



LOCAL GOVERNANCE MAPPING IN ALBANIA



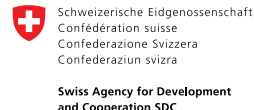


Governance Perception in a Reforming Albania

Nationwide Local Governance Mapping in Albania

AUTHORS

Institute for Development, Research and Alternatives (IDRA), Albania
and Ms. Mithulina Chatterjee, International Expert



Disclaimer

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FOREWORD

The local level is the place where direct democracy and civic representation are exercised, where services are provided, and where social and economic development takes place. Local governments play a critical role in shaping and developing the social and economic life of their territories, bringing communities together, and providing local solutions to local problems.

The performance of local government, and how it interacts with citizens, affects the latter's behavior as well as cohesion and trust within and among communities; this legitimizes the local government's efforts and drives sustainable development.

On the other hand, it is well known that (local) government outcomes are difficult to measure objectively. Often public performance is measured with hard indicators that relate to resources and outputs, however, there is a growing recognition that money is not enough. Rather, there is a growing demand to see how these outcomes respond to community needs, what is the level of interaction of citizens in decision-making, how local accountability and transparency works, and how the local government's efforts and challenges are recognized and felt by citizens.

This document, the Local Governance Mapping, undertaken within the 'Support to Territorial & Administrative Reform - STAR II' Project, is a first attempt to look into this at a national scale. With about 12,000 citizens' and 400 municipal officials' interviews and consultations, the first of its kind, it attempts to give a picture of local governance and of how local government work is perceived by a range of local stakeholders. This comes with the recognized caveat that citizens rely on their personal experiences when shaping their views of local government, such views are inextricably linked to people's knowledge and understanding of local government performance, and on occasion they can hold local authorities responsible for issues which are not under their direct control.

The present survey attempts to mitigate such bias through the development of composite indicators that combine different views on the same question. Though, not a scientific measurement, the aggregate results point towards the common problems with local governance and the perception citizens have about their opportunities, roles and influence over local matters. The underlying premise is that perceptions of increased quality of local governance will increase public satisfaction, and those satisfaction indicators can therefore be used as proxies for good governance.

Inadequate local governance affects all citizens, but especially the vulnerable, often enhancing exclusion. Lack of participation means that the vulnerable often do not have a voice and a choice in addressing their own needs. Inadequate decisions and allocation of resources can lead to disproportionate socio-economic development and spending on priorities of the better-off. Thus, understanding public views towards local government, whether real or perceived, is an important part of improving local government effectiveness and efficiency, service delivery, and ultimately improving the accountability of local administrations. And such improvements can help reduce social apathy, build trust between local governments and their communities, curb opportunities for corruption, improve the overall effectiveness of services, also in terms of accessibility and equity to all, increase municipal revenues by increasing confidence that taxes are used to address community concerns, but also help to raise public employees' ethical standards and instill a sense of public service among elected and appointed officials.

Such exercises pave the ground for increased engagement between citizens and local authorities, and ultimately for better understanding of roles and responsibilities, as well as aspirations and expectations. The hope is that this is only the beginning of more local dialogue, accountability, and shared responsibility.

I hope this survey will make an important contribution to promoting democratic local governance. This publication should benefit not only politicians and officials in local government who are thinking about ways to improve their public service, but also national and international development stakeholders engaged in local government and broader governance reforms.



Limya Eltayeb
Country Director
UNDP Albania

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ALL	Official Currency of Albania
ASPA	Albanian School of Public Administration
CD	Community Dialogues
COS	Civic Opinions Sector
CRC	Citizens Report Card
CSC	Community Score Cards
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DR	Desk Research
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
GADC	Gender Alliance Development Center
GIS	Geographic Information System
GLP	General Local Plan
IDRA	Institute for Development, Research and Alternatives
IPRO	Immovable Property Registration Office
LCAC	Local Citizen Advisory Commission
LDOP	Local Development Operational Plans
LGB	Local Governance Barometer
LGU	Local Government Units
LITS	Life in Transition Survey
MFG	Municipality Focus Groups

MSLI	Minister of State for Local Issues
MTBP	Medium Term Budget Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
OSFA	Open Society Foundation for Albania
OSSH	One Stop Shop
RTI	Right to Information
SSS	Social State Service
STAR	Support to Territorial and Administrative Reform
TAIEX	European Commission's Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
URI	Urban Research Institute
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WV	World Vision

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Territorial and Administrative Reform, as a precursor to a series of local government reforms, created a new and favorable framework for strengthening local government institutions and service delivery efficiency, but also re-dimensioned the challenges of advancing local democracy and citizen engagement in public affairs.

In 2016, the Government of Albania, in partnership with the United Nations Development Program - UNDP in Tirana, started the implementation of the project “Consolidation of the Administrative and Territorial Reform - STAR2”. The project benefits all 61 municipalities and aims to improve institutional capacities of local administrations, the service delivery sector and the environment for active civic engagement, which together aim at achieving good local governance. The project has been made possible through the support of and cooperation with the European Union and USAID and the governments of Sweden, Italy and Switzerland.

Prior to detailed planning and implementation of project activities, the Minister of State for Local Issues and UNDP required insights into the current status of functioning as well as on the strengths and weaknesses of the newly established local government structures with regard to aspects of good governance and service delivery. In this view, the Government of Albania and UNDP agreed to map the perceptions and experiences of citizens and municipal officials across municipalities and explore on issues affecting them directly.

Local Governance Mapping is one of the first activities of UNDP’s STAR2 project. The initiative attempts to assess the level and practices of good local governance as seen from citizens’ and municipal officials’ points of view across Albanian municipalities. The underlying belief of this assessment is that findings at municipal and national level will benefit local decision-makers, but also central institutions, international partners and civil society organizations that assist institutionally and/ or programmatically local governance in Albania.

The assessment, applied to all 61 municipalities, takes into consideration the dimensions of Effectiveness and Efficiency, Transparency and Rule of Law, Accountability and Participation and Citizen Engagement, which are all important principles of good governance. Along these selected dimensions, the assessment has attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are the views of citizens about different aspects of local government operations?
- What aspects of local governance are more / less problematic from both citizens’ and municipalities’ perspectives?
- How familiar, informed and engaged are citizens with their local administrations?
- How do citizens perceive the capacity of local governments and their responsiveness?

- What is the situation of local governance at an aggregate national level and the common challenges that deserve attention?

The mapping methodology, adopted by similar studies conducted by UNDP or other international development organizations in other countries, combines desk research with qualitative and quantitative research, based on the techniques of the Local Government Barometer and the Citizen Report Card.

The methodology was developed in the period October-November 2016. It was followed by intensive field work in all municipalities, from December 2016 to March 2017. Data processing and preliminary results were presented to citizens and local government officials in each municipality during March-April 2017, with the purpose of verifying and validating the data before finalizing the reports for each municipality and the aggregated national report.

In a summarized form, the data of this report are derived from the following sources:

- 12,000 questionnaires with community representatives in 61 municipalities through the Citizen Reporting Card;
- 340 semi-structured interviews with senior civil servants in each Municipality;
- 61 Focus Groups with municipal high level officials;
- 90 Community Dialogues with the citizens; and
- Collection of secondary data from the 61 municipalities and other sources for the demographic, economic, social, public and administrative framework.

Respondents were selected randomly within each municipality, in proportion to the Census 2011 population data. The margin of error is estimated to be approximately 0.89% with a confidence level of 95%.

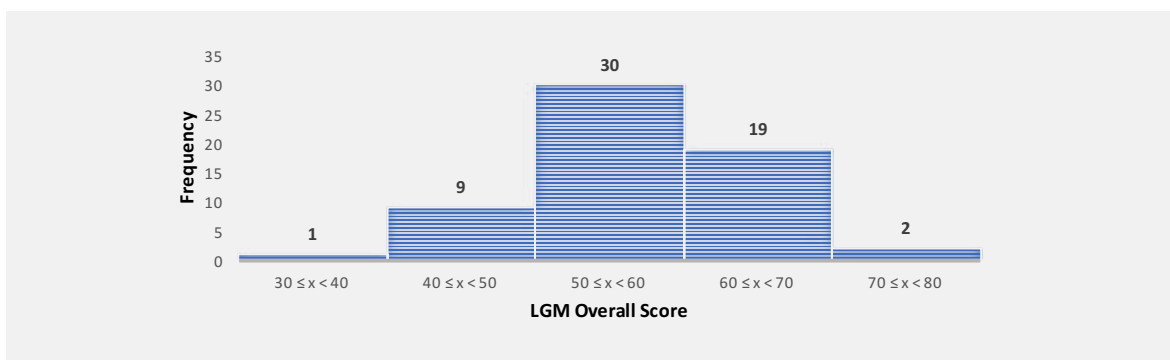
For implementation reasons, the assessment task was split into three random clusters of approximately 20 municipalities each, based on their relative location to the north, center and south of the country, and implemented respectively by the Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC), Urban Research Institute (URI), and Institute for Development, Research and Alternatives (IDRA).

The first results of the exercise are 61 separate municipal reports prepared by the respective implementing organizations. The current aggregate / national report, summarizing the findings and conclusions resulting from each municipality, is prepared by IDRA, in close cooperation with URI and GADC, in accordance with the agreed methodological approach.

General findings

- Overall, there are clear indications that the Territorial and Administrative Reforms appears to have now become an integral part of Albanian communities *at large* and of policy makers in particular. Findings of Local Governance Mapping broadly indicate that while planning and service delivery systems have begun to take roots in the municipalities, the quality of various public services are not up to the expected levels, information flow to the citizens is rated average and while personal experience with corruption is low, transparency and performance tracking systems are found to be inadequate. An issue of greatest concern is the low level of citizens' engagement in the democratic processes.

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of municipalities according to LGM overall score



Source: Author's work

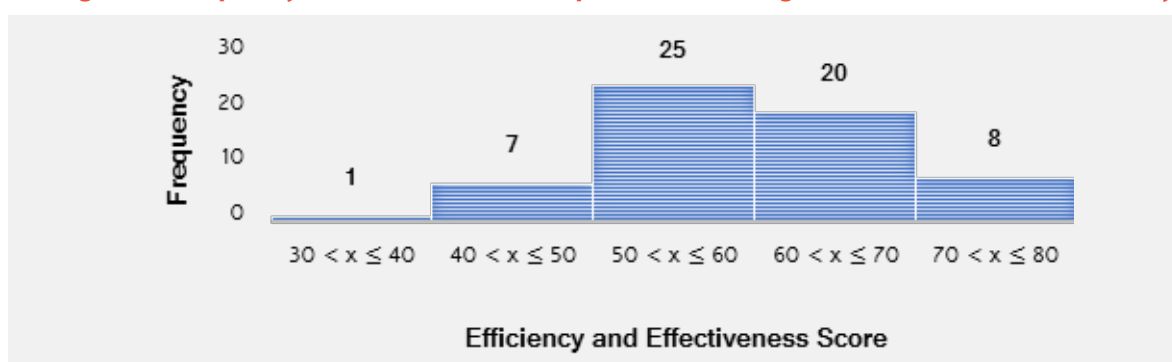
- The overall Albania Local Governance Barometer Scorecard shows that across the four governance criteria, 64% of the municipalities (39) operate at an 'average' level (score at 40-60), 34% (21) are rated 'good' (61 -80), and only 2% or one municipality has received a "poor" rating (30-40). None of the Albanian municipalities has received a rating of 'very good' (> 80) or 'excellent' on all the four governance criteria.
- The national Local Governance Dashboard shows an average performance across the four criteria of governance. From the perspective of each of the four criteria, Effectiveness and Efficiency is rated the best compared to the other three, thus reflecting a comparatively better performance in the areas of planning, financial management, coordination and provision of public services which comprise this criterion. Forty-six per cent of the municipalities (28) have been rated as 'good' and 'very good' on this dimension.
- This is followed by the Accountability criterion where 49% (30) of the municipalities have obtained a score of more than 60 on this criterion indicating that these municipalities have, in fact, set up good institutional mechanisms for improving responsiveness.

- On the other hand, on the remaining two criteria, namely, Transparency and Rule of Law and Participation and Citizen Engagement, the municipalities have not fared as well. Only 21% of the municipalities (13) have established reasonable transparency initiatives. As far as the Participation and Citizen Engagement criterion is concerned, nearly 83% of the municipalities fall under the 'Fair', 'Poor' and 'Average' categories with an overall rating of <60. These results highlight the need for investment in all areas with a greater focus on improving transparency and citizen participation.
- The findings also show a substantial perception gap between the community and the municipal authorities in almost all the municipalities. There are significant differences between the assessments made by municipal officials and those made by the citizens on various aspects of their work. The average difference in the ratings between the authorities and the community is 14 points. This difference gap is higher for Accountability and Transparency and Rule of Law.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

- *Effectiveness and Efficiency* is rated highest among all the four main governance criteria with 60 points (with slight difference with Accountability). Of the 5 sub criteria that constitute Effectiveness and Efficiency, Coordination and Cooperation with third parties and Satisfaction Towards Services are rated 'good' (60-79), while the other three, namely, Clear Vision and Inclusive Planning, Financial Management and, Informed Decision Making have been given an average rating of 40-59. All municipalities appear to have good interface with the central government, international community, other municipalities and with the municipal council itself. Within municipal service delivery sub criteria, while access to service delivery is rated very high, citizens' satisfaction towards quality of service delivery has been rated average.

Figure 2. Frequency distribution of municipalities according to Effectiveness and Efficiency



Source: Author's work

- With regard to planning, the municipalities do not appear to have a clear vision about their future development. In many cases, there are no plans at all, and even when plans exist, they often do not

appear to be the guiding force behind their operations and development goal. Only half (31) of the municipalities possess a General Local Plan (GLP) and 17 of them are yet to prepare one. Although municipalities score higher in possessing an annual sectoral plan, they lag behind in their implementation.

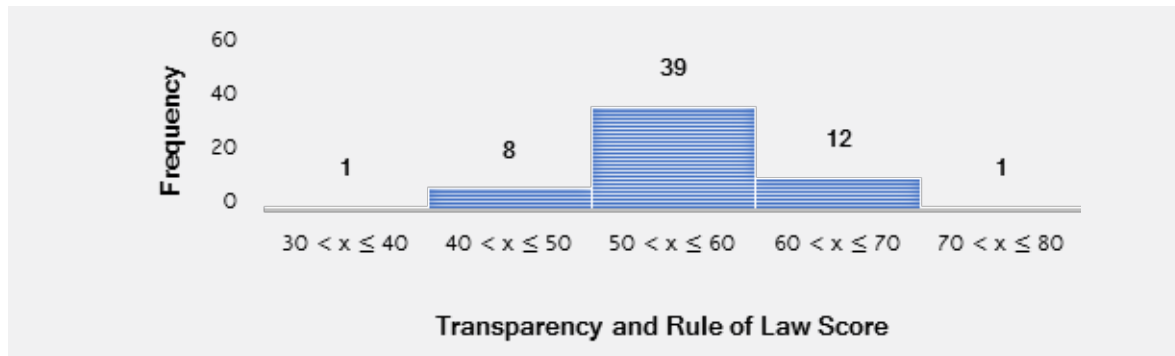
- Financial autonomy of local government remains a challenge. The development of the Medium-Term Budget Programme (MTBP) and the Local Revenue Collection are rated as average and poor, respectively. However, there are some good financial control mechanisms within the administrative set up.
- Availability of reliable and accurate data at local level is another major gap in terms of managing and planning local affairs. Although there is some data available in each municipality, it is often found to be incomplete, insufficient and outdated for a well-informed decision-making process.
- Inaccurate land records with overlapping boundaries, their poor maintenance, and the below-par use of the GIS platform are contributing factors to ineffective planning as well as poor generation of local revenues.
- With regard to coordination, there appears to be relatively good internal coordination among the municipal departments and with the municipal council. However inter-departmental collaboration needs greater attention.
- In service provision, municipal officials indicate an effective public services access including same quality over all municipal territory; the citizens perceive significant gaps in the quality of the services delivered (46 points) and rural-urban disparity, even though citizens in general acknowledge good levels of administrative service availability and access.
- The **major challenges** for improving efficiency and effectiveness include financing of the drafting of a GLP, low finances to fund plan implementation, lack of a statistical office to maintain and provide accurate and reliable data, absence of an integrated reporting system within the municipality, inadequate service assessment capabilities and difficulty in recruiting qualified municipal staff, particularly given the requirement of new competencies emerging as a consequence of the Law on Local Self-Government.

Transparency and Rule of Law

- *Transparency and Rule of Law* reflects an overall 'average' scenario with 56 points. This is mainly due to the fact that the perception on Transparency Levels, Access to Information about projects, activities and services are all given an average rating. At the same time, most municipalities (44) have an official website but are updated only with some minimal information. Most municipalities

use other information dissemination channels such as municipal newspapers and public hearings. However, transparency of administrative procedures for issuance of building permits, business licenses, etc., is given a higher average rating of 'good', albeit with differences in municipal officials' (80 points) and citizens' (56 points) perceptions.

Figure 3. Frequency distribution of municipalities according to Transparency and Rule of Law



Source: Author's work

- With regard to the Rule of Law, the institutional legal framework ensuring equal rights for all citizens is largely perceived as being effective. However, legal awareness and the impartial enforcement of law appears to be insufficient.
- In terms of Corruption Levels, while the citizens' perception of corruption at the local government level is rated average, the personal *experience with corrupt practices* has been given a lower rating, indicating that corruption practice as such may be much lower than it is perceived. The local strategies, plans and mechanisms to fight corruption at local level, however, are seen as insufficient calling for further interventions.
- While there is an institutional framework in place to ensure Equal Rights, especially for women, men, youth and vulnerable groups, data show that there are inadequate systems to educate citizens on their legal rights and obligations (e.g. the legal office). Similarly, awareness raising by local government on laws and local regulations, through websites or public media (radio, newspapers, and social media) is also considered insufficient.
- The **major challenges** to raising awareness about the municipal budget, activities, plans and projects, etc., relate to the insufficiency of transparency initiatives, but gaps also indicate lack of adequate municipal mechanisms to control/manage corruption, and the absence of CSOs to provide the required support on legal awareness among the community.

Accountability

- *Accountability* of local governments, comprising of three sub-criteria, namely, Control Mechanisms (checks and balances), Recourse Mechanisms and Government's Responsiveness has received a rating of 60 points, essentially representing a relatively good achievement in local government's overall institutionalization of the Accountability criterion. The CRC (54 points) and the Community Dialogue (46 points) results show that local governments are somewhat responsive to filed complaints from citizens. This is supported by innovative feedback practices such as a dedicated space on the official websites ('Improve my City') of some municipalities, and applications like 'My Tirana' where citizens can share inputs and suggestions for improving local governance.

Figure 4. Frequency distribution of municipalities according to Accountability score



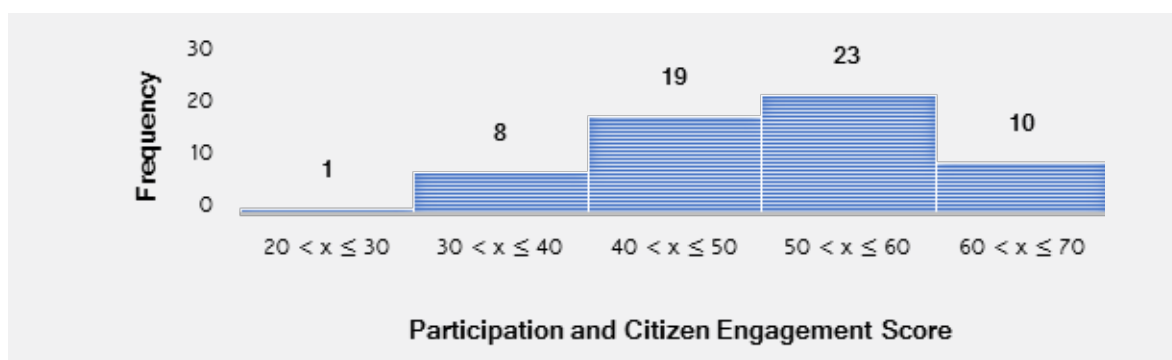
Source: Author's work

- It also appears that oversight bodies such as State Audits, with control, supervision and sanctioning powers, are functioning well. The mechanisms however are rather insufficient especially with regard to the citizen/community/civil society dimension of control. While municipalities appear to rather "fear" and follow recommendations of the State Supreme Audit, there is little or no "fear" from the CSOs, which can monitor and act like watchdogs for the local government activity. The monitoring role of NGOs and community councils is considered average and, in fact, CSOs are considered mostly not capable of holding local government into account.
- The major **challenges** expressed across all the municipalities under this criterion consist of low presence of open forums for CSOs to engage with local government and even total absence of CSOs in some smaller municipalities. Likewise, the smaller municipalities also face the additional challenge of non-existence of community councils. Another challenge faced by the local governments is the lack of an integrated system for complaint management and, a consequent failure to track filed complaints and determine their status of resolution.

Participation and Citizen Engagement

- Participation and Citizen Engagement seems to be the weakest link in the entire governance structure with an average score of 50 points. It was more than apparent that in none of the municipalities did the citizens see themselves as partners neither in governance nor in any of the development processes. On the contrary, they felt distanced from the municipal authorities as was evident from the vast differences in the ratings given by the local authorities and the citizens.

Figure 5. Frequency distribution of municipalities according to Participation and Citizen Engagement



Source: Author's work

- While the institutional framework with laws for participation is in place, implementation challenges persist. The various platforms and structures for citizen participation are rated average. Community structures seem to be mostly absent. Other institutional mechanisms, namely the Coordinator on the Right to Information and Coordinator on Notification and Public Consultation are only partially effective.
- Citizen participation in planning, local project implementation and monitoring of public sector performance are all rated at 'average' level. This dwindles further down to a 'poor' level when it comes to the engagement of the communities or CSOs to improve the local situation, reflecting a constant lack of engagement of the community in local governance.
- A major issue with the CSOs is that they seem to be incapable of exercising any influence at the municipal level. The interface between the CSOs, youth, vulnerable groups and local governments in the decision-making process is also rated as 'average' but with the silver lining of women's engagement being rated 'good' except at higher levels of management.
- The **challenges** here include a low culture of democratic participation. It also appears that municipal officials themselves, across the municipalities, (barring a few exceptions) are either not used to engaging with people on technical planning and budgeting, or find them ill-equipped to do so or simply do not see the importance of the voice of the people.

WAY FORWARD

Based on the local governance mapping findings, it is deduced that there are governance issues affecting the functioning of the LGUs and service delivery across the municipalities. There are several managerial, administrative and financial issues apart from socio-political challenges and grounding of policy and regulatory reforms that need further attention and focused inputs.

Fiscal decentralization process needs to be advanced to address the weak fiscal autonomy resulting from changes in tax regulations, lack of effective regulations for revenue generation and lack of trained and competent staff within the municipalities.

Ensuring good statistics at each municipal level will have wide implications not only for providing reliable and accurate real time data (through data collection, data analysis and data utilization) for decision making but also for improving the overall quotient of local governance.

In general, transparency and accountability systems need to be strengthened, especially the citizens' accountability mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of public sector performance. Given the importance of non-state actors in holding the government accountable, capacity building and empowerment of CSOs to lobby, advocate and demand for more accountability from the part of LGUs is an important objective in search for good governance.

Better implementation of the Right to Information law and better use of the IT for information dissemination including standardized updated municipal websites and other media would benefit transparency programmes.

Finally, increasing and empowering the community structures and citizen participation across the municipalities in various decision-making processes will support confidence and partnership building.

Drawing from the reform context, the local governance mapping conclusions and STAR 2 objectives, several axes of strategies need to be taken forward. The following are suggested:

1. Policy and regulatory reform related interventions to improve the municipal fiscal space, promote the implementation of the civil service law and increasing resource allocation for better implementation of the two critical legislations on Public Consultation and Right to Information.
2. Capacity strengthening strategies for local administration for improving service delivery organiza-

tion and performance management of key services through leadership development, improving participatory planning and budgeting skills, dedicated systems for statistics and development of equitable service delivery standards and systems.

3. Strengthening of transparency and integrity mechanisms within local administration as well as improving information access.
4. Creation of sustainable and effective mechanisms for citizen and CSO engagement with local authorities.

The above, by no means takes away the fact that a lot of ground has already been covered by the local administrations and the municipal authorities since the launch of the reform process. If, however, the key lacunae highlighted in this report are formally taken forward and appropriately institutionalized and pursued at the highest level, it will further strengthen this process and result in the achievement of the final goal it set out to do.

INTRODUCTION

Good local governance is the backbone of democracy as it directly impacts citizens' everyday lives by both the way it interacts with and serves them. From this angle, effective local governance requires a two-way communication between government and citizens.

It should be noted that Good Governance is a widely-used term in development, but still without a single agreed definition. However, it is related with different processes of governance and with the way how decisions are taken, who determines these decisions, who and how is involved in decision-making and how mechanisms of control and accountability are applied.

One of UNDP's definitions of governance, combining dimensions of capacity, accountability and responsiveness, describes it as "the processes by which public policy decisions are made and implemented ... the result of interactions, relationships and networks between the different sectors (government, public sector, private sector and civil society) and involves decisions, negotiation, and different power relations between stakeholders to determine who gets what, when and how ... Governance is therefore much more than government or 'good government' and shapes the way a service or set of services are planned, managed and regulated within a set of political social and economic systems¹".

That is to say that local government response cannot be sufficiently comprehensive and responsive if it resorts only to symptomatic and top-down solutions and measures like increased organizational capacities, internal control, etc., without addressing additional core matters of inter-relationship between state and the citizens and taking into account local knowledge, expectations and perspectives. On the other hand, if local government is not accountable to its citizens or not responsive to their needs, people will lose trust in the processes that regulate interaction and in their local government. There are also many approaches and parameters attempting to measure the quality of governance. Among those, UNDP identifies nine main dimensions: Participation, Rule of Law, Transparency, Responsiveness, Consensus, Equity, Effectiveness and Efficiency, Accountability and Strategic Vision, as adequate proxies for measuring good governance. However, such measurement is far from straightforward. The interactions and interrelations of these dimensions with each other are very complex. For example, improved access to information fosters transparency and accountability, but also citizens' engagement. Public engagement increases consensus as well as the legitimacy of decision-making. Accountability strengthens the rule of law and thus the governance equity.

The present Local Governance Mapping attempts to give a broad assessment of citizens' perceptions of the capacity, accountability and responsiveness of their respective local governments to the needs and expectations of the public, the relations and interactions between citizens and their local administrations,

1. UNDP, A Users' Guide to Measuring Local Governance, UNDP 2009 http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/local_governance/a-users-guide-to-measuring-local-governance-.html

beyond mere municipal outputs or services provided. The exercise, applied to all 61 municipalities, takes into consideration the following dimensions: Effectiveness and Efficiency, Transparency and Rule of Law, Accountability and Participation.

Along these selected dimensions, the assessment attempts to answer the following questions:

- What are the views of citizens about different aspects of local government operations?
- What aspects of local governance are more / less problematic from both citizens' and municipalities' perspectives?
- How familiar, informed and engaged are citizens with their local administrations?
- How do citizens perceive the capacity of local governments and their responsiveness?
- What is the situation of local governance at an aggregate national level and the common challenges that deserve attention?

The assessment was carried out during the period October 2016 - May 2017. The results were obtained through processing data collected through secondary, qualitative and quantitative research techniques, combining Local Government Barometer and Citizen Report Card techniques, in accordance to a methodology developed specifically for this purpose, which can be found at the following address:

http://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/democratic_governance/local-governance-mapping-methodology-in-albania/.

The Local Governance Mapping is considered as an important starting and ending point for the implementation of STAR2, to initially inform subsequent project activities, and then to provide a measurement of change in the local governance environment as well as identify any attributable STAR2 project effects on local governance.

The report is structured in five chapters:

The first chapter provides an overall background on Albania's governance context and Local Governance Mapping. It starts with a brief introduction of main legal and institutional developments with regard to local governance, the context of STAR 2 project and the objectives of the Local Governance Mapping exercise.

The second chapter describes the mapping methodology. It presents the selected local governance methodological approaches, analytical framework of local governance mapping with the good governance criteria, local governance scoring approach and the qualitative and quantitative methods used to collect the information from the municipalities.

The third chapter presents the mapping findings and provides an overview of the nation-wide local governance situation describing the level of effectiveness and efficiency, transparency and rule of law, accountability, participation and civic engagement. The current status of service delivery by the municipality, emerging key policy areas and local reforms as well as key issues to be addressed are highlighted in this chapter.

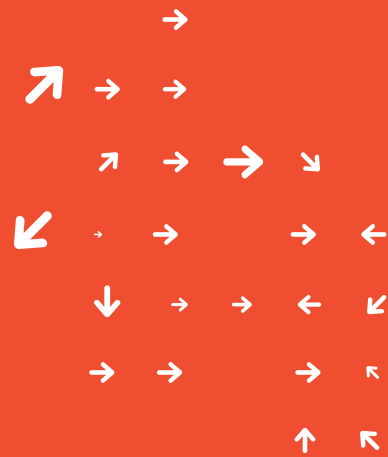
The fourth chapter presents the main conclusions of the findings of the mapping exercise.

The fifth chapter offers some overarching recommendations and potential strategies for emerging governance gaps at the municipal level as a Way Forward for interested development stakeholders and actors.



01. BACKGROUND

Albania governance context and local governance mapping



Albania, a small country in South East Europe has a long Adriatic and Ionian coastline. The country's population of 2.8 million² is largely rural with an increasing ageing population. While it was a growing economy in Europe, the financial crisis of 2008 derailed the positive outlook and owing to its current growth, it belongs to the low middle-income category.

Albania is transforming into a market economy; however, it is the agrarian sector that is the major employer as poverty levels in the urban areas remain high. Overall, unemployment is high with poor infrastructure and corruption further constraining the economic environment. Overall, levels of education have improved but not without persistence of inequalities where enrolment rates are higher among the wealthiest quintile than the poorest quintile. Similarly, health outcomes have improved but inequities exist among different socio-economic groups.

Despite its historical legacy, Albania has been undergoing an extraordinary period of transformation. The transition from a highly-centralized form of governance to a decentralized system is exemplified by its shift to one that is more devolved, as well as a shift from once being an isolated country to one that is now engaging actively in the process of European Union integration.

→ 1.1 Local governance reforms and challenges in Albania

Albania is undergoing transformational changes and the local government system in particular is going through a series of structural and institutional reforms. The latter changes began at the end of 2013 with the launch of the administrative and territorial reform, reducing the former 373 local government units to 61 municipalities, completely overhauling the administrative-territorial structure of the country³. Several policy developments of key relevance to strengthening the local government institution and local governance in general have followed suit in the last couple of years. The EU enlargement and accession process⁴ has also led to a heightened interest in aligning with EU principles of democratization and popular engagement at the local level. Since the EU integration process of Albania is a priority, respective local government related strategies and laws that have been developed are in line with the principles and standards enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government⁵. Among those, of direct relevance are the *Decentralization and Local Governance Strategy*, the *Law on Local Self-Government* as well as the *Public Administration Reform Strategy*.

2. According to Census 2011

3. Law no. 115/2014 on "the Administrative-territorial Division of Local Government Units in the Republic of Albania" was adopted on 31 July 2014. One of the major changes introduced by this Law was the downsizing of the number of Local Government Units (LGU) from 373 "urban municipalities" and "communes" to 61 new Municipalities, "communes" having been abolished.

4. EU integration gained impetus with the Stabilisation Association Agreement (SAA) between Albania and the European Union in 2009 and obtaining a candidate status in June 2014.

5. Council of Europe, 'European Charter of Local Self-Government', <https://rm.coe.int/168007a088>



The National Crosscutting Strategy on Decentralization and Local Governance 2015-2020⁶ fits the new context of local government organization and has the ambition to create an efficient system of local self-government where the latter is empowered and enabled to provide quality services and manage the territorial development sustainably. The Strategy reiterates the aim for the consolidation of local human resources and their skills: “empowering the local administration [through] the establishment of a non-bureaucratized, professional and transparent public administration ... able to respond to the expectation of the business and the community for public services [and the development of] a special “performance monitoring system” for the LGUs ... to guarantee the accountability of the public administration ...”. Through this strategy, it is also aimed at strengthening the role of local governance in the EU integration process, especially in the areas indicated below:

1. Local governance will embrace a more dynamic approach regarding local governance obligations stemming from the implementation of *acquis communautaire* and EU standards.
2. LGUs’ capacity to receive EU funding will be increased through the technical assistance training program of the European Commission’s Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument (TAIEX) for designing and submitting quality project proposals.
3. Regional and cross-border cooperation with local partners of other regional and member countries is one area where local governance will focus its priorities. This cooperation will be the cornerstone of neighborliness and regional economic diplomacy.

In a further articulation of the above strategic objectives, the new Law on the Organization and Functioning of Local Government⁷ orientates local self-government units to regulate and administer the exercise of their functions in full effect and free from outside control, in accordance with the Constitution, the European Charter of Local Autonomy and the laws in force. Thus, the Law on the Organization and Functioning of Local Government introduces several novelties regarding the definition of local government functions, decentralization of new competencies to the local level, the roles and competencies of the elected and executive levels in the new municipal structures, including the administrative units, new requirements on service provision and the necessity to apply service standards, a new concept of determining the level of local finances and obligations for enhancing local democracy and good governance through improved transparency, accountability and participation.

Likewise, the Public Administration Reform in Albania is a necessary and continuous process, which is closely associated with the process of integration into the EU. The National Strategy for Development and Integration II (NSDI 2015-2020)⁸ and Public Administration Reform Strategy (2015-2020)⁹ commit to developing

6. Minister of State for Local Issues, National Crosscutting Strategy on Decentralization and Local Governance 2015-2020, <http://www.plgp.al/images/pdf-files/DecentralizationStrategy2015-202-Engilsh.pdf>

7. Law 139/2015, on ‘Local Self-Government’, http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

8. Council of Ministers, National Strategy for Integration and Development 2015-2020, https://ssl.kryeministria.al/SKZHI_FINAL_QBZ.pdf

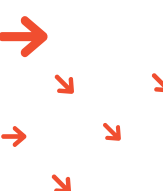
9. Ministry of Innovation and Public Administration and Public Administration Department, Public Administration Reform Strategy 2015-2020, http://dap.gov.al/images/DokumentaStrategjik/PA_R_Strategy_2015-2020_English.pdf

a public administration able “to provide high quality services to citizens and businesses in a transparent, effective and efficient way, through the use of modern technologies and innovative services and, that complies with the requirements of EU integration through impartial, professional and accountable civil servants, part of efficient setups”. Also, the NSDI commits to substantially advance the administrative and fiscal decentralization agendas for empowering local governments to foster sustainable local development with a high institutional integrity that enjoy public trust and guarantee quality services.

The EC Progress Report 2016 notes the above developments in the legal framework of local governance and continuation of the territorial reform process but also highlights the slow progress on financial and administrative consolidation within local government, implementation of administrative reform and medium-term financial sustainability of the decentralization strategy. Given that the Law on the Organization and Functioning of Local Governments decentralizes new competencies to the municipalities, the budget allocated (despite an increase from 2.2 % of GDP in 2015 to 3.2 % in 2016), does not represent a considerable net increase in municipalities’ resources.

Other assessments show¹⁰ weak governance institutions and infrastructure for a growing economy and inefficiencies in service delivery and public spending, continuing weak capacity of local institutions and limited accountability to service users which together have led to socio-economic and spatial inequalities in access to public services. This is also linked with the governance challenges and corruption levels in Albania that have existed over a long period of time.

Albania’s EU integration process remains one of its supreme goals during the NSDI II period and thus clearly recognizing the challenge of delivering on the various structural and institutional reform initiatives to move towards its EU aspirations.



→ 1.2 STAR2 project context

The above reform context and the predecessor STAR project¹¹ sets the backdrop within which the STAR2 project is developed as a collaborative effort of international partners, under national leadership, to support the implementation of the reforms at the local level and thus assist in further consolidating the local governance system. STAR2 launched in July 2016, covers all newly formed 61 municipalities with the aim of improving capacities of local administration, efficiency of service delivery system and citizen participation in the local decision-making process.

STAR2 builds on the national commitment to reform and strengthen local governance and public administration in general, enhance the efficiency and transparency of public institutions for an effective response

10. World Bank, ‘Next Generation Albania, A Systematic Country Diagnostic Study’, World Bank Group, 2015

11. The STAR (–2016) project provided technical, operational and logistic support to the Minister of State for Local Issues in development and implementation of the territorial and administrative reform.

to public expectations and fight against corruption, make citizens central to service delivery transformation and modernization, and create climate of trust, cooperation and democratic decision-making for a healthy and sustainable development.

As part of this, UNDP STAR2 supports the leadership of Minister of State for Local Issues (MSLI) and capacity development of local self- governments to strengthen institutional, organizational capacities of mayors and civil servants to deliver quality services; improve administrative and financial management and performance monitoring of service delivery. It seeks to enhance inclusive and transparent governance through strong citizen participation.

