I think that after 25 years of self-governance local governments have demonstrated that they can work very well, for instance in areas like spending money or meeting local needs.' (Mayor).

- **The quality of life in local communities has improved:** above all, this results from the leap associated with to the emergence of essential infrastructure, even though changes in other spheres of social life are also important.

    'Overall, the changes which happened in Poland in the last 25 years in key spheres of life, such as improved living standards as a result of the restructured environmental infrastructure, as well as education, culture and sports… Well, such topics started to surface in recent years. For instance, much more attention is now being given to mothers, women with children, young children, construction of crèches and day care facilities for children who reach the age of 30 months or so.' (Mayor).

- **The appearance of cities, towns and villages has changed.** One voit proudly commented: *'Poland has been growing ever more beautiful, day after day. The way Poland looks today is owed mostly to that reform.'* The following changes are commonly appreciated: construction of new roads, revitalisation of urban space, care about cleanliness and the environment. Those efforts have changed the appearance of many Polish cities, towns and villages. This change also reflects a more profound shift in Poles' attitudes towards public space: the changes are no longer focused on building things, making them work or making life easier. What comes to the fore is the aesthetic value of public spaces, which fills local residents with pride about the place where they live.

- The interviewed respondents tend to ascribe the **entrepreneurial spirit, which 'exploded' in early 1990s**, to the activities of local authorities, at least to a certain extent. The systemic transition in Poland changed the relations between the government and the citizens. What was not legally forbidden, was allowed. Naturally, this brought about the *'activity, which was released.'* This activity was demonstrated in various fields and, obviously, did not always contribute to the common good. Nevertheless, the overall balance of the transformations is very positive.

The new empowerment, economic and social growth, and improved aesthetics of public spaces – all these factors have gradually built the **identity of local communities**. While this process is long lasting and hard to measure, the respondents from local government units do see that their activities and the operations of the LGUs translate into how people see themselves, who they are and how they want to be perceived by others. As one respondent put it:

'I think we gradually see practical local communities being built, people are beginning to identify with their town or city, or village. Identification is weakest in cities, though.' (Mayor of a city).

In the light of social research conducted in Poland, we should note that the very positive opinions quoted above are confirmed in views expressed by the vast majority of citizens. The public perception of transformations connected with the activity of local government is generally positive, even though this assessment is not unambiguous. A study conducted in May 2013 by the Association of Polish Towns and Cities (ZMP) on a nation-wide sample of adult Poles[32] showed that two thirds of Poles (62.4%) believe that local governments are '*good hosts for local affairs.*' This finding reflects the overall positive assessment of the activities undertaken by the local government, yet it is also important to bear in mind that 1/3 of the respondents hold a negative view on the subject.

The overall perception of local government activities revealed by the ZMP survey is confirmed in the long-term analysis conducted by CBOS: for many years, over a half of the respondents have been consistently positive about the activities of their local authorities.[33]

Chart 3: Evaluation of the performance of local government (source: CBOS)

Date of survey (month 'year)
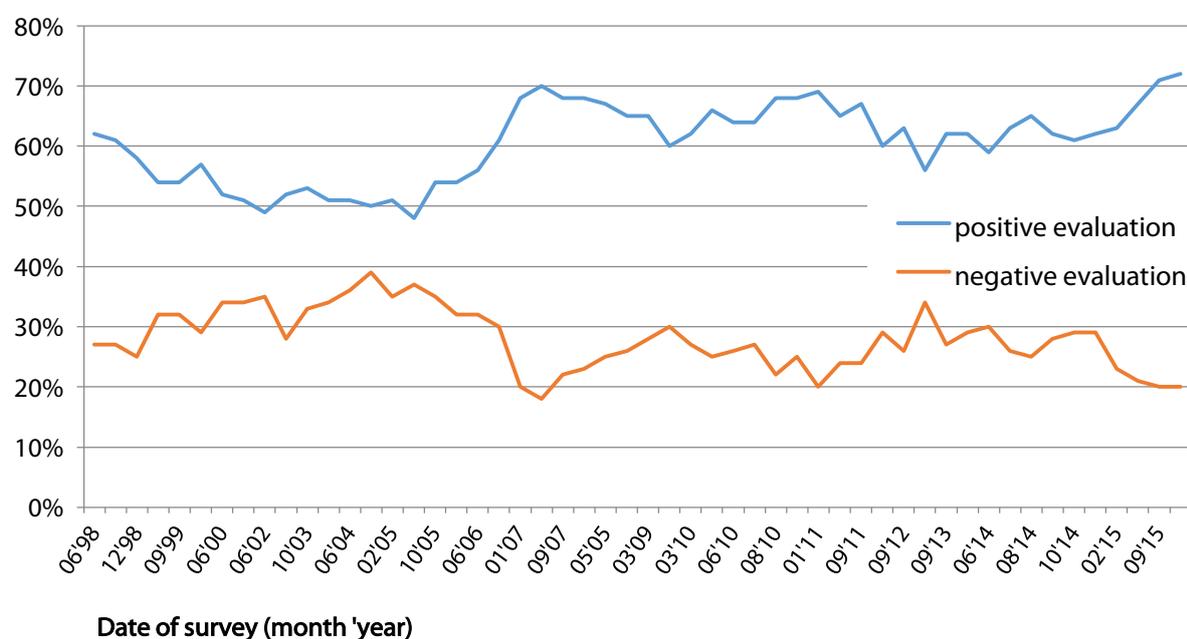
The generalised positive assessments of the activities of local government given presented by the respondents in nation-wide surveys are reflected in the opinions expressed by local government officials themselves. Based on the results of research conducted by the FRDL, we can note relatively high satisfaction with the quality of life in local communities, both among local leaders as well as secretaries of offices.

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[32] A study on performance assessment and finances of local government, conducted by PBS for the Association of Polish Towns and Cities (ZMP) on a nation-wide random-quota sample of 1,600 adult Poles: www.zmp.poznan.pl/aktualnosc-8-757-konferencja_prasowa_organizacji.html– accessed 28 May 2013

[33] CBOS communique No. BS/44/2013 'Evaluation of Public Institutions', April 2013.

3.2. Weaknesses of local government – failures of local government reforms

Even though the respondents consider local governance to be among the greatest successes of Poland's democracy, there were also critical voices, pointing to various weaknesses of local governance or failures suffered in the last 25 years. In terms of quantity, failures outnumber strengths nearly four times. However, the analysis of negative aspects of local governance presented below should not be viewed as a sign of respondents' disappointment with the idea of local governance. The advantage of critical voices over positive ones results from their care about the idea which they hold close to their hearts and from the obvious fact that memory tends to focus on issues that cause concerns.

Notably, **two factors which build the position of local government as an effective policy tool** come to the fore among local government leaders. Those are, firstly, autonomy of operations and, secondly, EU funding available via competitions, regardless of the current political situation. These two factors deserve attention at this point since they reflect important criteria applied to assess the performance of local government: **organisational independence and financial independence as key principles which enable local governments to pursue their own visions of local development**. From this perspective, **the key problem of local government occurs when their autonomous activities are constrained and when tasks are imposed by central authorities without the necessary financial resources**. In this vein, one mayor gave a diagnosis of Poland's local governance, describing it as a backlash: *'going back from the idea of local governance towards centralisation.' (Mayor)*.

Below mentioned are the most important problematic spheres related to the activities of local authorities, as seen by the respondents.

Financial shortages and problems

Most respondents point to **financial shortages** affecting local governments, even though the respondents want to highlight the fact but also realise that most problems cannot be reduced to financial shortages.

> *'Barriers, well, if I didn't mention the financial barrier, my colleagues would bite me to death because this is the key argument in any discussion on local government: no money.' (Mayor of a city).*

The respondents do not view financial constraints as the main source of problems for the local government. Rather, this is a source of management problems, sometimes very serious ones. The financial theme is mentioned in most statements concerning the weaknesses of local government, yet none of the voits or mayors said that problems would disappear if they had enough financial resources on the bank account.

> *'The government (…) often gives us public tasks to carry out without adequate financial resources, which means that some competencies and responsibilities of the local government become 'empty phrases'. There is a format, there is a general provision but there is no possibility to carry them out, or our possibilities are limited, and this simply stems from the fact that local budgets are underestimated and the responsibilities, which are described in such a broad way, cannot be fulfilled to the level expected by the residents of our municipality.' (Mayor of a city)*

At this point, it is useful to quote the calculations made by the Association of Polish Towns and Cities: the operating surplus of all LGUs in Poland in 2015 amounted to PLN 17.9 billion (9.2% of LGU revenues, totalling PLN 196 billion). However, once the debt instalments falling in 2015 were paid back, the surplus shrank to merely PLN 9.4 billion, or 4.8% of the LGU revenues. The latter amount is available to local government units for their future development goals (own contribution in EU projects, own investments). This figure does not include any new debts or revenues from selling assets. This 'disposable operating surplus' is distributed very unevenly among LGUs in Poland.'[34] At the same time, the progressing financial burdens shifted onto local governments leave ever less room for the implementation of flexible and independent development policies.

> *'As of today, Poland has over 700 municipalities which do not generate any operating surplus. What is an 'operating surplus'? Well, their running costs of operation are higher than their proceeds.' (Mayor).*

When asked about recommended changes in the sphere of local finances, the survey participants postulated … **a completely new act of law**, which would provide that local finances are based on local revenues of LGUs and that such funds can be freely used.

> *'If there is an amendment to the legislation on local government and the relations between the central budget and local budgets, this may lead to total stagnation. If we consider the financial condition of local governments today, it's really on the verge of bursting. And now, when we have the 2016–2020 perspective in mind, where we need to show our own financial resources to file an application, this is becoming problematic because municipalities have a certain level of debt. The capital expenditures which have been incurred have not yet brought a return.' (Voit)*

No partner-like relations with central authorities

The difficult relations with central authorities (understood as the central government, the legislature, ministries and other bodies, all of them generally described as 'Warsaw') are a complex topic which is often mentioned in critical comments on the operation of local government. The respondents' statements focused around two key themes: excessive and irrational burdens imposed on local governments under the so-called 'commissioned tasks', coupled with mistrust and central authorities' antagonistic attitude towards local governments.

What comes to the fore is **the problem that central authorities delegate tasks onto local authorities without providing adequate financial resources**. Nearly all the respondents mentioned this problem, often in the context of different public policies. Based on those opinions, instead of delegating tasks into local government with adequate resources and freedom in governance, central authorities irresponsibly delegate an increasing number of tasks under the label of 'commissioned tasks'.

> *'This reduces local government to the role of someone who just executes central tasks, and this really contradicts the idea of self-government.' (Mayor).*

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[34] 'Współpraca jednostek samorządu terytorialnego narzędziem wsparcia polskiej polityki rozwoju' [Collaboration of Territorial Government Units as a Tool to Support Poland's Development Policy], a collective volume edited by Tomasz Potkański, PhD, published by ZMP 2016; page 120.

This policy pursued by central government contradicts the idea of self-governance: local governments become just performers of tasks and have no influence on those tasks and no financial resources to perform them. This situation goes against the respondents' sense of justice. Moreover, they are outraged by the fact that nobody consults the changes with the local government and, in addition, such tasks are all too often poorly prepared and introduced hastily.

> *'It's like you would decide how much my staff should earn but I am supposed to find money to pay them. This is what we have in the education system.' (Voit)*

Many respondents believe that such a chaotic and short-sighted policy of the central government has existed for years, no matter which party was at power. The burdens shifted onto local governments are usually not connected with essential, carefully designed reforms. Instead, they result from fragmented, ad hoc modifications to existing solutions: tasks are being shifted, calculation of various ratios changes, or regulations are slightly amended. When summed up, those incremental changes create barriers which hinder local development.

One crucial issue is the **trust of central authorities in the local administration.** One might think that in the face of numerous developmental successes enabled by local governments and their operation, this issue should not be debatable at all. The respondents believe that, with few exceptions, local governments have proven their effectiveness and the ability to pursue development policies. Meanwhile, while the central government formally delegates the responsibility for some tasks, it significantly constrains the decision-making powers of local bodies in those areas. Therefore, the idea that local governments should have more independence and real decision-making power has become disputable in many cases.

> *'The state should not disturb local governments, the state should have more trust in them and delegate even more competencies to them, mostly in the sphere of social welfare and education. The same money will be available but let the local council decide locally on how to spend it. There is enough money but it's spent in a wrong way.' (Mayor)*

The respondents stressed, with regret, that central institutions offer no support in situations which are critical for local development. This affects, in particular, major cities which face challenges connected with major investments, or negotiations with corporations or multinationals. In particular, large local government units often grapple with problems which would necessitate the involvement of central administration. However, as the respondents said, central administration is sluggish and the decision-making mechanisms are not transparent. For this reason, local government activists are forced to resort to lobbying. In their effort to get something done, local government officials would *'walk around, ask around, explain things. Whenever there some allies, we would send letters (…). We waste a lot of time and energy on such things which could have been done more easily if competencies were handed over to regions, poviats or municipalities. The stronger the centralisation, the harder it is because decisions are made somewhere up there, higher up.' (Mayor).*

Local government officials, especially those from major cities, expect **a more dialogue-based approach from 'Warsaw' and a joint search for solutions instead of being told what to do.**

> *'If someone commands that there should be a change, well, they should manage it wisely, they should create an opportunity to prepare for that process to help us achieve goals. If we see that decisions are wise, we will prepare for them. And we won't be building monuments of misunderstanding showing that Warsaw doesn't understand local Poland*

> *(...) This is not about a magic wand, a miracle or a sack of cash. It's about processes that require awareness of changes, partnership, participation, dialogue, conversation, a search of good solutions. And this is when those changes will bring positive results.' (Mayor of a city).*

Faulty legal solutions and overregulation of the local government system

The interviewed local government leaders believe that the **newly introduced laws and regulations usually have poor quality and are often irrelevant for the needs of citizens or capabilities of local governments**. Worse still, clearly bad regulations are not improved, or they are improved too slowly. The respondents described various cases of interventions at the voivodship or central level: sometimes they meet with understanding but, as a rule, nobody wants to assume the responsibility for faulty regulations. There is no courage to act or simply no political will to implement the required changes. The respondents unanimously stressed that centrally adopted laws often leave no possibility to incorporate regional or local background in the implementation of public tasks. In the respondents' opinion, this deprives local administration of the possibility to adapt the implementation of tasks to local needs. In a way, this has an incapacitating effect for the local government. One should also state that the practices of central institutions grossly contradict the principle of subsidiarity.

> *'Today, some ministries write laws which specify the number of officials to carry out a task at a municipality level. (...) Well, isn't it the local government which is supposed to decide how many people to employ and how to solve a problem? It is supposed to get money and tasks and find ways to solve those problems, because this is the nature of self-government.' (Voit)*

Overregulation is another sphere of difficult relations between local government and central authorities. Local government leaders commonly believe that the central government and the parliament currently regulate an increasing extent of various social policies and areas of life which do not require such regulation. For incomprehensible reasons, *'the legislators try to regulate everything, trying to unify this framework, which often leads to totally absurd situations because many regulations concerning big cities are totally inadequate for small municipalities; moreover, this often leads to situations where better practices and procedures, implemented for years, are being replaced with more expensive ones imposed by the state.' (Mayor of a city)*. The new **regulations unnecessarily complicate the decision-making process** in matters which used to be handled efficiently. This makes citizens' lives more difficult and exposes local authorities to undeserved criticism.

