

Lazauskienė Aistė

Jurga Bučaitė-Vilkė

## Non-Electoral Representation at Local Level: The Case of Lithuania

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### Abstract

In studies of representation at the local level, the focus is usually on elected representatives. However, as different authors pointed out, representation also involves non-elected representatives. There are a wide variety of organisations and individuals such as councils, boards etc. acting in local politics. In this paper we focused on institutionalized relations between local governments and societal actors at municipal level in Lithuania. The Law on Local Self-Government and other related legal documents define the obligation of municipal authorities to establish advisory bodies in order to institutionalize and support the interconnectiveness between different local stakeholders. In this paper three institutionalized networks between local government and societal actors were examined: Councils of non-governmental organizations (NGO councils), Youth councils, Boards of Local Action groups. The research was based on document analysis and survey data.

The analysis of documents indicates the dominance of ‘self-reflective’ local state-society networks in Lithuania. NGO councils and youth councils refer to the institutional arrangements with highly regulated provisions, strictly organized membership and statutory rules and limited social and economic impact at the local level. These networks are not isolated from decision-making in the city or town halls but have just an advisory role. Boards of local action groups represent much more influential ‘consociational’ network.

The date of survey shows partly contrary results. Non-elected members of networks perceive their councils as quite autonomous (3,47 score out of 5), with high impact to local society. Around a half of respondents stated that the decisions taken by them are important or highly important for the local community. The highest result was among members of Youth Councils, where 63 % of respondents agreed that their decisions in regard to scope of impact are important or highly important to the local community (in regard number of people affected - 56 % in regard to public awareness - 50 %). Contrary, only 22% of respondents from NGO councils agreed that their decisions in regard to scope of impact are important or highly important. Considerably, almost all answers of youth councils were more “optimistic or positive” in comparison with NGO councils or Boards of Local Action groups. The members of youth councils agreed or strongly agreed (71 %) that they are very committed to their local network, while in other networks only 51 (Boards of Local Action groups) or 45 (NGO councils). For the next steps we need elaborate a deeper analysis of our empirical data, having in mind different variables.