→ 1.3 Objectives of the Governance Mapping Exercise

As the territorial and administrative reform is recent and the implementation is still on-going, the application of good governance principles and changes in effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery still need to be determined. Further, as part of STAR 2, assessment instruments were to be designed and, a local governance mapping was to be undertaken at the beginning and at the end of the project implementation. With this intention, UNDP in close cooperation with the Government of Albania and the MSLI, in particular, agreed to conduct a full mapping exercise across Albania, covering all the 61 municipalities, to better understand the perspectives of citizens, government and non-government stakeholders on service delivery as well as to identify the existing governance capacities to effectively implement and meet the demands of the reforms. It was also envisaged that this exercise would provide insights into the divergent perspectives of government authorities and citizens. With this singular intent, a Local Governance Mapping exercise was undertaken in all municipalities.

The initial mapping is expected to inform subsequent project activities, while the final mapping will serve to provide a measurement of change in the local governance environment as well as identify any project impact on local governance directly attributable to STAR2. These findings will ultimately benefit the government and other decision makers including development partners for their capacity development interventions.

In summary, the mapping of local governance aimed to:

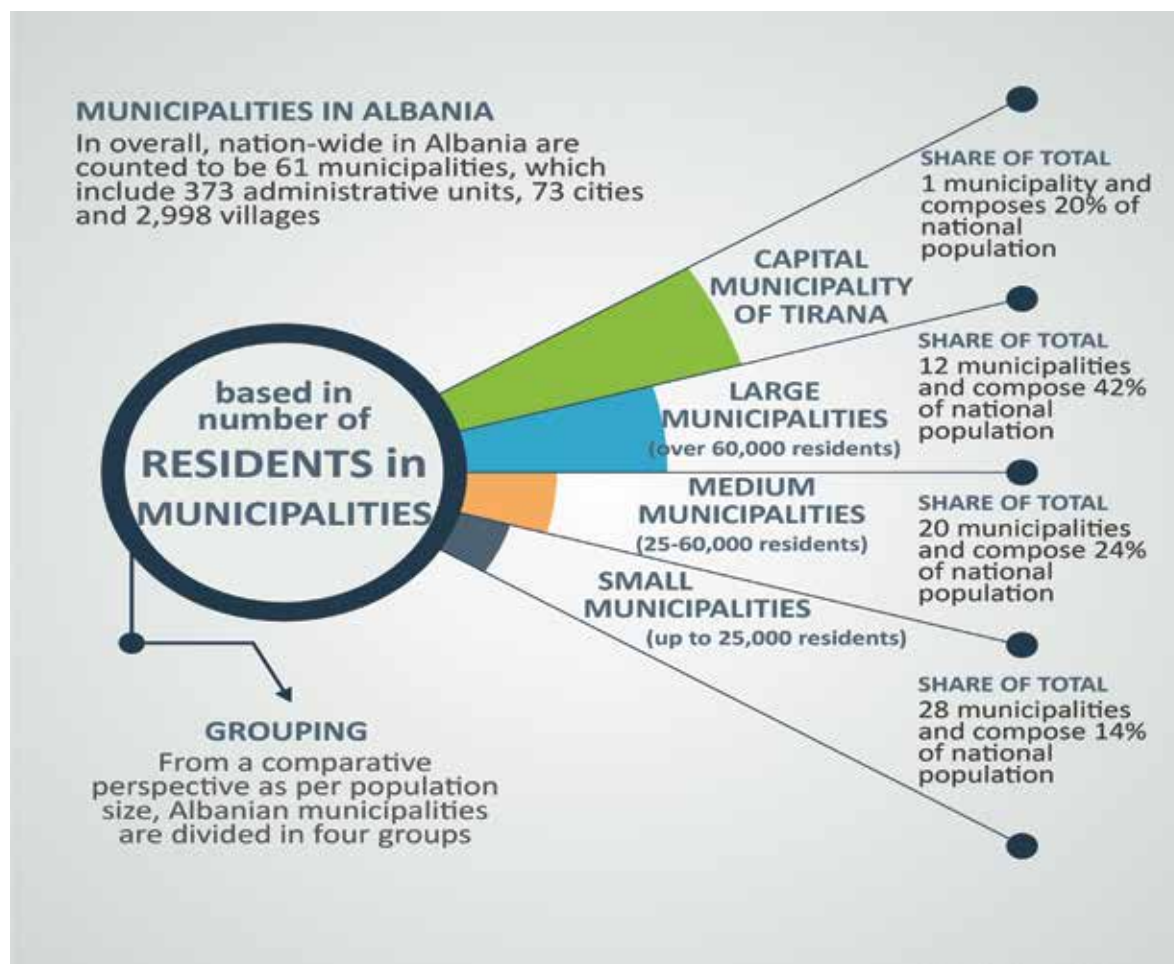
- Assist in making governance measurable and debatable at the local level;
- Identify potential gaps and constraints in local policy making and implementation;
- Highlight capacity building needs amongst all stakeholders which if addressed properly could strengthen local governance;
- Emphasize the need to prioritize, plan, budget and monitor related capacity development activities;
- Provide evidence-based policy advice to local and central government;
- Enable improvements in engaging civil society in local governance;
- Provide an objective account of achievements and thus build accountability.

→ 1.4 General Description of Albanian Municipalities

As all Albanian municipalities were covered under the local governance mapping, some key demographic indicators for each municipality are presented here while the details can be found in the Annex in Table 5.

In brief, in terms of population distribution over the territory, Albania is divided into 61 municipalities, which include 373 administrative units, 73 towns or cities and 2,998 villages. Tirana stands out as the municipality with the largest surface (1,089 km²), followed by Tropojë (1,042 km²) and Malësia e Madhe (961 km²). The municipalities with the largest number of towns are Mirditë (4), Kurbin (3) and Durrës (3), and the top three municipalities with the largest number of villages are Dibër (141), Tiranë (135), and Elbasan (116).

Figure 6. Classification of municipalities according their population



Source: Author's work

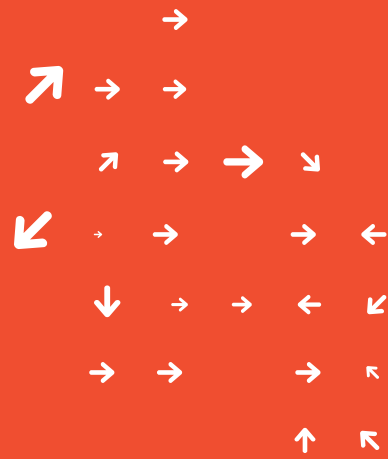


According to Census 2011, the population size in Albania is 2,800,138 residents. In terms of population, municipalities with the highest population are in a decreasing order Tiranë, Durrës, Elbasan, Shkodër and Fier, which together account for 40% of the total country population. However, differences are more pronounced if one compares the population of the top 30 municipalities (the upper half), which comprises 85% of the total country population, while the remaining 30 municipalities account for just 15%. The sampling and the survey have mirrored this distribution.

From a comparative perspective, as per population size, Albanian municipalities can be divided into four groups: 1) capital city, 2) large municipalities, 3) medium municipalities and 4) small municipalities. The municipality of Tiranë accounts for 20% of the total population of Albania; 13 Municipalities cover 62% of Albanian population; and thus about 33 municipalities of the 61 cover 86% of population.



02. MAPPING METHODOLOGY



The selected methodology¹² for the Local Governance Mapping exercise has been adapted from methodologies successfully applied in various other countries and is especially suited for countries that are at the initial stages of local governance reform, have limited statistical data on services, or are developing a government performance management system on quality of governance and service delivery.

These methodologies are also well suited for countries that are seeking to enhance active citizen participation and downward accountability. They also help to ascertain both institutional and citizens' perspectives. For Albania, the following tested methodologies have been chosen, namely, Local Governance Barometer and Citizen Report Card.

- ✓ Local Governance Barometer (LGB) is mostly applied in countries, which are characterized by a limited availability of reliable administrative and statistical data on the service delivery processes and the quality of governance. LGB uses a set of localized governance indicators that are presented to various stakeholder groups to "score" performance on governance measures at the local level. It emphasizes awareness raising and constructive dialogue around governance and presents an overview of governance strengths and weaknesses. While the LGB uses a global model of good local governance, it is tailored to specific country contexts to develop a specific model as the case in Albania. Given the time and cost constraints, it was tailored to look at limited perspectives of few groups of stakeholders and not at all levels of service providers. Thus, the LGB was used with a group of citizens and civil society and another group of service providers at the municipal level.
- ✓ The Citizen Report Card (CRC) technique is a tool that helps identify citizens' opinions/perceptions about how local governance processes work, their opinion on public service delivery quality, as well as main problems and issues as viewed from the beneficiaries' perspective. A number of questions were developed to seek people's perspective on the above issues. CRC helped to determine citizen (single stakeholder) perspectives, identify gaps and inequalities in local governance processes and service delivery.

→ 2.1 Analytical Framework for Local Governance Mapping

Field assessments have been carried out in conformity with an Analytical Framework, a methodology and structure based on Local Governance Barometer (LGB), developed purposely and adopted within the context of Albania's local government. The Analytical Framework ensures representation from both government actors (key local government staff) and non-government ones (citizens and CSOs) and concentrates more on the 'interactive' dimensions of governance. The Framework includes a set of localized governance

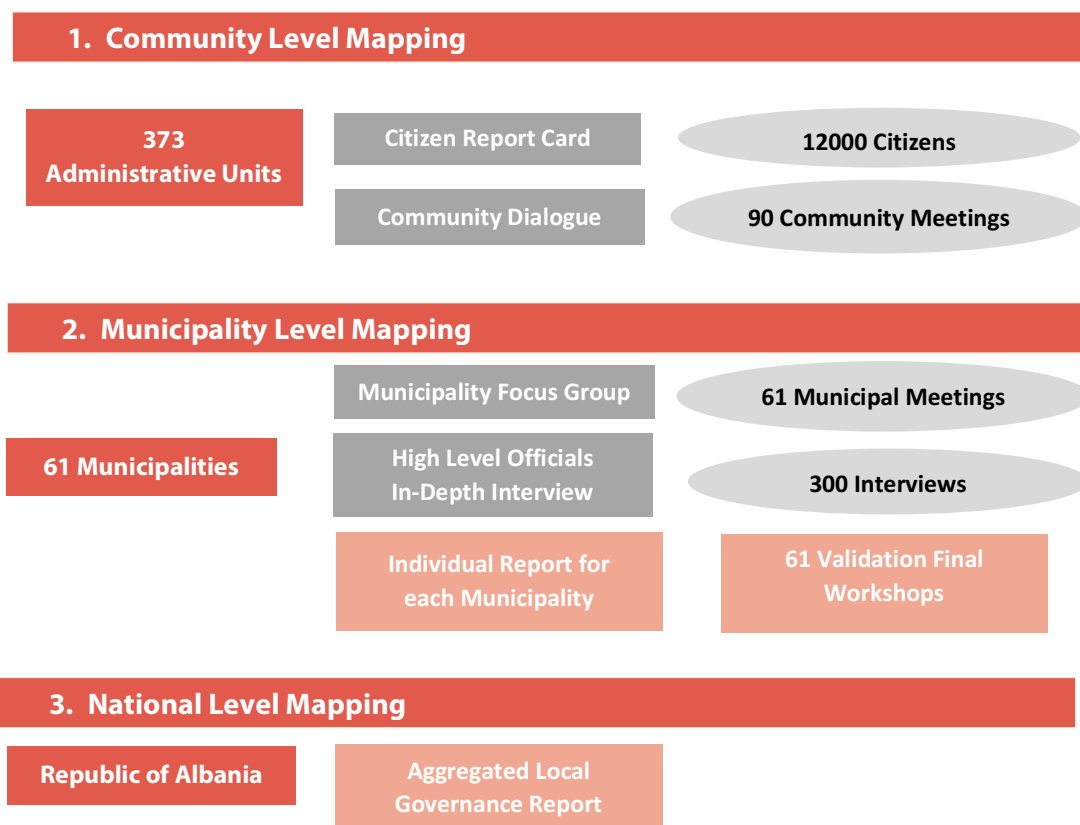
12. For details of the methodology, http://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/democratic_governance/local-governance-mapping-methodology-in-albania/.

indicators that are used by various stakeholders' groups to score specific governance dimensions at the local level.

The four main good governance dimensions selected for this assessment are:

- Effectiveness and Efficiency,
- Transparency and Rule of Law,
- Accountability,
- Participation and Citizen Engagement.

Figure 7. The Map of Local Governance Mapping Implementation



Source: Author's work

2.1.1 EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

Effectiveness refers to measuring the extent to which interventions or specific services achieve the desired goals and effects. Effectiveness in local government has to do with planning, coordination and implementation capacities of the administration in response to citizens' priorities in service delivery and economic development.

Efficiency means achieving the best possible result by using existing limited human and financial resources and avoiding or minimizing losses, delays or misuse.

This dimension includes the following criteria:

- ***vision and planning of local administration*** (if the latter have gone through a participatory and inclusive process),
- ***financial management*** (planning and management of local financial resources),
- ***informed decision making*** (based on reliable and updated information),
- ***coordination and cooperation*** (municipality interactions with central government, donors, and other municipalities), and
- ***level of satisfaction toward services*** (quality and accessibility of public service)

2.1.2 TRANSPARENCY AND RULE OF LAW

Transparency, in the present study implies an environment where actions, decisions, decision-making processes of local administration are made public and satisfactory information is accessible to citizens and actors directly affected by these decisions. Transparency is linked to access to reliable information and real-time data on the decisions and performance of the local administration.

The *Rule of Law* is a broad notion that in some literal definitions includes transparency, integrity, equal access and opportunities, necessary institutional capacities, respect and equality before the law, protection of human rights, etc. However, for the purpose of this study, the Rule of Law has been defined with a focus on the existence of an effective legal and institutional framework to ensure equal rights, awareness of the rights and duties of each individual, impartial law enforcement and institutional effectiveness in the fight against corruption.

For the needs of this framework this dimension is represented by the following criteria:

- ***transparency*** (if public service delivery performance and resources planning and utilization are available and accessible to citizens),
- ***rule of law regarding the Institutional Legal Framework at local level*** (whether a relevant legal framework exists and is effective), and
- ***incidence of corruption*** (existence of anti-corruption policies, corruption perception level, corruption experience level).

2.1.3 ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is defined as the ability, will and obligation of the municipality to report its actions to the citizens, explain the purposes and reasons for decision-making acts, justify the approach and the procedures to realize them so as to enable the assessment of compliance and performance by interested parties. Thus, it is about local government ability to show, explain and be held accountable for its decisions based on agreed targets and objectives to the public at large.

The accountability dimension is composed by the following criteria:

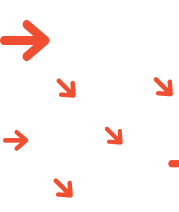
- **checks and balances** (the existence of institutions, which have control, supervision, and sanction power on the local administration),
- **recourse** (whether there are in place mechanisms for filing complaints and/or collecting citizens' inputs and whether they are effective), and
- **government responsiveness** (level of municipal responsiveness to filed inquiries and complaints).

2.1.4 PARTICIPATION AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Participation and Citizens' Engagement refers to the active participation of all citizens (involvement of different interest groups) and civil society in local matters and development with a view to influence decision-making and allocating resources appropriately. This includes active, inclusive, free and meaningful participation of men, women and other groups from the community in the decision-making processes.

The Participation and Citizen Engagement dimension is represented by the following criteria:

- **institutional framework** (whether there is an institutional framework which ensures and manages citizen participation)
- **decision making** (involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process),
- **citizen engagement** (the level of interaction with local government), and
- **civic engagement** (the level of citizens, CSOs, and media activism on local matters and development).



→ 2.2 Research Methods

The research methods used include desk, qualitative and quantitative research. Different instruments were used to collect data from different sources:

- a) Desk Research (DR);
- b) Municipal Official Focus Groups (MFG);
- c) Semi-Structured Interviews (SSI);
- d) Community Dialogues (CD) and,
- e) Citizen Report Card (CRC) Survey.

2.2.1 DESK RESEARCH

This method involves collecting data that already exists, especially from the data and reports of the municipalities involved in the assessment. The study of materials and secondary data was important to create the general background and gain specific knowledge on local government issues. Further, secondary data are also used for the analytical framework, supplying the latter with information for the purpose of evaluating its component indicators. The desk research helped in understanding the situation of the municipality(ies), creating a municipal profile and assessing some of the governance criteria.

The typology of data and documentation collected from each Municipalities includes:

1. Demographic data – which includes the number of villages, households, population per each administrative unit, and the number of municipal employs in total, professionals in managerial positions and total members of municipal council aggregated by gender (organigram of the Municipality)
2. Social data – containing the number of the persons and families that receive social assistance and the number of facilities such as schools, health centers etc.
3. Economic data – including data about the latest budget of each municipality with respective revenues and expenses, and information on the number of business and farms at administrative unit level.
4. Data on public services provided – like the surface of the asphalted roads, sidewalks, surface of green areas etc.
5. Relevant institutional plans – General Local Plans, Strategic plans and any Sectorial Plan.

2.2.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

2.2.2.1 Municipality Focus Groups

The MFGs¹³ helped in collecting qualitative information on specific local governance issues as well as scoring of the governance criteria in the mapping analytical framework. In each municipality, a Focus Group

13. A specific moderation guide was designed for these MFGs. For more information please refer to Methodological Note. http://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/democratic_governance/local-governance-mapping-methodology-in-albania/).

Discussion was held with the municipality managerial staff and thus 61 MFGs were conducted. On average, each MFG consisted of 10-14 persons comprising of representatives / managers / directors from the main departments of the municipality and Administrators of Administrative Units.

2.2.2.2 Semi-structured Interviews

SSIs were conducted to obtain more strategic information on planning, budgeting, accountability mechanisms, public service delivery systems, transparency initiatives and citizen and civic engagement mechanisms. Thus, in each municipality, at least five in-depth interviews were held with specific senior municipal representatives such as the Mayor, Head of Municipal Council, Head/Director of Financial and Budgeting Department, Head/Director of Social and Economic Development Department or similar department, Head/Director of Department of Public Works and Services, and the Department/Sector responsible for mechanisms for transparency and accountability – Coordinator for Information and Consultation.

2.2.2.3 Community Dialogues

Community Dialogues¹⁴ were crucial in obtaining qualitative data from citizens and other stakeholders on local governance and service delivery issues as well as score municipal performance against the four governance criteria in the analytical framework. A total of ninety CDs were held in the following manner. In 30 largest municipalities (population size), two CDs / per municipality were held, one in the urban municipal center and one in the rural administrative unit. In the other 31 smaller municipalities, only one mixed CD was conducted at the center of Municipality. Each CD was composed of about 15-20 participants, representing the following groups: citizens, Civil Society Organization (formal or non-formal) of the area, local media representatives and business representatives.

2.2.3 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The quantitative research component for the purposes of this project involves the Citizen Report Card survey. The CRC questionnaire was used to seek citizens' opinions on the quality of local government and their level of satisfaction with main public services.

The survey is representative of Albanian municipalities' population. A total of 12,000 interviews were undertaken all over Albania with an average of about N=200 interviews per Municipality. The margin of error is $\pm 0.89\%$ with a 95% confidence interval. Technically, a margin error of $\pm 0.89\%$ means that if the study is repeated with the same sampling, 95% of them will reflect data from the population with an inaccuracy less than $\pm 0.89\%$. The distribution of questionnaires for each municipality and administrative unit was done based on their population according to Census 2011.

Table 1. Sampling criteria and total number of conducted interviews

14. A specific moderation guide was designed for these CDs. For more information please refer to the methodological note. http://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/democratic_governance/local-governance-mapping-methodology-in-albania/.

Population	Sample Size	Municipalities	Total
Up to 25,000	150	28	4,200
25,001-60,000	200	20	4,000
60,001 -110,000	250	8	2,000
over 110,000	300	4	1,200
Tirana	600	1	600
Overall Total		61	12,000

Source: Author's work

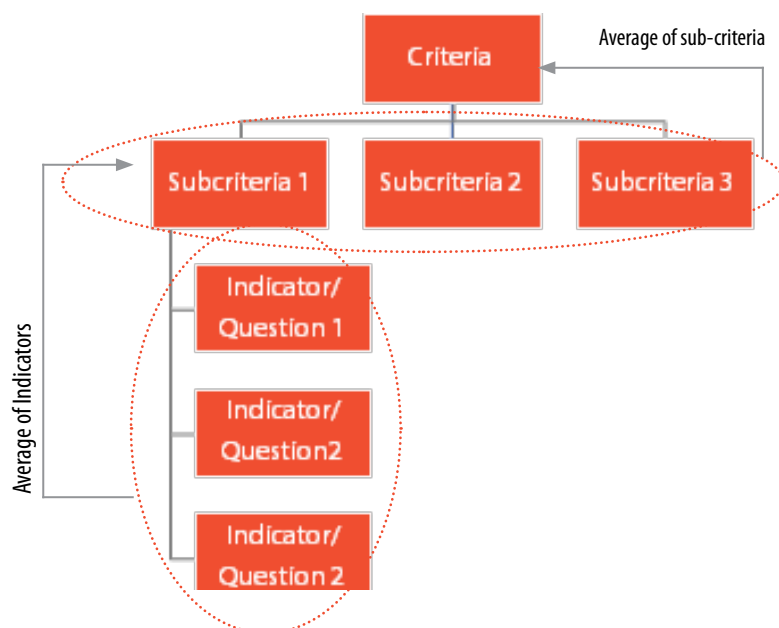
2.3 Scoring approach

Each of the criteria of the Analytical Framework contains several sub-criteria, and the latter comprise questions to be answered. In answering those questions, various stakeholders (representatives / municipal officials, community citizens, civil society representatives and entrepreneurs) assessed various aspects of local administration activity based on personal knowledge and perceptions. Answers were collected through different techniques such as Municipality Focus Group, Citizen Report Cards, Community Dialogues and Secondary Data.

Many questions were addressed to different stakeholders, i.e., municipal officials and community, in order to capture all the different perspectives and ensure a comprehensive information set. Thus, the final score was the average value of all the results obtained from all sources for each criterion and the score for each criterion was the average of the respective sub-criteria. In the case of focus groups (with municipality or community), same indicators/questions were used to ensure comparability and elicit their respective perspectives. Wherever more than one source of information was involved, for instance, focus group discussions and citizen report card, the average score collected from all the sources was considered as the final rating for that variable.

The scoring is constructed in a scale **from 0 to 100 points**, where 0 indicates "Very Poor Governance" and 100 "Full / Perfect Governance". The scoring range is divided into 5 categories: 0-19 (very poor), 20-39 (poor), 40-59 (average), 60-79 (good), 80-100 (very good). The scale allowed for indicator scores to be easily rolled up into overall scores for each sub-criterion, then rolled up into each criterion, and finally rolled up into an overall LGB score.

Figure 8. The Evaluation Diagram

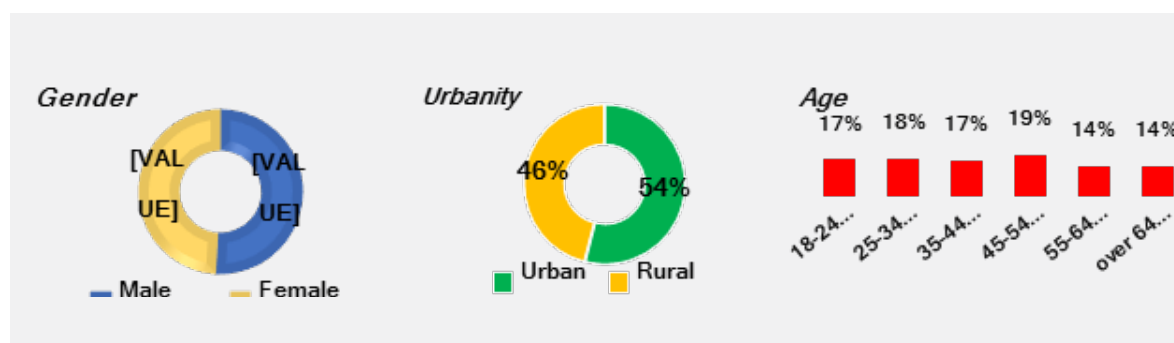


Source: Author's work

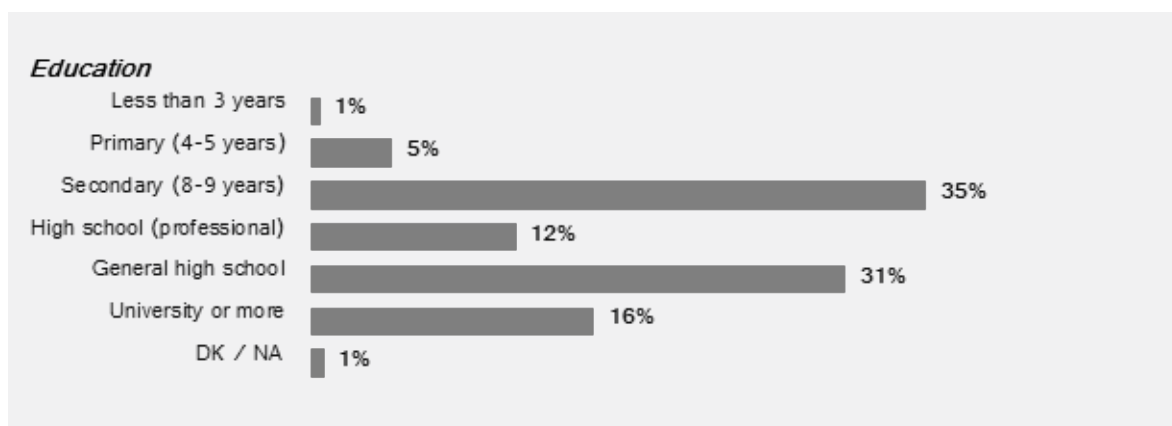
2.4 Respondents' profile

The proportion of respondents to the Citizen Report Card at the national level stands at the ratio 49 percent male and 51 percent female. Also, in line with the population structure, 54 percent of questionnaires refer to the urban community and 46 percent to the rural one.

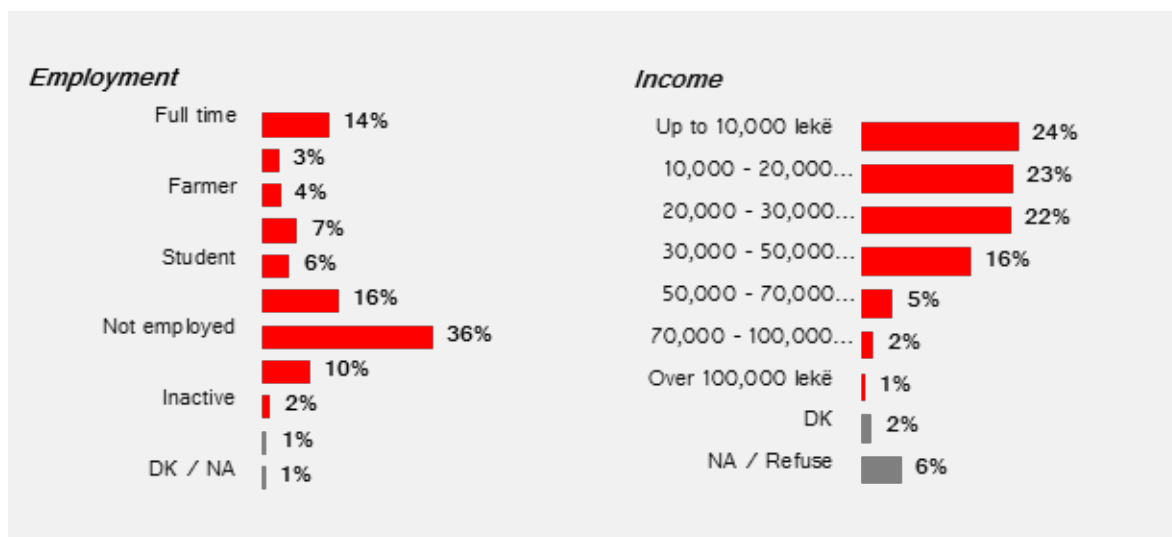
More than half of the respondents surveyed were young to mature adults aged between 18 – 45 years old, almost 85% of the respondents were at a working age, though in aggregate about 36% of respondents declared themselves unemployed.



The top three respondents' groups in terms of education were those who have completed up to the secondary education (35%), high school (43%) and university and above (16%).

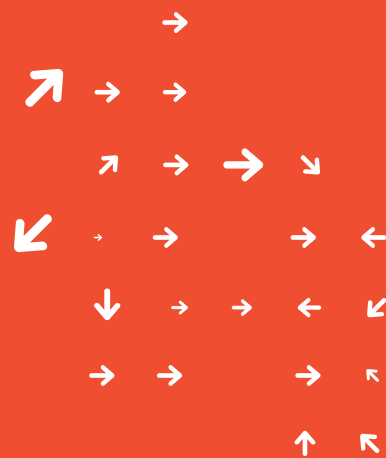


As per the employment status, the top three surveyed groups are the unemployed (36%), retired (16%), and full time employed (14%), which in aggregate constitute 66% of the entire sample size. And finally, in terms of income, most of the respondents are at the lower end, since over 70% belong to the lowest income ranges, while another 8% of respondents have refused to disclose this information.





03. LOCAL GOVERNANCE MAPPING: FINDINGS





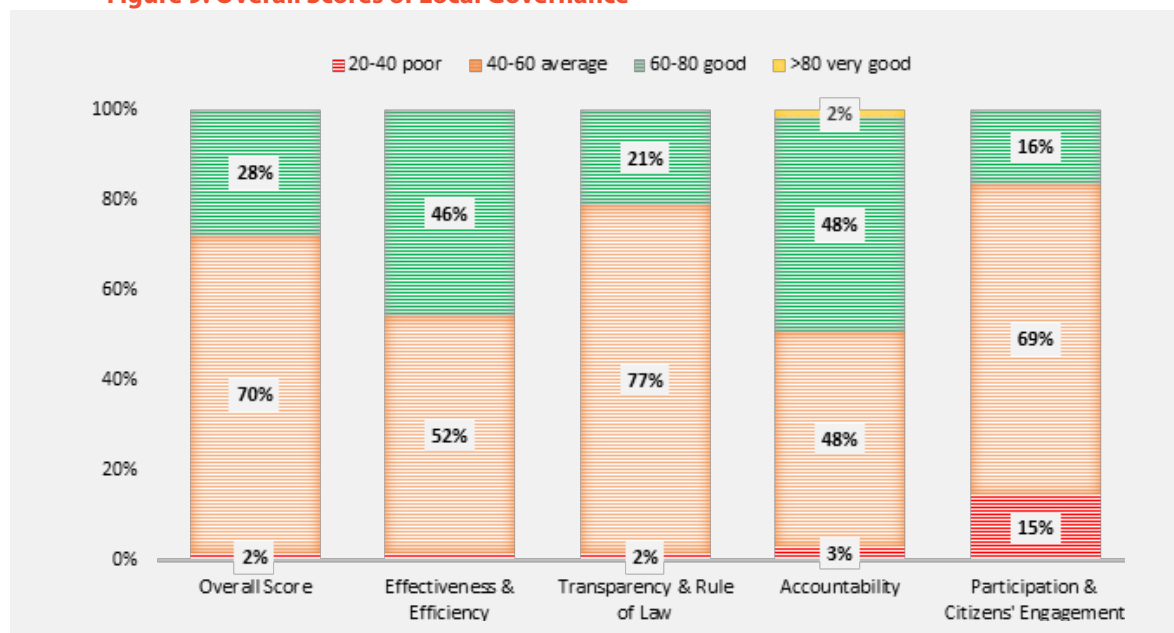
→ 3.1 Overall overview on Local Governance

The assessment of the local governance in accordance with the adopted scale indicates that there are no “excelling” municipalities in Albania. Nevertheless, no municipality scores extremely low either. Most of them oscillate around average scores, with a higher performance in Effectiveness and Efficiency and Accountability and lower in Transparency and Rule of Law and Participation and Citizen’ Engagement.

It is, however, important to note that results, computed as an average of scores obtained from different sources for the same indicator, sometimes hide extreme views coming from different perspectives. Citizens, interviewed through CRC or focus groups, generally have a lower estimate of the work and performance of local government, while municipal employees are more optimistic about what they do and how they are viewed by the community.

However, considering individuals as interacting social agents, an effort has been made for each indicator to determine which categories of individuals can potentially give a feedback / opinion. In this way, a number of indicators have been answered only by municipal staff, other indicators are responded only by the community (citizens or focus group), and in other cases, the evaluation is done by both parties. When an indicator has been evaluated from more than one source, then the final indicator is calculated as the average of the assessment made from all sources. The findings are based on such data averages, though in some cases it is attempted to also distinguish nuances. The below graph presents the results at the aggregate level of the overall score and the four individual dimensions of local governance for all 61 Albanian municipalities.

Figure 9. Overall Scores of Local Governance

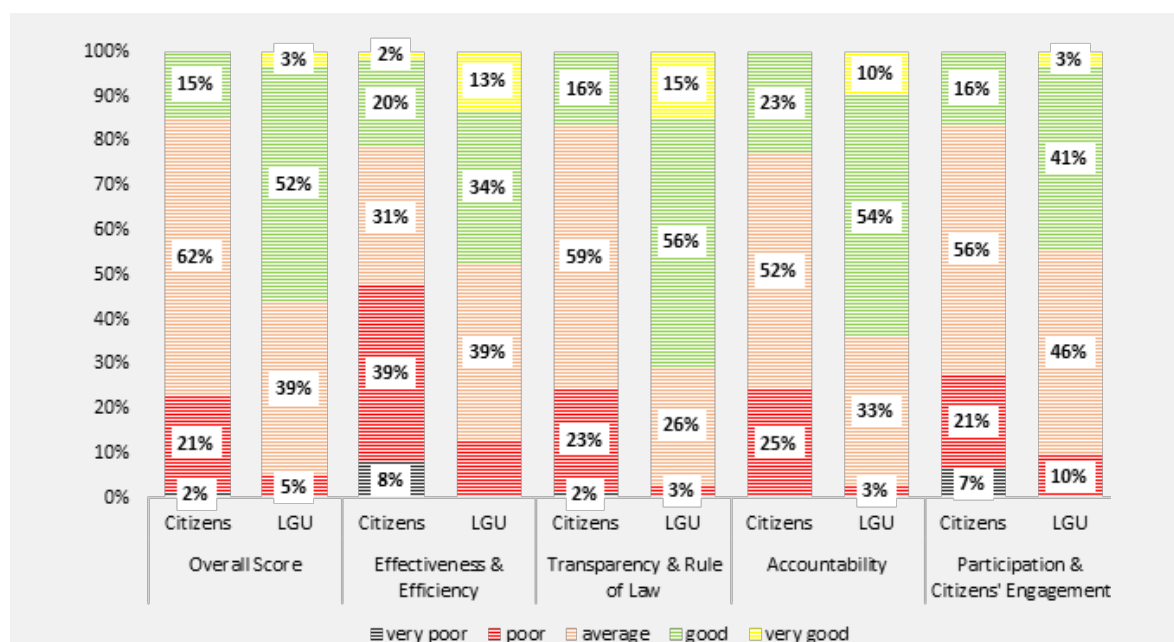


Source: Author's work

Thus, overall 43 municipalities score within the average range and only 28% or 17 municipalities stand about that average. There is only one higher score in the Accountability dimension, referring to only 1 municipality, and 9 municipalities score lowest in the Participation and Citizen Engagement dimension.

The following graph attempts, however, to distinguish differences between citizens' and municipal employees' perceptions over local government work by removing alternatively the respective assessments where the final indicator results as the sum of two sources.

Figure 10. Differences between Citizens and Municipality Scoring



Source: Author's work

The citizens' more skeptical assessment is clearly visible in the four dimensions with predominance in the average range, while local officials perceive most of them as "good". The above differences, reflected also in the scoring of dashboard indicators, result in a different ranking of problems and priorities for citizens and municipal employees.