Local government leaders postulate **that the legal system should be streamlined, starting from the way it is adopted, through execution, up to the judiciary**. While many expectations are voiced in the context of legal reforms, two specific postulates are strongly put to the fore: **to eliminate unnecessary regulations and to simplify procedures**.

> *'One should abandon the overregulation, which would give us more flexibility and a sense that the goals are clear but methods should be sought in various places, with different culture and tradition; Poland is a country with varied traditions and expectations towards public authorities.' (Mayor of a city)*

Inconsistent or ineffective development policy at the central level

What should be added to the aforementioned negative phenomena is the **absence of consistent development policies which would make public activities predictable.** Various reforms are introduced by surprise, adopted plans are not implemented, and individual changes are made on an ad hoc basis, depending on the current political situation. There is a lack of basic stability, enabling local authorities to plan local development rationally.

> *'[What is missing] is the stabilisation in long-term activities, for instance those concerning education. There is no single direction in which education should develop. This is what happens now. We did one reform and we're going to do another reform in a moment, and this is not protected from the formal and legal point of view. On the one hand, there is no consensus in policy work and, on the other hand, there are no regulations and conditions in the law itself. We don't want a situation where the central government simply comes and says, well, the current things are bad, let's do a new reform.' (Mayor).*

Some respondents, particularly those representing smaller centres, stressed the inefficiency of the existing regional development model. They emphasised that the current success of the diffusive development model[35] adopted by the Civic Platform government polarised the country. This situation has been observed for several years and, as a result, different areas of Poland have developed unevenly. Of course, one may presume that this model could produce some outcomes in the long run.[36] However, this prospect often seems too distant for people living in less developed areas. Some respondents felt that the distribution of funds between urban and rural areas was unfair, to the detriment of the latter.

> *'Regional operational programmes offer money but mostly for towns and cities which have been growing nicely. However, the rural development fund has been quite insufficient given the existing needs.' (Voit).*

And, finally, local government leaders very often complained about **the central authorities' lack of will to cooperate with local government associations**: *'There are discrepancies between the central and local government and you can see them particularly clearly in some local government associations, such as the Association of Polish Towns and Cities, or the Association of Silesian Municipalities.' (Mayor).* The respondents directly speak about *'the state functioning poorly' (Mayor of a city),* which gives rise to mutual distrust and *'considerably constrains development opportunities because public authorities behave unfairly towards one another.' (Mayor of a city). 'Theoretically, local governments should work together with Members of Parliament. But, let's face it: there is no such co-operation. We asked for it many times but there's none…' (Mayor).* Local government leaders feel excluded from decision-making processes which affect their activities. For this reason, **it is essential to reinforce dialogue between representatives of local communities and the central government.**

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[35] Cf. report: '*Polska 2030. Wyzwania rozwojowe' [Poland 2030. Developmental Challenges] (https://mac.gov.pl/files/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Strategia-DSRK-PL2030-RM.pdf - accessed on 12 April 2016).*

[36] This is emphasised by the authors of the 'Poland 2030…' report. They write: 'if the polarisation-diffusion model is chosen, the consequence is that 'development leaders' are strongly supported in their growth and the uneven pace of development is accepted', pp. 119–120.

Limited possibility to develop strategic plans for local development

When criticising the central government for the absence of strategic development planning, the respondents also admit that the problem lies on their part, too: **strategic thinking and strategic actions are not always a strength of local administration.**

The need for improvement in strategic management in Polish local government units is strongly emphasised by various communities and is beyond dispute. In the light of studies and expert opinions, **strategies adopted by municipalities often have little in common with effective and efficient strategic thinking.[37]**

Based on survey results, a current development strategy is available in nearly 70% municipal units. This rate differs, depending on the size and type of unit: a general strategic document is most commonly available in urban municipalities (75.8%) and is much more common in major centres (83.6% of LGUs from 10K to 100K residents and 100% of major LGUs) in comparison with small municipalities (57.8% of municipalities up to 5K residents).

The widespread practice of developing strategic documents may be highly misleading. One mayor made a sceptical comment in this respect: '*What's the point of developing strategies for all LGUs if they are not implemented in practice?'* Strategies rarely represent a consistent set of measures aimed at the development of the local community. In many a case, those documents are written 'by administration for administration' and help LGUs to meet formal requirements when applying for external funding. Sometimes, such documents serve promotional purposes. Some of the interviewed leaders thought that there was no need to develop comprehensive strategic programmes for small LGUs. In their view, smaller rural municipalities should pay more attention to common sense and flexible approach instead of strategies. On the other hand, one cannot govern large cities without a long-term plan and a strategy, just relying on common sense.

> '*You can discuss strategic thinking, this varies a lot from one municipality to another (…) [I am not sure] if this should be reduced to the level of municipal government.' (Voit)*

Ineffective structure of local government

Another issue which was critically discussed by the interviewed leaders concerns the structure of local government. The three levels, a large number of municipalities and weak poviats – all these factors reflect the **fragmentation of local government in Poland.** As one respondent observed, a large number of small municipalities is positive since it enables even small communities to have their representatives. However, when '*local government is too dispersed, this isn't quite good, there are serious disproportions.' (Mayor)*. As a result, a small rural municipality and a large city can, formally speaking, be seen as identical in the local government structure.

Firstly, the three levels of local government give rise to the problem of **fragmented responsibilities.** One example is the management of roads. '*The entities responsible for roads have multiplied around the poviat. There are municipal roads, poviat roads, neighbourhood roads, voivodship roads, national and private roads, quite a lot of them.' (Mayor)*. A similar situation occurs in spheres

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[37] Cf. numerous publications on this topic, e.g. Kłosowski and Warda 2001, Kopyściański and Ignacy 2006, Gawroński 2010, Górniak and Mazur 2012, Strategicznie dla… 2011 [Strategically for… 2011], Barometr rozwoju… 2013 [Development Barometer… 2013].

such as education, health care or welfare. Secondly, fragmented responsibilities mean that it is not clear who is responsible for what.

> *'I must admit that linking things with the level of competence and figuring out who is responsible is complicated in Poland; and sometimes even ourselves, at the local government, we struggle to figure out who is responsible for what and who we should approach with an intervention.' (Mayor).*

Many critical comments were made by the respondents (i.e. leaders of municipal units) about poviats. Generally speaking, they believe that **the distribution of responsibilities between various levels of local government has been poorly designed.**

> *'This is because poviats carry out certain tasks which, by their very nature, go beyond municipalities, or beyond a single municipality; this was a good idea but was it necessary to establish such a complicated structure? Was it necessary to create a big council? Was it really necessary to establish the poviat board, the office and all those other institutions, the family support centres etc.? Why multiply some responsibilities of the municipalities at the level of poviats? I'm really not so sure. (Voit)*

When speaking about major problems related to the operations of poviats, the respondents mentioned, above all, the reduced competencies (many were taken away from poviats in the last fifteen years), absence of own revenues and insufficient financing of the tasks entrusted to poviats.

Regardless of the postulated solutions, nearly all the respondents agreed that the current situation cannot continue and must be changed. Some did not take any specific position, just formulating the postulate to reform the existing system in some way.

> *'So it's about increasing the role of poviats, increasing the financial resources, or liquidating them.' (Voit)*

> *'Well, certainly, when we're talking about poviats, it's disastrous; they should either be liquidated and those responsibilities should be handed over to the municipalities, or poviats should receive the competencies from the voivodship and the central government, giving them an extra burden.' (Mayor)*

Poor collaboration between LGUs

Considering the dispersion of local government and the imperfections in strategic management, the **lack of co-operation between various LGUs becomes ever more problematic**.

Firstly, collaboration between municipalities in Poland is still not widespread. While the data show that a total of 319 municipal associations have been registered in Poland since 1990 (313 inter-municipality associations and 6 poviat associations), yet only 145 of them send reports to the Ministry of Finance, which may be seen as a token of active work.[38]

> *'This has failed. Local governments at the municipal level don't know how to work together.' (Voit)*

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[38] Porawski A., T. Potkański, J.M. Czajkowski, J.Szewczuk 'Ogólna charakterystyka stanu i uwarunkowań współpracy jednostek samorządu w Polsce' [Overall Characteristics of the Condition and Background of Collaboration between Local Government Units in Poland' in: T. Potkański (ed.) 'Współpraca jednostek ….' [Collaboration of Local Government Units…], p. 29.

> *'We should help each other. I mean, local government people. We should work together instead of creating problems for one another, which is often the case.' (Mayor).*

Secondly, collaboration often boils down to joint implementation of project-related responsibilities. The results of research conducted by the ZMP[39] indicate that the vast majority of local government partnerships (82%) emerge primarily in order to obtain external financing for specific undertakings. Only a half of them were created as a result of a needs diagnosis, and a half did not reflect on needs until a formal partnership was established. The most important problems of partnerships include the asymmetry of power between strong and weak partners (33% of responses), passivity of partners (27% of responses), isolation of closed groups and 'power games' within partnerships (23%).

Cooperation between municipalities could be an effective way to strengthen the capacity of LGUs, particularly small ones. Further on, cooperation can be worthwhile in a short run because of the possibility to implement EU-funded projects jointly. In the long run, potential benefits may include the coordination of public policies, rationalisation of services offered, improvement in the quality and efficiency of services and, thus improvement in the financial situation of municipalities.

> *'They* [municipalities] *must work together. They must get united, work in municipal associations. To make sure that different municipalities are not separated with the Great Wall in China.' (Voit)*

Problems in the implementation of selected public policies

One of the most commonly mentioned problems faced by the local government is the activity of education establishments. The essence of the problem does not relate to the need to manage schools (nobody complained about that) but the very limited opportunities to shape educational policy within a local government unit.

> *'[This is] a gigantic problem. (…) Voits just hardly manage. If a voit is not an authority and a strong personality to convince people, they're doomed to failure. They have no chances of winning the battle with teachers. Teachers get through to parents directly and they have the final say. Education is absolutely the number one problem.' (Mayor).*

Under current conditions, while local governments formally are the 'managing authorities' of schools, the vast majority of decisions related to the functioning of schools are reserved for central administration. Local government is responsible for most activities of schools while having only a limited influence. The costs of operation of local educational facilities are charged to local budgets whereas the results of their work have an effect on many local issues. On the other hand, local government often have only illusory possibilities to shape long-term education policy at the local level.

Another problematic area mentioned by some respondents is the implementation of social policies. As a result of reforms conducted in Poland in 1990s, local government became largely responsible for this sphere. A complicated network of institutions emerged, with various scopes of responsibilities, tasks and financial resources. As a result, the implementation of policies in spheres such as employment, housing, health care, social welfare or child care depends largely on the

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[39] Ibidem: T. Potkański (ed.) „Współpraca jednostek ….' [Collaboration of Local Government Units…].

collaboration between institutions at the municipality, poviat and voivodship levels. This collaboration is partially regulated by the law and partially dependent on decisions made by various institutions, such as employment councils or regional social policy centres. This system is not always effective: various studies have shown that locally implemented social policies often lacks consistency and coherence. One way to improve the coordination of social policies would be to adopt prospective planning, coupled with identification of local problems and prioritisation of tasks. As a result, a few strategic documents are created at each level of local government. By definition, those documents should set goals and help to coordinate activities of various institutions. In many places, however, this is not the case. This largely stems from the fact that **powers of local authorities in the sphere of local social policy are limited by the powers of central ministries**. Some respondents stressed, for instance, that there is no possibility to adapt assistance instruments in a flexible way to pursue social policy goals at the local level.

> *'Possibly also social welfare issues. Those are not easy things because it is sometimes hard to explain things to people who need assistance in basic survival; and there is always an impression that some people have been wronged; yet many things are a consequence of legal regulations and they cannot always be bypassed.' (Mayor)*

In consequence, local authorities pursue their planned activities (goals) but are unable to resolve the dominant problems. Therefore, they seek other solutions such as projects financed from subsidies and EU assistance programmes. What is missing, however, are local, future-oriented activities aimed at improving the social situation at the local level.

Studies conducted by the FRDL[40] also indicate that **many municipalities have hardly any conscious cultural policy or one related development**. What happens is that the local office provides some habitual organisational and financial support for activities pursued by institutions or NGOs in the sphere of culture yet the authorities do not position themselves as creators of cultural policy, less so as initiators of cultural activities. One common practice is to delegate the responsibility for cultural events onto individuals who hold managerial positions in institutions reporting to the local government, with limited interest in the daily activities of those institutions. Presumably, this state of affairs exists due to the absence of widespread reflection on the outcomes of activities undertaken by cultural institutions and their role in shaping the local identity and building social capital. This is also reflected in the results of national research conducted in late 2014 and early 2015 among local government leaders.[41] In that research, only 15.2% of the respondents mentioned integration of residents as an element which reflects a success of a municipality or a city/town.

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[40] C. Trutkowski 'Lokalna Polityka Kulturalna. Wpływ inwestycji w infrastrukturę instytucji kultury na jakość życia w społecznościach lokalnych' [Local Cultural Policy. The Impact of Investments in Cultural Infrastructure on the Quality of Life in Local Communities], FRDL 2016.
(http://www.frdl.org.pl/pliki/frdl/image/marta/polityka%20kulturalna.pdf)

[41] A study entitled 'Bilans kadencji 2010–2014' [Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office] conducted by Cezary Trutkowski, in collaboration with Anna Kurniewicz, for FRDL, among voits and mayors of local government units.

Chart 4: Tokens of success of municipalities/towns and cities (a FRDL study 'Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office'; answers from local government leaders (voits and mayors)

Development of municipal infrastructure	72,0%
Amounts of EU funding raised	49,1%
Fulfilment of residents' expectations / representing voters' interests	41,3%
Residents' satisfaction with public services provided/co-ordinated by the LGU	35,1%
Favourable economic ratios (e.g. low unemployment rate, number of economic agents)	26,4%
Residents' involvement in planning and shaping local development	17,4%
Social integration of residents	15,2%
High level of own revenues	14,3%

Two independent nation-wide studies conducted by FRDL (a study with LGU secretaries and LGU leaders)[42] found that the support of cultural institutions was considered to be a priority for municipalities only by 4.8% of the secretaries and 6.7% of the leaders.

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[42] Studies reported in this document entitled 'Zarządzanie rozwojem kadr samorządowych' [Management of the Development of Local Government Personnel] conducted under the supervision of C. Trutkowski by the FRDL in late 2015 and early 2016 in 1703 LGUs, and the aforementioned study 'The Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office'.

Chart 5: Budgetary priorities of LGUs as declared by LGU secretaries and leaders

Which areas should be particularly SUPPORTED in the specific situation of the local government unit?