Top 5 and Bottom 5 overall ratings from the public and the local governments

	PUBLIC	LOCAL GOVERNMENT
TOP 5	➤ Equal access to local government services	➤ Compliance with recommendations of state audit
	➤ Low levels of corruption experience	➤ Responsiveness to requests from the community
	➤ Access to municipal service delivery	➤ Transparent administrative procedures
	➤ Effective institutional framework	➤ Effective institutional framework
	➤ Available mechanisms for filing complaints	➤ Available mechanisms for filing complaints
BOTTOM 5	➤ Lack (or lack of information) of adequate development planning	➤ Lack of adequate development planning
	➤ Low levels of civic engagement in general	➤ Low or no usage of GIS platforms
	➤ Lack of information on municipal projects, activities, budget, including local website	➤ Inexistence of community structures to engage in civil initiatives
	➤ Poor level of CSOs skills and engagement in local matters	➤ Poor level of CSOs skills and engagement in local matters
	➤ Inexistence of community structures to engage in civil initiatives	➤ Lack of or weak anti-corruption policy, strategy or action plan

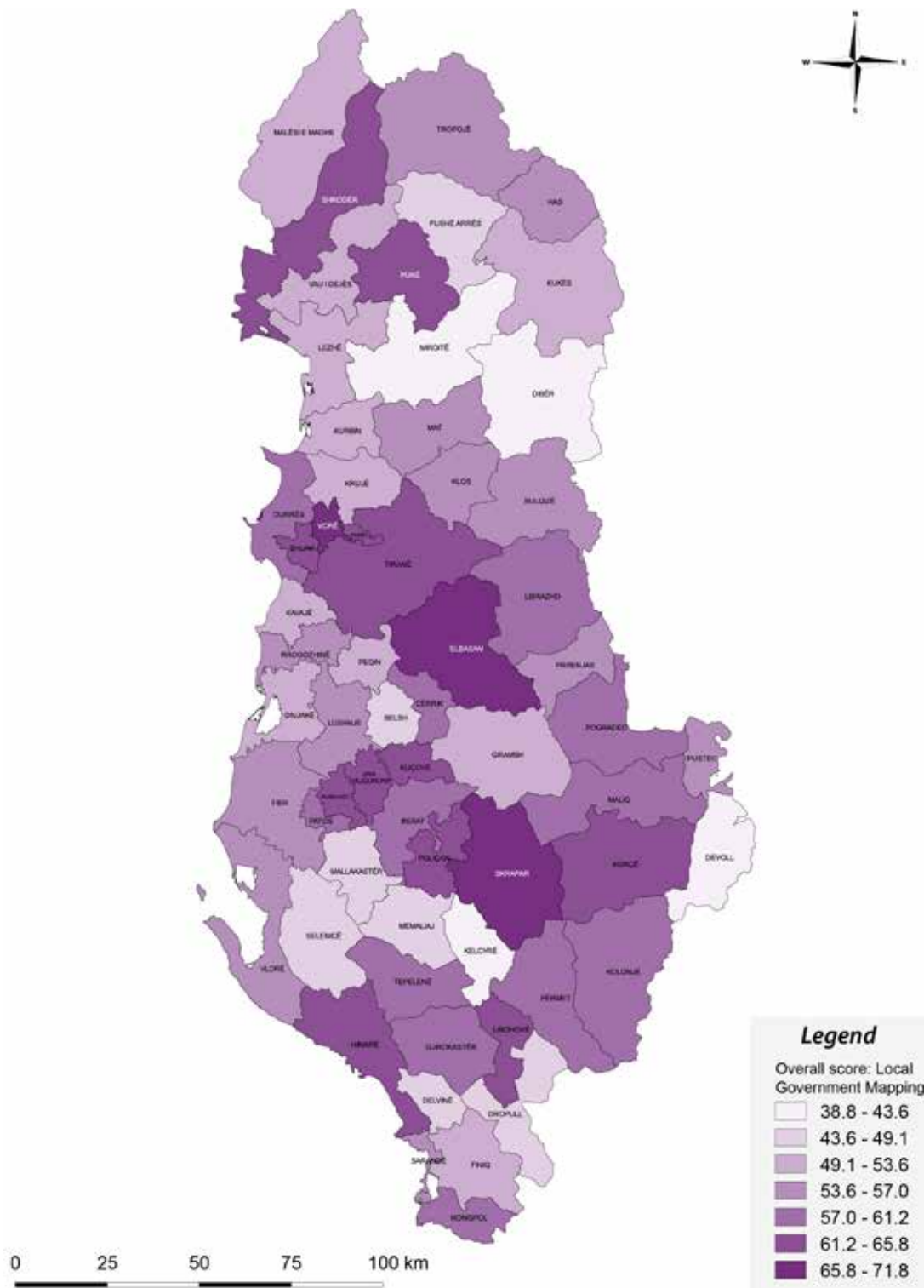
→ 3.2 Effectiveness and Efficiency

“Effectiveness and Efficiency” dimension scores the highest at a national average (60), just passing the threshold to qualify within the “good” scoring range. Twenty-eight municipalities (46%) remain below this threshold, with Fushë-Arrëz scoring the lowest and Skrapar the highest.

This dimension assesses the existence and level of implementation of development plans, the existence of a financial management and fiscal performance plan, the level of informed decision making, coordination and cooperation with third parties as well as satisfaction with public services.

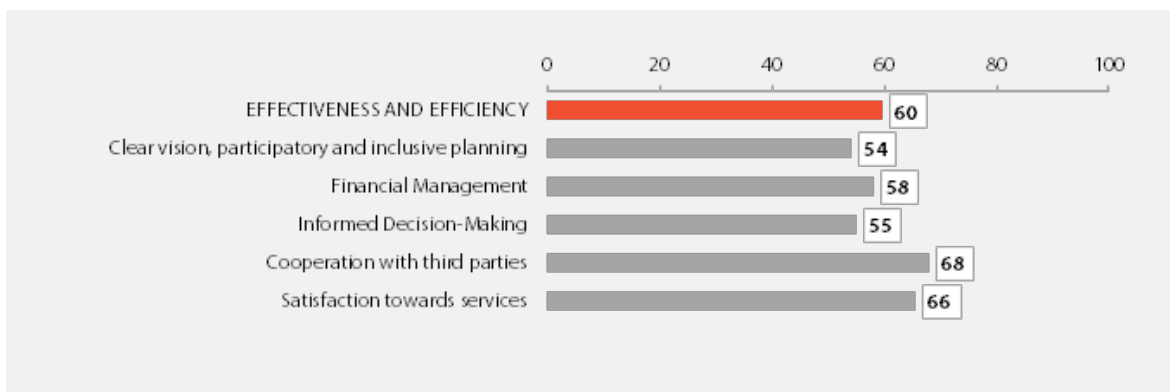
Effectiveness and Efficiency has a national score of 60 points indicating good performance (Figure 12). A more detailed review picture however reveals that the municipalities do not have a clear vision about the future development of their municipalities nor do they engage citizens sufficiently in this process. While financial planning and management is taking place, the quality of these processes is variable with financial autonomy being not in pace with the competencies. It appears that the municipalities coordinate better with the other actors within and outside the government.

Figure 11. Local Government Mapping



Source: Author's work

Figure 12. Effectiveness and Efficiency Criteria



Source: Author's work

From a more in depth review of the assessed indicators, the following results score the highest/lowest:

On the positive side	On the negative side
➤ horizontal and vertical institutional cooperation as well as with other development stakeholders	➤ availability and level of implementation of development plans (half of municipalities possess General Local Plan)
➤ the existence and/or quality of annual sectorial plans	➤ evidence based decision-making (rarity of usage of GIS platform)
➤ the report and control mechanisms in place for budget management	➤ actual levels of revenue collection (assessed through secondary data)
➤ provision of equal access to municipal services	➤ quality of service delivery

With regard to municipal planning, a number of legislations inform the process. Firstly, according to the Law on Territorial Planning and Development, each municipality should develop a General Local Plan (GLP) for a better and sustainable territorial development.¹⁵ This GLP is implemented through sectorial plans, detailed local plans and development permits. The Law on Local Self-Government also obliges them to plan for various services and economic development and ensure public participation in the decision-making process.¹⁶ Despite legal provisions, Albanian municipalities are mostly incapable of financing the development of such a plan from their own budget. Hence, most of the municipalities are being provided support to develop their GLP from the central government or donor funds.

The Law on 'Local Self-Government' also provides for financial planning and financial management in ac-

15. Article 30, Law No. 107/2014, on 'Territorial Planning and Development', <http://www.planifikimi.gov.al/sites/default/files/ligji%20i%20planifikimit%20te%20territorit%20miratuar%20dt.31.07.2014.pdf>

16. Article, Law No. 139/2015, on 'Local Self-Government', http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

cordance with all applicable legislation. It mandates local governments to design and approve annual and medium term budget programmes, per the legislation that regulates the budget system and local finances.¹⁷ Overall, Albanian municipalities seem to adhere to the aforementioned provisions and possess a MTBP 2017-2019. However, several municipalities are yet to finalize it.

With respect to informed decision-making, it is the responsibility of the Mayor to attend to the gathering and processing of local statistics, classified by gender, and ensure their publication.¹⁸ The Mayor is also responsible for submitting to the council an annual written report about the financial activity and the implementation of the budget in the local self-government unit (LGU) and the subordinate institutions thereof.¹⁹ Overall, Albanian municipalities appear to be keeping track of municipal data somehow, however, a large number of them lack a statistic office or an integrated reporting system. For a better reporting system, terms on the typology and the periodicity of the reports should be included in the internal regulation of the institution.

As a result of the Territorial-Administrative Reform, all the municipalities have increased not only in size (because of the reconfiguration of the former 373 LGUs) but also their functions and services to be rendered to the citizens have undergone a radical change requiring new skills and competencies. The Law on Local Self-government governs the types of services. However, these new competencies have not been necessarily associated with required necessary financial resources and capacity development to enable the old as well as the newly recruited local government functionaries and officials to exercise their new functions. Consequently, this has influenced local self-governments' performance in effectively and efficiently delivering on these public services.

Summing up, the major challenges expressed across municipalities for becoming effective and efficient, are difficulty of financing the drafting of a GLP or a Strategic Plan through their own budget, the lack of a statistical office or an integrated reporting system within the municipality; the difficulty in finding qualified municipal staff, and the difficulty in implementing the new competencies that have passed on to the LGUs as per the Law on Local Self-Government.

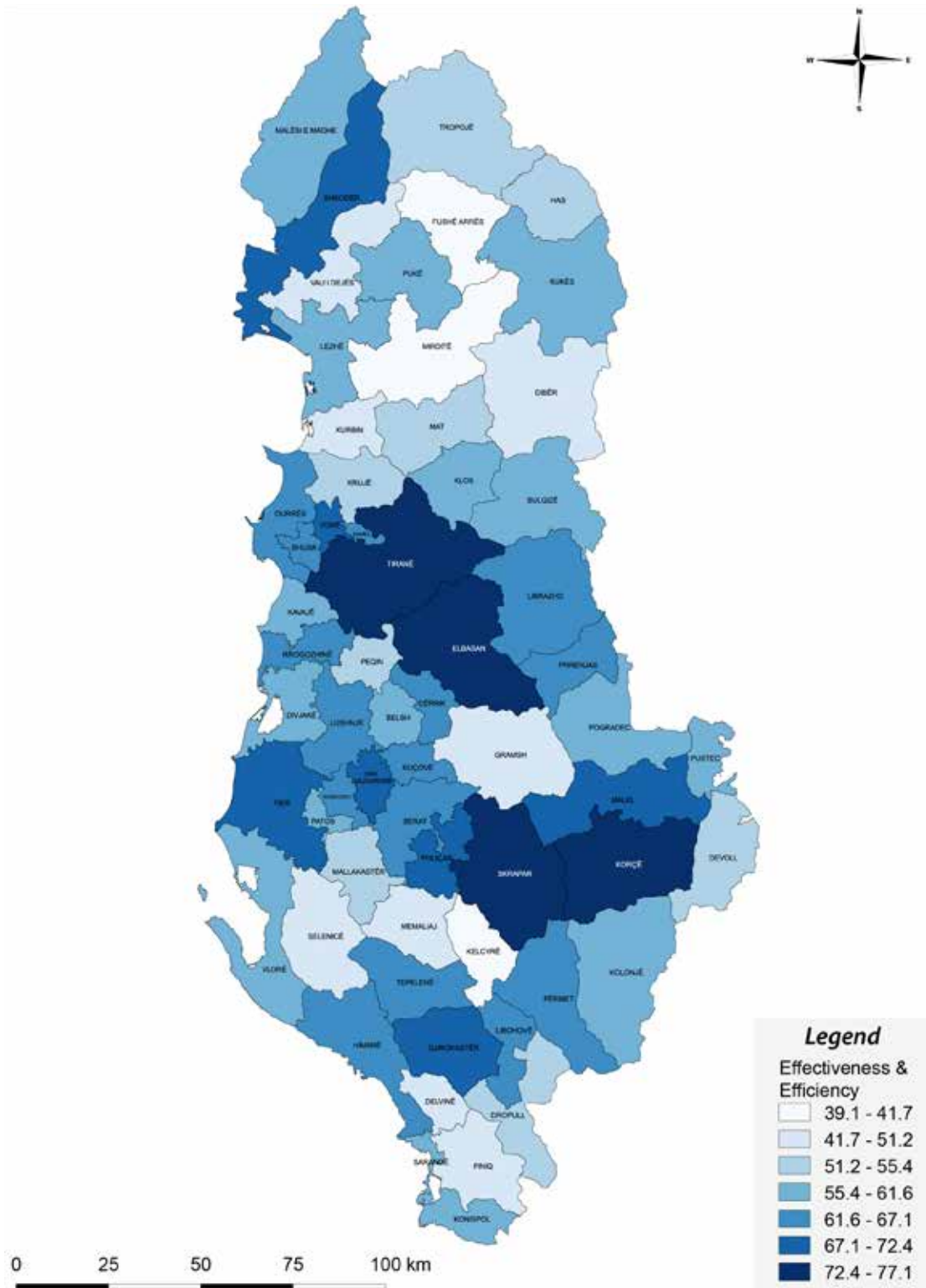
Figure 13 below presents a national overview and a comparative picture of the municipalities of the local government's performance on effectiveness and efficiency.

17. Article 41, Law No. 139/2015, on 'Local Self-Government', http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

18. Article 64, Law No. 139/2015, on 'Local Self-Government', http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

19. Article 44, Law No. 139/2015, on 'Local Self-Government', http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

Figure 13. Map of Effectiveness and Efficiency



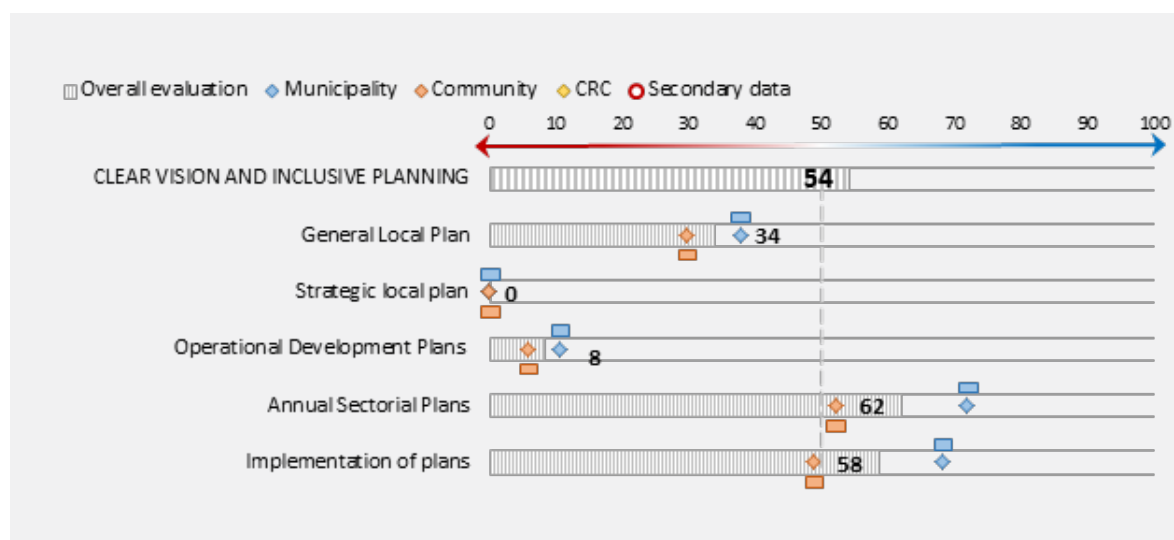
Source: Author's work

3.2.1 VISION AND PLANNING OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

This sub-criterion assesses whether the municipality has a vision and participatory and inclusive plans, and if the latter guide the municipality decision-making process. The indicators scoring better in this regard are the *existence of annual sectorial plans* and the *implementation of plans* compared with the other indicators.

Given that the reform process is still in its nascent stage, not all municipalities have all the necessary planning instruments to guide its decision-making process and thus has received a total score of *54 points* (Figure 14) with the exception of *annual sectorial plans* and the *implementation of plans* where the municipalities have fared slightly better.

Figure 14. Vision and Planning of Local Administration



Source: Author's work

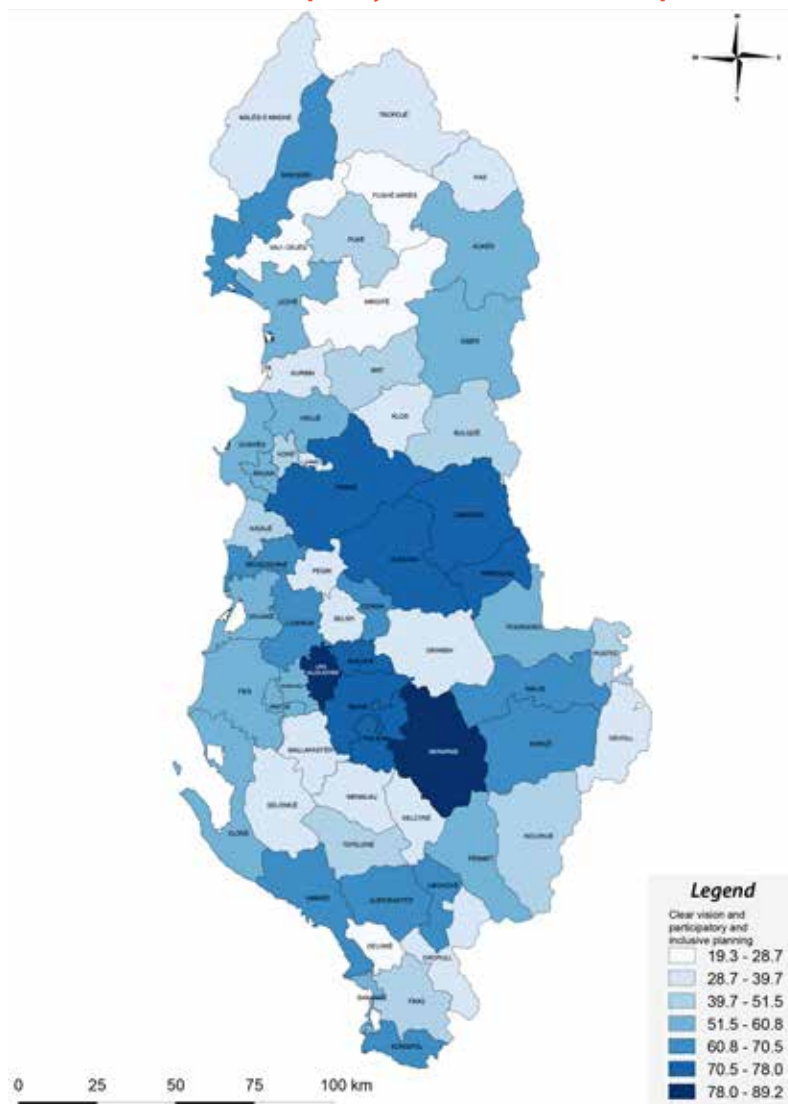
Half of Albanian municipalities (31) have a General Local Plan or are near its finalization. For municipalities, which lack a General Local Plan, the evaluation achieved for this indicator from both municipal officials and community is 0 points. Moreover, municipalities that do not possess a General Local Plan, do not possess a Strategic Local Plan either. Operational Development Plans, supported by STAR1 project in 26 small municipalities in early 2016, were somewhat proxy local development plans aiming at defining the problems and short-term operational priorities of the municipalities. Nevertheless, also in this case, there is mixed experience with their acquaintance and/or implementation across municipalities.

Meanwhile, the situation regarding the existence of annual sectorial plans is judged more positive. Municipalities possess various annual sectorial plans, referring to various areas, such as finance, education, agriculture, urban development, etc. However, there is no consistency as not all municipal sectors are covered by sectorial plans. In general, municipal focus groups have confirmed the availability of the most necessary sectorial plans. However, for some small municipalities (such as Devoll, Fushë-Arrës, Laç and Vau-Dejës) this

aspect is still deficient. On the other hand, through community dialogues, citizens have given an average score (52), linked to some awareness about municipal sectorial plans, but low levels of information about their content.

This insufficient level of information comes due to the low level of citizen engagement by local administration, partly due to the lack of an effective dialogue platform to communicate with the community and raise awareness among them, and partly due to the lack of citizens' interest to be an integral part of their respective municipality's activities. Furthermore, citizens' level of awareness about sectorial plans appears also to be affected by the fact that they are of the impression that such annual plans documents are meant more as internal documents for the respective departments than for the general public.

Figure 15. Clear Vision and Participatory and Inclusive Plans Map



Source:
Author's work

The implementation of existing plans is scored overall as average. Municipal officials' score is high (68), referring to a relatively good implementation and affirming the latter guides somehow the municipality decision-making processes. Problems concerning their full implementation are partly due to ineffective planning and lack of sufficient finances. The mapping findings resonate close with the World Bank assessment²⁰, which pointed out the limited capacity of LGUs in preparing and adopting local development plans. On the other hand, citizens' score stands at 49, in part due to their level of acquaintance with such plans and the municipal implementation efforts and follow up. The extreme scores for this indicator are Skrapar (90) and Fushe-Arrez (19).

Summing up, major issues identified across local governments in terms of planning is that some municipalities (17 of 61) still haven't began working for the drafting of the General Local Plan. The ones which do poses a GLP or are in its initial phase reflect up to some extent consideration for the community thoughts. Meanwhile, despite the fact that most municipalities possess annual sectorial plans, still not all sectors are covered with such plans. At the same time, the community seems to be mostly uninformed about their content since the latter aren't public. However, the greatest challenge faced by municipalities according plans is their incomplete level of implementation, coming as a result of an initial bad planning or due to lack of finances.

3.2.2 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

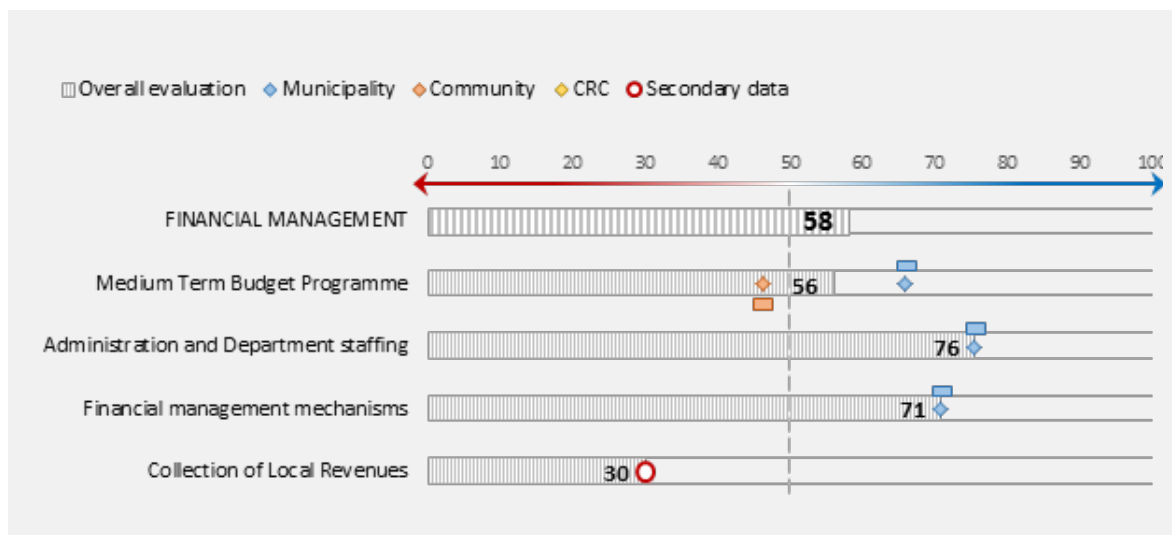
This sub-criterion aims to provide an overview of the effectiveness in planning and management of local financial resources. It assesses the existence of a Medium-Term Budget Program (MTBP), the municipality adequacy and capacity (administration and department staffing) to manage its budget efficiently, the presence of good and effective financial management and control mechanisms and the efficiency of local government in collecting local revenues. From the scores (Figure 16), it appears that the municipalities have adequate staffing and capacity for efficient budget management and effective control mechanisms for financial management. However, their performance in collection of local revenues appears to be 'poor'.

57 out of 61 municipalities possess a MTBP, the exceptions being the municipalities of Delvinë, Finiq, Kelcyrë and Konispol. There is, however, much more at stake than merely the availability of an MTBP. Often, municipal MTBPs consist mainly of two financial statements, that of income and expenses, and lack of proper analysis and justification. It may, however, be due to the lack of awareness among the community, and also a lack of availability of a citizens' budget in a simplified manner.²¹ It is also important to mention in this context that the *EC Progress Report 2016* notes that while efforts are being made at gender-responsive budgeting in a small set of municipalities (captured under 3.5.2), implementation of gender mainstreaming in the MTBP at municipal level is yet to be reflected in the corresponding national legislation.

20. World Bank, 'Next Generation Albania, A Systematic Country Diagnostic Study', World Bank Group, 2015

21. Commission, 'Albania 2016 Report', Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM (2016) 715

Figure 16. Financial Management



Source: Author's work

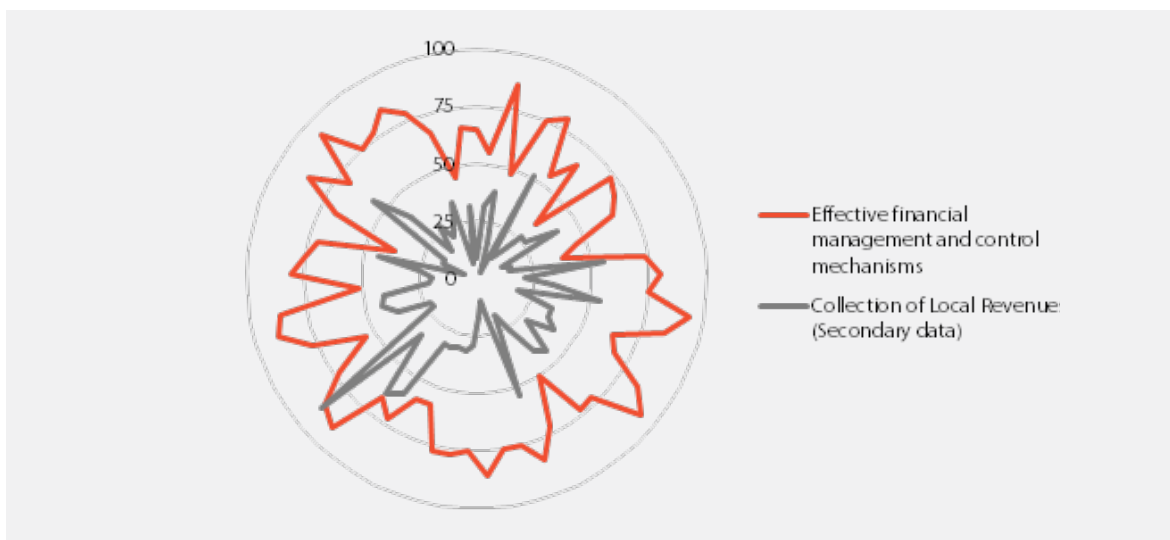
Although municipal focus groups' average score stands at 66 points, for one in every three municipalities (20), the score is in the average or lower ranges. On the other hand, the public assesses the linkage of the MTBP to the strategic plan / objectives of the local government definitely in the average range (46), whereas two in three municipalities (43) get an average or lower score. The highest scoring municipality overall is Ura-Vajgurore and Vore and the lowest one, besides those municipalities lacking an MTBP, is the municipality of Memaliaj.

Municipal officials value very high the adequacy of capacities of personnel/staff to manage their budgets efficiently. Only eight municipalities score relatively low, with municipality of Këlcyrë being at the bottom of the ladder, nevertheless, they all remain within the average range. Usual difficulties relate to finding and retaining qualified staff and securing additional training and capacity building for the available ones.

It is important to note that the final scores obtained cover large differences between the assessment made by municipal officials and community/citizens. For all the indicators that have been assessed by both groups, the public assessment results approximately 70 to 80 percent more skeptical than that of the local administration. Also, for some of the indicators, data cross-checks give a very different picture. For example, the difference is very noticeable when considering the control and budget management mechanisms that are highly valued by municipal employees and the low performance of local revenue collection. The gap is very consistent across almost all municipalities, as shown in the following graph:

As expected, the gap is smaller for high performing municipalities, although even in this case the assessment of the internal financial management is somewhat excessive compared to the actual collection rates performance; for low performing municipalities it is simply a gross over-estimation.

Figure 17. Financial Management versus Local Revenue Collection



Source: Author's work

However, when it comes to *local revenue collection*, the picture is almost completely reversed: one in three municipalities (19 of them) score “very poor” and five in six municipalities (46 of them) score either “very poor” or “poor”. Almost all Albanian municipalities showed a low level of independence from the central government or foreign donors’ funds. The information is obtained from secondary data and assessed based on *the ratio of municipal own revenues from local taxes to the total revenues of the municipality (unconditional transfers, conditional transfers, grants from international donors, etc.)*. The lowest performers, below 10 percent, are municipalities of Has, Këlcyrë, Tepelenë and Bulqizë; on the other hand, Rogozhinë and Roskovec fare relatively highest at a range of 59 -64 percent, while Tirana tops it all with 88 percent. Overall, this is one of the lowest scored indicators, which shows a worrying inability of local governments to generate revenues and guarantee fiscal autonomy.

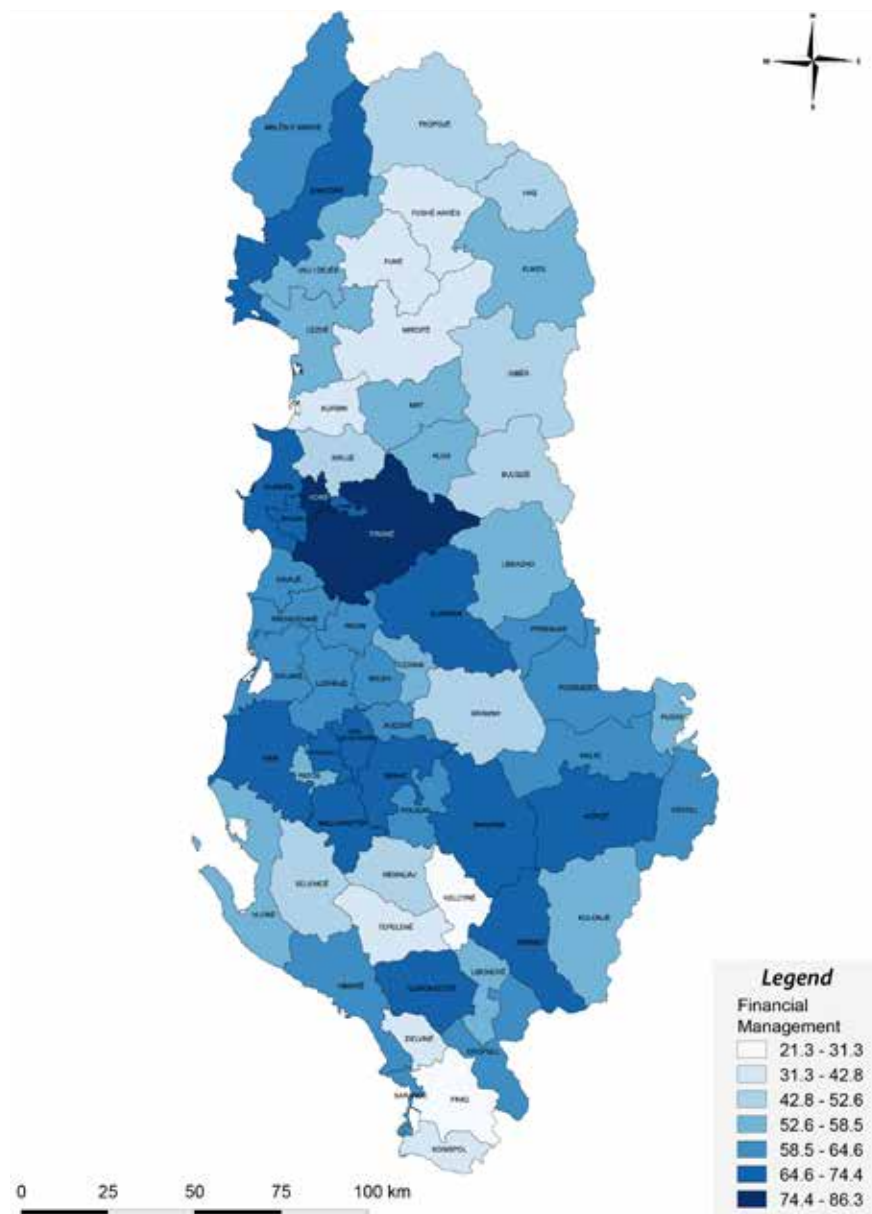
Figure 18. Financial Management versus Local Revenue Collection (Top 10 Municipalities)



Figure 19. Financial Management versus Local Revenue Collection (Bottom 10 Municipalities)



Figure 20. Financial Management Map



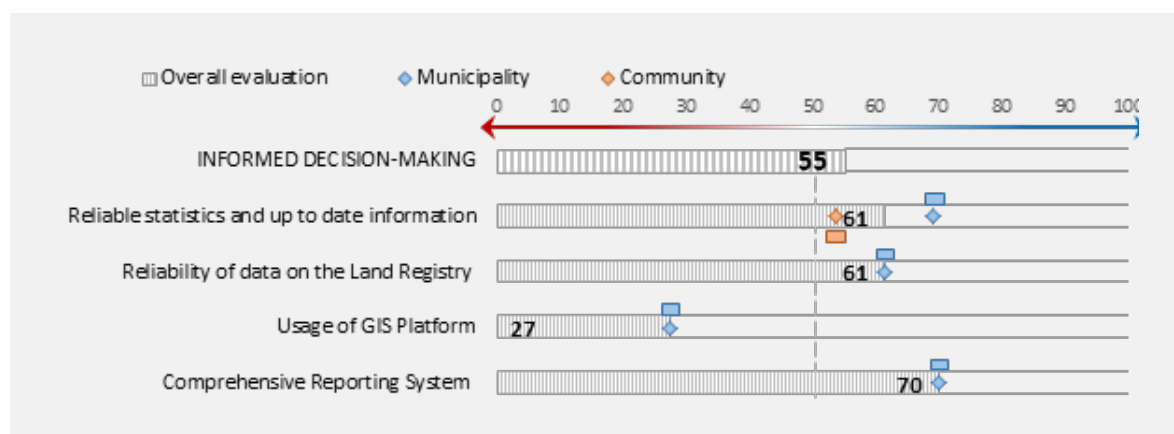
Source: Author's work

In general, all municipalities, with few exceptions, have a MTBP (2017-2019) but with varying quality. The emerging trend across municipalities in terms of financial management is that despite the fact that municipal officials claim that they have good administration staff capacities and effective financial management and control mechanisms, they identified the need for additional training of staff in order to perform better. In addition, when it comes to collection of local revenues, their performance is much lower than expected, resulting in low level of fiscal autonomy.

3.2.3 INFORMED DECISION MAKING

Informed decision making represents an important aspect of good functioning of local governance. It assesses how much is the decision-making based on reliable statistics/data and up-to-date information, how reliable are data on Land Registry, the extent on which the municipality uses a GIS system/platform and the existence of a comprehensive reporting system within the municipality. The best rated indicator under this sub-criterion is the *Comprehensive Reporting System*, whereas the *Usage of GIS Platform* scores the lowest.

Figure 21. Informed Decision Making



Source: Author's work

Overall, decision-making for all municipalities results to be based mostly on *reliable statistics/data and up-to-date information* as municipal officials' average rating is 69 points overall. Citizens are more skeptical, giving a lower score of 54 points. A main problem in this regard is the lack of a statistics office in most municipalities or the lack of an integrated data system within the municipality. For instance, the lack of statistics regarding the number of businesses, their size and typology, operating within the local government territory affects directly the good planning of revenue collection from local tax and tariffs. This then has larger implications for revenue autonomy and project implementation.

The top five municipalities for this indicator are Ura Vajgurore, Skrapar, Vorë, Kuçovë, and Poliçan, which except for Vorë, are almost adjacent municipalities. Whereas, the bottom five municipalities, in ascending order, are Mirditë, Delvinë, Devoll, Dibër, and Laç. It is also worth mentioning that for the municipalities of Bulqizë and Këlcyrë, the municipal own assessment is very low; surprisingly, the public assessment is higher, which shows the public is ill-informed or inclined to believe their municipalities make good use of data and information.

Overall, municipal officials tend to give some credibility to the *Land Registry data* and have evaluated its reliability with 61 points. However, community members often think differently and corroborated this by indicating lack of ownership certificates and overlapping boundaries of properties. It is worth highlighting

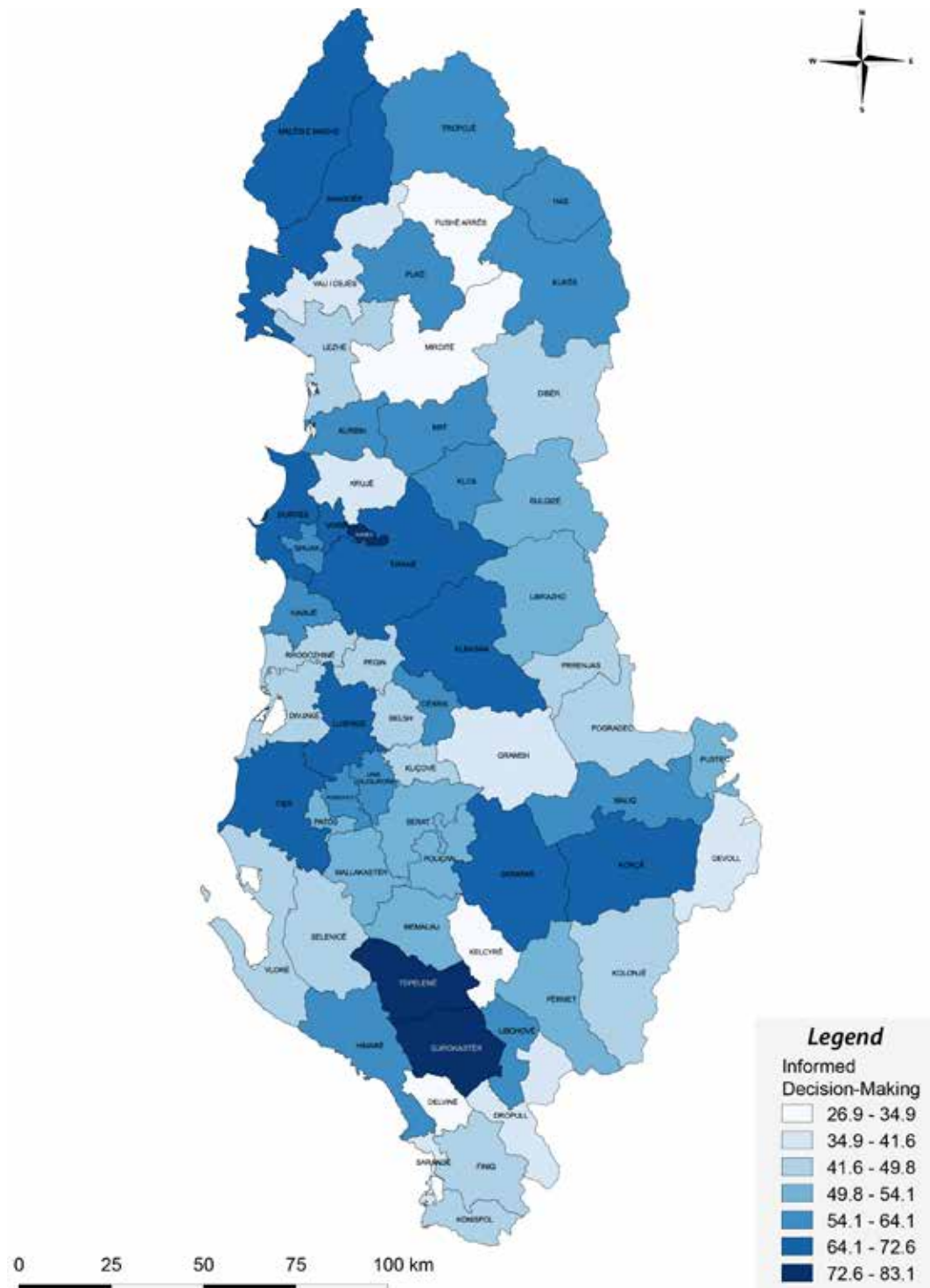
that shortcomings and flaws in the land registry data affect the proper collection of the tax on property and tax on the agricultural land. In spite of these claims, however, only three municipalities – Fushë Arrëz, Pukë and Delvinë – score this indicator below average.

GIS system/platform usage remains deficient across municipalities. About half of the municipalities use little or no GIS system. When it is used, municipal officials state that this platform is mainly used by the urban planning department and only two municipalities (Fier and Tirana) confirm that GIS platform is also used by their taxes and tariffs municipal departments. During the in-depth interviews with urban planning department directors, the latter declare that the department/sector lacks qualified staff in this regard and that for a better usage of the platform, additional training, specializations and capacity building are needed. Municipalities that receive more points in this indicator are Gjirokastrë, Tepelenë, Kamëz, Fier, and Durrës. It should be noted that this is a self-assessment made by the municipal officials, thus, not immune from overestimation.

Reporting within the municipality is rated by municipal employees as highly adequate, whereby municipalities of Malësi e Madhe, Skrapar, Gjirokastrë, Libohovë, and Tepelenë consider it perfect (100 points). Almost all municipalities confirm to exercise this practice through monthly, quarterly, semi-annual and annual reports. Still, these reports are generally not made public, thus, not contributing to municipal transparency. However, the situation is not as good in some small municipalities where the reporting system consists mostly on direct informal communication of each sector with the mayor (Memaliaj, Këlcyrë, Dropull, etc.). The low scoring municipalities, as per the own municipal assessment, include Fushë Arrëz, Këlcyrë, Mirditë, Vau Dejës, and Gramsh.

Summing up, the decision-making process does not seem to be based on very reliable data or systems. While reliability of statistics/data is judged to be mostly reliable, the statistics/ secondary data collected for the purpose of this mapping from the municipalities are not entirely accurate and reliable. More specifically, the Property Registry data is considered rather problematic by citizens, with many overlaps in property demarcations and other inaccuracies. The usage of the GIS platform is for all practical purposes non-existent. Overall the reporting system is considered good barring the fact that these reports are not open to public and in some municipalities the reporting is maintained at a very informal level.

Figure 22. Informed Decision Making Map

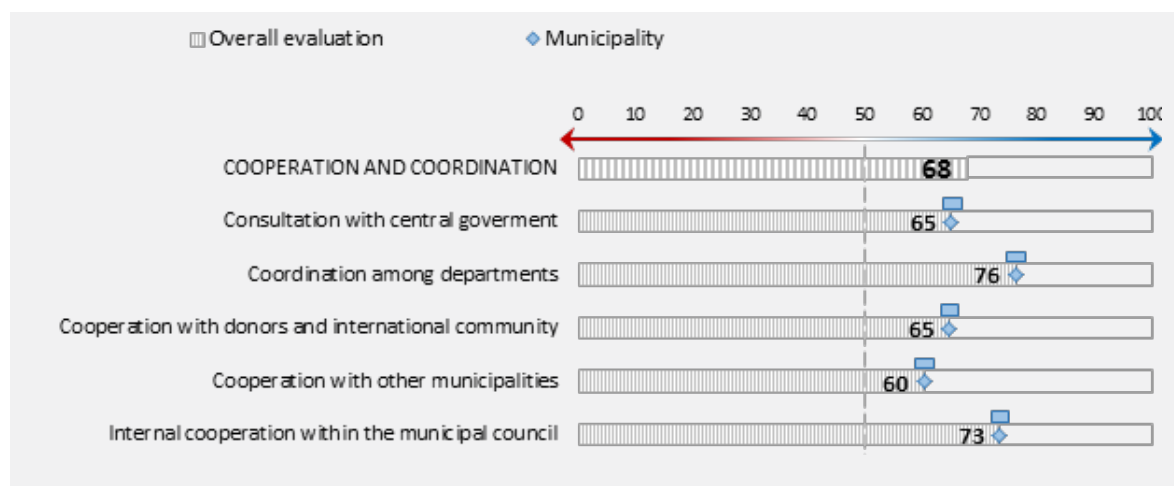


Source: Author's work

3.2.4 COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

Cooperation is an important mandate of the local governments and is well articulated in the local self-government law²². *Effective coordination and cooperation* estimates the level of internal coordination among municipal departments, the cooperation with the municipal council, the level of consultation processes with central government, the inter-municipality cooperation, and cooperation with other national and international stakeholders. As these are mainly matters of internal functioning of the municipality, for which the public is not actually well aware, the respective indicator scores are fully derived from municipal employees' self-assessments/perceptions. All indicators, composing this sub-criterion, are scored satisfactorily ("good"), without large variations; though, inter-municipal cooperation slightly results as the "weakest" one.

Figure 23. Level of Municipal Coordination and Cooperation



Source: Author's work

The *cooperation between central and local government* seems to be relatively effective for most of the municipalities. Communication and coordination with respective ministries or institutions as well as investments benefits from various state financing schemes result in a good level of satisfaction. Nevertheless, there are municipalities that are not at all satisfied with the current level of cooperation with the central government. The municipality of Mallakastër turns out to be extremely unhappy, while demand for improvement in the area of cooperation and investments comes mainly from municipalities that are led by the political opposition.

The *internal coordination among municipal departments* is a high scoring indicator for most municipalities, reaching in aggregate 76 points. Though, one has to recall that this is a municipal self-assessment only. During the mapping process, implementing organizations noted that, in several cases, municipal departments seemed to be poorly coordinated with each other, and, in many instances, municipal officials showed

22. Article 14, Law No. 139/2015, on 'Local Self-Government', http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

Level of Cooperation with Central Government (alphabetically)	
TOP 10	BOTTOM 10
Fier	Gramsh
Kolonjë	Kamëz
Korçë	Kelcyrë
Libohovë	Kukës
Maliq	Lezhë
Poliçan	Mallakastër
Roskovec	Mat
Tepelenë	Pogradec
Tiranë	Selenicë
Ura Vajgurore	Shkodër

little level of awareness about other sectors' work and outputs and how the latter could be linked to their daily work. Furthermore, on top of possible overestimation bias, the low scores for the bottom five municipalities of Mirditë, Laç, Mat, Finiq, and Këlcyrë are problematic, though not critical.

The situation is similarly satisfactory when it comes to cooperation with the municipal council. Fifty-two municipalities (85%) score this indicator as "good" or above and for 26 municipalities (43%) the cooperation is "very good". At the bottom of the ladder, though within the limits of "average" scores, there are a few cases where cooperation with the municipal council is suffering. The bottom five municipalities here include: Këlcyrë, Lezhë, Mirditë, Selenicë, and Gjirokastër.

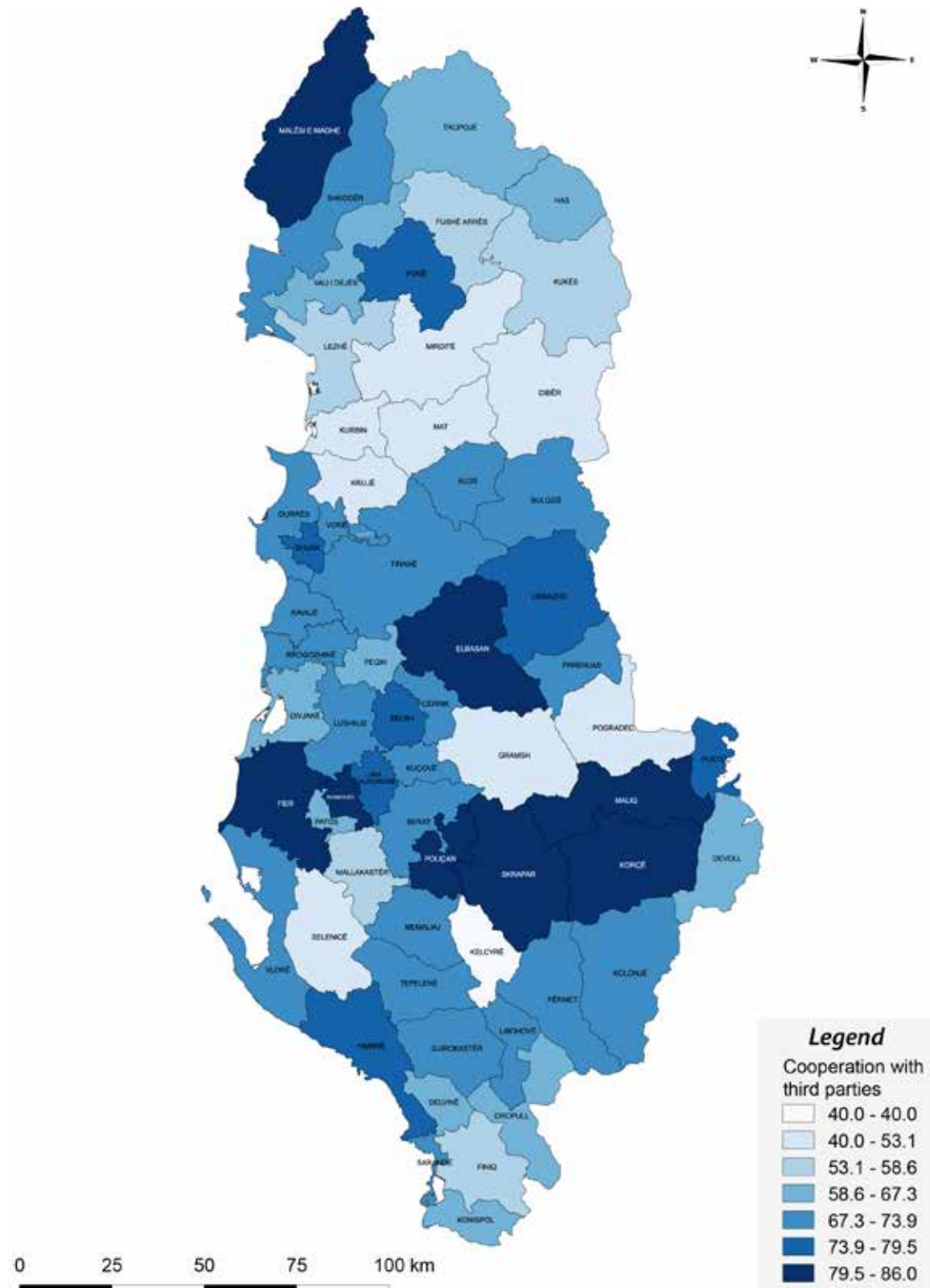
Cooperation with other municipalities is assessed from "very good" to "average", with only five municipalities falling beyond that threshold: Kukës, Gramsh, Patos, Libohovë, and Këlcyrë. The interaction consists in both informal and formal communication with neighboring municipalities. Common examples of cooperation include joint projects, or assistance in offering public services such as firework service, waste management etc. Beside this kind of interaction, some municipalities also claim to be part of twinning agreements with foreign municipalities (Konispol, Himarë, Divjakë, Patos, etc.) and that these agreements have resulted in tangible support, such as benefiting an auto-ambulance vehicle, a waste collection machine, waste containers, school equipment as desks, chairs, etc. Most municipalities value the *cooperation with donors and international community* and its benefits as "very good" or "good" (64%), and as "average" (31%). However, for a few municipalities - Divjakë, Libohovë, and Krujë - this cooperation is from "poor" to inexistent, as they declare there has not been any direct cooperation or specific project funded by the international community in their municipalities, except for sporadic contacts or communication.

By manipulating and re-arranging data, it is noticed that for a good part of low scoring municipalities, cooperation deficiencies are found in more than one direction. For example, all municipalities declaring poor results in cooperation with the international community are equally weak in inter-municipal relations. Thus, in part, the causality for such situation is inherently linked to local capacities to communicate and team up and the way municipalities operate.

Table 2. Municipal Cooperation: Incidence of Low Scores					
Municipality	Cooperation with central government	Coordination among departments	Cooperation with international community	Cooperation with other municipalities	Cooperation with municipal council
Mat	X	X			
Selenicë	X				X
Pogradec	X				
Mallakaster	X				
Kamëz	X				
Këlcyrë		X	X	X	X
Mirditë		X			X
Laç		X			
Finiq		X			
Patos			X	X	
Lobohovë			X	X	
Krujë			X	X	
Divjakë			X	X	
Lezhë					X
Gjirokastër					X

While the internal horizontal cooperation, including the coordination among the municipal departments and within the municipal councils, is rated 'good', the mapping process witnessed little coordination between the municipal departments. With regard to vertical cooperation, the coordination with central Government stands mostly at a 'good' level both in terms of communication and of received investments. Similarly, the vertical cooperation with donors and international community is also relatively good. However, there are few remote municipalities, which haven't had any cooperation. Overall despite being newly formed restructured municipalities, they appear to have relatively good internal coordination, but may need support to improve coordination with international partners to mobilize resources.

Figure 24. Map of Cooperation and Coordination

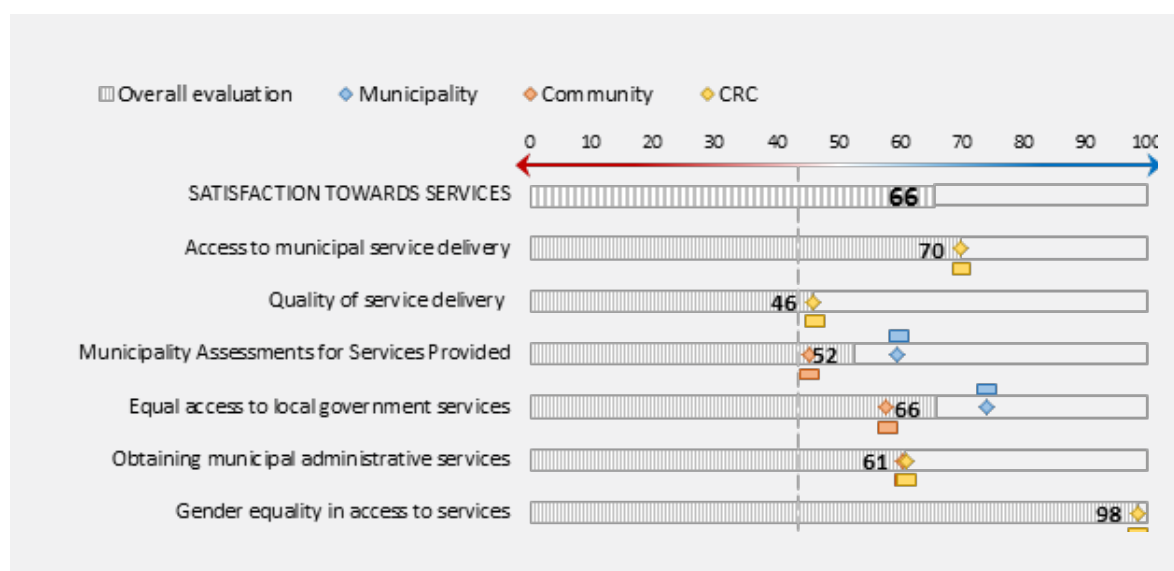


Source: Author's work

3.2.5 LEVEL OF SATISFACTION TOWARD SERVICES

Local service delivery is the core function of local government. Citizens expect to receive equitable, efficient and quality services that respond to their needs and increasing demands. An idea of how much these expectations are met is explored through assessing combined perceptions on the *level of satisfaction with local services*. Within this sub-criterion, various characteristics of local service provision are considered: citizens' satisfaction with the quality of service delivery, service availability and access, easiness of obtaining municipal administrative services, the existence and the quality/effect of assessments conducted by local governments to determine citizens' levels of satisfaction with the delivery of public services, priority services according to the citizens' perspectives, etc.

Figure 25. Level of Satisfaction with Public Services



Source: Author's work

Figure 26. Public Assessment of Local Services



At an aggregate level, satisfaction with public services is above average for about 80% of municipalities and within an average range for the remaining 20%. Thus, there is no municipality below the 40 percent score, based on a combined citizen-municipal assessment. However, a detailed data review helps reveal differences and deficiencies, across a mixed group of municipalities, including large ones. While the equality of access between men and women is almost 100 per cent, the quality of service delivery has received only

Table 3. Low Community scores on service provision

Municipality	Quality of services in general	Equal access to services	Quality of administrative services
Bulqize	x		
Diber		x	
Durres	x		x
Fier	x	x	x
Finiq	x		
Fushe Arrez		x	x
Has			x
Kamez			x
Klos	x		
Kukes		x	x
Lac	x		
Lezhe			x
Malesi e Madhe	x	x	x
Maliq	x		
Mallakaster	x		
Memaliaj	x	x	x
Mirdite		x	x
Puke	x		
Pustec	x		
Selenice	x		
Shijak			x
Tropoje			x
Vau Dejes	x		
Vlore		x	x

an average assessment (Figure 25). Citizens' are consistently more critical on the overall quality of delivered services, but often value the administrative services higher than the aggregate result.

Among the raised concerns, in an ascending order, the public is critical vis-à-vis equal access to services (8 occurrences), quality of administrative services (13) and quality of services in general (14).

Overall, the *existence of and access to municipal services* stands at a relatively good level (70 percent). However, there are substantial differences in the opinion of the municipal officials and citizens where municipal officials have judged equal access with 74 points and citizens have only given 58 points. This is further validated by the CRC (Figure 27), which shows a rural-urban polarity with substantial differences in access between urban (81 points) and rural areas (63 points). On analyzing further, it is revealed that this difference is more pronounced for certain public services such as street lighting, firefighting service, parks

and public space maintenance, sport spaces/ activities, cultural activities, and social housing which are less available in rural areas compared to urban areas. Communities confirm a satisfactory availability and access to Health Centers (93), Water Supply (92) and School Maintenance (89). Public services considered as less available are Social Housing (39) and Cultural/Natural objects and activities (49). With slight variations, this view is equally shared between male and female respondents.

However, from the citizens' perspective, the quality of services is unsatisfactory. Social Assistance, Social Housing, Irrigation and Drainage and Road Maintenance get the lowest quality marks. On top of this, rural residents perceive several services are provided with an inferior quality in the rural areas, with the most striking differences noted for sewerage (17), road maintenance (18), public cleaning (20) and public lightening (21).

Figure 27. Public Services Availability and Access

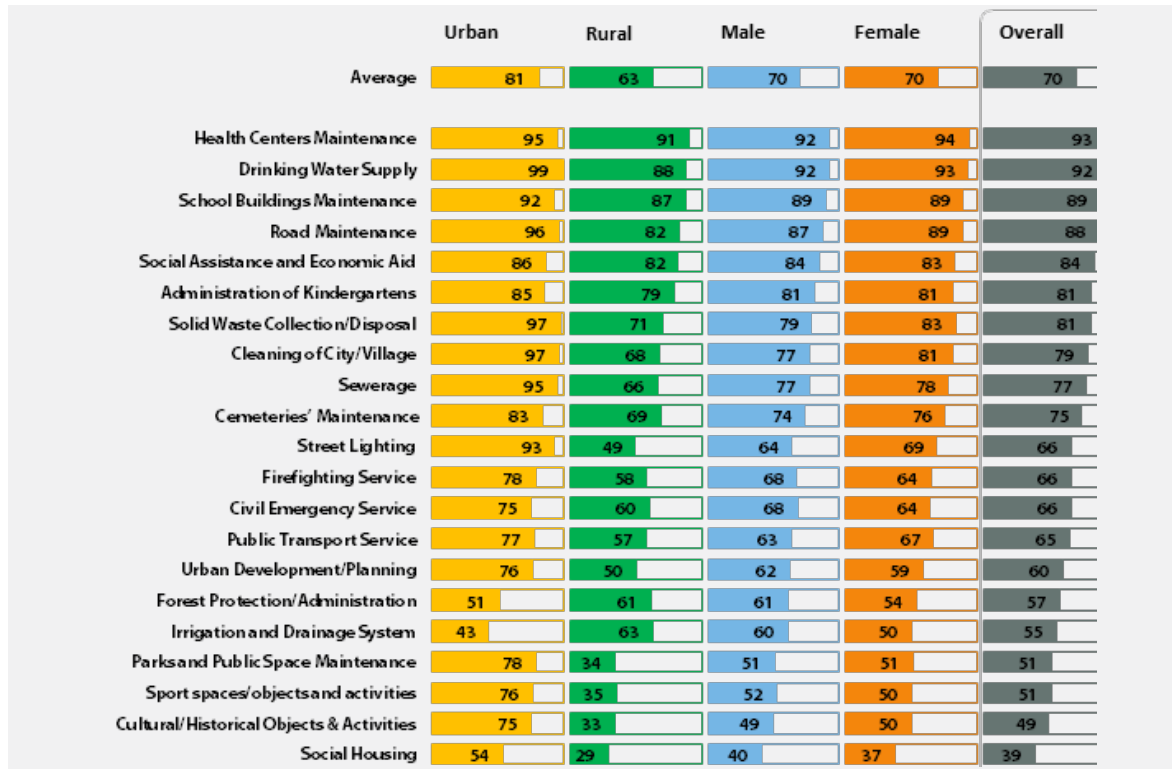


Figure 28. Citizens Level of Satisfaction with Public Services Quality



Source: Citizens Report Card

In many cases, municipal officials state that they know well the situation on the ground and the local needs and from time to time undertake various forms of assessments about citizens' satisfaction with services provided. For the citizens, such measures are either inexistent or in the best case very random and consist in sporadic meetings and irregular surveys. With a few exceptions, large discrepancies between municipal and public assessment rates, in the range of 30%-55%, are noted in both small and large municipalities such as Memaliaj, Dropull or Klos from one side, and Shkodër, Lushnjë, Fier and Vlorë on the other. Few municipalities (e.g. Fier, Patos, Lushnjë, etc.) declare to have undertaken some kind of citizens' satisfaction surveys but only for some specific services or have assessed citizen perception on municipal performance as part of projects funded by international donors. Thus, there is no regular instrument to collect feedback from end users in general.

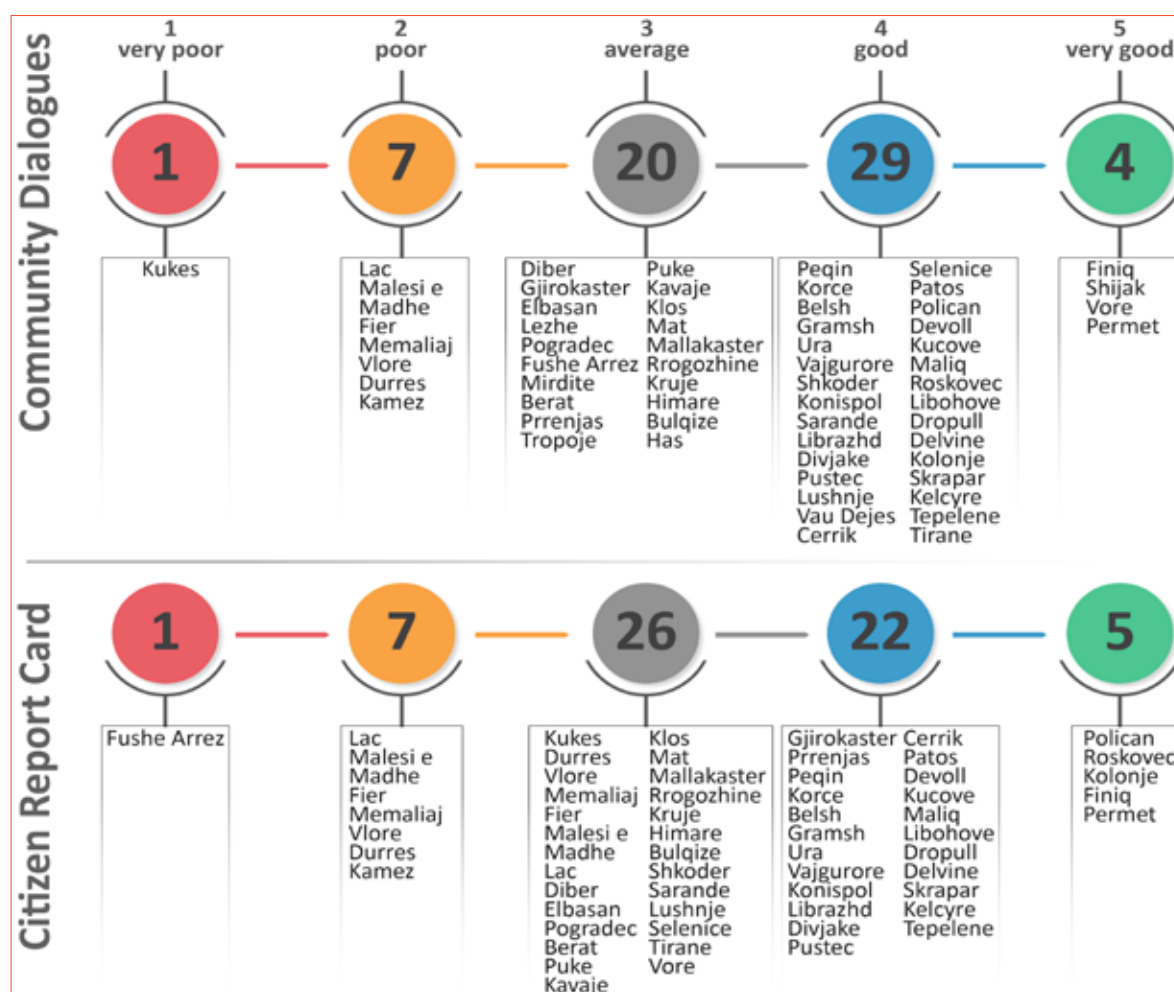
In a majority, municipal views on ensuring *equal access to services* is "high" to "very high", with only 9 municipalities out of 61 having a self-assessment below "average". According to citizens' views, the number of municipalities below average is 29, contrasting also some very high municipal self-assessments as in the case of Kukës, Mallakastër, Vlorë and Malësi e Madhe. It is worth emphasizing that there are no significant *differences in the access between men and women* in almost all municipalities.

Among main causes influencing citizens' perceptions on equal access to services might be also the existing infrastructure for accessing some services and/or the narrower menu of offered services to the rural residents (limited to no services on fire rescue; street lighting; existence and maintenance of public leisure or sportive spaces, municipal promotion of cultural activities and heritage preservation, social housing, etc. as indicated earlier). Nevertheless, the present study could not go more in depth in this analysis.

	Equal access to services (municipal assessment)	Equal access to services (community assessment)	Largest difference between municipal and community assessment on equal access to services
TOP 5	Libohovë	Korçë	Malësi e Madhe
	Korçë	Poliçan	Kukës
	Malësi e Madhe	Skrapar	Vlorë
	Poliçan	Ura Vajgurore	Mallakastër
	Skrapar	Vorë	Gjirokastër
BOTTOM 5	Dibër	Fier	Memaliaj
	Fushë Arrëz	Dibër	Fier
	Has	Kukës	Dropull
	Laç	Memaliaj	Durrës
	Mirditë	Vlorë	

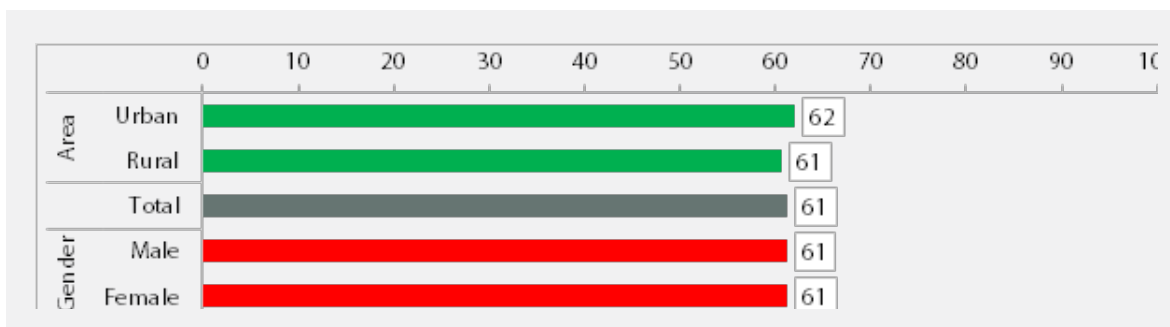
Easiness of obtaining administrative services, measured as an average of results gathered from Community Dialogues (CDs) and Citizen Report Cards (CRC), ranges largely between “average” and “good” for about 90% of municipalities. Although some differences were noted between CDs and CRC perspectives, which had an influence on municipal ranking, for 75% of the municipalities there are only slight differences between the two scores. The below figure summarizes the results, the areas of best practice as well as those of potential concern according to the quantified perceptions/views.

Figure 29. Easiness in obtaining Municipal Services



Source: Author's work

Figure 30. Easiness in obtaining administrative services



Source: Citizens Report Card

Moreover, citizens who had at least one contact with municipal offices/sectors, over the last 12 months, express a relatively good level of satisfaction. For instance, the highest evaluated offices are those of Local Taxation Office (69 percent), Administrative Units (68) and Information Desk (66). Overall, it is worth highlighting that there are no important differences of satisfaction based on gender or among urban and rural residents.

Figure 31. Satisfaction levels with local administration offices

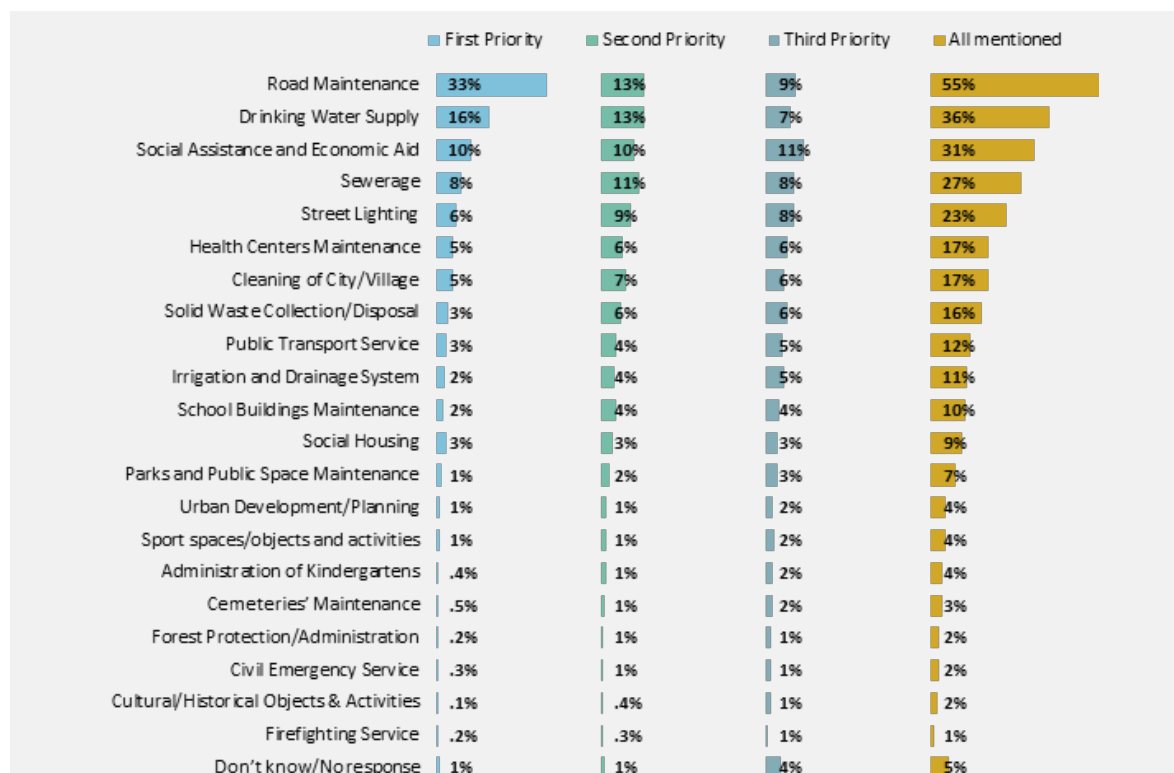


Source: Citizens Report Card

The results of this mapping exercise, however, are not in full conformity with those of Life in Transition Survey (LITS) 2016²³ in Albania, where a majority of citizens noted satisfaction with the quality of public services²⁴ except with the local roads network where more than 50 percent were dissatisfied. The results also showed that equitable access to services was a challenge with regional disparities and where rural areas as well as women have less access to health services.

When the identified priorities were compared to the LITS 2016 results for Albania²⁵, 35 per cent highlighted health care as a priority for government spending, followed by helping the poor, improving pensions and investing in education. The mapping and the LITs data also reveal that people want to address more immediate needs. While the EC progress Report 2016 noted waste management as a burning issue for Albania (as waste segregation is non-existent and waste collection for recycling purposes is largely informal), only 16 per cent of the citizens in CRC identified this as an issue.