Area	LGU secretaries (N=1679)	Local government leaders (N=627)
road infrastructure	70,9%	64,3%
education and pre-school facilities	67,9%	65,2%
water supply and sewage system	50,9%	45,1%
social assistance and municipal housing	31,3%	22,5%
public security	20,5%	17,7%
health care and prevention	14,1%	10,8%
support for NGOs	5,2%	6,9%
cleanliness in the streets and public areas	5,0%	7,3%
cultural institutions	4,8%	6,7%
extracurricular classes for children	4,1%	3,2%
sport and leisure	3,7%	6,5%
green areas	1,3%	5,6%
another sphere	0,9%	0,3%

Spatial chaos

The local spatial policy is in deep crisis. Experts indicate that urban structures in Poland 'spill out' into open areas, which creates spatial chaos on a scale unseen in other European countries. According to the data presented in the report entitled *'On Economic Losses and Social Costs of Uncontrolled Urbanisation in Poland'*,[43] the adopted urban planning studies and directions include 3.3 million ha of planned housing areas with a demographic capacity of 230 million residents (with a total population of 38 million people in Poland). At the same time, local plans enable the settlement of 62 million people, with the absorptive power of the planned residential areas in some municipalities exceeding the current population nearly ten times. The expansion of

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[43] Cf. Kowalewski, A., J. Mordasewicz, J. Osiatyński, J. Regulski, J. Stępień, P. Śleszyński 'Raport o ekonomicznych stratach i społecznych kosztach niekontrolowanej urbanizacji w Polsce' [Report on Economic Losses and Social Costs of Uncontrolled Urbanisation in Poland']; FRDL & IGiPZ PAN, 2013. (http://www.frdl.org.pl/pliki/frdl/document/zalaczniki_artykuly/Raport%20Ekonomiczny%2029.10.2013%20c alosc.pdf)

settlement areas throughout Poland is accompanied by a decline in the population figures, which generates unjustified financial liabilities for the state and local governments and, moreover, deteriorates the living conditions for the residents.

The participants often talked about the absence of corresponding instruments that would enable the implementation and enforcement of zoning plans. Again, as in the case of education, the essence of the problem consists in limiting the competencies of the municipalities in that sphere.

> *'A municipality has the right to create a zoning plan but has no right to enforce it. I am not party to proceedings when someone acts completely against the law.' (Voit).*

Politicisation of poviat and voivodship-level local government

The respondents fairly rarely mentioned the influence of political parties on the operation of local government units. If at all, they stressed negative phenomena related to the politicisation of authorities in major cities and of regional authorities.

> *'Local governments in voivodships and major cities are heavily politicised, which is really a pity (…) Rural or rural-urban local governments are hardly ever politicised and this is valuable, from the perspective of local government.' (Voit).*

Analysis of the results of most recent elections (2014) largely confirms those observations. The data indicate that there is a clear rule in this regard: **as the category of LGUs rises, so does the share of candidates backed up by party committees.** In voivodship parliaments, candidates from party-endorsed committees or party coalitions represented 74% of all those running in the local elections. The respective percentage in poviat councils was 53%, with 31% in municipal councils.

A similar regularity can be observed in the elections of voits and mayors. In small municipalities (up to 5K residents), the percentage of non-party candidates has remained high (approx. 74%), whereas in larger municipalities (over 100K residents), much like in 2010, it was slightly over 46% (after a visible decline between 2002 and 2006, from 60% to 40%). The highest share of those running from party-supported lists can be seen among candidates for mayors of major cities (nearly 50%). For this reason, **if we compare the election results in 2010 and 2014, we cannot conclude that political parties have reinforced their positions at the municipal level.** This is reflected, above all, in the nearly unchanged percentage of non-party voits (82.1%), mayors of smaller centres (82.9%) and mayors of major cities (62.3%). Of course, these data only reflect official affiliations.

Internal conflicts in local authorities

One respondent raised the issue **of conflicts between the local government and the council.** The introduction of direct elections to the posts of voits and mayors was in line with the society's expectations. At the same time, it triggered an institutional problem: an elected official may have the local government council against him/herself.

> *'That system (…) largely blocks the possibility of proper functioning. And this is something to discuss, certainly. I cannot tell you what kind of solution should be adopted.' (Voit)*

The problem of conflicts between representatives of executive power (voits and mayors) and the local council or some councillors is not common. The results of the study entitled 'The Summary of

the 2010–2014 Term of Office' indicate that it affects approx. 10% of LGUs. Nevertheless, the occurrence of such conflicts has a considerable negative effect on the day-to-day management of the LGUs and on the social perception of local government as such. If we juxtapose the results of the study with the outcomes of local elections, we will see that **a leader's success in the elections is largely conditional upon the frequency of conflicts in local government bodies:** in those LGUs where stormy relations were diagnosed, the leader was much more likely to lose his/her position in the first round of the elections.

Leadership in local government, communication with residents

The creation and development of citizens' co-responsibility for the local community is immensely important in the process of building self-governance. As Jerzy Regulski admitted, 'it is easiest to amend the law, it is more difficult to transform institutions and it is most difficult to change people's mentality and habits.'[44] Decentralisation of the state is not only about changing the sphere of law. Decentralisation also entails a change in citizens' mentality: they change their understanding of the local community and its tasks, and the role of residents and the local government in that community. The experience of many countries shows that such a change in the world outlook usually takes much longer than the introduction of legal amendments, however complicated they might be. Presumably, the reason lies in Poland's communist heritage. For many years, local governance hardly existed at all in former communist countries. Local affairs were decided centrally and citizens had hardly any influence on decisions which were being made.[45] As Regulski notices, 'people often do not realise what local self-governance really involves. They do not realise they are allowed to make their independent decisions and, moreover, that they are actually expected to do so; they can decide about their own local affairs and it depends on themselves how those affairs will be solved.'[46]

This is exactly the spirit in which many local government leaders spoke, indicating that human mentality often obstructs effective governance in selected spheres of local life. They pointed out that some citizens cannot find their place in democratic procedures and adapt to democratic decisions.

> *'Overall, the most difficult thing to change is the human mentality because all the social changes are more difficult than anything. Any change, even an obviously positive one, is met with reluctance. Everything is accepted with reluctance until some positive effects of change can be seen.' (Mayor).*

The respondents' comments also reflect lack of patience, at least among some local government leaders, about people who have no knowledge or competence.

> *'You know, if I had to tell you intuitively, well, this would reflect my inclination towards my own perception of the world and this job, a somewhat authoritarian perception. I would say I have to accept compromises with fools. I'm not talking about the residents but about*

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[44] Regulski, J., (2000), 'Samorząd III Rzeczypospolitej. Koncepcje i realizacja' [Local Government of the Third Polish Republic. Concepts and Implementation] , Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN; p. 388.

[45] Cf. Trutkowski C., Mandes S., 'Kapitał społeczny w małych miastach' [Social Capital in Small Towns], Warszawa: Scholar 2005; p.259.

[46] Regulski, J., (2007), 'Reformowanie Państwa. Moje doświadczenia' [Reforming the State. My Experience], Szczecin: FRDL and WSAP Szczecin; p. 70.

politicians who are fools. You know, local freaks, and there are lots of them in local government.' (Mayor of a city).

In that situation, the leader holds an important key to success of a municipality. The leader should demonstrate the ability to provide the right diagnosis of the local situation, be able to identify strengths and weaknesses of their units, have a convincing idea of how to develop their LGU and, finally, have the right people who will be able to fulfil those plans. Institutional factors related to the management of the local government office will be mentioned later on in this report. What is worth stressing here is that local government derives its strength from the leaders and from the competences of people who consistently implement their vision of development. As mentioned earlier, the respondents admitted that local government lacks strategic thinking, with the collaboration between key actors of local life often being inefficient.

3.3. Does local government need reforms?

The aforementioned summary of key systemic problems mentioned by the respondents may lead to various conclusions and generate a variety of ideas for reforms. Many were mentioned directly: the need to develop new regulations on local finances, the need to develop a new model to structure the local authorities, improved consistency in central policies regarding local tasks, the need to make a radical change in the rules of spatial management or the reversal of centralisation processes, and the restoration of the subsidiarity principle. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list. For instance, it does not include spheres where local governance is failing because leaders do not take the right actions, there is some neglect in governance or lack of awareness of developmental challenges or needs of local communities. Nevertheless, one should clearly stress that local government leaders hardly talked about their expectations to undertake radical reforms. The respondents felt that **changes were necessary but should be gradual and evolutionary**.

'The state does not work properly on many levels and does not come up to the challenge. Local government does. And that's it. We can improve it. It doesn't call for a great breakthrough but we need to reform the local government. We need to improve certain mechanisms which can, and should, work better. That's the point.' (Mayor).

Some respondents felt that reforms should actually restore the status quo from 1990s. As mentioned earlier, this period of local governance in Poland tends to be idealised.

'I think we don't need any great revolutions today or any great changes but, instead, we need something I would call 'going back to basics'; we need to restore that spirit of trust between the central authorities, the government, the parliament, and the local authorities. What lies at the heart is the belief that we exercise public governance from those two levels (…) and that both those authorities must feel co-responsible for building the quality of life on the one hand (…), and, on the other hand, there must be understanding that local government is a partner rather than an outsider; that local government is part of public authorities where the goals and tasks build the reality of the entire country and, as such, they reinforce the state.' (Mayor of a city).

4. Local development priorities and difficulties in managing LGUs

Essential administrative activities of local governments aside, one important challenge is to shape local development. For this reason, one of the goals of the studies was to identify the priorities of local governments in this regard. As a rule, such priorities entail a specific type of activities which require the right kinds of competences from people who are responsible for achieving them. A similar regularity can be expected when it comes to identifying the difficulties in managing LGUs. Once we exclude systemic problems, such difficulties may indicate insufficient competencies among officials, or a lack of mechanisms or skills to ensure effective governance at the local level.

4.1. Development priorities of LGUs

When asked about major tasks faced by their units, the interviewed local leaders mentioned various activities. The following categories of tasks were mentioned:

- Infrastructural investments – mostly the implementation of road projects and investments in technical infrastructure (construction of sewage systems);

- Revitalisation and modernisation of centres and special facilities (e.g. a railway station, historical monuments etc.) as well as architectural development:

  > *'We develop the city in terms of urban space, we are facing a really serious challenge: building a new centre of the city.' (Mayor of a city)*

- Preparing areas for investments: land reinforcement, construction of access roads etc.

  > *'We will want to obtain land and try to lay all the utilities there (…) We want to do it perhaps not on a large area but something to suit a specific investor… This is a challenge that we would like to …' (Voit)*

- Creating new jobs;

- Developing public transport;

- Improving the housing infrastructure, investments in municipal housing;

- Activities in the sphere of education – measures to improve the quality of teaching, reforming vocational education etc.

  > *'Education is an absolute priority because, well, we can wait and lay a sewage pipe tomorrow but we cannot catch up with today's education later on. We believe that our policy is absolutely right because we are investing in the young generation.' (Voit)*

- Development of projects in areas such as culture, leisure, sports and entertainment: constructing playgrounds, outdoor workout places, revitalisation of green areas, construction of sports facilities, bicycle paths etc.

  > *'We put a strong emphasis on looking for new projects at the verge of culture. In actual fact, this is a path to innovation, development, economic stimulation… Today, a modern city cannot exist without exciting events or interesting cultural activities.' (Mayor of a city)*

- Solving social problems, fighting exclusion

   'We want to do projects related to exclusion, this time it was digital exclusion but we are approaching other things as well, and we want to fight social exclusion, and run social programmes, too.' (Mayor)

- Fighting depopulation, combating external migration

   'Fighting depopulation has become a priority for me. I'll let others build a road or something. I'm dealing with somewhat difficult and unobvious mechanisms to stop depopulation because this requires intuition, creativity, psychological skills.' (Mayor of a city)

- Undertaking promotional activities

   'Creating a modern brand of the city; the brand is built because we want to create the quality, to have a place which is a source of inspiration.' (Mayor of a city)

The aforementioned responses given during individual in-depth interviews do not offer a closed list or an exhaustive catalogue. However, they can be viewed as an illustration of the changing perception of local development. Changes evoked by civilisation, as well as social and demographic transformations have brought a new perspective on tasks and challenges of local government. Therefore, the **actions undertaken by local government are not determined only by the development of key infrastructure and the improvement of living conditions but, increasingly, local governments speak of a more long-term perspective in context-based strategic thinking.**

   'The time for simple recipes, such as making sure that a road is straight, is long gone. We have exchanged all the lamps and we have lights everywhere (…). In a moment, everyone will have a toilet facility in their buildings, which is quite an advancement [in our town] and everyone has running water. We will have a waste sorting plant and nearly everyone who wants to work has a job; if people die, they die in very decent conditions, in a hospice, which we have expanded and so on.' (Mayor of a city).

Of course, this relates to the views of a very specific, narrow group of the respondents. The interviews (as mentioned at the beginning) were not representative. Nevertheless, they indicate at least how some local government leaders define various phenomena.

On the other hand, representative data were obtained from two independent quantitative surveys conducted among LGU secretaries as well as voits and mayors (the study was entitled 'The Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office'). Their findings reveal the dominance of the traditional hierarchy of developmental priorities. When it comes to challenges faced by Polish municipalities, infrastructural investments take a strong lead. When interpreting the results presented in the chart below, it is important to remember that the local government leaders were asked about the priorities of the past term of office whereas secretaries were asked about the priorities in the current term of office. In this context, it is worth noting that the importance of investment projects has fallen slightly whereas the frequency of mentions for 'stabilisation of the municipality/town budget' has gone up.

Chart 6: Development priorities in LGUs, as seen by secretaries and leaders

infrastructural investments — 76,7% / 86,4%

improving the quality of public/municipal services — 31,6% / 31,3%

stabilisation of municipal/town budget — 31,3% / 24,2%

social issues, e.g. solving social problems, resident integration — 21,1% / 16,6%

ongoing management, responding to problems as they arise — 15,4% / 15,2%

social activation of residents — 14,7% / 15,8%

another issue of local importance — 0,4% / 1,3%

■ LGU secretaries (priorities in this term of office) - N=1703

■ LGU leaders (priorities in the 2010-2014 term of office) - N=627

4.2. Sources of difficulty in day-to-day local governance

The opinions expressed by local government leaders with regard to major problems in the operations of local authorities are confirmed by the results of the surveys. Below presented are comparisons between opinions expressed by LGU leaders and secretaries, obtained from two independent surveys. Worth noting are the relatively small differences in the presented perspectives. When interpreting the findings, it is good to remember that respondents' opinions were influenced by the situation in their respective local government units. Whereas the comments made in the previous chapter largely refer to generalised perception of the local government system in Poland, the data presented on the chart below reflect a hierarchy of various problems at the local level.