Figure 32. Public services considered as main priorities for intervention according citizens' perception



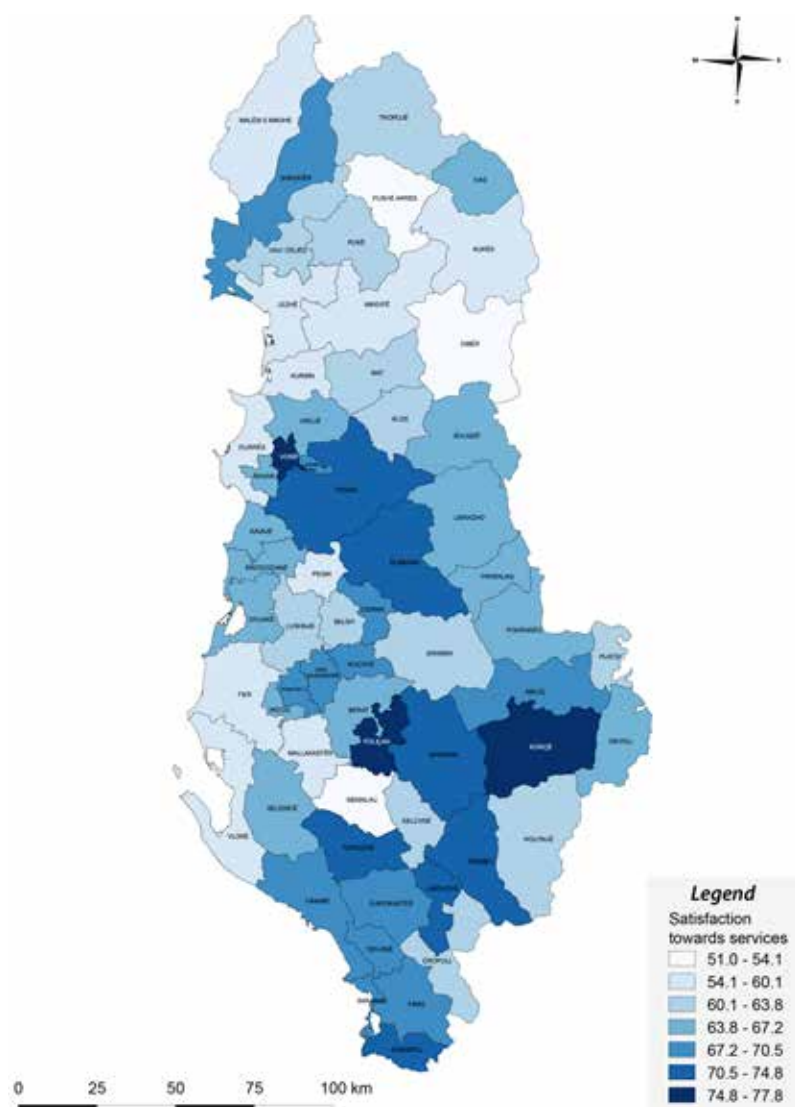
Source: Citizens Report Card

23. EBRD, 'Life in transition, a decade of measuring transition', European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2016

24. Only five public services of electricity, water, heating, telephone lines, postal services and roads were assessed

25. EBRD, 'Life in transition, a decade of measuring transition', European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2016

Figure 33. Satisfaction with Public services Map



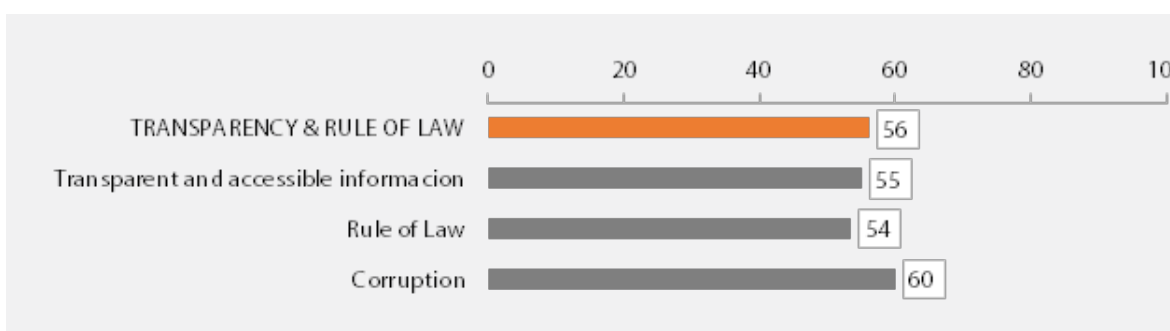
Source: Citizens Report Card

In conclusion, despite the consistent assessment of municipal officials in indicating an effective public services access including same quality over all municipal territory, the citizens perceived significant gaps in the quality of the service delivered highlighting rural-urban disparity, even though the citizens in general acknowledged good levels of service availability. Communities articulated their top priorities for the local government interventions as road maintenance, drinking water and social assistance and economic aid. The citizens were more positive in terms of ease to access to administrative services. However, the municipality has to strengthen its efforts to improve its public service assessment capabilities, to make it more systematic and reliable and use it to influence its decision-making process.

→ 3.3 Transparency and Rule of Law

The **Transparency and Rule of Law** criterion is evaluated with 56 points at national level, qualifying within the “average” scoring range. Thirty-four Municipalities (55%) remain below this threshold, with Dibër scoring the lowest (39) and Skrapar scoring the highest (74). This dimension assesses transparent access to information by citizens on public service delivery performance and resource planning and utilization, the effectiveness of institutional legal framework on legal rights and obligations, and on the degree/incidence of corruption and measures to fight it at the local level. Among the three sub-criteria, the *incidence of corruption* appears to be low, thus receiving a marginally higher score, compared to *access to information* and *rule of law*. There is, however, a stark difference between the perception of municipal officials and that of the citizens on transparency of information and rule of law as is evident from the scores (Figure 36 and 41).

Figure 34. Transparency and Rule of Law Criteria²⁶



Source: Author's work

From a more in depth review of the assessed indicators, the following results score the highest/lowest:

On the positive side	On the negative side
➤ Corruption Experience (93)	➤ Awareness raising on laws and local regulation (41)
➤ Effectiveness of institutional legal framework (71)	➤ Transparency (45)
➤ Transparent administrative procedures (68)	➤ Anti - corruption policy, strategy or action plan (48)

The law on local self-government specifically mandates local government bodies to guarantee transparency of their activities through various transparency initiatives. They have to publish all acts of local self-government bodies on their official website and display them in particular places for public announcements²⁷. Furthermore, Albania's Right to Information Law (RTI) is rated among the top ten countries (ranked 6th) in the world, with regard to the strength of its legal framework for the right to information, according to Right to

26. Note: the evaluation for the Incidence with Corruption sub-criteria is 0 – for maximum level of corruption and 100 – no corruption at all
 27. Article 15, Law No. 139/2015, on 'Local Self-Government', http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

Information Rating²⁸. Here, each LGU shall be obligated to appoint a *Transparency Coordinator* and adopt a *transparency programme*, ensuring access to public information (laws, bylaws, policies, procurement procedures, spending plans, quality of service standards, etc.) to all, especially for the poorest communities, in accordance with the provisions of the applicable RTI Law²⁹. Despite these legal provisions, only half of the 61 municipalities (approximately) have adopted a transparency programme. The European Commission Progress Report notes that transparency initiatives exist in most institutions, however, their quality and implementation requires further improvement. In this regard, the capacity and authority of the Commissioner for the Right to Information needs to be increased so that the implementation of the law is properly monitored and enforced³⁰.

With reference to the rule of law and incidence of corruption, there are two national legislations, which address the fight against corruption at local level, namely, Law on 'Public Cooperation in Combating Corruption' and Law on 'Whistleblowing and Whistle-Blowers'. The purpose of the Law on 'Public Cooperation in Combating Corruption', is to encourage public participation in the denunciation of corruption, protecting and encouraging people who report corrupt practices of abuse of public authority. Under this law are established rules, procedures and responsibilities applicable in state institutions for reporting and recording of corrupt practices as well as compensation and protection of persons who report³¹.

To further foster the fight against corruption, the Law on 'Whistleblowing and Whistle-Blowers' sets out rules for whistleblowing a suspected corruption-related action or practice in public and private sector, establishes a mechanism for whistleblowers' protection and states the obligation of public authorities and private entities regarding whistleblowing³². The main purpose of this law is to prevent and address the issue of corruption in the public and private sector. It also seeks to provide the protection to individuals who signal suspected acts of corruption at their place of work thus encouraging whistleblowing of suspected corrupt practices. Under the provision of this law, each municipality is expected to assign the responsibility to a specific unit, which records, administratively investigates and reviews the alleged cases. Further, the National Coordinator against Corruption (who is also the Minister of State for Local Issues) is responsible for the design, coordination and monitoring of anti-corruption policies.

Summing up, while an enabling framework with several legislations exists, their implementation is yet to take a strong footing within the LGUs and other levels. Other major challenges expressed across all municipalities under this criterion include lack of sufficient systems and mechanisms within the municipality to

28. <http://www.rti-rating.org> The Right to Information Rating is a program founded by Access Info Europe (AIE) and the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD).

29. Law No 199/2014, on 'The Right on Information', <http://www.eurallius.eu/index.php/en/library/albanian-legislation/send/55-the-right-to-information/111-law-on-the-right-to-information-en>

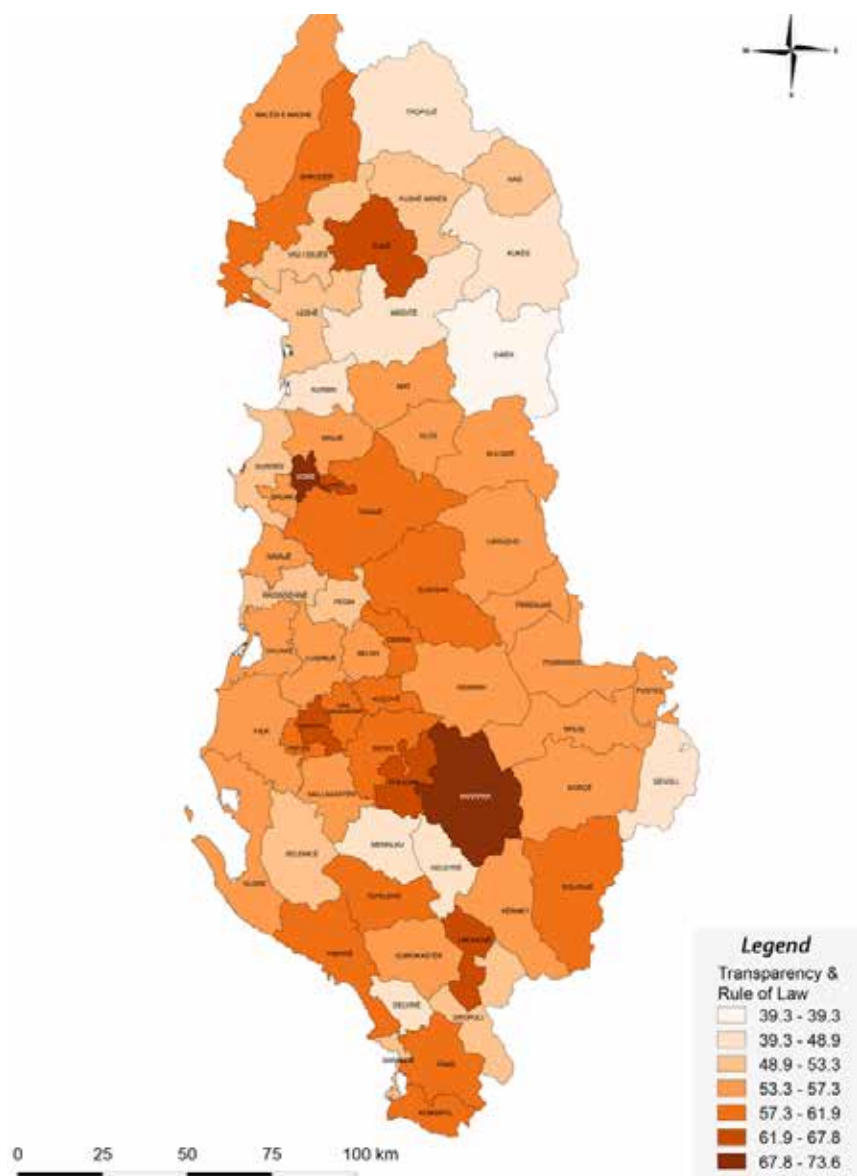
30. Commission, 'Albania 2016 Report', Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM (2016) 715

31. Law No. 9508, dated 03.04.2006, on 'Public Cooperation in Combating Corruption', <http://www.eurallius.eu/index.php/en/library/albanian-legislation/send/74-combatting-corruption/145-public-cooperation-in-combatting-corruption-en>

32. Law No. 60/2016, on 'Whistleblowing and Whistleblowers Protection', <https://www.parlament.al/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ligj-nr-60-dt-2.6.2016.pdf>

inform citizens about the municipal budget, activities, projects, etc., on a regular basis. The lack of consistent engagement between the citizens and the local governments has led to increasing the distance between them and reducing the trust in the government and consequently increased lack of credibility about the local government's commitment to transparency. With limited CSOs across the municipalities and inadequate mechanisms of LGUs to promote legal education, legal awareness of citizens has suffered. While there are clearly anti-corruption laws and policies, clear action plans and integrity mechanisms are not set in place with the result that people's mindset and the general culture of corruption still has not changed significantly.

Figure 35. Transparency and Rule of Law Map

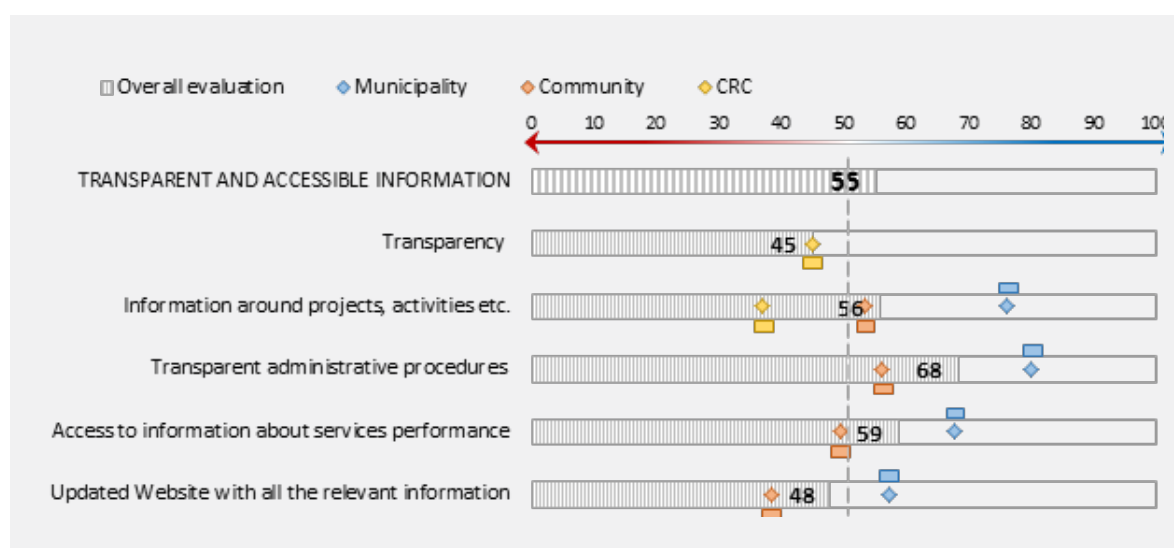


Source: Citizens Report Card

3.3.1 TRANSPARENCY

At the national level this sub-criterion is evaluated with 55 points. It aims to provide an overview of the municipal and citizen's assessment on local government transparency, the extent of information flow from the municipality towards the community (on local projects, activities, municipal budget or service delivery, the level of transparency of administrative procedures), the extent to which citizens have access to information on local level performance and the existence of official municipal websites updated with all the relevant information. The highest evaluated indicator is the *transparency with administrative procedures* (68) and the lowest score goes to the *transparency of the local administration* (45) indicator.

Figure 36. Transparent and Accessible Information



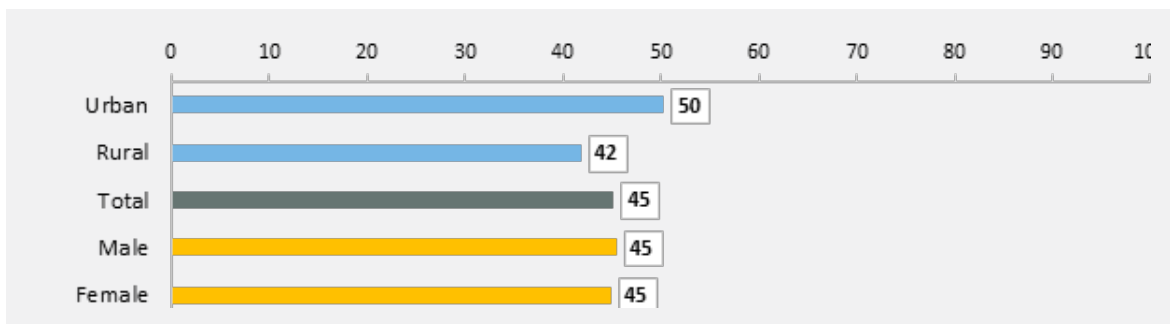
Source: Author's work

Thirty Municipalities (49%) stand below the threshold (45), whilst best evaluated municipalities are Kamëz, Vorë and Skrapar. Nine municipalities (15 per cent) qualify within the "good" scoring range, standing at a level higher than 60 points and twenty-one municipalities (34 per cent) qualify within the "poor – very poor" scoring range, standing at lower level than 40 points. Whereas both, males and females share similar opinion concerning local government transparency, standing at average levels (45 points), the urban community tends to give a higher score for municipal transparency (50 points) compared to the rural community (42 points).

The *information flow from the municipality to the community (on local projects, activities, municipal budget or public services delivery)* indicator is evaluated with 56 points at national level. Thirty-five municipalities (57 per cent) fall below the threshold and twenty-two (36 per cent) qualify within the "good" scoring range. None of the municipalities is evaluated with a "very good" score. The municipal officials rated themselves with 76 points indicating "good" information flow while the citizens on the other hand have rated it as 'av-

erage' with 53 points, which, interestingly, dwindles down further to 37 points in the CRC survey. This difference in perceptions is very significant and needs to be taken seriously for introspection by the concerned authorities.

Figure 37. Transparency of the Local Administration according to Citizens' Perspective



Source: Citizen Report Card

Box 1: Information dissemination

The Municipality of Korçë followed the practice of publishing a local magazine once in two months presenting local developments, local policies as well as social-cultural activities organized in the city. Similarly, the Municipality of Elbasan publishes a free weekly newspaper, which reflects weekly developments and important local government communications regarding citizens.

Municipal officials substantiated their score by indicating the use of different tools and mechanisms to improve the information flow, such as: municipality announcement wall, municipal official website, municipality page on social media (mainly Facebook), local newspapers or bulletins (Korçë and Elbasan publish free local informative periodicals), local public hearings, local media (TV, Radio), etc. An important role in increasing the levels of citizen information is also played by donor funded projects, for example: i) VENDIME.AL online platform financed by USAID³³

contained published decisions of the municipal councils for 16 municipalities, representing the national archive of legislative acts of local government, and ii) Municipal Finance Data Portal financed by OSFA³⁴ which provide support to CSOs and other stakeholders interested in accessing, understanding, monitoring and analytically using financial performance data at the local level in Albania. On the other hand, citizens were less enthusiastic about these mechanisms, as they emphasized the insufficient information flow about local projects, activities, municipal budget or public services delivery. The rural communities seem to be receiving even lower levels of information than their urban counterparts (Figure 38).

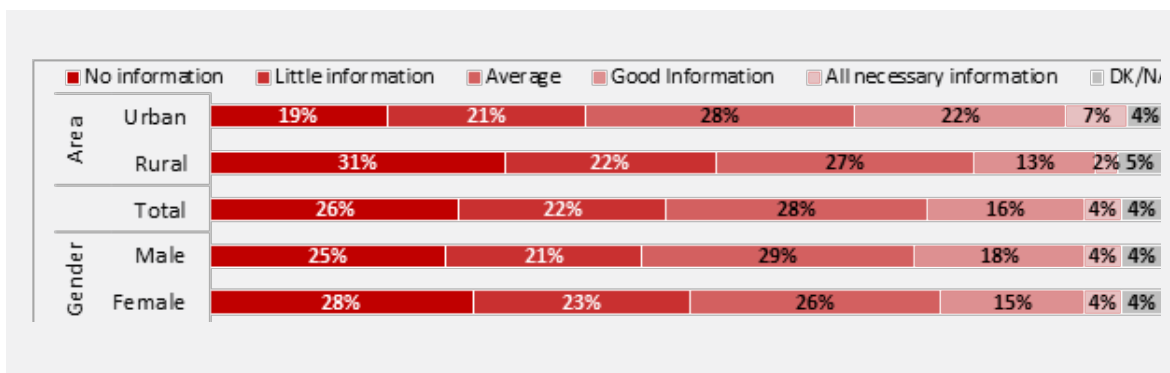
Municipalities are evaluated “good” in terms of ensuring *transparent administrative procedures*, such as building permits, business license, etc. Eight municipalities³⁵ (13 per cent) are evaluated as “very good”, whereas twenty-nine (48 per cent) remain under the threshold.

33. <http://www.vendime.al/>

34. <http://financatvendore.al/>

35. Shijak, Shkodër, Vorë, Cërrik, Poliçan, Skrapar, Ura Vajgurore, Libohovë

Figure 38. Municipal information flow around projects, activities and public services



Source: Citizens Report Card

Municipalities are evaluated “good” in terms of ensuring *transparent administrative procedures*, such as building permits, business license, etc. Eight municipalities (13 per cent) are evaluated as “very good”, whereas twenty-nine (48 per cent) remain under the threshold. Inquired about the level of citizen *access to information on the performance of the local services, resources available and how these resources are used*, municipal officials give a score of 68 points translating into a “good” scoring range whilst, both in the urban and rural community dialogues, citizens evaluate this indicator with 49 points, arguing that overall the information stands at average levels.

As of July 2017, forty-four municipalities have an *official municipal website*. Twelve municipalities (20 per cent) are evaluated as “very good”, amongst which the highest scores are received by Tiranë, Shkodër, Kuçovë, and Roskovec. Twenty-one municipalities (34 per cent), are evaluated as “poor” and “very poor”. There were several among those that have a website, that stated their websites lack important information and are not regularly updated, thus rendering them for all practical purposes, dysfunctional. Also, although some citizens noted that the website provides some level of information on municipal projects, activities, municipal council meetings, etc., they still felt that it is insufficient and hence gave it a ‘low’ rating of 38 points. A similar trend is seen with municipal officials indicating that the administrative services (issuance of permit, licenses, certificates, etc.) are rendered in a very transparent manner (80 points) while the citizens once again assess this as an average performance (56 points).

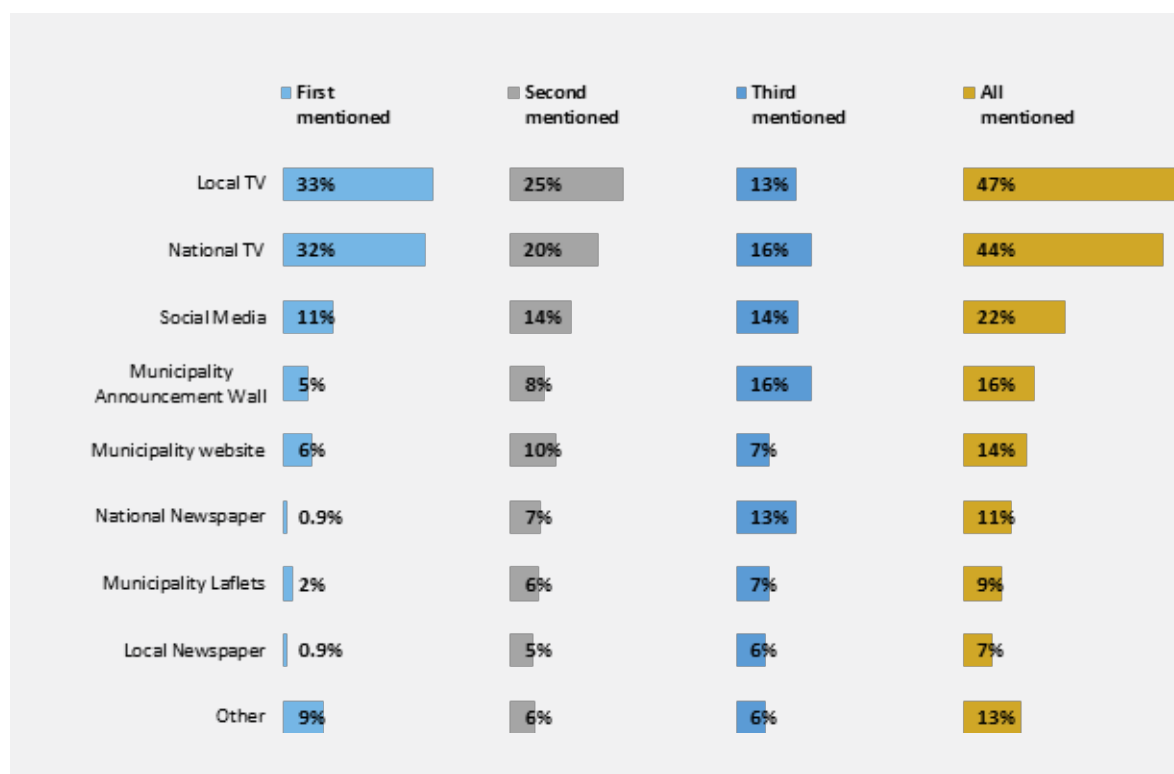
Additionally, the municipalities claim that they provide citizens with good *access to information on the performance of the local services, resources availability and how these resources were used* (68)

Citizen access to information on performance of local services and resources	
TOP 10	BOTTOM 10
Maliq	Dibër
Konsipol	Kukës
Skrapar	Mirditë
Roskovec	Mallakastër
Tepelenë	Laç
Elbasan	Lezhë
Kuçovë	Sarandë
Ura Vajgurore	Devoll
Pukë	Dropull
Pustec	Vau Dejës

which is once again contrasted with the 49 points given by the citizens indicating 'average' access. Nevertheless, the best rating is found in the municipalities of Konispol (80 points), Maliq (81 points), Skrapar (78 points) and Tiranë (79 points) indicating 'high' level of access to information by the citizens.

For the citizens, however, the main sources of information on the governments' activities and development plans are essentially Local TVs, National TVs, Social Media, Municipal Announcement Wall, Municipal Website and the print media, like magazines and newspapers.

Figure 39. Main sources of information citizen use to get informed on city matters and different activities of their municipality

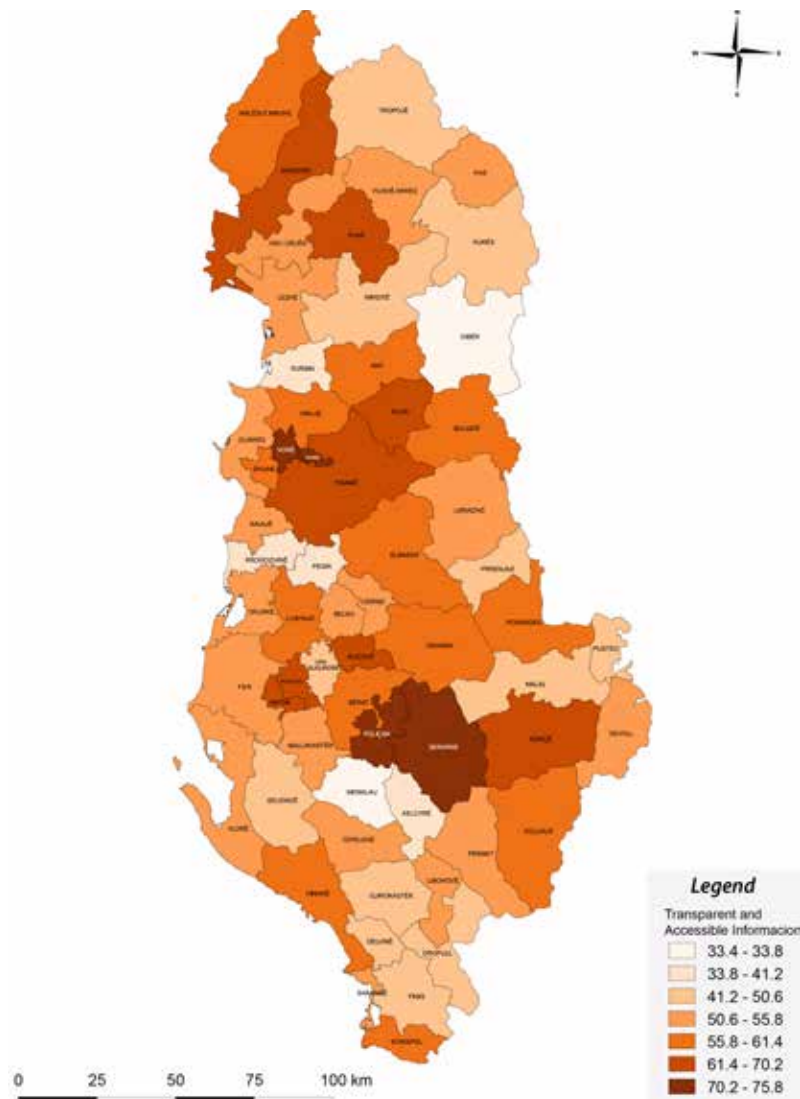


Source: Citizens Report Card

The LITS 2016 study, on the other hand, showed TV and Radio as the main sources of information followed by discussions with family, friends or colleagues (58%) and, the internet and social media (38%). In internet, there is a rural-urban divide with 44 per cent of people in urban areas using internet daily compared to 30 per cent of the inhabitants in rural areas³⁶. This data converges starkly with the information provided by the municipal authorities that citizens use forms of media such as municipality announcement wall, municipal official website, public hearings, local media, municipal Facebook page, etc. to stay informed on city matters and different activities of their municipality.

36. EBRD, 'Life in transition, a decade of measuring transition', European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2016

Figure 40. Transparency of Local Administration Map



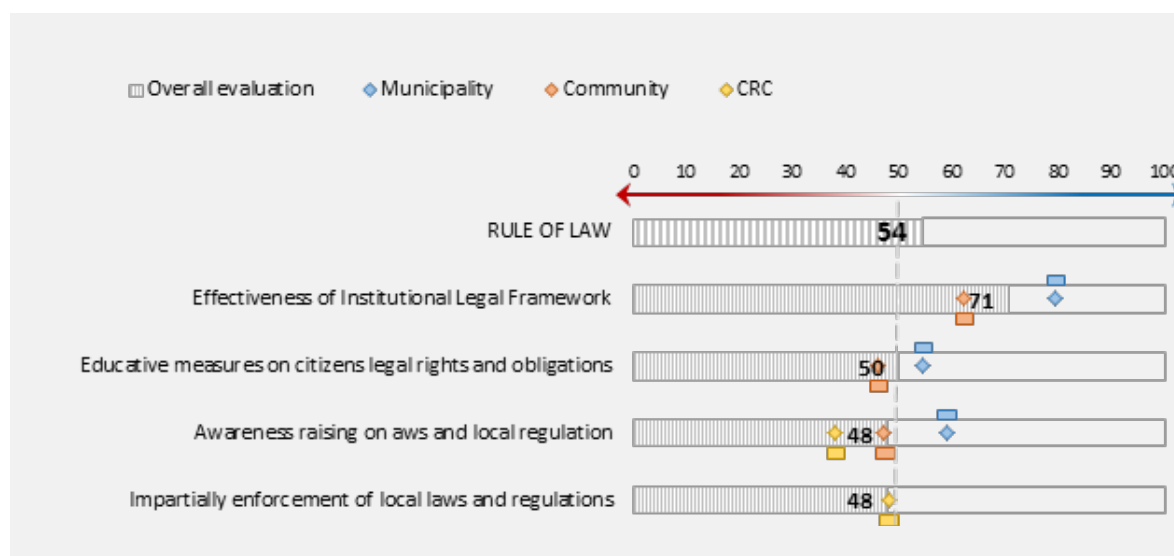
Source: Citizens Report Card

Across almost all municipalities there is a common skeptical perception among the citizens concerning transparency of their local government, with little exception. The general rating on information flow about local projects, activities, municipal budget or public services stands at an 'average' level. Communities have average access to information about the performance of the local services, resources available and how these resources are used. The transparency of administrative procedures for issuance of building permits, business licenses, etc., seemed to be the best assessed, albeit with differences in institutional and citizens' perception. Different mechanisms used for information dissemination include municipal official website, municipal newspaper, public hearings, local media, etc. Meanwhile, although most municipalities (44 out of 61) possess an official website, it has limited utility as it is not regularly updated.

3.3.2 RULE OF LAW

The *Rule of Law* sub-criterion has received an average total score of *54 points* for all the municipalities. It aims to measure the level of effectiveness of the institutional legal framework at local level and is composed of four indicators, namely the effectiveness of the institutional legal framework in ensuring equal rights for all citizens (women, man, youth, and vulnerable groups); the existence of Municipal measures in place to inform citizens about their legal rights and obligations; the extent to which local government raise awareness through its own website or public media (radio, newspapers, and social media) about laws and local regulations; and the extent to which the municipality enforces laws and regulations impartially. Figure 41 shows that in comparison to all the indicators, the municipalities seem to have a good institutional legal framework in ensuring equal rights of all municipality citizens with the remaining indicators operating at an average or below average levels.

Figure 41. Rule of Law



Source: Author's work

Both, municipal officials and citizens have evaluated the *effectiveness of the institutional legal framework* above the average, respectively with 79 and 62 points. Thirty – three (54 per cent) municipalities rank above the threshold (71). Municipalities which score the highest points in this indicator are Ura Vajgurore, Kuçovë, Skrapar, Vorë and Libohovë. Considering that in some municipalities, the local administration must ensure two kinds of rights, civic and minority rights³⁷, it is important to highlight that in the municipalities with a minority community, citizens have scored this indicator at or above national average score, for example Finiq, Dropull and Pustec.

37. Draft Law on 'National Minorities Protection in the Republic of Albania', <http://www.kryeministria.al/al/newsroom/projekt-ligj/projektligje-te-miratuara-ne-mbledhjen-e-keshillit-te-ministrave-date-12-prill-2017&page=1>

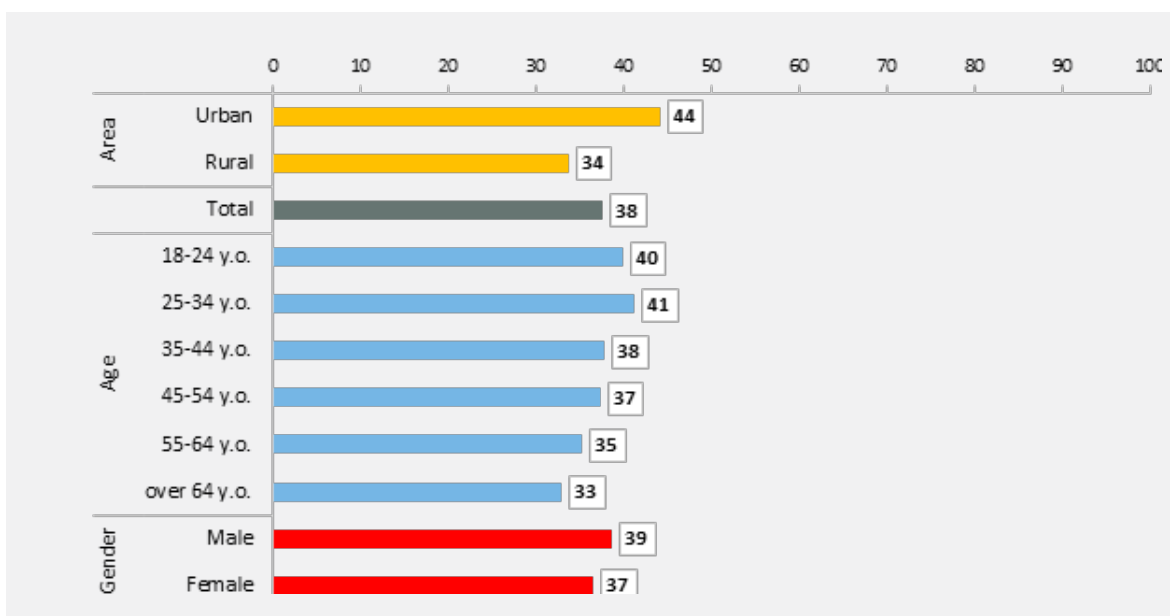
Both, municipal officials and citizens report that municipalities have *some measures in place to educate citizens about their legal rights and obligations*, scoring respectively with 55 and 46 points. At national level, the existing mechanisms seem to be rather insufficient, with twenty-nine (48 per cent) municipalities falling under the national average score, even though the community dialogues have identified several good practices. In Dropull, the Ombudsman Office shows to have a special focus on such activities, whilst in the municipality of Gjirokaštër and Libohovë the legal department organize weekly meetings and distribute leaflets

Box 2: Practices on legal rights awareness measures

Dropull municipality has an Ombudsman Office, which has created measures for legal rights awareness. The Municipality of Gjirokaštër and Libohovë is experimenting with its legal office, which holds a weekly meeting with citizens on their legal rights and responsibilities, etc. The Legal Department employees also went to the field to conduct community meetings and distribute leaflets to inform them about their legal rights and obligations. Similarly, the municipality of Delvinë organizes public hearings with the citizens to discuss cases of violations of their legal rights. The Municipality of Elbasan in their free weekly newspaper, apart from reflecting weekly developments and important local government communications for citizens, has a dedicated section on civic participation in decision-making, where citizens are informed on the legal and regulatory framework governing the right to participation and the mechanisms for its implementation.

to inform citizens on these matters. The Municipality of Delvinë organizes public hearings with the citizens in cases when legal rights violations are reported. The free weekly newspaper, issued by the municipality of Elbasan, dedicates a special section to civic participation in decision-making, whereby citizens are informed on the legal and regulatory framework from where the right to participation is derived. As reflected, when it came to actual *awareness raising by local government on laws and local regulations, through websites or public media (radio, newspapers, and social media)*, the citizens do not seem satisfied with this critical variable (as they gave 47 points compared to 59 points by the municipal officials).

Figure 42. Local Government awareness raising about laws and local regulations

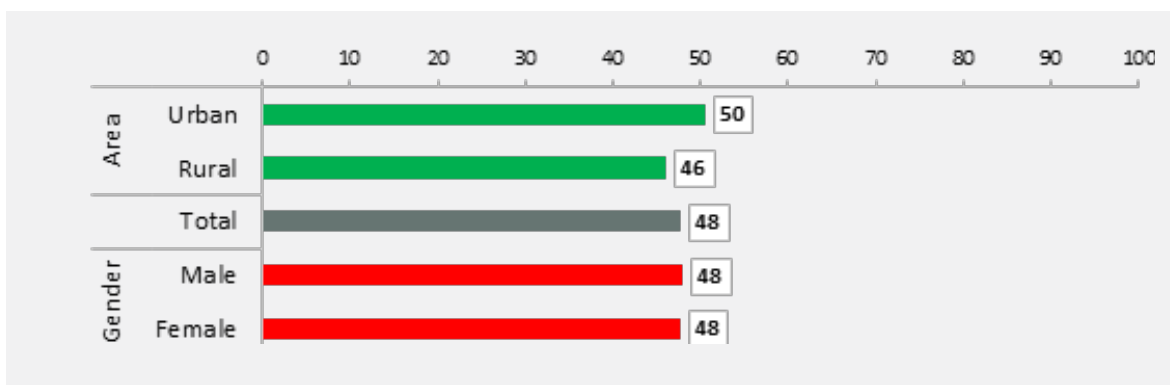


Source: Citizens Report Card

This was further validated by the CRC where they gave it an even lower score of 38 points (Figure 42), with urban inhabitants rating it a little higher (44 points) compared to rural inhabitants (34 points) with a minor difference between males and females. It is worth stating that the younger age groups appear to be more informed about laws and local regulations compared to the older generation. Thus, despite the differences, the informing process on laws and local regulations, in general, stands on relatively shaky grounds.

An important dimension of rule of law is *impartial enforcement of laws and local regulations* and the citizens (CRC) judge local governments to be operating at low average levels (48 points) in this dimension. While there are no gender differences in perception, the urban inhabitants perceive municipal authorities to be slightly better on this indicator compared to the rural community (Figure 43). Overall, with a modest advancement in justice reform, Albania has mostly had a negative trend in the judicial system and in the application of laws and regulations. As a result, deficiencies in the rule of law have continued to hamper the business environment. Additionally, domestic violence has been a critical concern with 74 per cent of the victims being women (as per the 2015 reported data in the 2016 EC Progress Report³⁸). The online system for reporting gender-based violence still only operates in 29 out of 61 municipalities.³⁹ The mapping data corroborates this information with the finding that the municipal gender/domestic violence officers are considered only somewhat effective with perceived differences in views expressed by the municipal officials on their effectiveness by scoring them with 66 points and citizens by giving them 50 points.

Figure 43. Level of impartiality in enforcing laws and local regulations



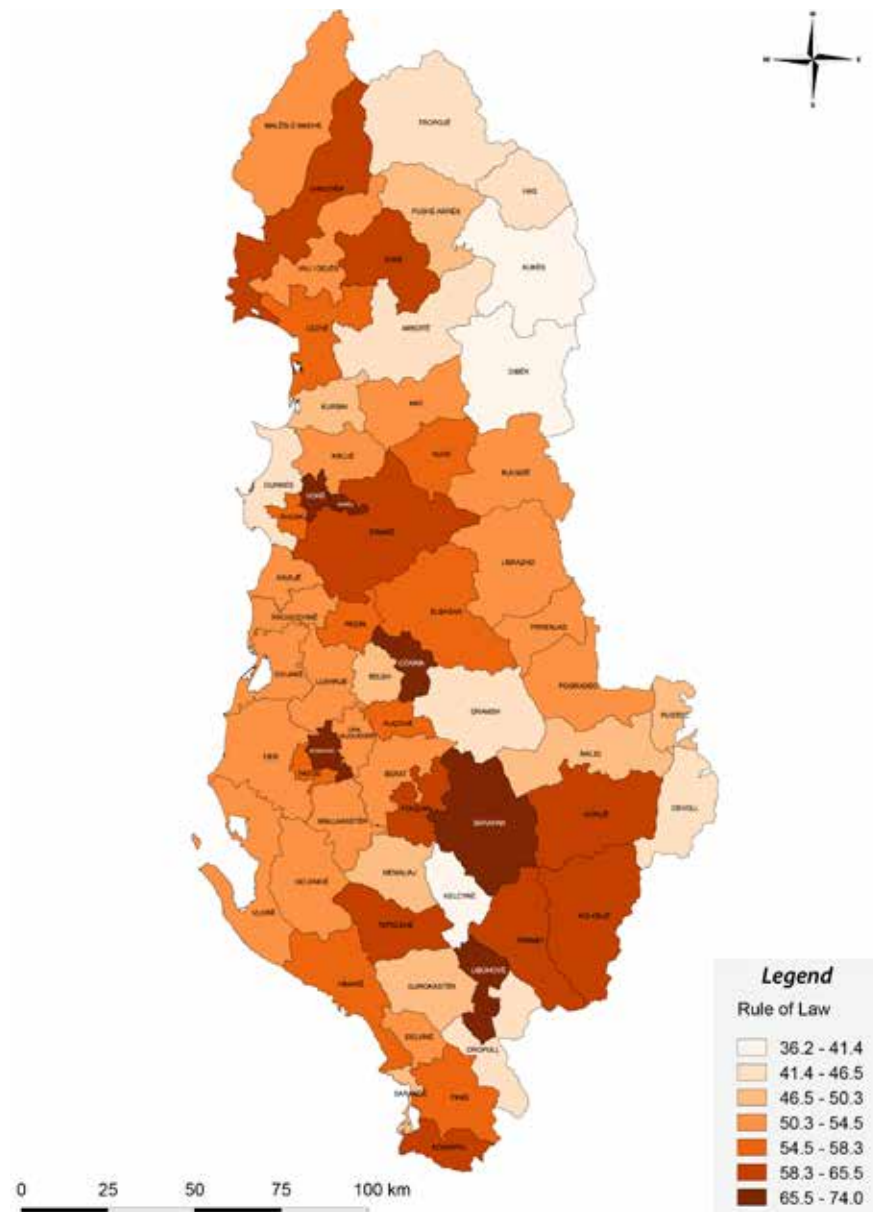
Source: Citizens Report Card

In light of all indicators related to rule of law, Figure 44 provides a comprehensive national picture across all the municipalities.

38. Domestic violence remained a serious concern. In 2015, 3 886 cases of domestic violence and other crimes in families were reported by the police, with 2 148 resulting in protection orders. In 1 300 cases of domestic violence, criminal proceedings were initiated and sent for prosecution. 74 % of domestic violence victims were women, which illustrates the gender dimension of violence.

39. Commission, 'Albania 2016 Report', Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM (2016) 715

Figure 44. Rule of Law Map



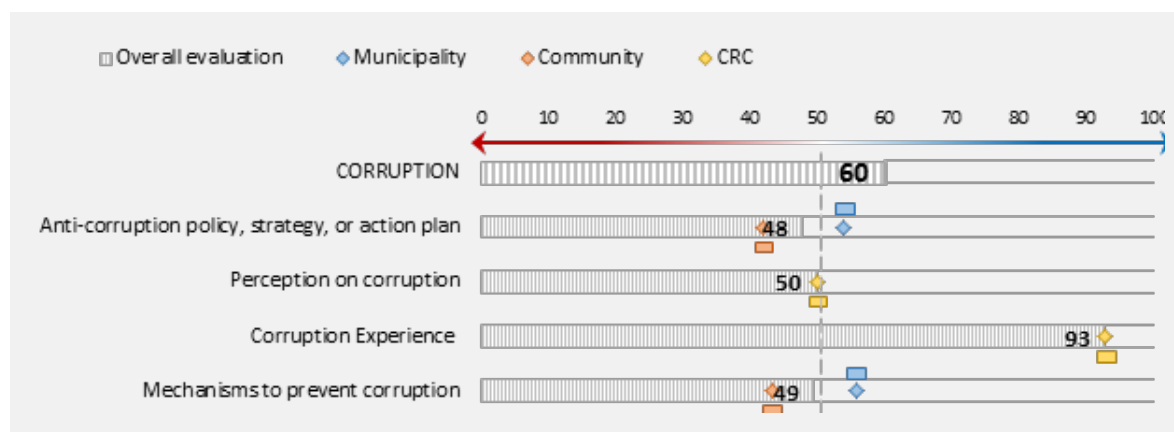
Source: Author's work

Overall, the institutional framework does exist in ensuring equal rights for all municipality citizens (women, men, youth and vulnerable groups), but despite some measures being in place to educate citizens about their legal rights and obligations (e.g. the legal office), these mechanisms are found to be insufficient. Similarly, awareness raising by local governments on laws and local regulations, through their websites or public media (radio, newspapers, and social media) is also considered to stand at average levels. Finally, the impartial enforcement of laws and local regulations is also seen to function at an average level.

3.3.3 INCIDENCE OF CORRUPTION

At an aggregate level the *Incidence of Corruption* sub-criterion received a score of *60 points* reflecting a ‘just above average’ (good) performance (Figure 45). It assesses the existence of anti-corruption policies, strategies, action plans and mechanisms to prevent corruption, the level of citizen perception on corruption at local level and the level of citizen experiences with corruption in relation to local administration.

Figure 45. Incidence of Corruption⁴⁰



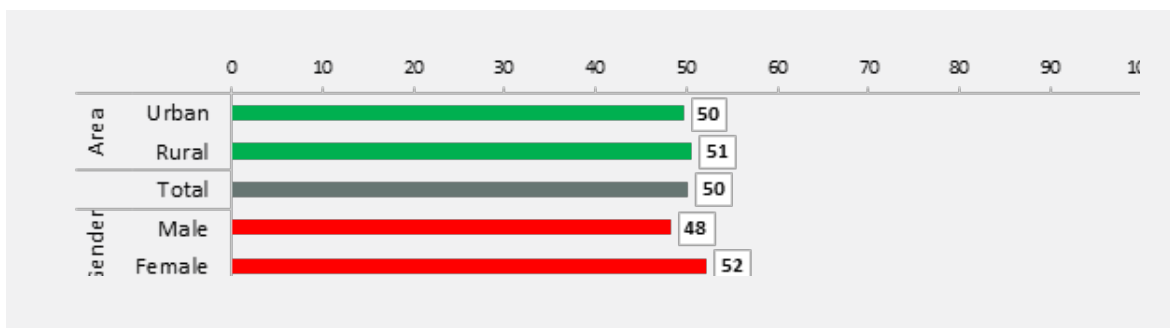
Source: Author's work

Municipalities have in place *anti-corruption policies, strategies and action plans dealing with corruption, or systems/mechanisms to prevent corruption at local level* exist, yet as data reveals, at an average level with an aggregate score of 48 and 49 points respectively. Municipalities have reported on the existence of an Audit Sector and a Complaint Office within municipal structures, the adoption of Transparency Programs and the appointment of two employees as whistle-blowers in their structures.⁴¹ Twenty-Six municipalities (35 per cent) score below the threshold and only two municipalities (Maliq and Ura Vajgurore) qualify within the “very good” scoring range. Furthermore, specific municipalities as Lushnjë and Fier possess an anti-corruption plan as well and have also published a phone number in their official website, where the community can denounce corruption practices within municipal structures. Across municipalities, citizens report they are informed on the existence of such instruments at an average level. In a scale from 0 (fully corrupt) to 100 (no corruption at all), at an aggregate level, citizens perceive the corruption level to be at the level of 50 points. Thirty – seven municipalities (60 percent) fall below the threshold, while the two municipalities where the corruption perception level is lower are Libohovë and Dibër. Whilst there are no differences between rural and urban communities, slight differences are identified regarding gender perspectives, whereby females perceive corruption at higher levels (52) compared to males (48).

40. Note on the evaluation scale for corruption incidence: 0- maximum level of corruption and 100- no corruption at all

41. In compliance with Law no 60/2016 on “Whistleblowing and Protection of Whistleblowers”

Figure 46. Corruption perception level for the municipal government

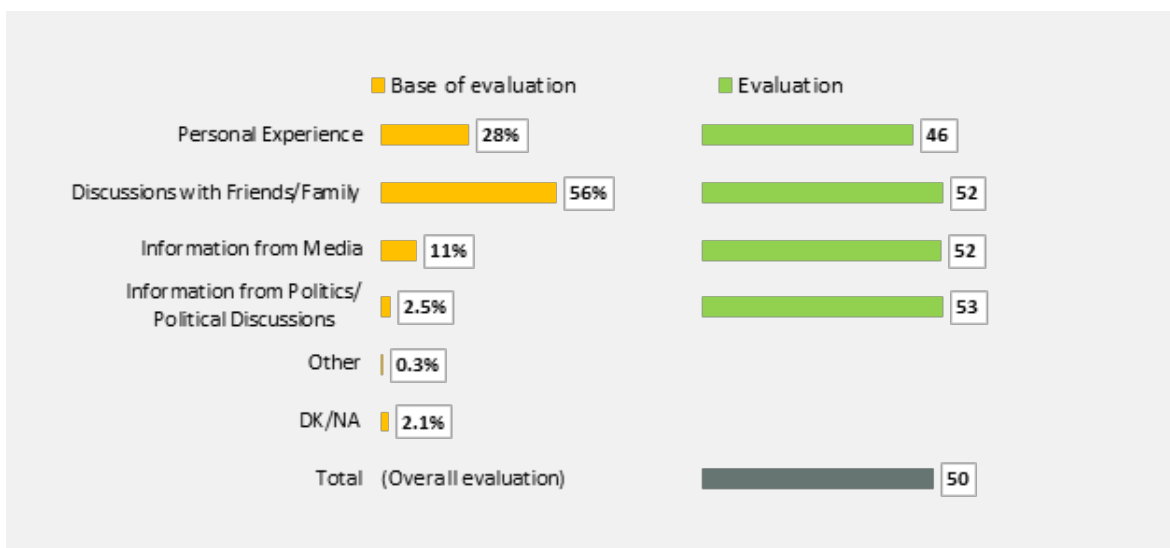


(Where 0= Not at all corrupt to 100= completely corrupt)

Source: Citizens Report Card

The findings further reveal that the above perception of citizens was mostly based on discussions with friends/family (56 per cent) and less on personal experiences (28 per cent) and the media (11 per cent). Interestingly, the perception of corruption is lower when based on personal experiences than when based on discussions with friends/families or the media. This is somewhat in conformity with the LITS Survey 2016 that shows that 35 per cent of Albanian respondents indicated that there was lesser corruption during the four years preceding the survey.⁴²

Figure 47. The basis on which citizens base most their corruption perception



Source: Citizens Report Card

42. EBRD, 'Life in transition, a decade of measuring transition', European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2016

Citizens report low levels of *personal experience with corruption* within their municipality. When asked specifically about their corruption experience at municipal level, 7 percent of citizens (504 out of 7200) who had been in contact with at least one municipal office in the last 12 months declare that at some point was implied that they had to bribe (in the form of money, gifts or favors) to get the service or solve the case they were interested in. Thus, in average municipalities are evaluated for this indicator with 93 points, which translates as very good. In several municipalities citizens, which have had contacts with the municipal offices/sectors over the last 12 months' report that neither was implied any bribe nor did they pay any bribe to get the service or solve the case they were interested in, thus evaluating their municipal integrity on maximum level with 100 points. Such is the case for the municipalities of Devoll, Dropull, Finiq, Fushë Arrëz, Has, Prrenjas and Skrapar.

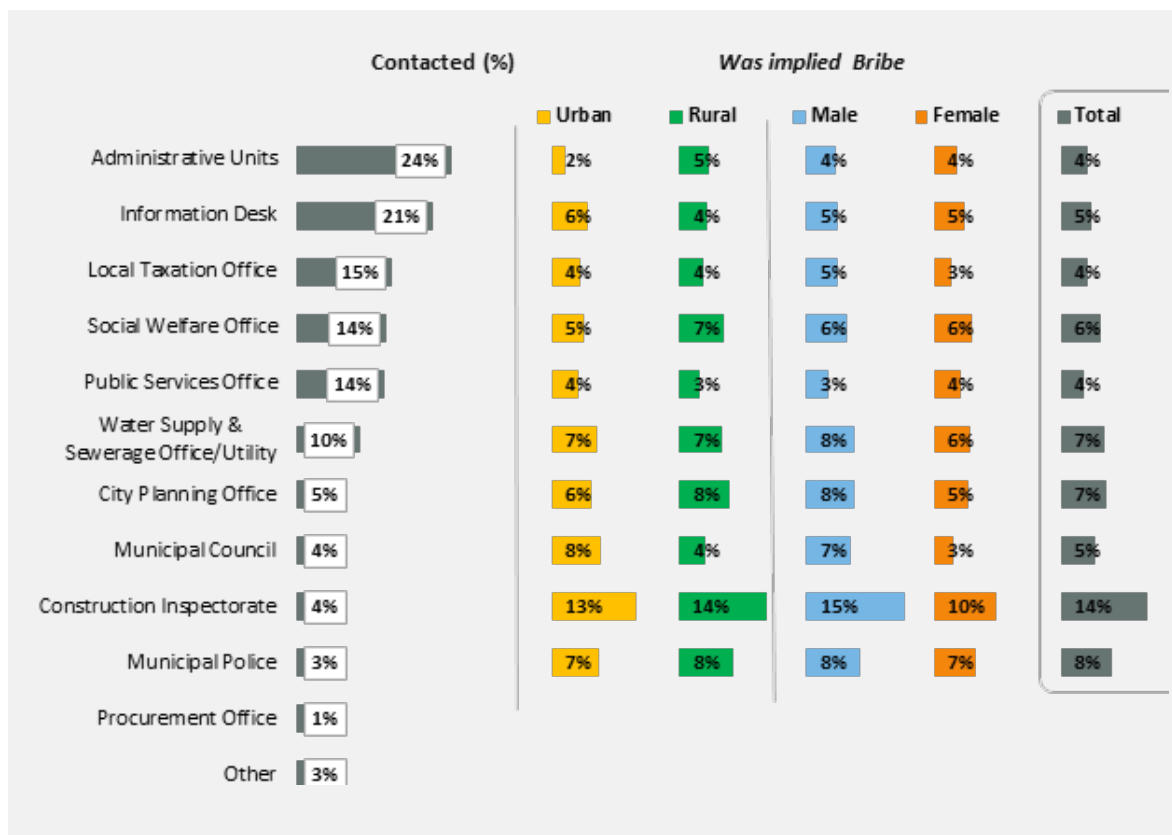
Citizens (with a personal contact with the local administration in the last 12 months) report that most problematic structures regarding corruption practices are the Construction Inspectorate, Municipal Police, City Planning Office and Water Supply and Sewerage Office/Utility. Figure 48 presents the share of citizens who declare visiting municipal offices in the last year and the part of them accepting that at some point bribe was implied to receive the requested service.

It is worth to point out that there is some convergence in the above data with prevailing perception of widespread corruption. Another survey⁴³ showed, that in some public service areas, informal payments were widely prevalent. Albanian firms reported an incidence of 18 per cent in the payment of bribes during meetings with tax inspectors and a 34 per cent incidence in meetings to secure government contracts. Citizens had also expressed dissatisfaction with petty corruption instances. The EC Progress Report 2016 has recognized that Albania has some level of preparation in the fight against corruption but corruption remains prevalent in many areas and continues to be a serious problem. Thus, although honesty and integrity of local governments in offering public services is considered rather high, it does not yet stand at an optimal level.

Anti-corruption policies, strategies and action plans in place dealing with corruption, or systems/mechanisms to prevent corruption at local level are considered to be at an average level. Municipal officials have evaluated them at mid-levels respectively, with 54 and 56 points, to be rather insufficient. In this regard, most municipalities do mention having an Audit Sector and a Complaint Office. Moreover, referring to the legal provisions, again most of them poses a Transparency Program and have appointed two employees as whistle-blowers in their structures (based on the Law on Whistle-blowers). Furthermore, specific municipalities as Lushnjë and Fier possess an anti-corruption plan as well and have also published a phone number in their official website, where the community can denounce corruption practices within municipal structures. However, citizens seem to be rather uninformed about the existence of such instruments and have judged them slightly lower than the municipal officials, with respectively 42 and 43 points.

43. World Bank, 'Next Generation Albania, A Systematic Country Diagnostic Study', World Bank Group, 2015

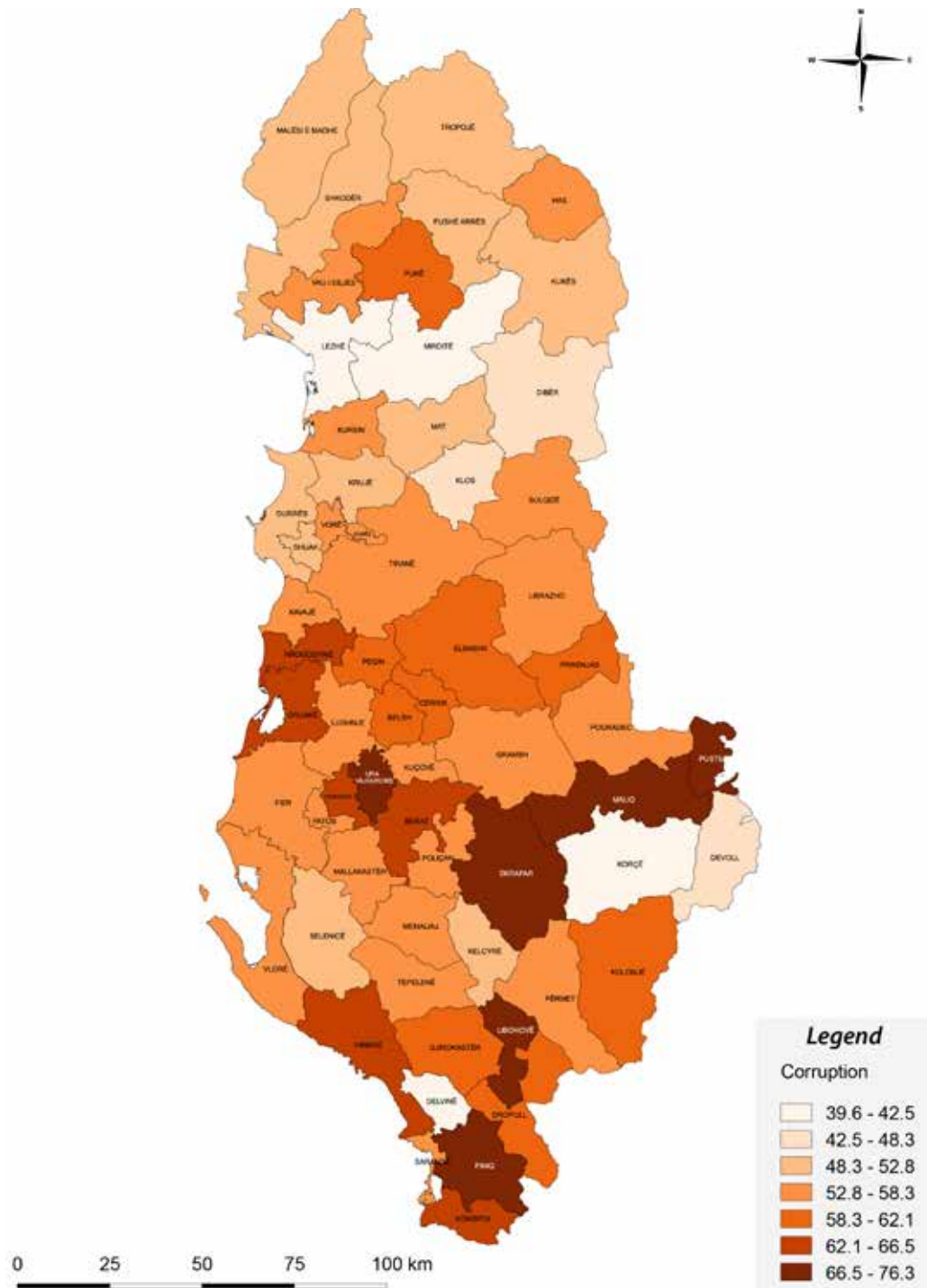
Figure 48. Corruption incidence in municipal offices contacted in the last 12 months



Source: Citizens Report Card

Across all municipalities, citizens' perception regarding corruption in their local government stands at average levels. As seen, when it comes to experience with corruption, the level of corrupt practices appears to be low, thus indicating higher levels of integrity within the municipality but not optimal. Similarly, it was noted that anti-corruption policies, strategies and action plans dealing with corruption, or systems/mechanisms to prevent corruption at local level stand at average level and further interventions are needed to keep corruption under check. Thus, the role of transparency programmes, the whistle-blower officials, local anti-corruption plans and the existence of a dedicated phone number where citizens can denounce corrupt practices cannot be over emphasized.

Figure 49. Incidence of corruption map



(0- maximum level of corruption and 100- no corruption at all)

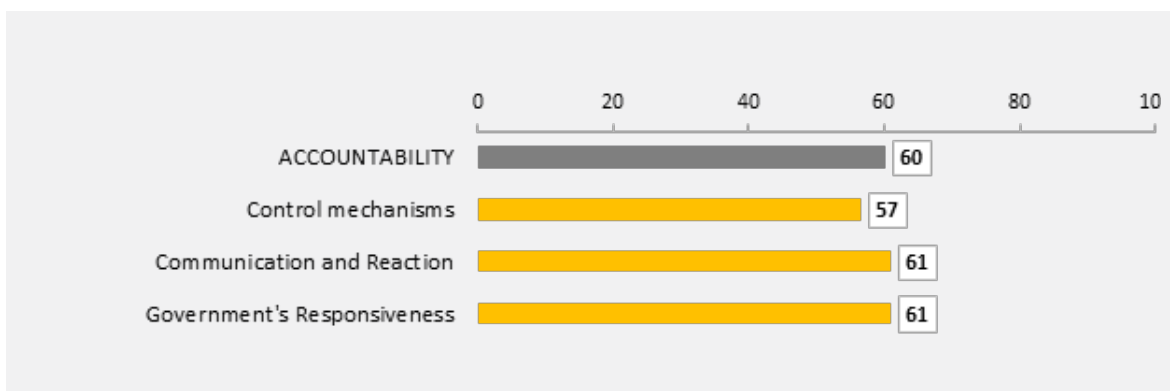
Source: Author's work

→ 3.4 Accountability

The “Accountability” criterion that aims to map the municipality’s ability “to be accountable” to the citizens through institutional and control mechanisms, effectiveness of complaint recourse mechanisms for different groups, and the level of local government’s responsiveness to citizens and businesses, is given a score of 60 points indicating a good (just above average) performance. Thirty-one municipalities (50 percent) remain below the threshold, with Mirditë scoring the lowest (37) and Vorë scoring the highest (80).

While the difference between the overall score across the three sub-criteria (Figure 50) is not large, the *government’s responsiveness* seems to be better rated than the *control mechanisms* sub-criterion which has received an ‘average’ assessment.

Figure 50. Accountability Criterion



Source: Author's work

Within this criterion, the extreme scores result the following:

On the positive side	On the negative side
➤ Following Recommendations of State Audit	➤ Open Forums for CSOs to engage with local authorities
➤ Mechanism for lodging complaints	➤ Ill - equipped and skilled local CSOs
➤ Responsiveness to request from the community	➤ Responding to complaints
➤ The average of complaints fully addressed	➤ Mechanisms to share inputs

According to the Law on ‘Local Self-Government’, local government units are subject to audit by the

Supreme State Control, according to the legislation in force.⁴⁴ Moreover, to ensure the implementation of national norms and standards set out in the relevant legislation, the Ministries, according to their areas of responsibility, monitor the activity of the bodies of local self-government units and, as far as delegated functions are concerned, they have the right to supervise them. An important role in holding local government accountable should be also played from the municipal council, non-profit organizations and community councils.

When talking about local government recourse and responsiveness, as regards to the Law on 'The right to Information', each municipality should have a register of requests and replies. Thus, the local government unit should create, keep and make public a specific record, reflecting the entire request for information and the information made available in response.⁴⁵ In general, almost all municipalities have established a public information office where citizens can file their complaints or requests. This office organizes the daily reception of citizens' requests and complaints and directs them to the respective sectors and offices depending on the issue they address. After reviewing the issue, the responsible sector responds no later than 30 calendar days from the request submission date.

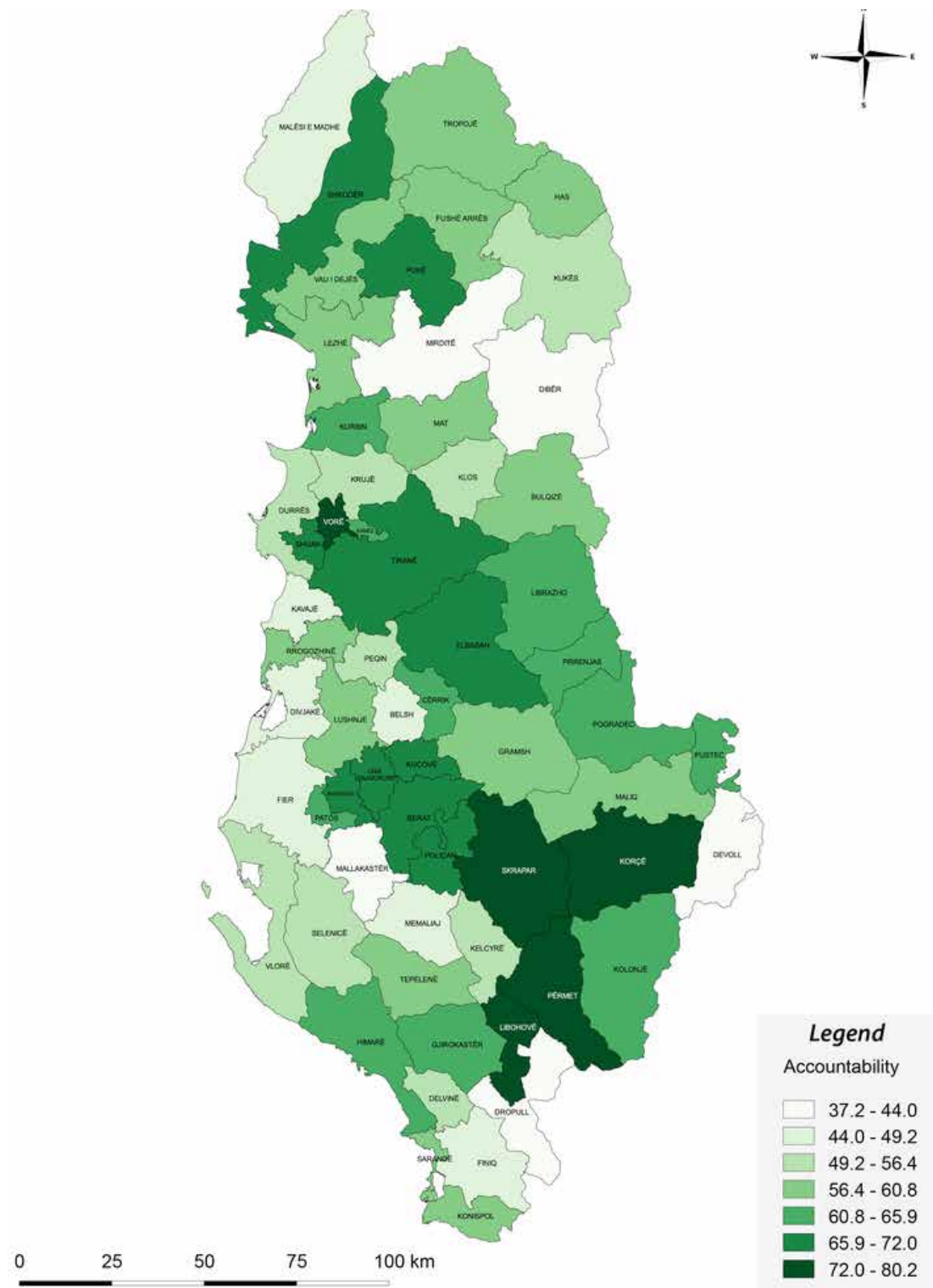
Both sets of respondents indicated the existence of few open forums for CSOs to engage with local authorities on municipal budgeting and planning processes. It is important to note that in a good number of Albanian municipalities there are no registered CSOs. However, the municipalities that emphasize the importance of civic participation in their daily work and activities, do nurture the intention of increasing people's participation in the consultative meetings they hold with the community or in the various public hearings.

The biggest challenge faced by local governments is the processing of the complaints filed by citizens due to the lack of an integrated system for complaints management and, a consequent failure to track filed complaints and determine their status of resolution.

44. Article 13, Law No. 139/2015, on 'Local Self-Government', http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

45. Article 8, Law No 199/2014, on 'The Right on Information', <http://www.eurallius.eu/index.php/en/library/albanian-legislation/send/55-the-right-to-information/111-law-on-the-right-to-information-en>

Figure 51. Accountability Map

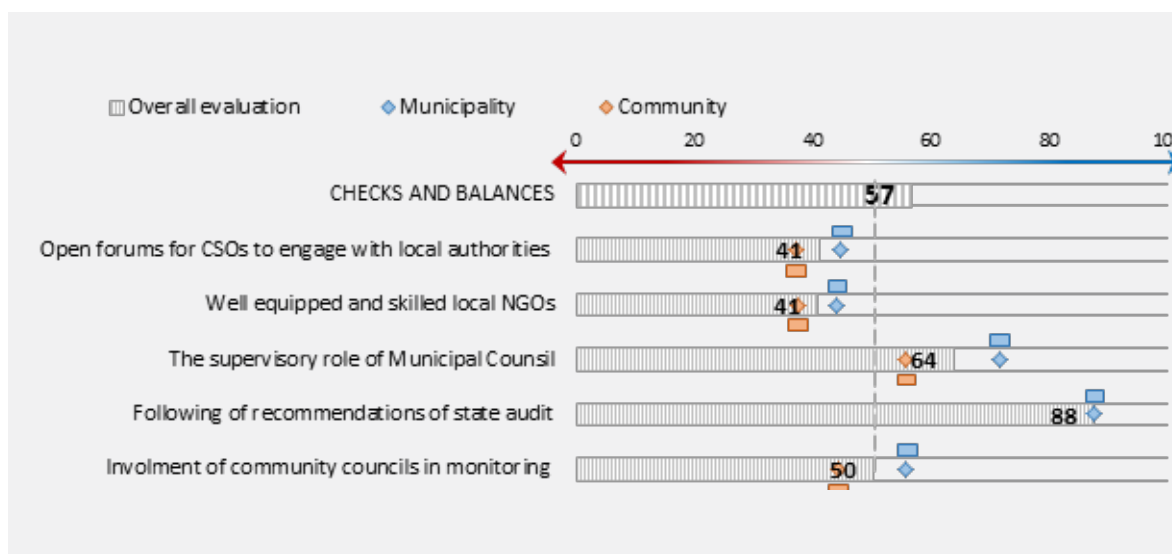


Source: Author's work

3.4.1 CHECKS AND BALANCES

The establishment of a Checks and Balance system is important for the sustainability of effective governance. The sub-criterion of *Checks and Balances* assesses whether institutions have effective control, supervision and sanctioning power over the local administration. The sub-criterion stands at an aggregate level of 57 points, which shows an 'average' performance. Among the five key indicators (Figure 52), the municipal score on compliance with the *state audit recommendations* is rated the best with 88 points, that is 'very good' performance. This is followed by the oversight role of the municipal council and an 'average' assessment of the presence of open forums for CSOs to engage with local authorities on municipal budgeting and planning, the capability of local CSOs to hold local governments accountable and the extent of involvement of the community councils in monitoring and evaluating public sector performance.

Figure 52. Checks and Balances



Source: Author's work

Both, municipal officials and citizens, consider the existence of *open forums for CSOs to engage with local authorities on the municipal budgeting and planning process*, to be rather insufficient, evaluating it with 45 and 37 points respectively. In twelve municipalities (20 percent)⁴⁶, the existence of open forums is evaluated in the range of 0 (no forums at all) and 25 (few forums with little access). On the other hand, the ability of CSOs to hold the government into account is considered below average (50), by both municipal officials and citizens, assigning respectively (44) and (37) points. In the case of small municipalities, often there is no presence of local non-governmental organizations, which further contributes to this perception and scarce experience.