Chart 7: Hierarchy of problem sources in local government, as seen by LGU secretaries and leaders

What are the sources of the GREATEST difficulties in day-to-day management of your local government unit?
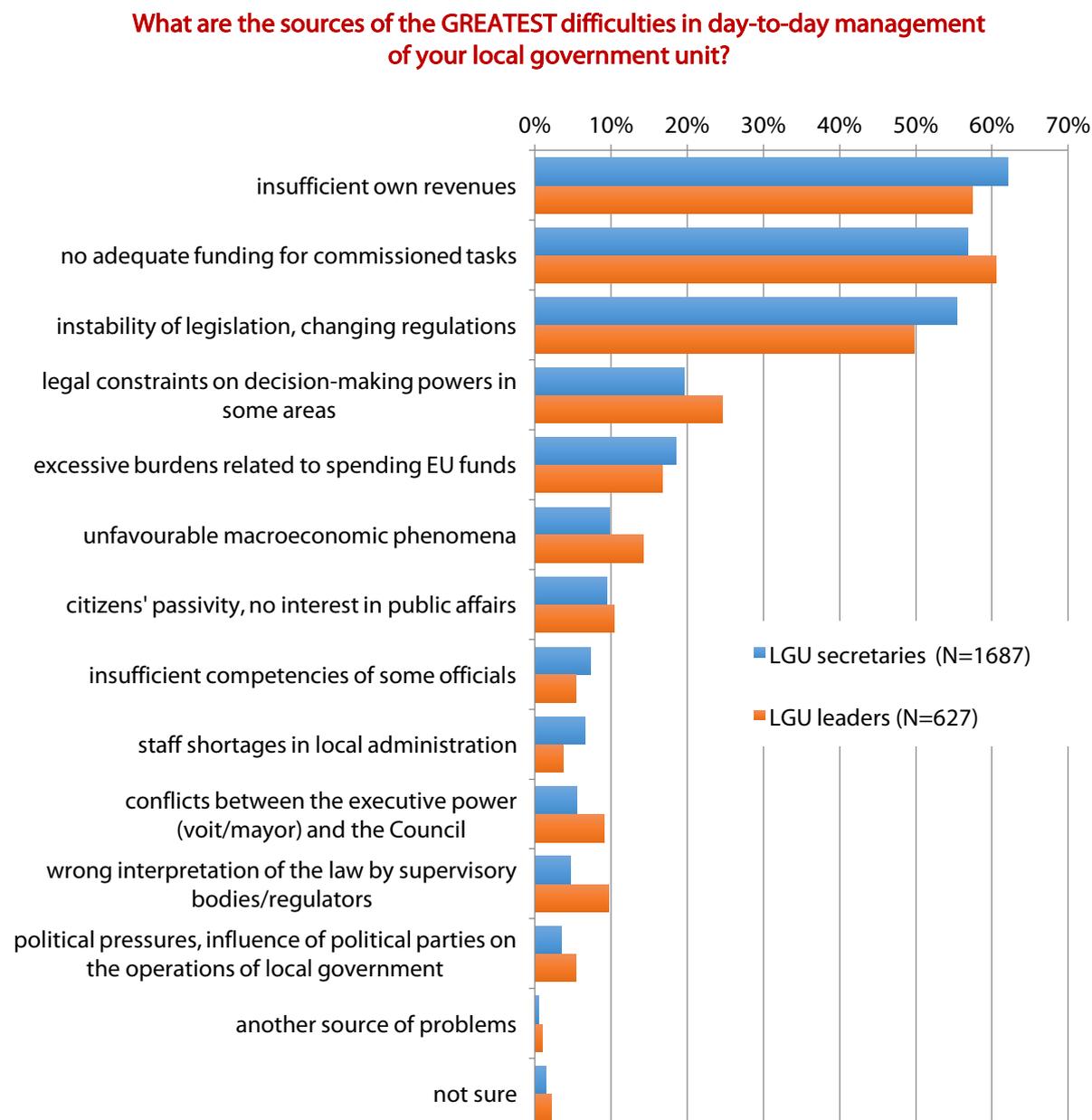
Analysis has shown that problems have a varied impact on the perceived efficiency of performance in LGUs. On the one hand, the data show that **'insufficient competencies of some officials' are potentially the greatest burden for the effective operation of some offices** (even though this concerns a relatively small group of LGUs). On the other hand, **'insufficient own revenues' are the most commonly mentioned source of problems**. This means that competence-related problems are not mentioned as the most common constraint, at least LGU secretaries, even though that have potentially the highest significance.

The respondents' declarations indicate that **the quality of life in local communities is most undermined by problems arising from insufficient own income generated by LGUs** (at the same time, the largest number of secretaries consider this issue to be particularly important). On the

other hand, sources of problems such as 'an excessive burden related to the spending of EU funds', 'improper interpretations of legislation by regulators', 'lack of adequate financing for commissioned tasks', 'legal constraints on decision-making at the local level in some areas' or 'instability of the law, changing legislation', which are identified as important sources of problems, do not have a particularly negative impact on operations in the broader sense. In other words, they do not translate into lower quality of life in the local community.

5. Managing the work of a local government office

Information obtained in the course of interviews conducted with local government leaders and the analysis of survey data indicate that the operations of local offices and the outcomes of their activity are influenced by three categories of factors (alongside external factors discussed in the first part of this document): (1) work organisation at the office, the approach to quality monitoring and analysis of outcomes, (2) competencies of officials and their attitudes towards work, and (3) relations between supervisors and subordinates, leaders' attitude towards subordinates.

However, before we proceed to discussing those factors, we would like to draw readers' attention to practices followed by leaders in their management of local administration, quality assurance methods applied at the offices, as well as methods to verify the attainment of results.

5.1. Management practices in local administration

Firstly, interviews conducted with local government leaders indicate that **there is no one-size-fits-all solution leading to a success in local administration**: it is impossible to identify a single issue or a group of factors which would inevitably improve the performance of a local government office. The freedom in shaping organisational structures of local government means that we are dealing with highly varied management philosophies and diverse solutions. Interestingly enough, the size of the office does not seem to play much of a role here. What is decisive, however, is the leader or, to be more precise, his/her personality.

Secondly, **based on the interviews we cannot conclude that locally adopted organisational solutions are backed up by in-depth reflection in the sphere of management**. Above all, a local office reflects the beliefs, experience, and intentions of the local authorities (or, at least, this is the conclusion from the interviews). As a result, we often deal with a 'colourful meadow' rather than a carefully designed garden, i.e. flexible reactions rather than rigorous implementation of a management model adapted to the economic or social background of the LGU concerned. Notably, this situation cannot be assessed unambiguously: one cannot validly claim that self-governing communities are unified in any way.

The existing legal regulations (above all, the Act on Municipal Self-Government, but also other regulations) leave **considerable freedom to local offices in shaping their structure.** Local officials are happy to exercise that freedom when implementing both general management concepts as well as specific solutions, in line with their idea of organising the work of their subordinates. As a result, a local government office is, to some extent, an emanation of the leader's beliefs and ideas. The interviews indicate that leaders perceive themselves and their working style to be highly influential. One can identify at least four general principles which, according to the respondents, characterise them as managers and influence the performance of 'their' administrative structures.

First and foremost, leaders highlight their **openness towards subordinates**, and this brings positive results. This attitude is well reflected in a statement made by one mayor of a big city: *'you just need to trust people and listen to them, that's important in management.'*

Another respondent pointed out that it was crucial to **be fair and play by the rules when managing a local office**. In that vision, the local leader is a guard and a guarantor of rules which regulate various requirements and rewards. If violated, even in minor ways, they may upset the entire system.

> *'If you select human resources professionals and trust them, things will work. But this depends on the mayor. If the mayor gets out of his role and begins to meddle with HR issues, even occasionally, he would ruin the system. It is not important how many new hires are admitted against the rules, it might not be significant in the overall figure. But it's enough to have one or two cases and people will know that they have no possibility to take decisions independently. In that case, they will apply self-censorship and constrain themselves, and things won't work any more. One must not allow precedents.' (Mayor of a city).*

Another management style mentioned by the respondents consisted in **setting goals and leaving the freedom to select the right methods** to achieve those goals. Officials are accountable for effectiveness and the leader does not inquire who achieved the goal and how, as long as the goal has been achieved.

> *'I give a lot of leeway to my staff. They might have ideas, I don't intervene. I only intervene when something begins to go wrong or when something collapses. And any official must be responsible for what they do. And once they understood that, they must do some thinking instead of doing things automatically. They need to think. What helps is that I never exert any pressure or anything like that.' (Voit).*

A completely different philosophy was adopted by another respondent, who sees **improvisation as a key to success**. Presumably (even though the respondent does not mention it explicitly), all relevant decisions in this approach are made by the leader.

> *'Overall, the operations of the office and the management are largely based on improvisation, as in a company (…), one cannot really arrange it neatly (…). [Things would be different] if we knew how much money we have, how many tasks we have and if we could arrange everything to make it work like a Swiss watch; [that] perhaps in some rich countries, [in] poor countries like Poland, and even more so like [our town], we need some room for improvisation.' (Mayor).*

5.2. Monitoring the quality of operations

It would seem that the organisation of the office should draw attention of those leaders who are interested in improving the performance of their administration. However, this is not the case. There were few comments to that effect in the interviews and those made were fairly superficial. However, quantitative surveys managed to verify the selected practices and implementation of specific organisational solutions.

The collected data indicate that only a small portion of LGUs have formalised, systematically applied mechanisms to monitor the work of their offices and to identify problems affecting their

operation. Even if leaders did mention some 'methods', such as 'assessment based on outcomes' or 'assessment by supervisors', the context of the statements indicated that we were not dealing with an effective, pre-planned monitoring mechanism. Most leaders from small towns and rural municipalities believe that it is sufficient to make assessments on the basis of information obtained in an unsystematic manner, directly from their subordinates, and from conversations with residents on various occasions.

Comments from LGU leaders indicate that whenever any monitoring indices are applied to measure the operations, LGUs usually check the number of complaints against the operation of officials, and the number of appeals against decisions issued. In some offices, this indicator is part of the ISO system whereas others apply this tool independently (or at least this is the conclusion from the interviews).

> *'Performance of a public office is best assessed by the number of complaints, appeals against decisions. How many complaints and appeals have been filed.' (Mayor)*

Municipalities and towns occasionally use social research to collect opinions among residents about the operation of their offices. Also in this case there is no precise information about research goals or methodology. However, the findings from 'The Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office'[47] indicate that customer satisfaction studies for their offices are conducted by approx. 44% of LGUs whereas satisfaction studies among customers of municipal organisational units are conducted by 22.3% of LGUs.

> *'We do research as regards our operations. We held such a study last year, using one [local] company.' (Voit)*

More than a half (53.3%) of secretaries participating in the survey admitted that their offices had not held any systematic self-assessment of performance. Given the absence of widespread monitoring mechanisms to provide information on the functioning of local government offices, one may wonder how local governments identify threats and problems at their respective units. Interviews with leaders bring only occasional and general answers to this question. Overall, the opinion expressed by one mayor of a major city is fairly typical:

> *'Everyone must feel responsible for what they do. They bear responsibility, also outside the office. In our case, this is based on trust and I presume that everyone works in good faith, being honest, competent and so on. There is so much work, so many decisions and so much is going on that sooner or later such cases would come to light, if they've ever happened. After so many years I can say this model works perfectly.' (Mayor of a city).*

Many leaders consciously accept the absence of well-developed mechanisms to assess the work of the office or reflect on its operations. Many of them do not feel the need to formalise this process.

> *'I trust my intuition and experience from the business sector. Things that work, work well, at least this is my opinion. And things work well when, to be blunt, nobody bothers me, and I don't meddle with other people's things.' (Mayor)*

Therefore, it is not surprising that when asked about the strategy and performance of public administration, the respondents would say: '*I suppose there must be, I think so,' (Voit), 'I can't remember but there probably are some,' (Voit), 'I think I can't remember that at the moment, there*

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[47] Trutkowski C., A. Kurniewicz, *ibidem.*

has always been things that public administration should be working better, some slogans, there certainly are some. I can't remember a document, but there certainly are some things.' (Mayor).

5.3. Overall assessment of the performance of LGU offices

The collected quantitative data indicate that public administration is rated very high for its performance. Both the overall mean value and the median of responses on a nine-point scale (from 1 – very bad to 9 – very good) was 7. Those ratings are not differentiated by the type of local government units.

Chart 8: Overall assessment of the performance of local administration

Total LGU secretaries (N=1657)

Rating	Percentage
1 - very bad	0,0%
2	0,0%
3	0,9%
4	3,0%
5	6,5%
6	18,3%
7	37,3%
8	24,3%
9 - very good	9,7%
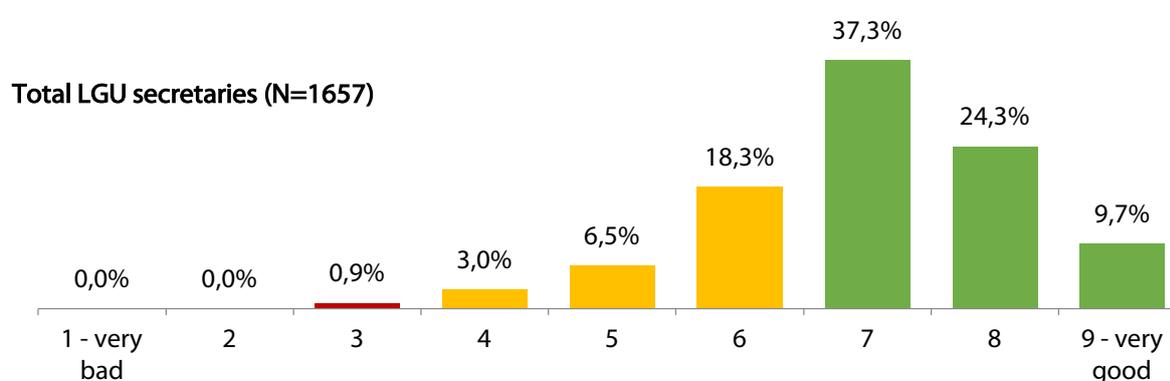
The respondents were asked to assess the effectiveness of various activities by their respective offices. Their answers revealed the following core problems in the operation of local government offices: 'implementation of e-administration and informatisation of the office' and 'public transport and roads'. Further on, one should add at least issues related to environment protection, spatial planning and real property management, external/internal audit and management control, planning and implementation of infrastructural investments, and implementation of educational policies.

Chart 9: Problematic areas of tasks carried out by local government offices (highly or partly) – as seen by LGU secretaries

Task area	partial difficulties	major difficulties
e-government platform and informatisation at the office	45,8%	31,0%
public transport and roads	48,8%	18,9%
external audit, internal audit and management control	47,6%	14,9%
environment protection	51,7%	9,6%
computer & IT training, use of IT tools	46,7%	13,7%
planning and implementation of infrastructural investments	46,8%	11,1%
educational policy at the LGU	45,4%	11,9%
spatial planning and real property management	48,5%	8,7%
building relations with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.	43,8%	9,9%
social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions	45,9%	6,9%
raising, servicing and managing external funding	43,4%	9,0%
team management, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.	44,2%	8,2%
strategic management at the LGU	45,4%	6,9%
protection of classified information and data protection	41,0%	6,3%
administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.	39,3%	3,3%
collaboration with NGOs	34,0%	6,5%
activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy	32,3%	7,6%
crisis management	34,6%	4,6%
public procurement and tender procedures	32,3%	3,8%
financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes, finance and accounting	30,6%	4,0%
HR management, HR policy	31,3%	3,3%
working time management	30,0%	4,0%
organisation of sport events, activities of sport and leisure institutions	26,5%	4,6%
work organisation at the office	28,7%	1,3%
operations of the Council, achievement of tasks by councillors	23,9%	4,3%
registry office and vital statistics	22,0%	4,5%
customer service, organisation of secretary's office, customer service centre etc.	18,2%	1,8%
ethics and prevention of corruption risks	15,7%	1,8%

Data analysis has shown that problems in the implementation of tasks in specific areas mentioned in the questionnaire have different levels of importance for the assessment of the performance of local offices. It turns out that the assessment of the performance related to strategic management, work organisation, HR policy, organisation of officials' work and management control play a crucial role. Among those categories, the greatest difficulties in the implementation are posed by management control. The data show that secretaries assess the performance of local administration mostly on the basis of factors related to the internal organisation of work at the local government office.