46. In alphabetic order: Belsh, Cërrik, Finiq, Devoll, Divjakë, Dropull Librazhd, Maliq, Mallakastër, Prrenjas, Rrogozhinë, Selenicë

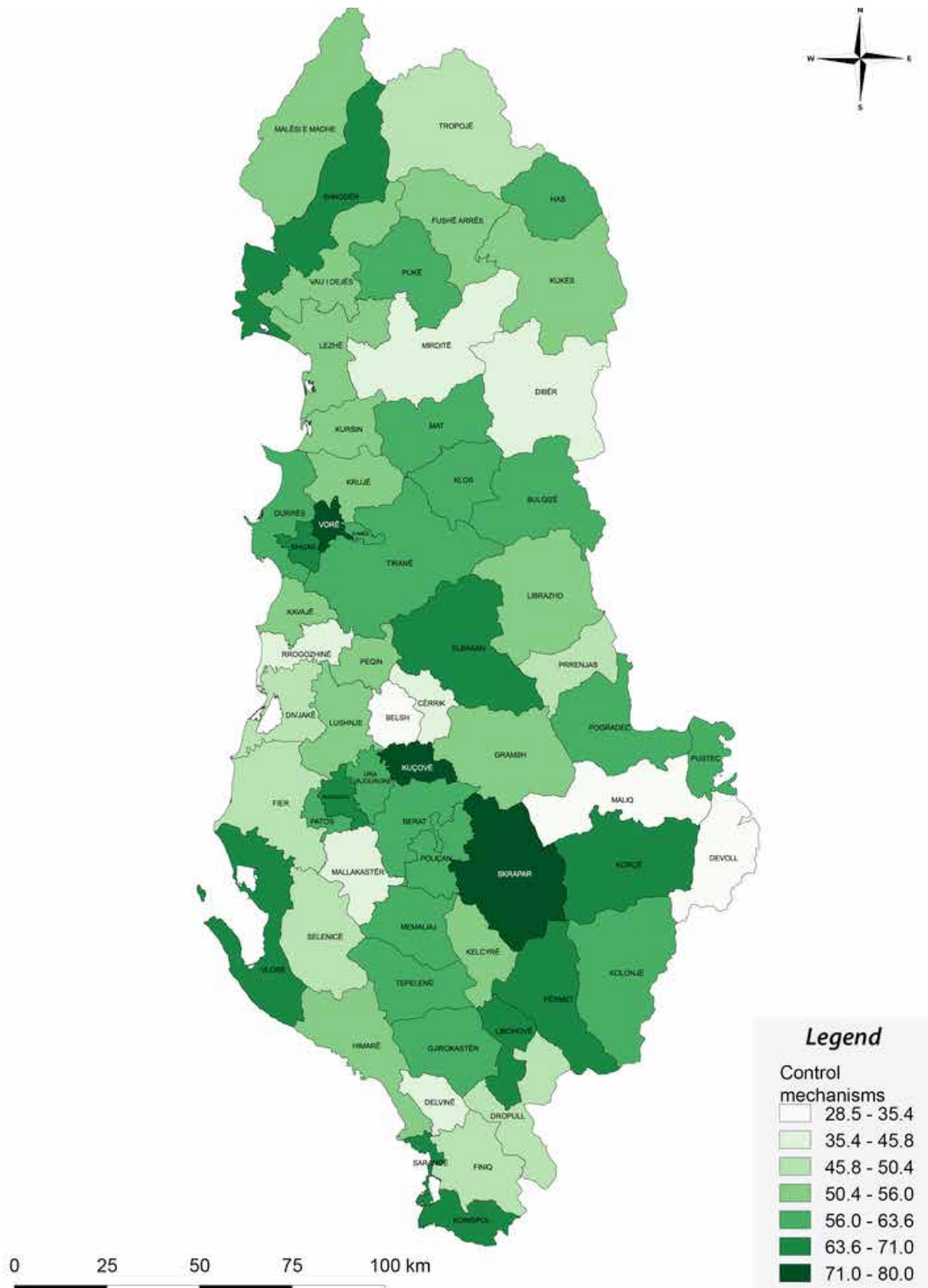
Community councils appear to have limited *involvement in monitoring and evaluation of public sector performance (department, projects, budgeting, etc.)*. Both municipal officials and the citizens have rated the involvement of community councils' as 'average', with 56 and 44 points respectively. At the same time, some municipalities have introduced a few innovative practices in their respective municipalities. In Fier, Vlorë, Patos, Korçë, Elbasan, etc., the Local Citizens Advisory Commissions (LCAC) are a special mechanism for strengthening civil engagement and encouraging bottom-up contribution from citizens to local government. They monitor local government performance and provide advice and recommendations to the mayor and to the local council. In some municipalities, these commissions have been formalized through a cooperation agreement with the mayor. The LCAC in Korçë Municipality consists of 70 members and holds meetings twice a month, thus becoming one of the most active ones.

Overall, the *municipal council* is considered to have a good *oversight of the municipal functions*. During the focus groups, organized in each municipality, municipal officials have evaluated this indicator with 72 points, arguing that the municipal council supervises at a sufficient level the work of the local government units. On the other hand, citizens, both in urban and rural areas, have judged that the municipalities' councils oversight role stands at mid-level with 56 points.

The municipality managements appear to follow all of *State Audit recommendations*, and comply with the same across all LGUs. Municipal officials have rated themselves 'very good' with 88 points. Thirty- six municipalities (60 percent) stand above the threshold and six municipalities (10 percent) have received the maximum score of 100 points. While municipalities appear to be rather "fearsome" and follow recommendations of the State Supreme Audit, there is little to no "fear" from monitoring and watchdog's roles of the CSOs.

Overall, while there may be less external/vertical accountability of the local administration to CSOs or citizens, it appears that municipalities are trying to ensure good internal/horizontal accountability. The control mechanisms are considered at an 'average' level mainly due to the lack or weakness of bottom up control structures. It is also stated that there are not too many open forums for CSOs to engage with the local authorities on the municipal budgeting and planning processes. Therefore, CSOs are considered mostly not capable of holding local government accountable. Likewise, the community councils are considered inadequate in their involvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the public-sector performance. On the other hand, the municipal council is also perceived to have a 'good' oversight of the municipal government functions. The best rated indicator showed that in general the municipality management does almost always follow all of State Audit recommendations, in a sufficient manner across all LGUs.

Figure 53. Checks and Balances Map

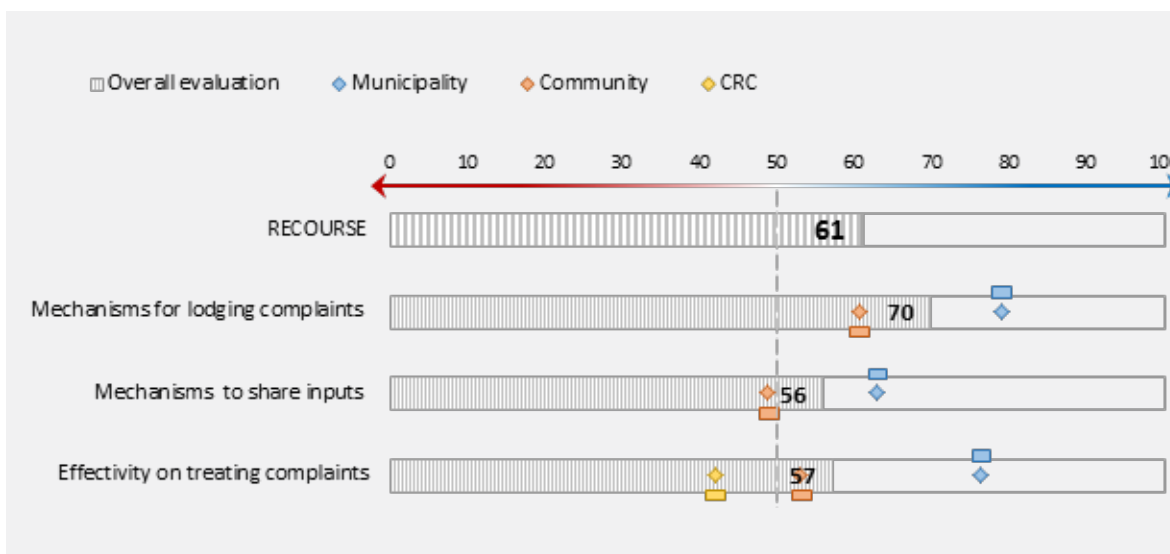


Source: Author's work

3.4.2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECOURSE

The *Local Government Recourse* sub-criterion stands at an aggregate level of 61 points. It assesses the existence of municipal mechanisms to address citizen's complaints and provide feedback as well as the effectiveness of the municipality in addressing citizens or businesses complaints. The best evaluated indicator is the *existence of mechanisms for lodging complaints*. Figure 54 shows the overall evaluation of the sub criterion and scores for each indicator reflecting views from Municipal Officials and Community.

Figure 54. Local Government Recourse Mechanisms



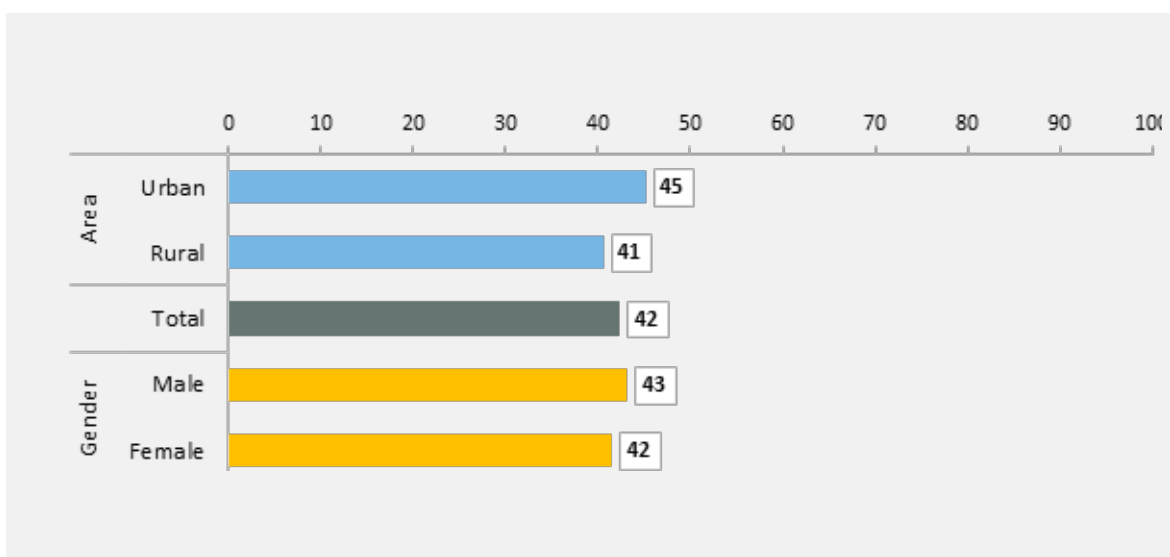
Source: Author's work

Both, municipal officials and citizens judge that municipalities have in place good mechanisms *for lodging complaints and provide feedback*, evaluating this indicator respectively with 79 and 61 points. Twenty-two municipalities (35 percent) stand above the threshold of 75 points, which translates into the existence of mechanisms with good feedback. Pursuant to Law 119/2014 all municipalities have established a structure which handles with filed complaints known as a Complaint Office, a Public Information Office, Appeal Office or Public Relation Office, etc. whereby citizens can address their issues and file their complaints or requests. The workflow, time-frames and other details related to processing the complaints and requests are specified by law. Other mechanisms citizens can use in this regard are citizen' open days organized by municipalities, dedicated space in the municipal official website and municipal telephone numbers. Several small municipalities (Memaliaj, Këlcyrë, Libohovë) have reported they lack standard complaint formats and /or complaints are addressed by citizens either by handwriting or through informal communication, which makes the process difficult to manage and ensure proper follow-up. Municipality of Himarë and Maliq rank on top with 90 points.

Feedback mechanism established for citizens to share inputs with local government concerning service delivery are reported to be in place, being evaluated with 63 and 49 points, respectively by municipal officials and citizens. Municipalities declare to organize meetings with the community and state that municipal official's welcome citizens to share their opinions and suggestions. Some municipalities (Belsh, Gramsh Vlorë, Fier, Patos and Sarandë) have developed IT tools, such as "Improve my City", enabling citizens to provide input. An excellent example is the smartphone application "My Tirana" giving citizens the opportunity to participate in improving public services related to infrastructure, lighting and cleaning.

Data show that municipal officials and citizens hold different views on the *effectiveness of Municipalities in treating citizen's or businesses' complaints*. Municipal officials have evaluated this indicator with 76 points, whilst citizens seem to be rather skeptical, scoring it with 53 points (in the Community Dialogues) and 42 points (in CRC). While there are no differences regarding gender, slight ones are seen in the evaluations received from residents in urban and rural areas as shown in Figure 55. Municipalities of Vorë, Përmet, Libohovë and Skrapar are considered as the most effective ones.

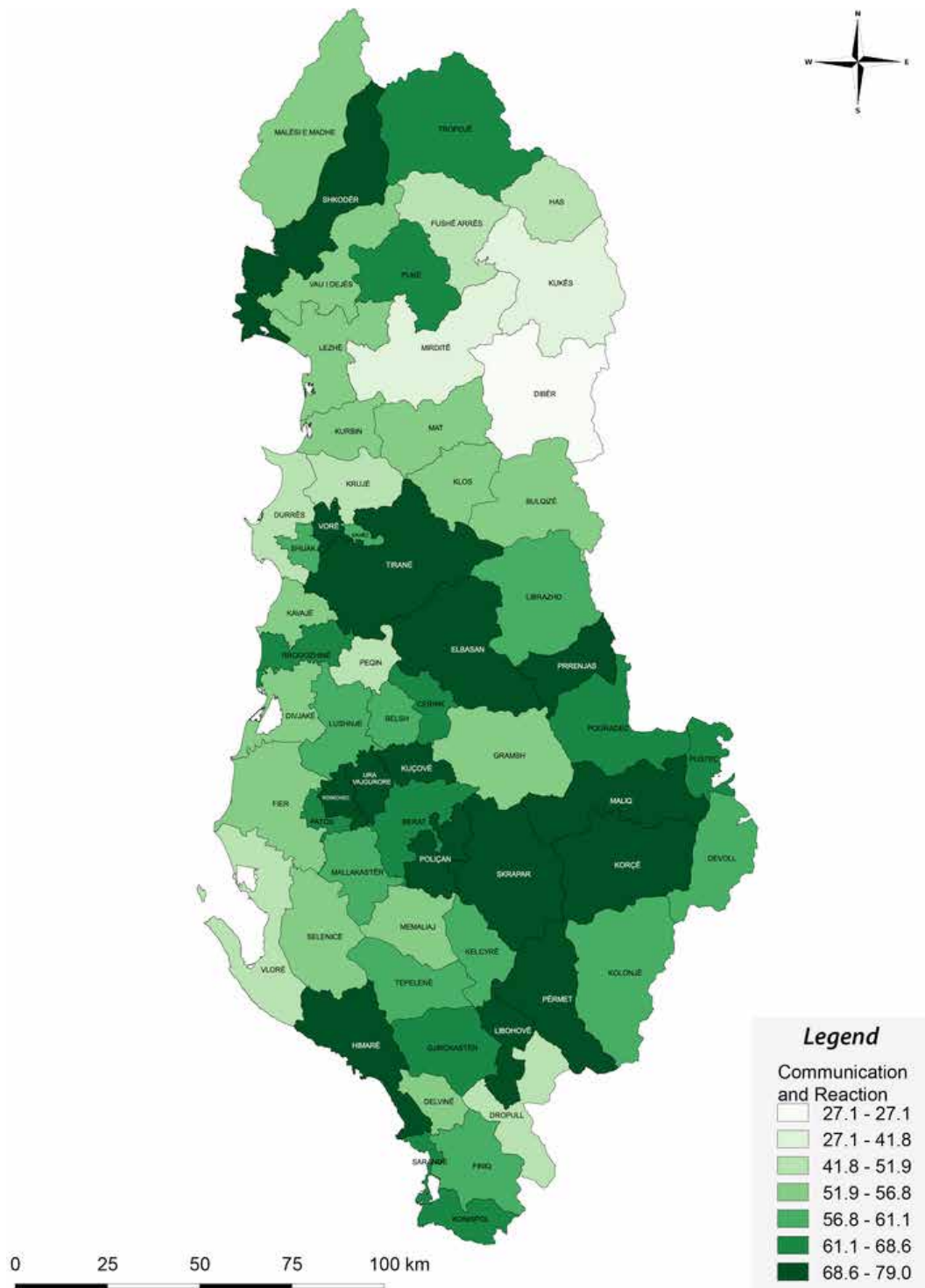
Figure 55. Local Government Effectiveness in treating complaints



Source: Citizens Report Card

A relatively effective complaint mechanisms exists across all municipalities but with average levels of feedback mechanisms for citizens' inputs on service provision as well as for treating of citizen's or businesses' complaints. At the same time, innovative practices exist for citizens' feedback mechanisms such as a dedicated space on the official websites ('Improve my City') in some municipalities or applications like 'My Tirana' where citizens can share input and seek improvement with local government.

Figure 56. Local Government Recourse Map

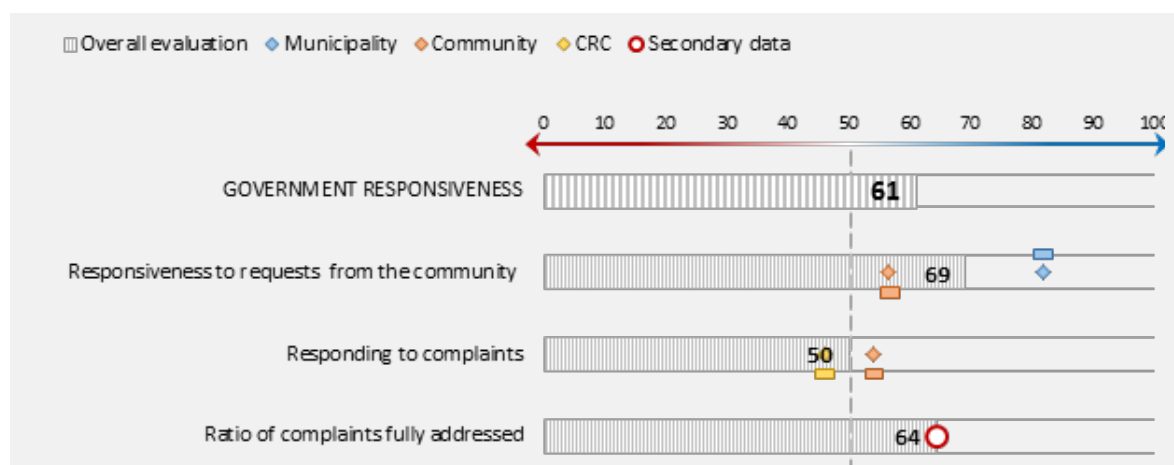


Source: Author's work

3.4.3 GOVERNMENT RESPONSIVENESS

The *government responsiveness* sub-criterion stands at an aggregate level of *61 points*. It assesses the level of government responsiveness to community request regarding projects, developmental issues etc., the level of municipal responsiveness to filed citizen's complaints and the share of resolved complaints over the annual total. Under this sub-criterion, the scores (Figure 57) suggest that perceptions about local government's responsiveness to requests from the community regarding projects, developmental issues, etc. has received a rating of 'good' but is just about 'average' for redressal of complaints of citizens. However, the secondary data reveals a relatively better scenario for resolution of complaints (ratio of resolved complaints over the total annual complaints).

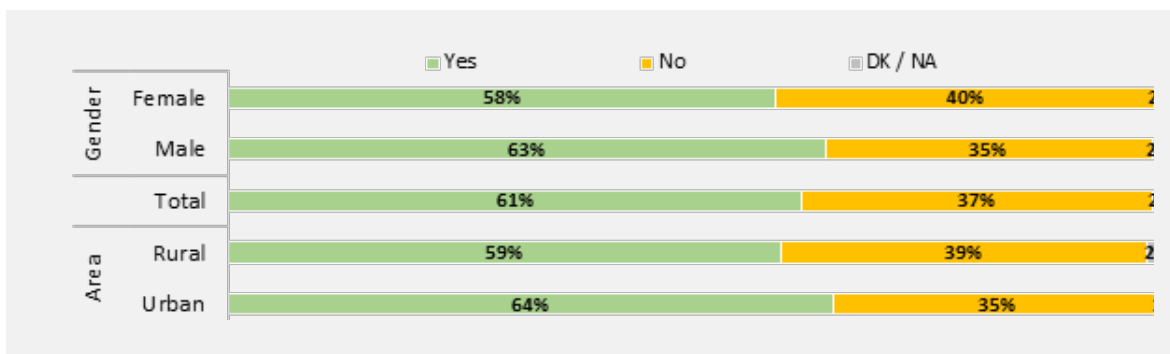
Figure 57. Government Responsiveness



Source: Author's work

The responsiveness of local government stands at a relatively good level. Thus, municipalities respond well to *requests (i.e. letters and phone calls) from the community, regarding projects, developmental issues, etc.* Municipal officials have evaluated at the level of 82 points, arguing that response rates to community requests are quite high. Citizens consider that the municipal responsiveness stand at mid-levels, judging it with 57 points during the community dialogues. On the other hand, according to the community, local government is somewhat *responsive to filed complaints from citizens*. Citizens have evaluated this aspect of their local government in the community dialogues and through the Citizen Report Card as well to stand at mid-levels, respectively with 54 and 46 points. Thirty-two municipalities (52 percent) fall below the threshold, with Vorë and Fushe-Arrez the highest (80 and 81 points) and Devoll the lowest (20 points). Lower levels of municipal responsiveness are perceived regarding the *complaints filed from citizen's* indicator. More specifically, in the Citizen Report Card, 29 percent of the community across all municipalities admit that during the past 12 months they have had reasons to complain about a municipal service and 61 percent of them declare they filed a complaint. Following the filing of the complaint, 46 percent of the citizens admit to have received a response from the Municipality. Here, it is worth highlighting that in general these levels of filed complaints show a good level of interaction between municipal residents and local government.

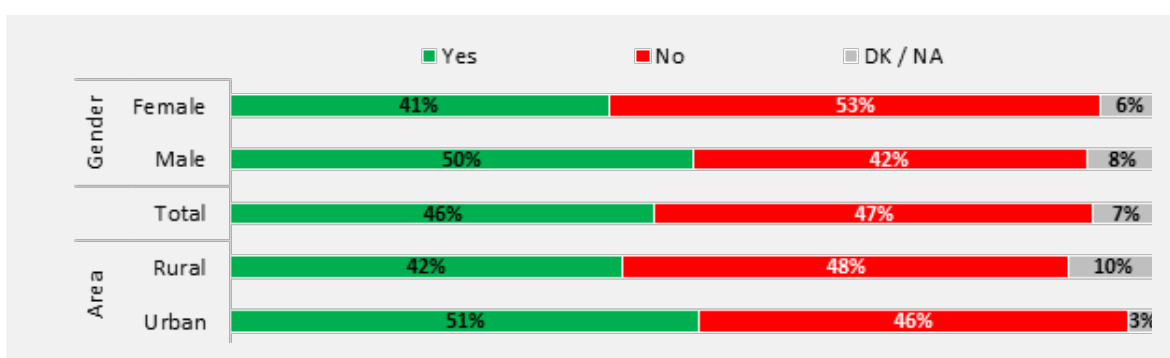
Figure 58. Submission of the complaint by the citizens who had reason to complain



Source: Citizens Report Card

In this regard, males and urban community stand at a slightly higher level of interaction with municipal offices than females and rural community. Citizens who have filed a complaint declare that the main routes followed for filing their complaints were by directly/personally contacting the responsible office (68 percent), filing a written complaint (26 percent) or calling a specific office number (7 percent). On the other hand, among the citizens who had a reason to complain about the services offered by the municipality in the last 12 months, 47 percent of them declare that they didn't make a complaint. Main reasons for not filing the complaint are: don't trust the complaint would be addressed by the Municipality (64 percent), didn't find time to make the complaint (13 percent) or didn't know how to file a complaint/didn't know whom to contact (12 percent).

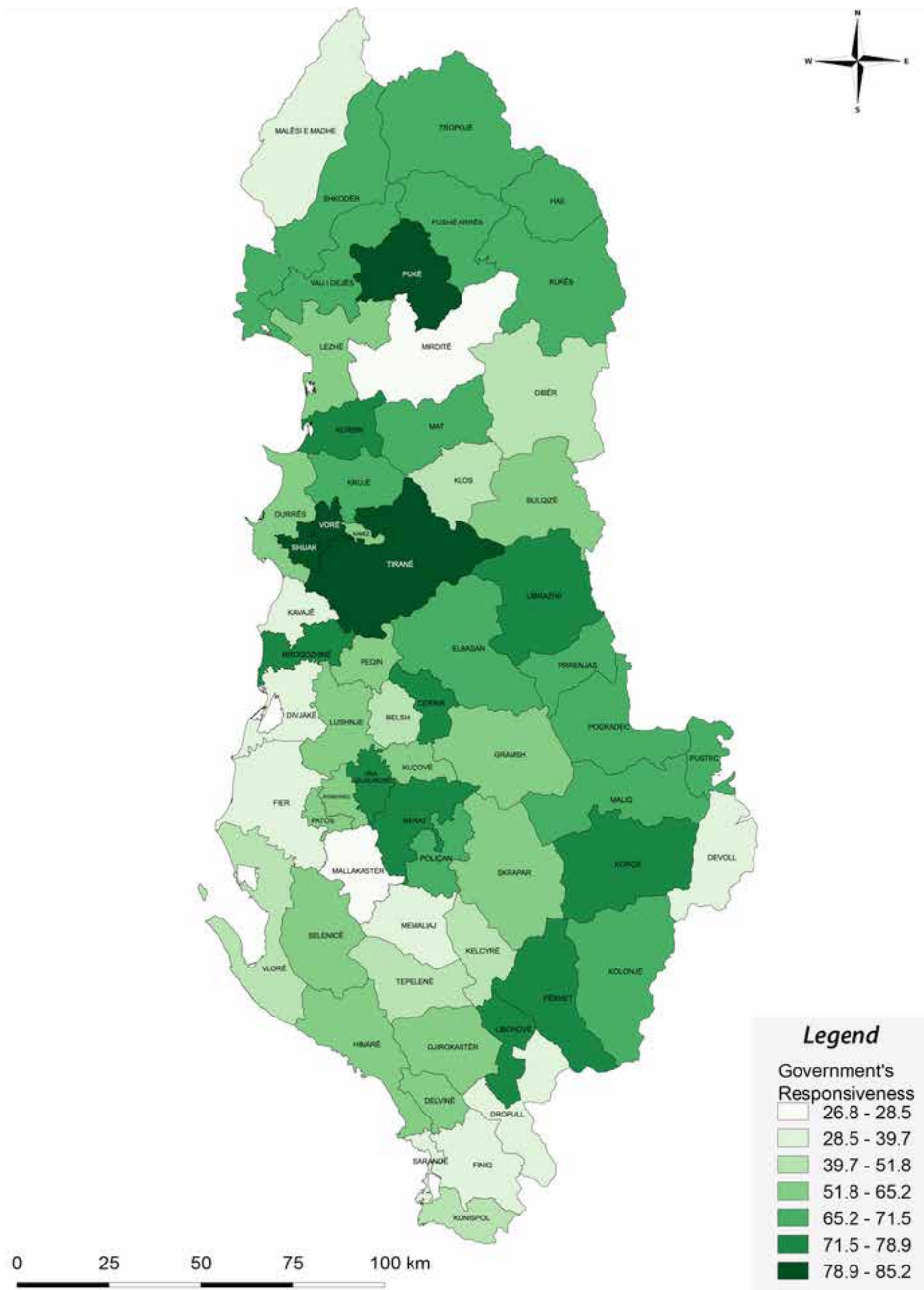
Figure 59. Municipal responsiveness towards citizens' complaints



Source: Citizens Report Card

Based on municipal statistics, municipalities show a generally good level of *resolved complaints* by the municipality, standing at 64 points. It is also worth emphasizing that a good part of municipalities does not poses statistics on the yearly total number of complaints addressed by citizens and business and neither on the number of resolved ones. This fact indicates that in some municipalities there is a lack of an integrated system for complaints management and municipalities fail in the process of tracking filed complaints.

Figure 60. Government Responsiveness Map



Source: Author's work

In general, the local governments do show a good level of responsiveness to citizens' requests for information on projects, developmental issues, etc. However, when it comes to filed complaints by citizens, local government responsiveness stand at the 'average' level. The biggest challenge faced by the local governments in this regard is the lack of an integrated system for complaint management.

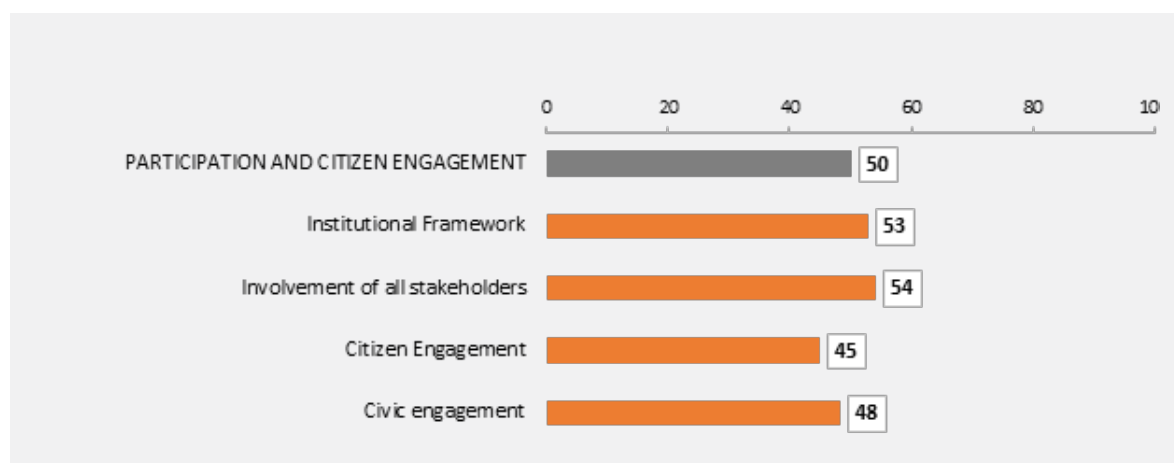
→ 3.5 Participation and Citizen Engagement

“Participation and Citizen Engagement” is the fourth and last measured governance dimension in this study, and it scores the lowest at a national aggregate level, just in the middle of the “average” range with **50 points**. This aggregate result covers a lot of variations and concerns related to both the demand and supply side for a vibrant and active society and the environment to enable such relationship between the public and its governing institutions. Overall, forty-two municipalities (69%) fall within the “average” range, only ten municipalities (16%) qualify within the “good” range, and the remaining nine (15%) are “poor”. The top scoring municipality of Elbasan scoring 65 percent, while Devoll scores the lowest with only 23 percent.

This dimension assesses the institutional framework for managing citizen participation, the presence of any platform or instrument for the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes, and the level of citizen and civic engagement. The highest scored sub-criterion results *involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes*, whereas the lowest is *citizen and civic engagement*. The results indicate levels of social apathy and indifference, a detachment from social activism, making the citizen feel peripheral and powerless, but at the same time “undermines” the efforts and work of the local administration.

However, municipal officials’ and the community representatives’ opinions seem to merge, with a slight difference, on several significant issues, namely, the inability of the local CSOs to lobby, advocate and influence the local administration and decision-making; the existence of very few community structures to help tackle different issues and propose changes to local administration; citizens’ awareness of their legal rights and responsibilities; and the capability of the local media to raise citizens’ awareness regarding their rights and responsibilities, as well as regarding the plans and activities of the municipalities.

Figure 61. Participation and Citizen Engagement



Source: Author's work

From a more in depth review of the assessed indicators, the following results score the highest/lowest:

On the positive side*	On the negative side*
➤ existence of platforms for citizen participation	➤ community structures arising from civil initiatives
➤ participatory budget system	➤ low CSOs' capacities to influence local decision-making
➤ engagement of women in decision-making	➤ low civic organization and engagement
➤ participation of citizens in local projects	➤ lack of or low levels of public involvement in monitoring and evaluation municipal performance
➤ awareness of legal rights and responsibilities	➤ inexistent CSOs' support to educate citizens

* For many of the results above, citizens' scores range between 7% to 25% less than municipal officials' scores.

According to the Law on 'the Right to Information', each local government unit has to appoint one civil servant as *Coordinator for the Right to Information*.⁴⁷ Among his/her responsibilities to provide access to public information to citizens and to coordinate efforts for meeting the requests for information within the time period prescribed in this law. Similarly, pursuant to the Law on 'Notification and Public Consultation', municipalities have to appoint as well one civil servant as *Coordinator of Notification and public Consultation*, who shall be responsible for the overall coordination and administration of the work to guarantee the right of notification and public consultation as stipulated by this law.⁴⁸ The law regulates the process of public notification and public consultation of draft laws, project documents, national and local strategic plans, as well as policies of high public interest. The legislation sets out the procedural rules which should be applied to ensure transparency and public participation in policy-making and decision-making processes by public bodies.

Referring to the Law on Local Self-Government, before considering and approving acts, municipal or regional councils shall hold consultation sessions with the community. Consultation with the public shall be made in any event as specified in the municipal council statutes using one of the necessary forms, such as the open meetings with residents and stakeholders, the meetings with experts, interested institutions and non-profit organizations, or by taking the initiative to organize local referendums.⁴⁹ Furthermore, each community, through its authorized representatives, or not less than one percent of the municipal population, has the right to present for decision to the municipal council citizens' initiatives on matters within the jurisdiction of the local self-government unit.⁵⁰

In this regard, in Figure 62, it is offered a visual map of participation and citizen engagement across all Albanian municipalities.

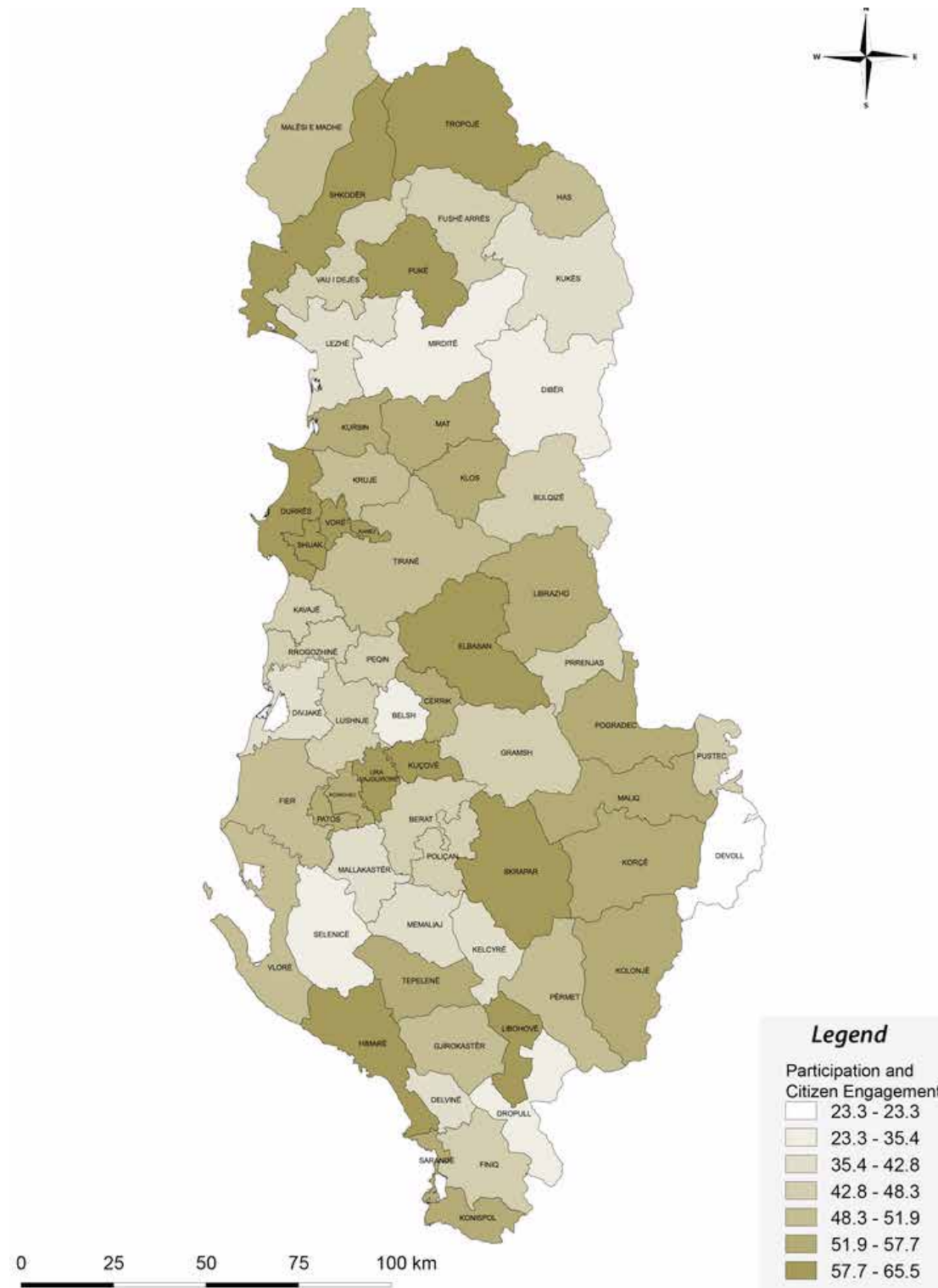
47. Article 10, Law No. 199/2014, on 'The Right on Information', <http://www.eurallius.eu/index.php/en/library/albanian-legislation/send/55-the-right-to-information/111-law-on-the-right-to-information-en>

48. Article 10, Law 146/2014, on 'Notification and Public Consultation', http://www.hidaa.gov.al/lige/Ligji_146-2014,_per_njoftimin_dhe_konsultimin_publik.pdf

49. Article 18, Law No. 139/2015, on 'Local Self-Government', http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

50. Article 20, Law No. 139/2015, on 'Local Self-Government', http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

Figure 62. Participation and Citizen Engagement Map

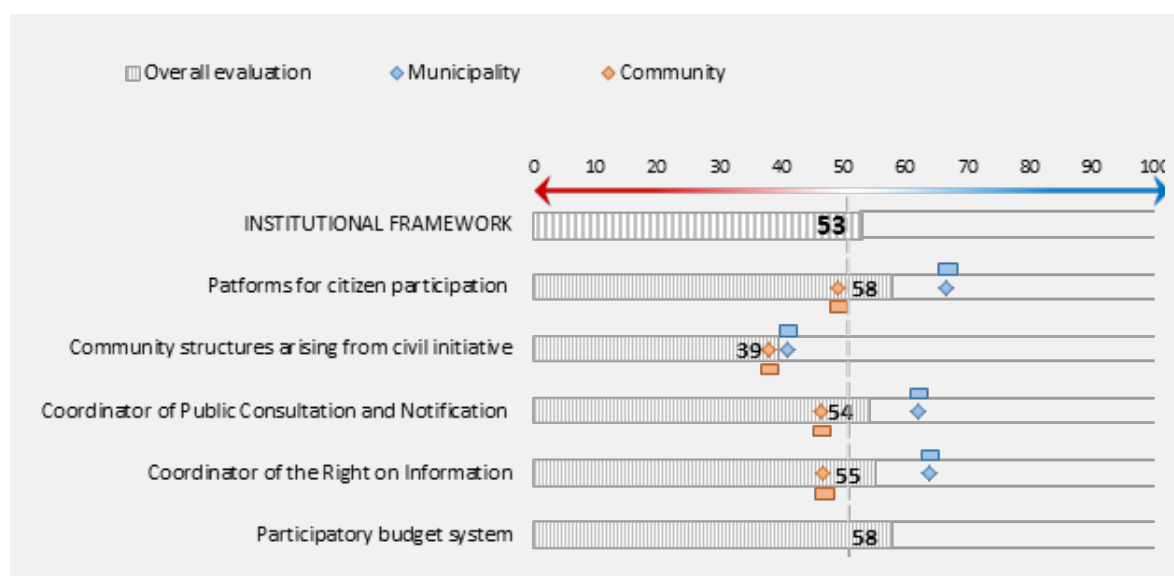


Source: Author's work

3.5.1 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The sub-criterion offers a general overview on the presence of opportunities/platforms for citizens' participation in development planning and decision-making processes, on the existence of community structures interacting with, making suggestions or proposing initiatives to the local government, on the level of application of a participatory budget system, and on the effectiveness of the Coordinator on Public Consultation and Notification and the Coordinator of the Right to Information. Municipal officials' and citizens' views differ on most indicators, but they both concur on the poor level of community structures, as a reflection of an environment of weak social networks.