5.4. Barriers to institutional development as seen by local government leaders

It should be stressed that the functioning of local government offices was not mentioned spontaneously either in comments about the weaknesses of local government or in comments about problems related to various areas of activities undertaken by LGUs. When asked directly about this issue, the respondents usually reacted with some surprise and assured the interviewers that they were satisfied with the work of their subordinates. When probed, they were able to identify a number of problems that their offices grappled with. Most of them were difficulties shared by rural and urban municipalities, except for two last difficulties mentioned at the end.

Lack of financial resources to remunerate staff properly – this issue was mentioned directly or casually in the context of hiring and motivating staff (see below). One respondent said:

> *'I would like to motivate the staff members who really excel at their work by giving them some extra financial bonuses but, on the other hand, my resources for salaries are limited in the budget.' (Voit).*

The respondents mentioned **legal regulations which do not allow staff to be remunerated in line with their knowledge, competencies or value on the labour market**. The following situations are by no means exceptional:

> *'The best staff are leaving the office. Especially those who have worked at the department which raises EU funding, that's because they were offered more money by private companies. We prepared them, educated them, they got experience and skills and now they've left. (…) Retaining a staff member who is really well-prepared, who is a good professional is a really big problem.' (Voit).*

A slightly different problem with staff recruitment was mentioned by another respondent who was sure that *'people can learn pretty much anything. You can train them. However, a pro-active attitude and creativity are missing. Because such people probably don't come to work at a public office, or few of them do.' (Mayor of a city)*. In his opinion, **local administration scares proactive people off**, i.e. people who are ready to face new challenges and learn new things. This is related to 'clerical mentality':

> *'I was 28 or 29 years old and I was struck by that clerical mentality (…) I mean, people come to work at 8:00 am, leave at 3:59 pm. They need a written document for everything and then they're safe. When they don't get something done but they have a paper, they're not under threat. When an issue comes to the surface, but they can give a refusal just on the basis of legal regulations, they will give a refusal. (…) Officials were not goal-oriented, they were action-oriented. We have action, we circulate documents and that means things are*

> *OK. What if the goal hasn't been achieved? Well, it doesn't have to be. Main thing, there is action!' (Mayor).*

Particular types of problems for the operations of local government offices are caused by inspecting institutions, such as regional accounting chambers of the Supreme Chamber of Control: *'What sometimes chills your engagement is the awareness that in case of any external inspection any doubts will be used against the person who is being inspected.' (Mayor)*. Even if officials feel support from their supervisor, they look at the legal consequences of their decisions and, naturally, take a secure way, in case they will have to face an inspection.

> *'When clerks are at work, the thoughts of inspection and potential consequences of decisions are a bit paralysing and, unfortunately, that makes people very cautious.' (Mayor).*

For this perspective, it is better to gather more signatures and issue a cautious rather than a fair decision. This problem is aggravated by the unpredictability of some inspecting institutions. It may turn out that things which are accepted in one voivodship will be rejected in another. Again, the problem lies in low quality of legislation and non-transparent rules of application.

Another barrier which prevents highly competent people with management skills from working for a public office was mentioned by one respondent who talked about a '**glass ceiling'.**

> *'A glass ceiling in public administration is a real thing, this is not something made up. The promotion process often depends on other people retiring or on your immediate supervisor being promoted. And that often takes ages.'* (2).

From a position of a head of office, people can be promoted to the position of a secretary or deputy director of the unit but this is where the career path ends. In order to achieve another level, that of a voit or a mayor, one must run in general elections, and win, which requires completely different competencies versus those needed for clerical work.

The last two problems are specific to offices in major cities with multiple staff members and many units located in different buildings around the city. Staff members do not meet in the corridor and might not know one another at all. Such public offices face two problems. Firstly, the problem of **co-operation**:

> *'There are actions which also have such attributes that are related to work in a large administrative structure, you need to teach people how to co-operate horizontally, you need to create task forces which go beyond and across the normal operations in an organisational structure, which is not always simple. You need to teach project-oriented thinking.' (Mayor of a city).*

Secondly, there is a problem of **supervision over different units** operating within separate public policies, often physically located in different buildings.

> *'We are not really able to check the activities of all units which operate, say, under the social welfare legislation. If I wanted to control it as a mayor, I would need to establish another institution inside my office. There is an entity tasked with this, and it works. From time to time we run functional inspections but I cannot clearly say whether they perform all the tasks which the residents would expect them to.' (5).*

In the survey, LGU secretaries were asked about their opinions concerning different ways to streamline the work of their office. From among nine different categories, the largest number of

mentions was given to 'increasing staff's competencies' and 'increasing staff's salaries'. In rural municipalities, staffing shortages play a particularly important role.

However, when we juxtapose respondents' beliefs with their assessment of performance of their respective offices, they provide varied recipes to improve the 'health' of those offices. Essential issues concerning the working conditions (increasing salaries, increasing staff count), which could indicate that there is a shortage of funding to cover human resources (poorly paid and overloaded officials) were mentioned by those secretaries who rated the performance of their offices more positively! In other words, **in units which are perceived to perform smoothly (and which, presumably, are well managed) the only ways to improve the performance, as seen by secretaries, were related to pay rises or increased staff count** (and it is not clear if this is an actual reflection of the needs in those offices or simply a reflection of the secretaries' wishes).

On the other hand, and this is very important in the context of the leaders' opinions presented above, **the main need in offices which received lower ratings is to enhance management, improve interpersonal relations and develop staff's competencies.** Therefore, there is a risk that lack of well-defined management goals or lack of effective active management practices will reinforce the stagnation in poorly performing offices.

Of course, one can ask why these issues should be seen as important (i.e. management practices, enhanced potential of local administration, staff's motivation, staff's satisfaction with work, level of commitment etc.). The answer is probably both trivial and significant. **The quality of management (or at least the way it is viewed by the respondents) remains connected with the perception of the local quality of life.** Data indicate that the areas which are particularly important in this context are related to the quality of management and influences on local development. Of course, one must always bear in mind that we are speaking of patterns which emerge from opinions and beliefs expressed by LGU secretaries.

5.5. Appeal of employment and officials' motivation to work for LGUs

In the light of the research results, a question arises about the underlying causes of difficulties in the management of the aforementioned areas in local offices. At this point, we skip the systemic, social and managerial issues (which have been discussed earlier) and will draw readers' attention to the secretaries' assessment of local officials working for their respective entities. First and foremost, one should note that this assessment is generally very positive. All aspects of the assessment included in the survey questionnaire (except innovativeness in solving problems) were rated high in over 50% of the offices. In more than 80% of the entities, particularly favourable opinions were expressed about the quality of work performed by officials, their professional knowledge, quality of customer service and honesty in carrying out their job responsibilities.

Chart 10: Assessment of local officials on various aspects (accumulated 'very good' and 'good' responses)

Aspect	Percentage
honesty in executing their job responsibilities	92,6%
quality of customer service	92,2%
officials' knowledge related to their job responsibilities	84,3%
quality of work performed by officials	83,6%
efficacy in solving problems as they arise	68,7%
ability to work in a team	66,4%
officials' commitment and motivation to work	63,8%
degree of independence within job responsibilities	62,1%
motivation to improve their professional qualifications	53,1%
innovativeness in solving problems	40,6%

■ Total (n=1645)

The data presented in the chart above indicate that while the secretaries' assessment of the staff's performance is largely positive, **the poorest ratings were given to issues related to professional development: innovativeness, motivation to improve professional qualifications, degree of independence in executing job responsibilities as well as commitment and motivation.**

Secretaries perceive local government jobs as fairly attractive: on a scale from 1 to 9 (definitely unattractive vs. very attractive), the mean value was 6.58, with the median amounting to 7. While the data do not indicate any significant differentiation in the perception of attractiveness across different types of LGUs, one should nevertheless notice that the appeal of local government jobs was somewhat less likely to be appreciated in rural municipalities.

Chart 11: Perceived attractiveness of working for local government (LGU secretaries)

In your personal opinion, is a local government job ATTRACTIVE or UNATTRACTIVE in comparison with other available employment opportunities?

N=1648

0,1%	0,5%	2,2%	6,7%	14,0%	20,8%	26,8%	18,1%	10,7%
1 - definitely unattractive		3		5		7		9 - very attractive
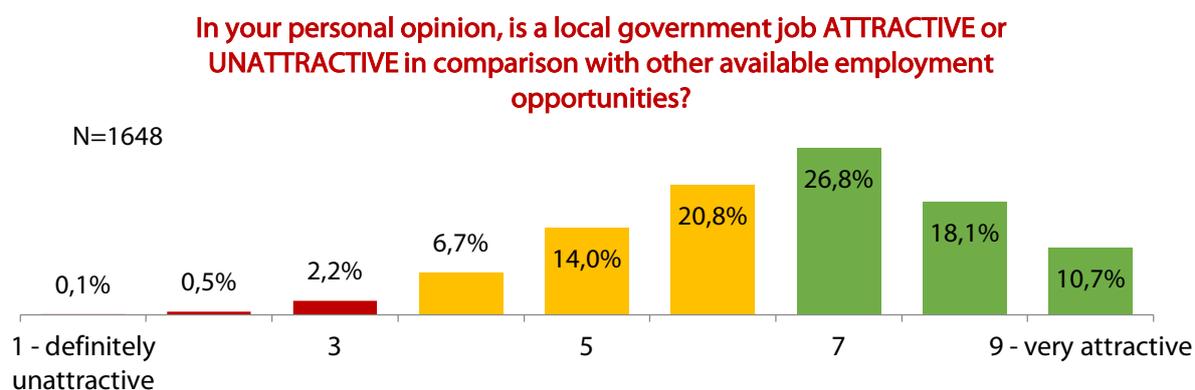
From the perspective of LGU secretaries, the main factors which determine the appeal of a local government job include 'job stability' and 'levels of salaries'. The respondents were less likely to mention aspects such as 'opportunities to improve one's competencies', 'proximity of work and

place of residence,'[48] 'employer's good reputation' or 'the possibility to reconcile work and private life'. Worth noting is that the respondents attached relatively lowest importance to aspects such as 'opportunities for attractive bonuses and pay rises', 'variety in tasks and responsibilities' or 'autonomy at work'.

Moreover, secretaries' responses indicate that the importance of factors which build the appeal of employment varies from one LGU type to another. In rural municipalities, more importance is attached to issues such as 'job stability' and 'proximity of work and place of residence' whereas in urban municipalities more attention is given to 'interesting challenges at work'.

The surveyed secretaries believe that the most important factors influencing officials' job satisfaction at their respective offices included, above all, issues related to working conditions: 'job stability', 'proximity of work and place of residence' and 'working time (working hours)'. Other issues play a secondary role.

Chart 12: Factors determining the appeal of a local government office as an employer – as seen by secretaries

Factor	Total (n=1631)
job stability	78,6%
proximity of workplace and place of residence	51,1%
working time, working hours	37,7%
attractive salary	25,6%
possibility to maintain a balance between career and private life	22,1%
opportunities to improve one's competencies	17,2%
employer's good reputation	10,7%
interesting challenges at work	9,5%
career and promotion opportunities	9,1%
opportunities for attractive bonuses and pay rises	5,3%
possibility to work with interesting people	4,5%
varied tasks and responsibilities	3,1%
autonomy at work	1,7%
not sure / don't know	1,2%
something else is important	0,6%

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[48] It is important to bear in mind that one third of the secretaries do not live in the municipalities where they work.

Data analysis has confirmed the opposition mentioned earlier, i.e. between officials' focus on satisfactory working conditions and the need to derive satisfaction with activities undertaken at work. While the latter perspective on local government jobs has a much stronger impact on job satisfaction, it is far less popular. **Regretfully, the dominant factors (related to employment conditions) do not enhance officials' satisfaction** (at least in the eyes of secretaries, perhaps being somewhat of a projection). Furthermore, we can assume that **for those staff members who attach importance to the observance of working hours and who are focused on striking a balance between career and private life (in whatever meaning), and who wish to get pay rises, a local government job is not particularly attractive.** Presumably, they treat it as any other job, without reflecting much on the nature of their responsibilities, not seeing them as a mission or a chance to do something for the good of the local community.

In the light of the aforementioned data, it may be somewhat surprising that local government leaders who took part in individual in-depth interviews were generally satisfied with the level of motivation demonstrated by their subordinates. *'My overall opinion is good,'* (Mayor), *'Some people get really involved, others get less involved but things are generally OK,'* (Voit). Only one critical voice was recorded: one respondent said that lack of satisfaction with the level of salaries may be causing staff's low commitment: *'I think it's too low, there is little, I have no particular bonuses to offer and this is what I'd like to focus on.' (Mayor).*

It is difficult to say on which basis those occasional opinions are formed since most offices **have not implemented any systematic staff appraisal mechanisms**. Only one person said that in their office *'people are assessed once in two years, it's self-appraisal, and the direct supervisor, myself, I assess those managers. And staff members express their opinions in questionnaires, and they can also speak directly, but there is also the formal staff appraisal path.' (Mayor).* The remaining respondents claimed they were satisfied with the indirect knowledge conveyed by the supervisors. Observations from interviews confirm the results of the survey: officials' satisfaction is studied very rarely and such practices are much less common in rural and rural-urban municipalities vis-a-vis towns and cities. For this very reason, the aforementioned results (secretaries' opinions about staff's satisfaction) should be viewed, above all, as a token of their beliefs rather than an account of systematic exploration.

When asked about the factors influencing on their subordinates' motivation and commitment, leaders mentioned mostly two elements, regardless of the size of their respective offices. Firstly, they spoke of the importance of **job stability and good working conditions.**

> *'A stable employer. A public office won't change its seat, won't go bankrupt, it will observe all labour law regulations; and the working hours are fairly predictable.' (Mayor).*

Stability should be understood not only as job security and compliance with Labour Code regulations but also as an opportunity to perform the same, repetitive tasks, without having to face new challenges. This factor sometimes plays a greater role than promotion opportunities or chances for a pay rise.

Leaders believe that the **salary** is another motivating factor for officials. One respondent referred to results of a survey conducted among officials and said that while officials were satisfied with their jobs, they complained about low salaries. Another one, without having such data, projected his own opinions onto his subordinates and said: *'if we asked our staff, they would say that everyone would like to earn more' (Voit).* Similar opinions, in different variants, were repeated in other

statements, yet were always hedged with *'money, but not only money' (Mayor)*, as if the respondents viewed their staff's desire to earn more as an embarrassing thing.

The views on other motivating factors (apart from stability and money) are varied. Two respondents thought that **officials derived satisfaction from achieving their goals**.

> *'That the job makes sense, that it's needed, that it helps to achieve visible, tangible, concrete goals.' (Voit),*

Another respondent also stressed **the importance of mission and work ethos** of local government officials as an important motivating factor (while detaching this opinion from his own position).

> *'A local government office is a bit of a special institution and in most cases people just have to love that job, and they have it at the back of their head that this is a mission for other people. If they don't feel it, they would leave. You know, either their boss will sack them because they misbehave towards clients, or they will decide by themselves that their work makes no sense. Or they may be disqualified by the residents because residents do write complaints about wrong organisation so such a person has to be fired.' (Mayor)*

Leaders' beliefs are only partly reflected in representative data from surveys conducted with secretaries. Issues such as 'appreciation by the management' (also by the leader) or the salary received do, indeed, come high in the ranking of motivating factors. However, satisfaction with the achieved goals and a sense of doing a meaningful job came at the very end of the list (nearly 18% of mentions, and the respondents could choose any number of factors). As regards the categories presented to the secretaries, this could be largely associated with the sense of influence: 'a possibility to influence the reality'. The situation looks similar in the case of ethos-related motivations. The 'sense of mission of local government' was mentioned by merely 18.5% of the secretaries. In the context of the aforementioned 'glass ceiling problem' and some officials' reluctance to pursue a career, we should also point out that 'promotion opportunities' were mentioned by merely 34.7% of the secretaries among factors that motivate officials to work better.

Chart 13: Factors which build officials' motivation to be committed and work better – as seen by LGU secretaries

Factor	essential (major) motivating factors	important but not essential	fairly unimportant	difficult to say
remuneration-related conditions	75,4%	22,5%		
appreciation by the management of the office	59,5%	33,4%	3,4%	
good atmosphere at the office	52,1%	41,3%	4,6%	
financial and in-kind rewards and prizes	51,1%	39,7%	5,4%	
good collaboration within the office	50,2%	41,6%	5,1%	
good relations with supervisors	47,2%	43,9%	4,4%	
opportunities for growth and experience accumulation	40,0%	47,9%	8,0%	
leader's charisma, respect for the voit/mayor	36,7%	37,6%	14,3%	11,4%
career advancement prospects	34,7%	48,5%	11,6%	
superiors' interest in staff members	33,2%	43,1%	14,5%	9,2%
employer's positive reputation	23,1%	43,3%	20,2%	13,4%
sense of mission of local government	18,5%	31,1%	31,0%	19,3%
sense of influence - impact on reality	17,7%	32,4%	30,0%	19,9%
considerable freedom in performing tasks	11,1%	39,3%	29,4%	20,2%

■ essential (major) motivating factors   ■ important but not essential   ■ fairly unimportant   ■ difficult to say

The array of motivating methods applied in local government offices is not very broad. The **system of rewards and bonuses** is the key mechanism. **Financial rewards** are the prevalent method and, not surprisingly, they are also preferred by subordinates. Differentiation of salaries is a particular case of this mechanism.

> *'We are trying to depart from the policy of pay rises in a standardised and uniform way. Instead, pay rises means that we pay more in order to reward those people whose contribution, work commitment and competencies are higher.' (Mayor of a city)*

As one respondent pointed out, other types of rewards may include: *'appreciation, an interesting job, challenges, travel, training programmes' (Mayor of a city)*. However, he did not specify on which basis such rewards were offered. Another person was more concrete when he said: *'we give them opportunities, and **bonuses to motivate them to improve their qualifications**. We offer financial support for post-graduate training programmes.' (Mayor)*.

Survey data confirm information obtained from leaders: two key methods applied at local government offices to motivate staff include financial rewards and financial support for study programmes, courses and training events.

6. Training experience and postulates

Above all, one should stress that the **competences of officials were rated as fairly high, both by secretaries (survey data), and local government leaders (findings from in-depth interviews)**. As one mayor said (this statement can be seen as typical for other interviews): *'our staff don't really lack competencies.'* This is not a surprising finding. It is usually the leaders who decide whom to employ and they often start their term of office with replacing some personnel, especially at high-level posts. Incidentally, such practices (exchange of personnel as a result of a change in authorities) were met by some local government leaders with surprise and disapproval, exactly in the context of their opinions on competences.

> *'People have to work for a couple of years to become good officials. And I'm very surprised that people win elections and replace the staff. Those people don't even realise how much it takes to prepare another person to do the same work… Unless this was a bad worker, OK, I can understand that. But if it's a good official, this person is priceless. And this should be respected, those officials should keep their jobs because a lot depends on them.' (Voit)*

Chart 14: Assessment of officials' competencies

Can you notice any problems in the work of your office primarily caused by knowledge or skills gaps on the part of officials?

Yes, definitely	Yes, probably	No, probably not	No, definitely not	Not sure
2,8%	23,3%	60,6%	5,0%	8,2%

N=1592
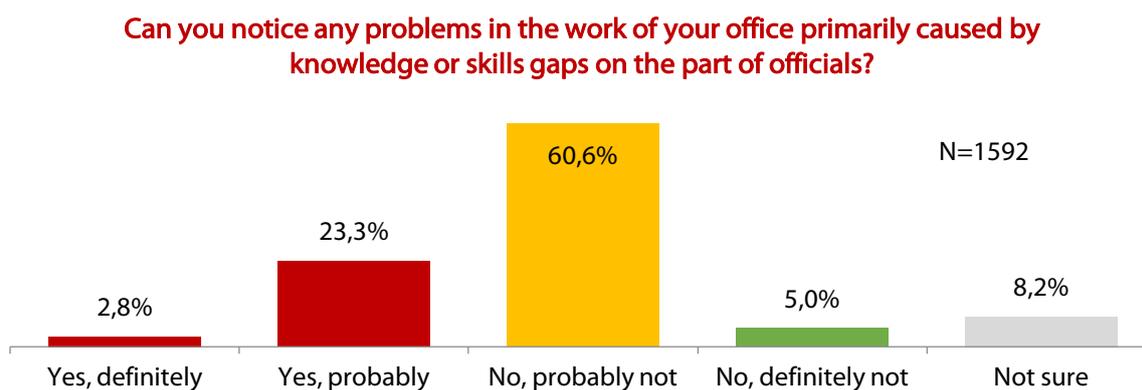
6.1. Training experience and practices

The interviewed local government leaders unanimously admit that staff training is extremely important. Based on the results of the survey entitled 'The Summary of the 2010–2014 Term of Office', more than 89% of LGUs very frequently or fairly frequently send their staff to training events, and the data do not reveal any significant differences in this regard (frequency of participation) between various types of municipalities.

> *'Education, education, and education again. The most important thing is to equip people with specific competencies. (…) And those who received this offer, I mean, they went to university, took a post-graduate programme.' (Voit)*

How often do staff of your office take part in external training?
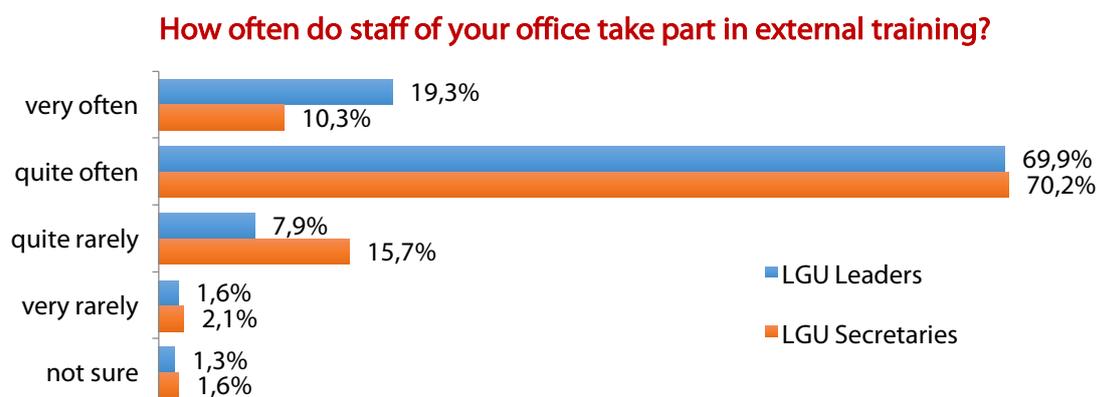
Much like before, when we compare opinions expressed by secretaries and leaders, we should emphasise that the data on the chart above come from two different, independent studies. The data reveal differences in beliefs between secretaries and local government leaders regarding their staff's frequency of participation in training events or programmes. On this basis, we can generally see that leaders are more optimistic in their responses. One statement expressed by a voit may be helpful in interpreting those differences. When asked about staff's participation in training, he wanted to refer the interviewer to the secretary and claimed that *'the secretary is the person responsible for the system of training.'*

Notably, the notions of 'very frequently' and 'fairly frequently' may be understood in various ways by the respondents. For this reason, in order to provide a reliable assessment of training practices, reference to other research data may be helpful. According to secretaries' declarations, representatives of 95.8% of LGU offices took part in various external training events and courses during the last year. Most of those were open, paid-for training programmes organised by external providers for staff of various public offices. The second position was taken by free-of-charge training organised under various projects. The latter were more commonly attended by officials from rural municipalities and those municipalities were also more likely to organise dedicated, closed training events intended for the staff of the office.

Therefore, one should conclude that regardless of some discrepancies in data provided by leaders and secretaries, **local government officials often take part in training**, even though some differentiation was recorded here. Training is more commonly undertaken by people working for town/city offices rather than rural municipalities, and it is mostly undertaken by officials from major local government units.

This information can be supplemented by data indicating that 56.3% of offices organised internal training events last year. Such training was usually organised by urban municipalities (74.6% of offices), and less frequently in rural-urban municipalities (63.2%), with the lowest percentage for rural municipalities (50.6%). Moreover, 83.9% of the secretaries declared that representatives of their offices participated in conferences devoted to local governance issues. Less popular were other forms of education and exchange of experience: meetings of occupational groups, clubs, forums (28% of mentions), distance learning (27.1%) as well as post-graduate programmes (26.3%).

It is difficult to identify a criterion that would help to assess the effectiveness of training among officials or the level of financial resources spent on staff training. On could take a benchmarking perspective and say, for instance, that expenses on staff training in the region of Podkarpacie are nearly twice as low as those in the Zachodniopomorskie voivodship. Another approach would be to say that only slightly above a quarter of the secretaries currently see problems in the work of their offices caused by insufficient competencies of staff whereas 56.5% of them claim that the amount of financing for staff training is adequate (34.1% think that needs are higher, with the largest percentages in Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Lubuskie and Łódzkie voivodships). However, one can also directly source leaders' opinions. When asked about the effectiveness of training, they are often confused, which indicates that this is something they have not thought about earlier! One respondent, trying to get himself out of this question, said vaguely:

> *'Inspections which come, they check the implementation of various things, very varied areas, and they give an answer to the question on whether the training brings any results or not. And whenever there are any serious comments, we can see that the staff member is well-versed with things. And we analyse it in this way: we sit down and analyse it, and there is a post-inspection report, and here we go, he took that training, and this must have been discussed at that training, and he either complied or didn't comply. Or, things have changed here, indeed, we haven't noticed that, our staff didn't attend the training from this field and we can see some gaps.' (Voit).*

As a rule, the respondents assume good faith among their subordinates. From the sheer fact that staff members decide to undergo training, the respondents conclude that the staff want to gain knowledge and use it in practice. Therefore, the respondents often do not see any need to monitor the efficacy of training. Considering that there are no widespread practices focused on exploring training needs of the staff (less than a half of offices declare having such practices, and mostly in the form of face-to-face conversations with subordinates), we can assume that most LGUs have not developed any consistent and coherent approach to developing competences of their clerical staff. While 54.6% of the secretaries declare that officials in their respective units are formally obligated to improve their qualifications, the most common foundation for this obligation is the Act on Local Government Personnel (which applies to all officials, not only those employed in the 65% of offices whose representatives mentioned this legal basis). **If we disregard the legislators' requirement invoked by the respondents, it will turn out that the obligation for the staff to undergo training (in any format) exists only in 18.3% of local government offices!** In other offices, people either decide that these matters are regulated by the law, or accept the absence of formal requirements in this respect. Of course, this does not mean that LGUs do not train their staff. However, this means that in the vast majority of cases those practices are not regulated or planned in any way.

Regardless of the absence of internal regulations, leaders believe that local government officials are willing to take part in training, albeit the degree of willingness might vary: *'Young people are happy to travel to train, older folks are less willing.' (Voit)*. The respondents also declare that their subordinates usually proactively report the kinds of training they would like to take part in.

> *'They want to learn more, they do, most of our staff are young, and most are women and many of those women have children; they are usually very good workers, many of them have more than one child, sometimes more than two, and this doesn't interfere with their work.' (Mayor).*

The chart below presents the most popular training topics for offices in 2015 (as mentioned by LGU secretaries). This summary clearly shows that the prevailing types of training are those which help officials fill their knowledge gaps on an ad hoc basis, as needed in their everyday work for local administration.

Chart 16: Topics of training undertaken by officials in the course of last year (as mentioned by secretaries, categories over 10%)

Topic	Percentage
financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes, finance and accounting	65,5%
registry office and vital statistics	58,9%
public procurement and tender procedures	58,9%
environment protection	57,8%
raising, servicing and managing external funding	48,2%
protection of classified information and data protection	45,2%
educational policy at the LGU	44,3%
spatial planning and real property management	40,6%
ePUAP (e-government platform) and informatisation at the office	35,2%
administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.	33,7%
crisis management	32,6%
collaboration with NGOs	32,3%
HR management, HR policy	27,6%
computer & IT training, use of IT tools	22,4%
public transport and roads	22,2%
social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions	21,4%
planning and implementation of infrastructural investments	19,2%
external audit, internal audit and management control	18,9%
councillors' tasks and responsibilities, operation of the Council's office	16,6%

■Total (n=1497)

The attitude towards training is reflected in how offices select the staff members to take part in such events. Councillors get training to a very limited extent: in 53.8% of offices no training was financed at all for members of the council in 2015 and further 23.6% reported only one such case. Merely 16.2% of the secretaries confirmed relatively frequent participation in training in the case of councillors. Presumably, apart from legal and formal obstacles related to cost settlements for such

training, this approach may stem from a specific perception of training and its usefulness: since councillors are not responsible for any specific tasks, it is thought that there is no need to train them. For this reason, mostly rank-and-file staff members are trained: low-level officials and, less frequently, heads of organisational units. This results from the belief that since they perform everyday administrative activities, prepare decisions, serve customers, develop draft documents etc., then they should be the ones to have a good grasp of current legislation and regulations and should be able to get that knowledge.

Chart 17: Training participants at LGUs

How often fo the following take part in external training (usually):

	very frequently	fairly frequently	fairly rarely	very rarely	not sure
top management of your office	5,4%	53,6%	32,0%	6,6%	
heads of departments/sections	5,1%	56,8%	19,6%		3,4%
rank-and-file staff members	12,9%	58,8%	12,3%		
councillors	1,7%		22,4%	51,4%	11,3%
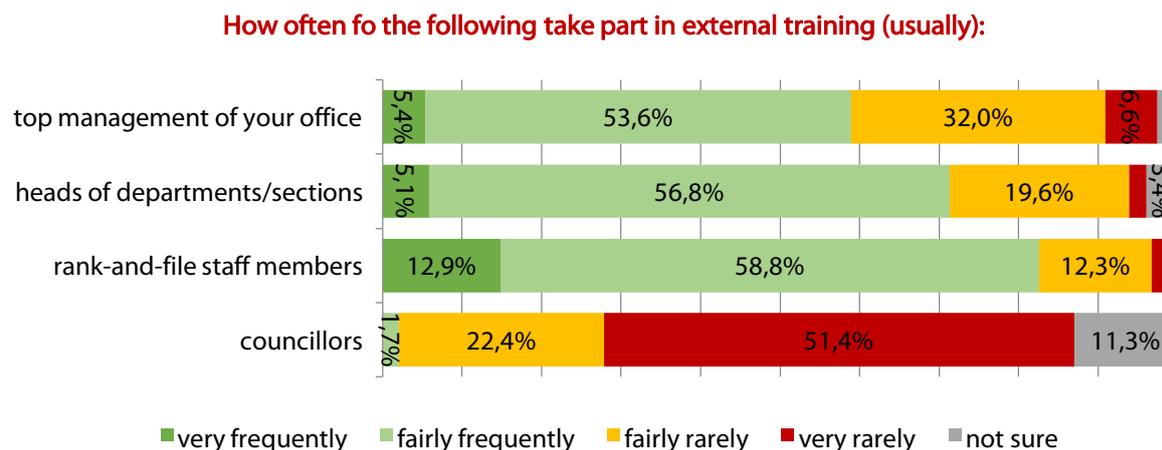
After many years of experience, leaders have a firm opinion on various educational activities targeted at officials and they have ways of selecting them. Since sending an employee to training entails costs and organisational problems, almost all such decisions are taken with care. Importantly, leaders believe that costs are not the decisive factor here: *'We are generous when it comes to spending money on training. But we select companies which really do good training, not ones that just kill the time' (Mayor).*

The respondents' comments indicate that a few factors should play a decisive role when selecting training offers. They include:

– **Reputation of the trainer** – it is best to have a trainer who has proven to be good, who is recommended by other officials or whose training was attended earlier. The most important strengths of a trainer include specialist knowledge, awareness of local singularities and the training methods applied.

> *'We analyse people who are going to conduct the training. Of course, it's a sectoral analysis. Not just 'let's get some training'. Instead, we analyse it for the sector, and, let's face it, we select people we've had positive experience with.' (Voit)*

– **Reputation of the organiser** – the respondents claimed they were happy to use recognised institutions or offers from **industry organisations**, which have two advantages: they are reliable and cheaper.

> *'I must tell you that my staff have become really picky, I mean, they won't go to just any training, they check who organises it, they check the organiser, they check the lecturer.' (Voit)*

- **Costs of training,** with quality guaranteed – offers from local government institutions and organisations enjoy popularity since they are credible and cheaper.

    'We look for cheaper ones, which doesn't mean they're worse; and we use things that are organised at the poviat or voivodship level, from specific ministries and from local government organisations. Associations of municipalities, of poviats, of towns, they carry out various programmes and their training is often free of charge, and our staff use it very often.' (Voit)

- **Location of training** – the respondents claimed they preferred training at locations which are not very far from their respective offices.

    'I really don't like to travel far when it comes to training.' (Voit)

    'They want to get trained, but few people would like to travel far so we try to organise things close by.' (Mayor)

Survey data allow us to assess the importance of various factors which determine the choice of training from a broader perspective. Those data indicate that there is an essential issue which is perhaps skipped by leaders as obvious, i.e. that the topics should be relevant for the current needs of the offices. The aforementioned factors mentioned by heads of LGUs come towards the end of the hierarchy. Partly, this means that **leaders' wishes do not fully overlap with reality: they want substantive training for their staff, conducted by excellent experts, organised by reliable and recognised entities, yet the 'prose of life' means that much more importance has to be given to factors such as costs of training and current challenges faced by their offices.**

In the course of the interviews local government leaders were asked to assess their previous experience with training and to reflect on the most common advantages and disadvantages of educational activities in which officials take part.

The main problem experienced by the respondents concerned low quality of training. The reason was thought to lie, primarily, in the principles of EU funds allocation under the Human Capital Operational Programme where offers were selected mostly on the basis of the lowest price.

> *'The problem of the lowest price, or the price and selection of the training company, and the beneficiary had really no influence on that selection, and the quality of training might really be quite varied.' (Voit)*

> *'There was a rush and there were plenty of EU funds, plenty of free training offers, and once after thirty minutes I was asked what I was doing here. That happens, too.' (Mayor).*

The respondents gave examples of training conducted in attractive locations. Proverbially, Zakopane, Poland's most famous mountain resort, was mentioned here, with a focus on tourist attractions, leisure and good food. However, the respondents often added that *'there might be fewer of those things now, times have changed now' (Mayor).*

Another reason behind poor quality of training is connected with unprepared or incompetent trainers, often resorting to fraudulent practices and offering very low quality in their training.

> *'A guy would come just to collect cash from the clients and read out the text of the law, and that kind of training makes no sense whatsoever.' (Mayor)*

Long-lasting or non-residential training events often give rise to serious problems in day-to-day operations of local government offices: *'When you need to send a staff member to training, someone has to substitute for her, and if she is the only specialist, well, you need to suspend it so there is something missing because of her absence' (Mayor)*. Non-residential training also gives rise to numerous problems in officials' private life.

> *'What often happens that it's quite problematic. You are absent from work and, moreover, you need to leave home. That's not simple or obvious for many adults. Some has to pick up the kids from school, cook dinner, make breakfast or run errands. Unfortunately, going away on training ruins those situations in many ways.' (Mayor of a city)*

Therefore, it is not surprising that, from the perspective of decision-makers, **an ideal training event is organised within their office during working hours, for a group of officials, facilitated by a proven, experienced expert in a selected area of competence, who refers to specific practical examples from the life of local offices** (as a reminder, in 2015, such training events were organised at 56.3% LGUs).

6.2. Training postulates and needs

Local government leaders usually had no precise knowledge of the kinds of competencies that were missing among their subordinates. Consequently, they found it hard to determine the concrete types of training that could be useful in their particular situation. When asked about the knowledge officials needed, the respondents usually gave fairly general answers, referring to the specific nature of particular departments, individual needs of staff or recent changes in legislation.

> *'Each department would have a different thing, when we have a public procurement department or architecture department, each speaks of completely different things. And if you go to the environment department, you will be speaking about other regulations. You know, we cannot say those are these sections or those sections.' (Voit)*

Also the secretaries were asked to assess the training needs. In many cases, secretaries directly supervise the work of specific organisational units and have the best awareness of knowledge gaps or skills gaps among the personnel. Their comments were used to develop a list of training postulates or expectations. What came as a strong winner on the list was the training related to implementation of e-government, followed by issues related to external funding (particularly EU funds), and, thirdly, public procurement and tender procedures. When we analyse the distribution of the respondents' answers presented on the following graph, we should also point out to the least mentioned items: organisation of sporting events, activity of sport and leisure institutions, ethics and prevention of the corruption risks, as well as activities of cultural institutions and implementation of cultural policies. In other words, what we find at the top of the hierarchy are matters related to day-to-day operations of the offices and their administrative responsibilities whereas local development policies come towards the bottom.

Chart 18: Training postulates –for staff of local government offices (as seen by LGU secretaries)

| Category	Total (n=1582)
ePUAP (e-government platform) and informatisation at the office	42,3%
raising, servicing and managing external funding	32,5%
public procurement and tender procedures	31,5%
administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.	29,8%
external audit, internal audit and management control	28,3%
protection of classified information and data protection	24,2%
financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes, finance and accounting	21,6%
computer & IT training, use of IT tools	19,1%
educational policy at the LGU	18,8%
spatial planning and real property management	17,6%
environment protection	17,5%
planning and implementation of infrastructural investments	14,3%
strategic management at the LGU	11,4%
public transport and roads	11,3%
language training, selected foreign languages	11,0%
team management, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.	9,8%
registry office and vital statistics	9,5%
building relations with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.	9,3%
collaboration with NGOs	9,3%
HR management, HR policy	9,1%
working time management	6,5%
work organisation at the office	6,2%
social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions	5,6%
crisis management	5,5%
councillors' tasks and responsibilities, operation of the Council's office	5,2%
customer service, organisation of secretary's office, customer service centre etc.	4,9%
activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy	2,9%
ethics and prevention of corruption risks	2,8%
not sure / don't know	2,6%
organisation of sport events, activities of sport and leisure institutions	1,5%

To some extent, the selection of training topics presented on the graph above might seem surprising. The topics which were mentioned quite often corresponded with those spheres of operation which, according to secretaries' declarations, were not a source of problems in day-to-day operations. A question arises then: how should we understand those responses?

It is important to bear in mind that the diagnosis of training needs should help to identify the discrepancies between the current knowledge of potential training participants and the knowledge which is required or desirable for some reason. It turns out that in many cases training expectations and postulates presented by potential training participants deviate from the actual needs. This happens for many reasons, such as lack of awareness that competencies are insufficient, erroneous identification of problem causes, or a stereotypical approach adopted when selecting training topics. Therefore, what is needed for the identification of training needs is the exploration of the causes of problems and identification of those which can be addressed by gaining new knowledge or developing skills. Those should be distinguished from areas which call for other actions or specific modifications. It is also worth remembering that uncritical acceptance of postulates might expose a local government office to unnecessary burdens (financial and organisational) or even lead to unfavourable consequences (when actually required knowledge is not gained).

In relation to the aforementioned comments, the training postulates mentioned by the secretaries were verified in contrast with the problem areas declared as existing in local government offices. Of course, this exercise is not sufficient for an actual needs diagnosis. After all, there are also other factors which influence the operation of offices, such as systemic factors (discussed in the first part of this document), or management practices employed by leaders. However, we cannot neglect the fact that the causes of at least some problems are connected with lack of competencies among the staff of offices represented by the secretaries.

Chart 19: Areas of major difficulties in fulfilling tasks, versus perceived training needs of staff (as mentioned by secretaries)
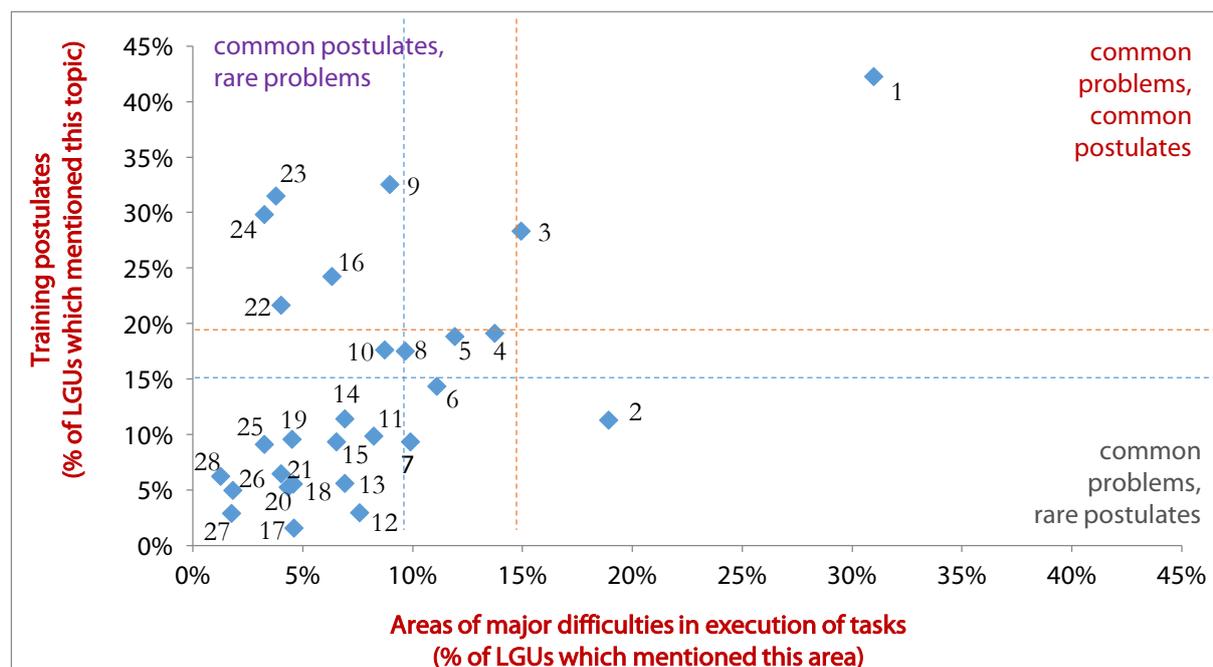
1 - ePUAP (e-government platform) and informatisation at the office
2 - public transport and roads
3 - external audit, internal audit and management control
4 - computer & IT training, use of IT tools
5 - educational policy at the LGU
6 - planning and implementation of infrastructural investments
7 - building relations with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.
8 - environment protection
9 - raising, servicing and managing external funding
10 - spatial planning and real property management
11 - team management, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.
12 - activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy
13 - social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions
14 - strategic management at the LGU
15 - collaboration with NGOs
16 - protection of classified information and data protection
17 - organisation of sport events, activities of sport and leisure institutions
18 - crisis management
19 - registry office and vital statistics
20 - councillors' tasks and responsibilities, operation of the Council's office
21 - working time management
22 - financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes, finance and accounting
23 - public procurement and tender procedures
24 - administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.
25 - HR management, HR policy
26 - customer service, organisation of secretary's office, customer service centre etc.
27 - ethics and prevention of corruption risks
28 - work organisation at the office

Data analysis has shown that the most important training needs of staff of local government offices (at least in relation to the problems faced by LGUs) relate to areas such as: e-government, public transport and road management, external and internal audit, management control. Secondly, we should mention training related to computer skills and the use of IT tools, education policy at LGUs as well as planning and implementation of infrastructural investments. There is also a group of topics which were often mentioned but are not connected with problems affecting local government offices. Of course, this does not mean that such training postulates voiced by secretaries should be neglected: after all, they reflect the potential intention to train staff in those areas. It is worth remembering, however, that the usability of such training at LGUs is not necessarily very high.

Overlap between problem areas identified in day-to-day operations and training postulates (correlations between responses)

protection of classified information and data protection	0.242
external audit, internal audit and management control	0.242
ePUAP (e-government platform) and informatisation at the office	0.221
computer & IT training, use of IT tools	0.205
councillors' tasks and responsibilities, operation of the Council's office	0.197
working time management	0.195

public procurement and tender procedures	0.189
educational policy at the LGU	0.185
administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.	0.182
spatial planning and real property management	0.172
registry office and vital statistics	0.170
crisis management	0.161
raising, servicing and managing external funding	0.157
ethics and prevention of corruption risks	0.155
collaboration with NGOs	0.146
environment protection	0.146
activities of cultural institutions, implementation of cultural policy	0.144
social policy, social integration, activities of welfare institutions	0.143
team management, team work techniques, conflict resolution etc.	0.141
building relations with residents, public consultations, collaboration etc.	0.138
work organisation at the office	0.138
strategic management at the LGU	0.136
customer service, organisation of secretary's office, customer service centre etc.	0.133
planning and implementation of infrastructural investments	0.132
financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes, finance and accounting	0.119
public transport and roads	0.116
organisation of sport events, activities of sport and leisure institutions	0.111
HR management, HR policy	0.094

Again, we should emphasise that the list provided above only results from a juxtaposition of declared problems in the operation of local government offices and training postulates voiced. The list does not cover other factors which influence the operation of offices, such as locally adopted strategic development priorities, the regional context, the nature of the locality, or economic, social and systemic constraints.

With regard to training postulates mentioned, there are some interesting variations depending on the type of LGUs. The data indicate that **towns and cities need somewhat different kinds of training support than rural municipalities**. Secretaries of urban LGUs were more likely to mention such training areas as e-government, computer skills and IT, strategic management, human team management, HR policy, public consultations and outreach activities (building relations with residents). In turn, smaller LGUs were focused on areas related to raising EU funds, data protection and environment protection. This may reflect the different perspectives on the role of local administration and the challenges faced by it. Rural municipalities, which spend less on training their staff (which is why their staff are less likely to participate in training), pay most attention to day-to-day administration, whereas urban offices attach more importance to education of a more strategic profile.

In rural municipalities, the priorities in training needs include: implementation of e-government, management of public transport and road infrastructure and matters related to external/internal audit and management control. Topics which are slightly less significant but nevertheless important include: computer skills, information technologies at the office, educational policy at the LGU, planning and implementation of infrastructural investments, environment protection as well as raising and processing external funding. This summary reflects the primacy of administrative topics related to day-to-day management of local government units.

Secretaries from urban-rural units mentioned areas which are very similar to those listed by rural municipalities. However, notable is a slight increase in the importance of outreach activities and public consultations.

The key training needs in urban municipalities (as declared by their secretaries) are close to the primary answers given by other types of LGUs. However, there is a significant increase in the importance of topics such as: human team management and working time management.

Secretaries of LGUs were also asked about the most important personal preferences in training. In other words, they were asked to identify training which would help them become more efficient in performing their responsibilities. The declarations obtained from this question are given on the next graph. It is easy to notice that the overall percentages of mentions are lower versus questions about staff's training needs. This is partly because secretaries were asked to select only three main categories. However, some priorities are similar to training needs of staff. What tops the list is e-government, external/internal audit and management control. Other leading topics are related to the organisation of work at LGUs (i.e. the actual area of responsibility for secretaries) and management of human teams.

What should be seen as a source of concern is the fact that implementation of public policies, ethics and prevention of corruption risks are not of interest for the interviewed secretaries. The latter were mentioned by some leaders, yet it is important to bear in mind that leaders are rarely involved in their staff's training, usually delegating those matters to secretaries.

> *'There should be some ethics, too. A bit of work ethos, again…, or perhaps for the first time for them. Sensitising them. You know, you need to remind them to treat people like clients, not like supplicants, they are our clients, the residents are. They should be treated like normal people, like partners, you know. Without the bumpkin-like attitude which you sometimes see.' (Mayor of a city)*

Chart 20: Training preferences reported by LGU secretaries

Training area	Total
ePUAP (e-government platform) and informatisation…	25,9%
external audit, internal audit and management control	24,7%
work organisation at the office	15,7%
protection of classified information and data protection	15,4%
team management, team work techniques, conflict…	14,1%
raising, servicing and managing external funding	13,5%
public procurement and tender procedures	13,2%
administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions etc.	13,0%
HR management, HR policy	11,3%
educational policy at the LGU	10,4%
strategic management at the LGU	10,4%
computer & IT training, use of IT tools	10,1%
working time management	7,2%
financial management at LGUs, local fees and taxes,…	6,8%
language training, selected foreign languages	5,3%
building relations with residents, public…	5,1%
not sure / don't know	5,1%
spatial planning and real property management	4,7%
collaboration with NGOs	4,5%
environment protection	4,4%
planning and implementation of infrastructural…	3,8%
registry office and vital statistics	3,7%
I do not need any particular training at the moment	3,5%
customer service, organisation of secretary's office,…	3,2%
public transport and roads	3,1%
councillors' tasks and responsibilities, operation of…	2,0%
crisis management	1,9%
social policy, social integration, activities of welfare…	1,7%
ethics and prevention of corruption risks	1,1%
activities of cultural institutions, implementation of…	1,0%
another area	0,8%
organisation of sport events, activities of sport and…	0,4%

Total (n=1578)

Finally, it is worth noting that the exploration of training needs at local government offices does not seem to be viewed as a priority. The data show that there is generally lack of reflection over the challenges related to the development of local government personnel. Many offices are reactive in this respect: they provide new knowledge mostly in areas which come to the fore as a result of changing legal regulations. There is little long-term, strategic thinking about developing local government offices as institutions which are not only supposed to administer public tasks but also create growth. Only in a handful of cases proper attention is given to the creation of creative, responsible, conscious and, yes, ethos-based local government organisation.

7. Summary – challenges to the development of local administration

Summing up, it is a good idea to go back to some comments made at the beginning of this report, where it was said that the diagnosis of training needs of local government personnel should always be included as part of an overall analysis of the situation in the national public administration sector and it should be accompanied by a summary description of the legal and institutional framework in which the local administration operates. As mentioned earlier, the regulations of the European Charter of Local Self-Government should be the main point of reference since they represent a constitutive element of a decentralised country. Therefore, it is a good idea to look at the provisions of the Charter in the context of the research findings presented in this document.

'Local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population.' (Article 3.1)

The article quoted above mentions the right of communities to manage their local affairs and the ability to exercise this right. The article also refers to a substantial share of such tasks. The research findings indicate that the portion of affairs left for communities to manage has been increasingly constrained. The respondents commonly mentioned the progressing re-centralisation of tasks, limitation of competencies of local authorities in various areas (primarily in education and social policy but also in organisational freedom of local government, issues related to investment procedures, tender procedures, rules of staff's remuneration etc.).

At this point, it is a good idea to invoke the pivotal principle of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, i.e. subsidiarity. The fairly fragmented system of local administration in Poland, and the operations of central authorities and institutions, have effectively undermined this principle for many years. When competencies are taken away from local authorities in areas of crucial importance for local development (e.g. the aforementioned freedom in shaping some public policies) and, in consequence, local government has limited possibilities to take action to influence the life of local communities, this cannot facilitate the development of an effective local governance system. Poviats, which are historically grounded in Poland's reality and which should be part of the model of a subsidiarity-based state, have become impotent. They have been deprived of tasks and resources they could use to support local development. This is coupled with the unobvious and often counter-productive relations between municipality- and poviat-level authorities.

What should be seen as at least partly problematic is the capability to manage local affairs. First and foremost, attention should be drawn to the fact that communities have a relatively low level of willingness to assume co-responsibility for local development. Based on various data we can conclude that the situation has been gradually improving, that communities have been learning about self-governance, expanding their spheres of activity and sense of influence. Nevertheless, if we invoke the consistently low turnout at the elections, little interest in participation in local activities, and lack of willingness to get actively involved in meeting social needs at the local level, we cannot really speak of actual co-decision practices when it comes to the life of municipalities.

As regards abilities, we should also reflect on the conclusions from the research presented in this document with regard to the professionalization of local administration. While participation in training is common, it is driven by low quality of legislation and frequent amendments to existing regulations. We cannot speak of conscious practices aimed at shaping the competencies of local government personnel or developing officials' awareness of self-governance. Rather, the observed phenomena should be described in terms of reinforcing administrative efficiency rather than building the ability to shape local development.

What is lacking in local government is the reflection on the consequences of changes implemented and projects undertaken. The challenges related to spending EU funding which, in themselves, represent an enormous development opportunity for Poland as a country and for its local governments ('small homelands') have, in many cases, overshadowed the overarching goal of all investments, i.e. the improvement of the quality of life in local communities rather than just living standards. It is important to bear in mind that once the basis existential needs of residents are satisfied, this will inevitably lead to the emergence of higher-order needs, such as personal growth, satisfaction with life, possibilities to pursue passions and interests, education etc. If those needs cannot be satisfied, citizens would be inclined to emigrate, either to larger urban centres or further away.

'Where powers are delegated to them by a central or regional authority, local authorities shall, insofar as possible, be allowed discretion in adapting their exercise to local conditions .' (Article 4.5)

This article opens up a never-ending debate about the so-called 'commissioned tasks', handed over to local governments which are expected to execute actions programmed by the central government or its agenda. Many issues in the field of operation of local administration are regulated on a top-down basis. The respondents speak of overregulation. In many cases, legislation gives local authorities no room for discretion or decision-making. And this gives rise to numerous problems.

Firstly, there are many areas where local authorities have no possibility to take action which would enable them to influence development in a planned manner, with due consideration for local conditions. Many tasks performed by local governments remain in a tight corset of legislation, ordinances, rules, indicators etc., which are beyond the influence of local authorities. In many fields, local government plays the role of a local intermediary in pursuing goals set by central agencies.

Secondly, the absence of local power in key areas of local administration does not enhance self-governance. Citizens hardly have a good grasp of the applicable laws and regulations, and are rarely aware of the legal foundations of local decisions (including unfavourable decisions in matters personally concerning those citizens). Not surprisingly, citizens take their dissatisfaction

directly to institutions which perform administrative functions. As a result of overregulation, local government is separated from decision-making functions in cases which should involve local needs and development conditions, and this certainly is not conducive to public confidence in local government.

Thirdly, there are many cases where local government has no discretion in defining how its tasks are to be performed. It is the official at the ministry level who decides on the organisation of administration responsible locally for processing matters delegated by central institutions. Considering the social, cultural, historical, economic or environmental singularities of local units, this kind of attitude is far from being efficient. Instead, it reflects central government's considerable mistrust towards local government. The research conducted to date clearly demonstrates that the policies pursued by central bodies lack consistency, coherence and sensible long-term planning. The range of tasks delegated to local administration usually does not result from carefully designed reform programmes. Instead, it is a result of ad hoc decisions adopted by decision-makers at different levels of central government. When seen in aggregate, those incremental changes represent considerable barriers which hinder local development.

For the record, we should also state that the local reflection on the organisational solutions adopted in local government or on ways to manage administration does not seem to be very advanced. This is partly due to systemic constraints and, presumably, also due to attitudes represented by a considerable group of local government leaders. In many a case, investment activities seem to overshadow problems arising from routine-based operations of the local offices, insufficient reflection on social needs or lack of innovation in shaping local development. At this point, it is a good idea to recall one conclusion from the present research: more than a half of LGUs do not apply any tools for self-assessment of their operations. Even if some respondents do realise those constraints, the implementation of corrective measures is often postponed 'until a better moment', presumably the moment when all investments have been completed. This is in line with a statement made by one voit (and quoted above), who would like to *'regroup the local office in a different way (…). But when the moment comes to do some work, I leave it aside for the time being (…). I have a vision and I think we will reach that vision sooner or later.'*

'Local authorities shall be entitled, within national economic policy, to adequate financial resources of their own, of which they may dispose freely within the framework of their powers.' (Article 9.1); 'Local authorities' financial resources shall be commensurate with the responsibilities provided for by the constitution and the law.' (Article 9.2)

Poland owes its recent degree of development largely to the activity of local government units. It is the local public authorities which were responsible for most infrastructural investments implemented in Poland for many years. However, local development is costly. This has been experienced by proactive local governments which boldly reached for EU finding. As a result, their financial burden related to the debt servicing is beginning to seriously constrain their capabilities. The results of analysis conducted by the Association of Polish Towns and Cities (ZMP) indicate that the funding available to local governments in the near future (e.g. for investments of implementation of measures to address local needs) will be increasingly limited. 'As many as 20–30% LGUs from all categories (…) forecast that their disposable operating surplus for 2016–2019

(i.e. after repaying debt instalments) will be under 1%, which forces them to make really rigorous plans.'[49]

Decisions made at the central level have a serious effect on the financial standing of LGUs. As noticed by Andrzej Porawski, the Director of the ZMP Office, 'faulty legislation, which we have combated for many years, has upset our financial balance. The parliament imposes a large number of mandatory tasks onto local governments, and their implementation requires ever greater financial outlays. At the same time, the parliament reduces local governments' own revenues through its political decisions. At the moment, municipal budgets do not have enough money to go ahead with investments but, worse still, to finance ongoing tasks related to support for residents.'[50] Similar opinions were expressed by local leaders invited to take part in the research.

On the other hand, it is worth pointing to the locally adopted goals and decisions to allocate funds which are at the disposal of local governments. LGUs mention infrastructural investments as a priority which, for obvious reasons, calls for considerable expenditures. The validity of at least some of these investments remains an open issue, especially given that some leaders are not interested in careful development of public policies which would enable local governments to address social needs other than just improvements in basic living conditions.

> *'The conditions of service of local government employees shall be such as to permit the recruitment of high-quality staff on the basis of merit and competence; to this end adequate training opportunities, remuneration and career prospects shall be provided.' (Article 6.2)*

Local government jobs are perceived as attractive in comparison with other locally available employment opportunities. What makes those jobs attractive? Regretfully, in many cases it is not the ethos of a local government organisation or a sense of responsibility for local affairs. While appreciating the work performed by many people in local government offices we should state that some people are simply administrators whose priority is to maintain stable working conditions, earn relatively satisfactory salaries, observe fixed working hours or get a bonus rather than to work for the satisfaction of the local community or to pursue ambitious development goals. Of course, this is a generalisation, yet it seems quite valid in the light of research findings.

Employees of local government offices quite actively participate in educational activities. The vast majority of offices do notice and appreciate the need to train their staff and largely address this need. However, this need is usually understood in a particular way: as a need to adjust officials' competencies in view of the changing legislation. In other words, this need is generated by the faulty system. On the other hand, there is little thinking about strategic development of the local administration to build local growth and development. What we see all too often in local government is the implementation of bold projects instead of developing staff's awareness to understand the impact of such projects and make the right use of their potential to enhance the quality of local life.

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[49] Szewczuk J, T. Potkański 'Integracja systemu zarządzania rozwojem obszarów funkcjonalnych – rekomendacje metodologiczne' [Integrated Management of the Development of Functional Areas]. in: T. Potkański (ed.) 'Współpraca jednostek samorządu…' **[Collaboration of Territorial Government Units…]**, *op.cit.,* p. 120.

[50] A statement for the Polish Press Agency dated 28 May 2013 (http://biznes.pl/kraj/budzety-jst-w-13-moga-osiagnac-nadwyzke-porawski-zmp/hgclx).