Figure 63. Institutional Framework for Citizen Participation



Source: Author's work

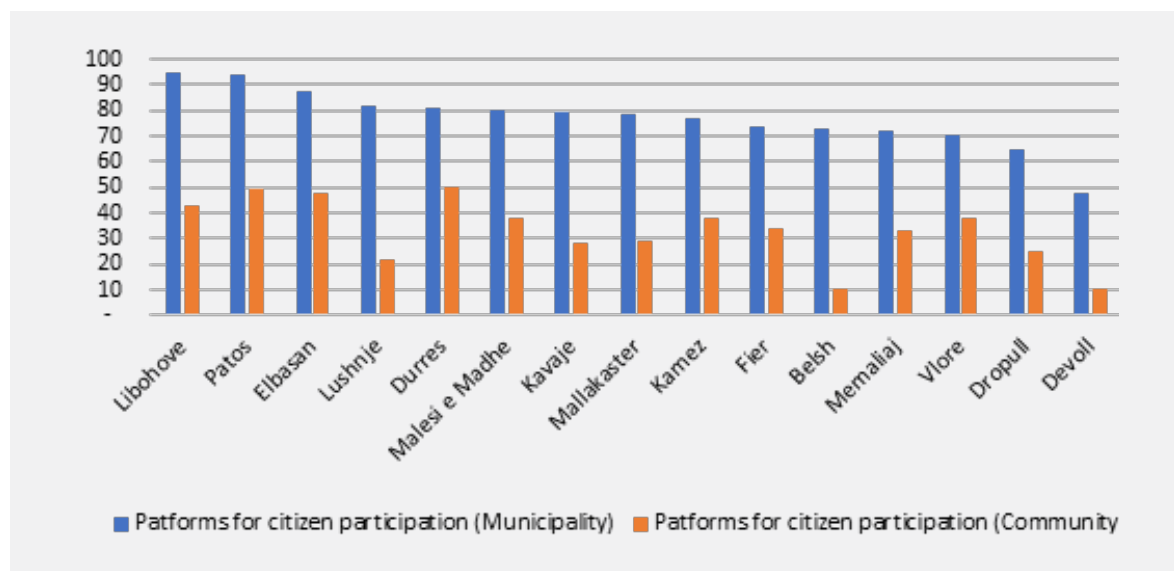
Municipal officials involved in the assessment believe their offices give ample opportunities to citizens' participation in decision-making processes. This view is not fully shared by the citizens in general, although there are cases where citizens are more positive than the municipalities themselves. However, the general picture shows a large contrast.

	Effective Platforms for Citizens' Participation			
	Poor (up to 40)	Average (40-60)	Good (60-80)	Very Good (above 80)
Municipal Assessment	2	15	33	11
Citizens' Assessment	21	22	16	2

Spotted differences are not characteristic only for small municipalities; for many large municipalities, the

municipal positive self-assessment on these participatory instruments is faced with a largely skeptical assessment by the citizens. The following chart visualizes the scale of discrepancy for the municipalities where this difference is more pronounced. One can also note that most of the municipalities in this range score themselves on or close to the top performers, while for the citizen, only a few reach the average level.

Figure 64. Platforms for Citizens' Participation (scale of differing views)



Source: Author's work

The situation is more unbalanced considering the scarcity or weakness of community structures, that is forums of public organization around issues or interests that interact and participate in various decision making processes, raise concerns about issues or suggest new initiatives. Both municipal officials and citizens have evaluated community structures to be at a rather low level respectively with 41 and 38 points. While the law on local self-government⁵¹ provides for establishment of community councils in cities and village boards, as an initiative of citizens, there are just too few effective community structures for any meaningful engagement with the local governments.

Box 3: Civic Initiatives

In the municipality of Elbasan, the Citizens' Council Panel monitors the LGU work. Korça municipality also has established a Citizen Advisory Committee, an important structure that is actively engaged in different municipal development activities. Similarly, in the municipality of Patos, with the support of USAID, a Citizen Advisory Commission has been created to tackle different local issues through periodic meetings with high level municipal officials. The Citizen Commission in Vlorë is indicated to be very effective in overseeing municipal work and in giving suggestions to the local administration. In Kuçovë municipality, the Citizen Advisory Commission is a voluntary structure that provides very effective assistance to the municipality. Tirana Municipality has another similar citizen's participation institution, namely, the Civic Opinions Sector (COS). Several Youth councils are also taking shape in several municipalities such as in the Municipalities of Maliq and Librazhd with the aim of increasing youth engagement with local government.

51. Article 68, 69, 70 and 71 Law No. 139/2015, on 'Local Self-Government', http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

The Coordinators on Public Consultation and on the Right to Information are relatively new positions within the local administration structure. Their role and effect in strengthening relations and interaction between local administrations and citizens is still not strongly felt and often unknown to citizens. However municipal officials give a relatively positive assessment. The top and bottom 5 municipalities according to the measurement of this indicator are the following:

Top 5		Bottom 5	
Public Consultation and Notification	Right on Information	Public Consultation and Notification	Right on Information
Kucovë	Himarë	Berat	Berat
Maliq	Pukë	Devoll	Devoll
Skrapar	Skrapar	Dibër	Dibër
Ura Vajgurore	Ura Vajgurore	Kukës	Mirditë
Vorë	Vorë	Mirditë	Prrenjas

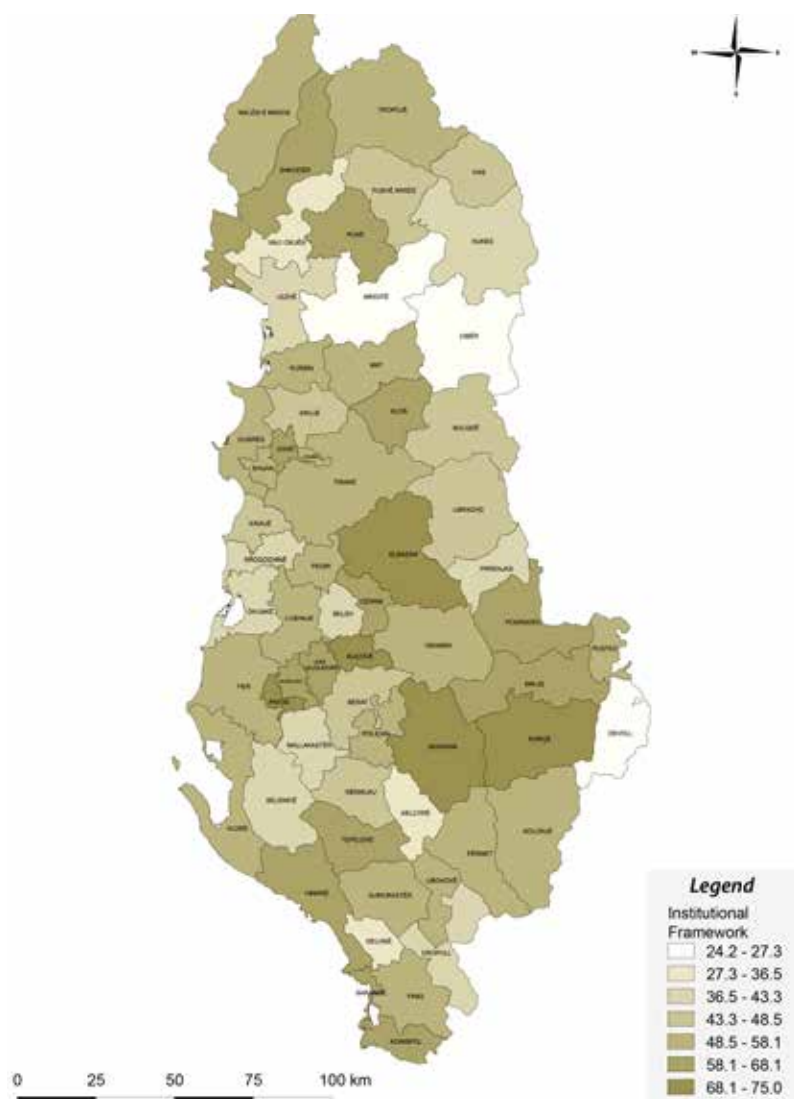
Below is a summary of mapping scores obtained by the municipality officials and respective communities/citizens on these two positions:

Public Consultation and Notification	Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very good
Municipal score	0	6	19	28	8
Citizens' score	5	19	23	13	0
Right to Information	Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very good
Municipal score	0	6	19	25	11
Citizens' score	4	18	22	14	2

It should be noted that according to findings, there are still a few municipalities that have not yet filled one or both vacancy positions.

Participatory budgeting is probably the most complete instrument for the application of the direct democracy principle and one of the most popular instruments for involving citizens in public decision-making. Albanian municipalities confirm to have adopted and implemented some types of *participatory budgeting processes*, witnessing a good participation from the citizens, but with only an average impact on decision-making and allocations. Even the municipal officials have judged this process to stand at an 'average' level with 58 points. Nevertheless, there are a few municipalities of Elbasan, Korçë, Patos and Skrapar that have demonstrated good practices in this regard.

Figure 65. Institutional Framework for managing Citizen Participation Map



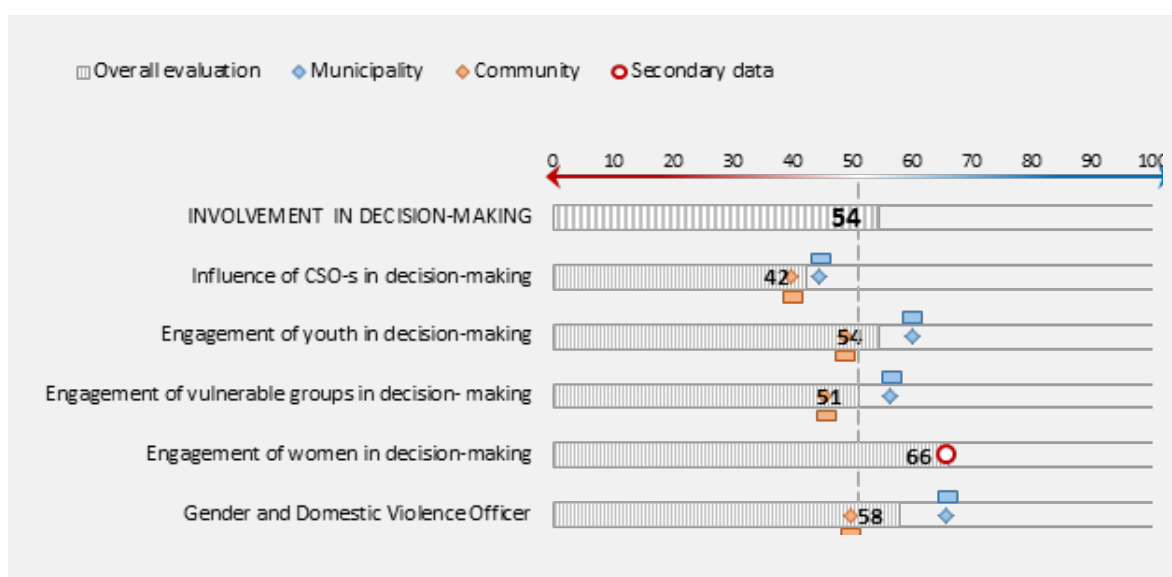
Source: Author's work

Overall, the institutional framework and arrangements for public participation are not well established and operationalized. Particularly, the opportunities/platforms for citizen participation in development decision-making stand at an average level. The situation is even less positive when it comes to community councils and their engagement in municipal governance functions, as these structures are few in number and insufficient. In addition, despite the fact that most municipalities recognize the need for a participatory budgeting system, the mapping reveals that only few municipalities have adopted such a system. Based on the new responsibilities of the local governments, the functions of the Coordinator of Public Consultation as well as that of the Coordinator for the Right to Information are found to be somewhat effective (average).

3.5.2 INVOLVEMENT OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN DECISION-MAKING

Stakeholder involvement in local government decision making sub-criterion relates to the capabilities of CSOs to lobby and advocate effectively to influence local government planning and decision making; the engagement of women, youth, and vulnerable groups in decision-making and the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming within the municipality. CSOs' capacities and influence in local matters results negligible; on the other hand, women in decision making and gender mainstreaming emerge in general at high levels.

Figure 66. Involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making process



Source: Author's work

CSOs are considered to have little *capacities to lobby, advocate and influence local government decision-making*. In aggregate terms, both municipal officials and citizens score them respectively with 45 and 40 points. Positive exceptions, from what the mapping assessment could confirm, are very few.

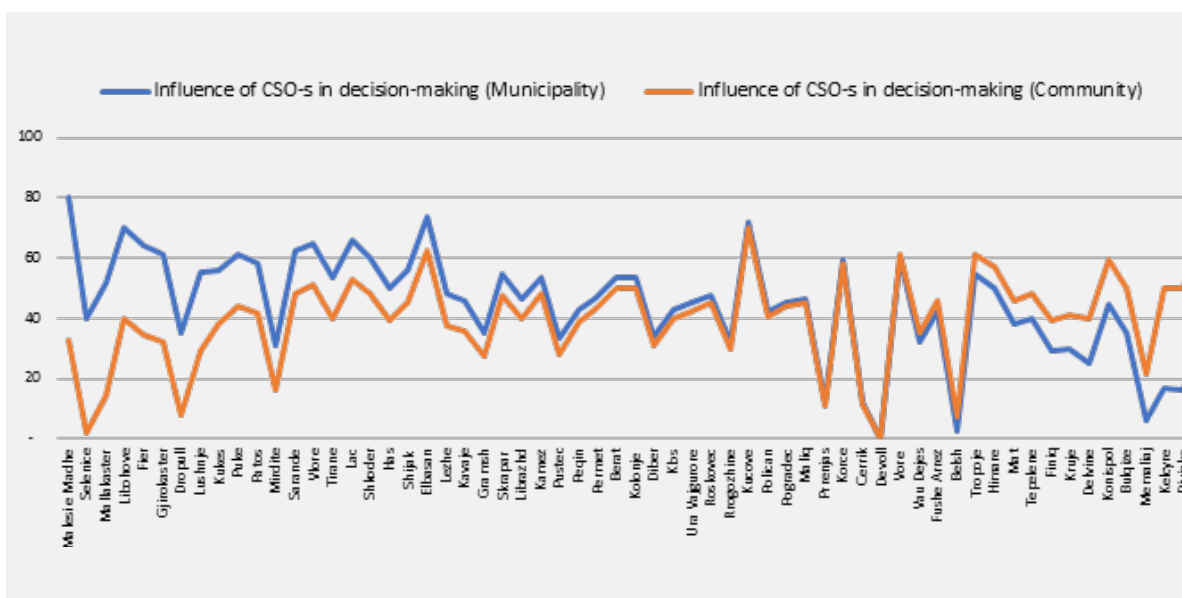
The concentration of the CSOs in the capital and the main urban areas, their quasi permanent financial dependence, the lack of a well-established tradition on policy development and monitoring and modality of co-operation with the central and local government, are some of the additional factors for these results. As a matter of fact, in many small municipalities not only local CSOs are inexistent but also there is rarely or no cooperation at all with external/national NGOs.

CSOs influence in decision making		
Lowest scoring municipalities	Highest scoring municipalities	Largest discrepancy between municipal-community scores
Belsh	Kuçovë	Malësi e Madhe
Prrenjas*	Elbasan	Durrës
Cerrik	Durrës	Selenicë
Memaliaj*	Vorë	Mallakastër
Selenicë	Laç	Divjakë

* at least, for these municipalities, there is no presence of local CSOs

This is also one of the few indicators where, with very slight variations, the citizens' and municipal scores are very similar for about 80% of municipalities.

Figure 67. Influence of CSOs in local decision-making



Source: Author's work

Local governments *engage youth and vulnerable groups in decision-making* sometimes but not systematically. Often, with youth engagement local officials understand simply the employment of young people in local administration. In other cases, the municipality admits itself the level of youth engagement is not adequate although its scoring is still more optimistic than the community's. Among the municipalities scoring poorly in aggregate, there is Mirditë, Devoll, Dibër, Memaliaj, and Belsh.

There are however, positive examples and a trend to work with youth. The municipal focus group of Gjirokastra indicated that the municipality has helped establish a Youth Council which organizes various socio-cultural activities. The municipality of Peqin has recently set up a Municipal Youth Council, whereby 30

young people represent the municipal youth. A Civic Advisory Commission is a volunteer structure of various fields that provide fruitful views on municipal affairs in Kuçovë. This structure is very active, contributing to municipal decisions, such as waste management, local planning. Librazhd has established a Youth Council with excellence students of various schools. The municipality of Patos is in the process of establishing a Youth Civic Council, with the aim of ensuring greater involvement of young people in decision-making. The municipality of Maliq is creating a youth group; currently, an announcement for participation in this structure is disseminated among high school students.

Vulnerable groups are much less invited and considered in local debates and *decision-making*. In most cases, where local officials claim that the situation is satisfactory, the citizens undermine these statements with a much lower estimate. In general, both local officials and communities agree that vulnerable groups need to be considered more seriously. The top five scoring municipalities for this indicator are Cërrik, Elbasan, Libohovë, Kuçovë, and Pustec, though only in the case of Cërrik and Kuçovë, citizens' views are close to those of local officials. On the other hand, the bottom five municipalities are Selenicë, Delvinë, Devoll, Dropull, and Dibër, where citizens' scores, except for Delvinë, are even more skeptical.

Although, during the mapping exercise, there was no evidence of any special arrangement for the engagement of vulnerable categories, it is worth mentioning a few examples where these groups are paid attention. In Gjirokastrë, the mayor noted that vulnerable categories have been taken into consideration by implementing an initiative to ease their fiscal burden, i.e. halving their obligations to the municipality. Also, a member from this community is also a member of the municipal council, conveying, in some way, the voice of this group to the council. The municipalities of Maliq and Librazhd, receive both assistance from World-Vision, and MEDPAK in the case of Librazhd, for the provision of integrated services for children and young people with disabilities. These organizations improve municipal work through lobbying and advocacy for disability rights. In Maliq, WV has undertaken an initiative for training school teachers on methods of education for children with disabilities. And lastly, whereas in Dropull there was no civil society until recently, a nonprofit charity has just been opened aiming to help children who are in critical need for assistance (children with autism, abandoned by their parents, children growing up in socially difficult family environments, etc).

Pursuant to the Law on Gender Equality, all municipalities have involved women in the decision-making process and the latter seem to have a good *engagement in decision making* by: being a member of the Municipal council, evaluated with 70 points, as well as representation as employees in the structure of total municipal employees, with 75 points. Despite this, it is worth highlighting that their rather low engagement in managerial positions seems to be the most problematic aspect concerning this issue, which stands at the level of 54 points. At the end of the ranking, the municipalities lagging mostly behind are Tropojë, Selenicë, Kamëz, Fushë Arrëz and Has. To complement this evidence here, the LITS 2016 shows that only 41 per cent of the Albanian people think that gender equality is guaranteed.⁵²

52. EBRD, 'Life in transition, a decade of measuring transition', European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2016

Moreover, for one in three municipalities, citizens are either unaware of the function of gender and domestic violence officer/professional or evaluate it as little effective. Dropull, Vau Dejës, Mirditë, Devoll, and Poliçan are found at the bottom of the ladder overall, but large discrepancies between local officials and communities are found also in some large municipalities such as Fier and Gjirokastrë.

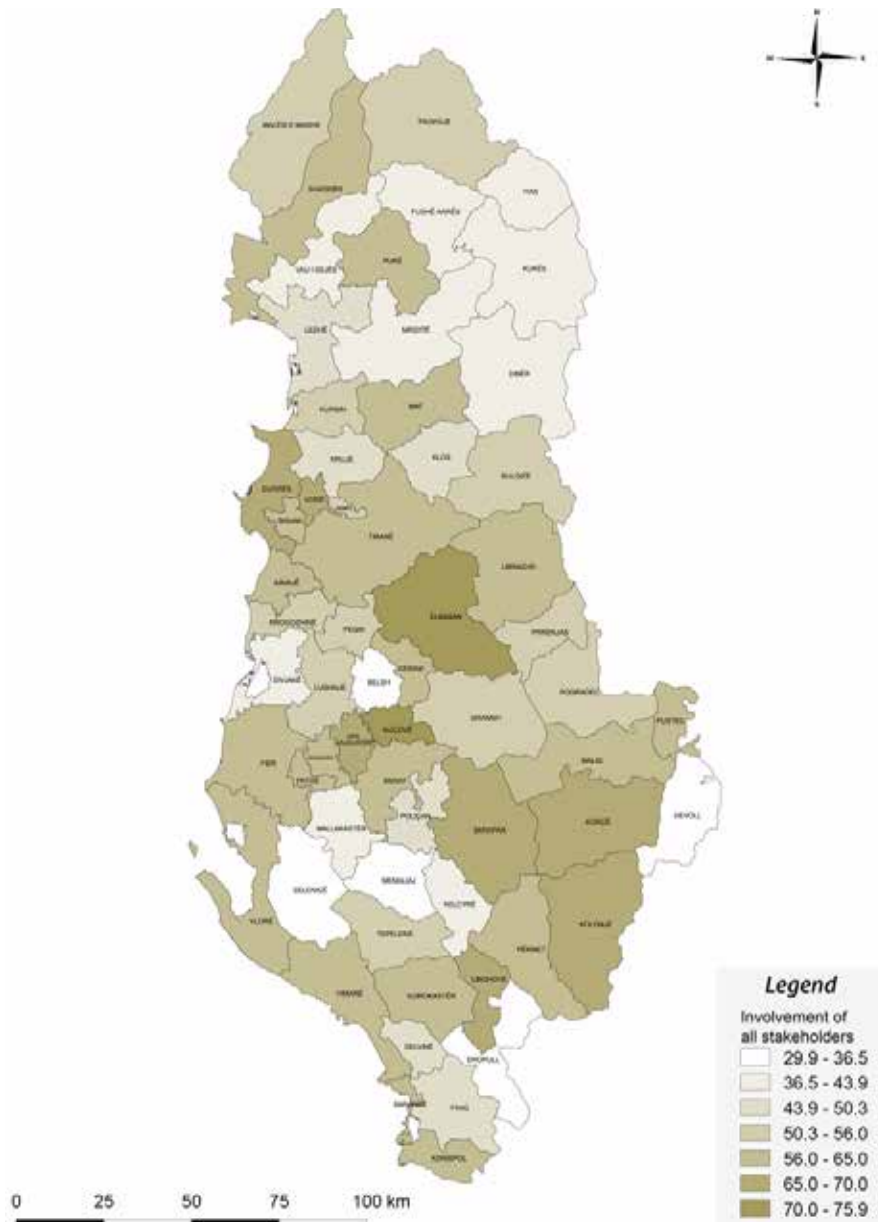
Table 4. Indicators scored below 'average' by either local officials or community

Municipality	Community structures	Participatory budgeting	Coordinators' performance	CSO influence in decision making	Youth involvement	Vulnerable groups engagement
Belsh	✗			✗	✗	✗
Berat			✗			
Bulqize	✗					
Cerrik	✗			✗		
Delvine	✗	✗		✗	✗	✗
Devoll	✗	✗	✗		✗	✗
Diber	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Divjake	✗			✗	✗	✗
Dropull	✗		✗	✗	✗	✗
Durres			✗			
Fier	✗		✗	✗	✗	✗
Finiq	✗	✗		✗	✗	✗
Fushe Arrez	✗					
Gjirokastrë	✗		✗	✗	✗	✗
Gramsh	✗	✗		✗	✗	
Has	✗		✗			
Kamez						✗
Kavaje	✗		✗			
Kelcyre	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Klos	✗					✗
Kolonje	✗		✗			
Konispol	✗					

Source: Author's work

Municipality	Community structures	Participatory budgeting	Coordinators' performance	CSO influence in decision making	Youth involvement	Vulnerable groups engagement
Kruje	✗	✗		✗		
Kukes	✗		✗		✗	✗
Lezhe	✗	✗	✗		✗	✗
Libohove	✗	✗				
Librazhd	✗		✗			
Lushnje	✗			✗		✗
Malesi e Madhe	✗		✗	✗	✗	✗
Mallakaster	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Mat				✗		✗
Memaliaj	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Mirdite	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Permet	✗					
Polican	✗	✗				
Prrenjas	✗	✗	✗	✗		
Puke	✗					
Pustec	✗			✗		
Rrogozhine	✗		✗	✗		
Sarande						✗
Selenice	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Shijak	✗					✗
Shkoder	✗					
Skrapar	✗					
Tepelene					✗	✗
Tirane	✗					✗
Ura Vajgurore	✗					
Vau Dejes	✗	✗		✗	✗	
Vlore			✗		✗	✗
Vore		✗				

Figure 68. Involvement of all stakeholders in decision making map



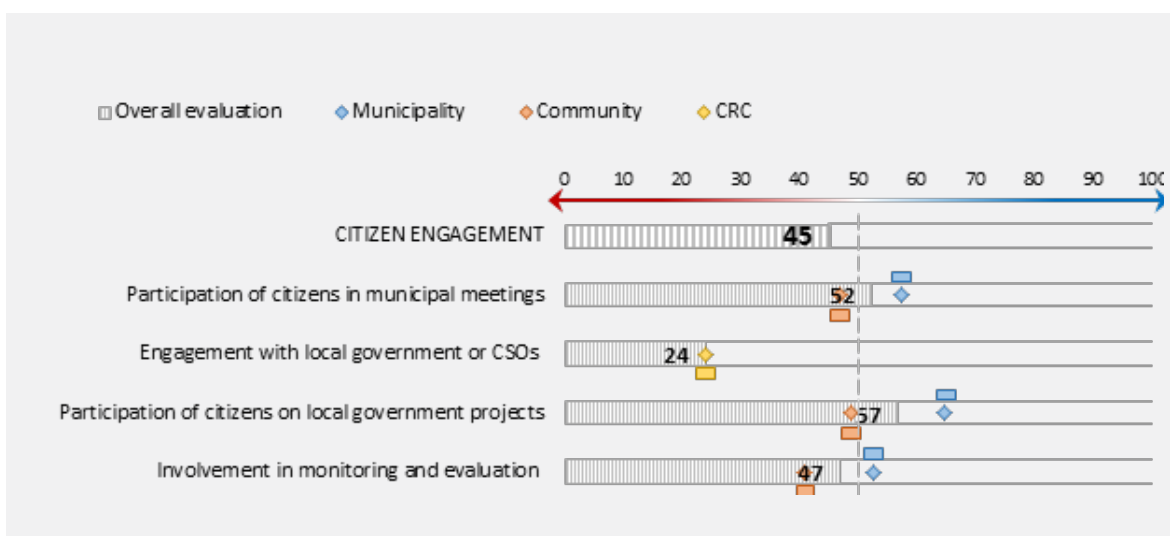
Source: Author's work

The dialogue platform, which ensured the involvement of all stakeholders in the process of decision-making is perceived as being effective only at “average” level. Across all municipalities, CSOs, due to their low capability to lobby and advocate at the municipal level, have little influence on local government planning and decision-making. The local governments’ engagement of youth and vulnerable groups in decision-making is also average and erratic. Women’s engagement in decision-making, however, appears to be positive, with good representation as municipal employees and as members of the municipal council. But their representation in higher managerial positions is weak and stands at an average level. More efforts are required to improve equitable participation.

3.5.3 CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

The sub-criterion of *citizen engagement* consisting of community interface with local governments has been judged to be at average level with *45 points* (Figure 69). This sub-criterion was measured by the frequency of citizen participation in local government planning, the level of citizen activism with local government and CSOs for improving the local situation, the extent to which local government projects are implemented with the participation of local actors/citizens and the level of citizen involvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the public sector performance.

Figure 69. The level of citizen engagement



Source: Author's work

Citizens assessed their participation levels in *local government strategic planning meetings*, as average with 47 points. Municipal officials seem to also concur with this impression as they indicated average participation of citizens with 57 points. This was further substantiated by the CRC where in general, communities were not found to be very active in *engaging with local governments or CSOs to improve local situation*. Only a few of them, 24 per cent in the last 12 months (prior to the survey), admitted to have participated at least once in public meetings, public hearings, municipal council sessions, NGO activities, communal activities, etc. It appears that citizens have either remained disappointed with limited impact of their participation or have little time to participate. This is also substantiated by the fact that, as mentioned earlier, there are few community structures (Figure 69). Similarly, municipal officials across the municipalities (barring a few exceptions) are either not very used to engaging with people on technical planning and budgeting, or find them ill-equipped to do so or do not see the importance of the voice of the people.

Despite citizens' low level of engagement there still are a few good practices where their participation and voice in public hearing have influenced the decision-making process. Such was the case of public hearings in the municipality of Tirana (for the area of "New Bazaar" and "Scanderbeg Square"), and the municipality

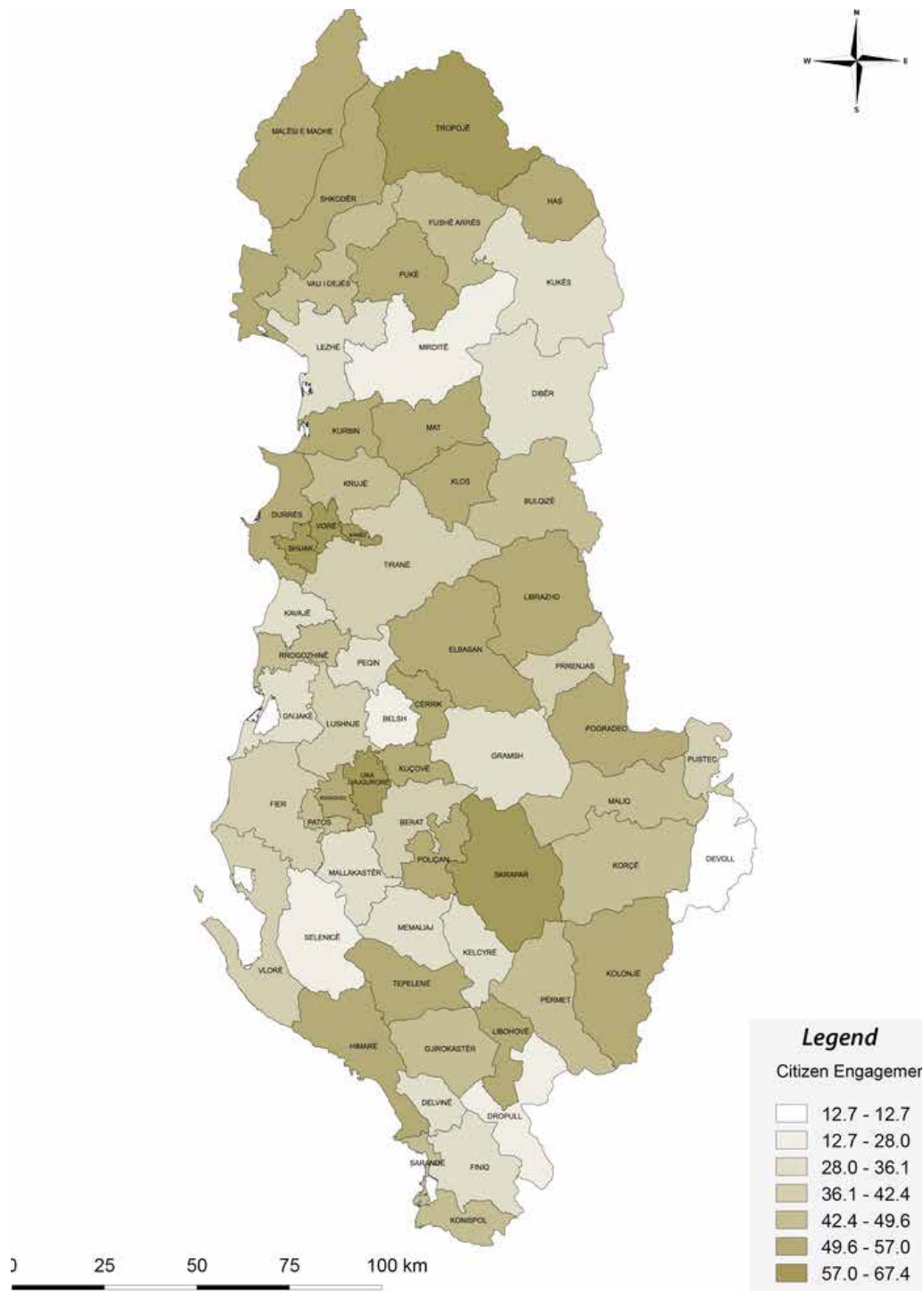
of Korçë (for the pedestrian street and the shopping area) where citizens' opinions and suggestions were considered in the decision-making process.

As a consequence of poor levels of community engagement, citizen participation in the *implementation of local government projects* is also limited. While the municipal officials seemed to be more optimistic about it and hence perceived of citizen participation in local project implementation at higher levels (65 points), the community members are considerably less positive (49 points) about it. Nevertheless, some good practices mentioned include community engagement with the municipality on mutual financing of local government projects to improve service delivery. For instance, in the municipality of Finiq, the infrastructure of some small segments of rural roads was improved through a co-financing arrangement of the local government and the community (small funds of 1000-1500 euros was contributed by both parties). Similarly, the municipality of Tirana undertook 'Adopt a Kindergarten' initiative where businesses and citizens contributed in repairing 31 kindergartens in the capital city.

Compared to participation in project implementation, citizens' *involvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the public sector performance (departments, projects, budgeting)* is ranked even lower. Municipal officials indicated that citizens were somehow involved and gave a scoring of 53 points, meanwhile the citizens rated this with 41 points clearly indicating that their level of involvement is mostly inadequate. This reflects the chronic pattern of disengagement from the communities and a resultant of low citizen-government interface.

Citizen participation in planning, local project implementation and monitoring of public sector performance are all rated at 'average' level. This dwindles further to a 'poor' level when it comes to the engagement of the communities with the local government or CSOs to improve the local reflecting a continued lack of engagement of the community in local governance.

Figure 70. Citizen Engagement Map

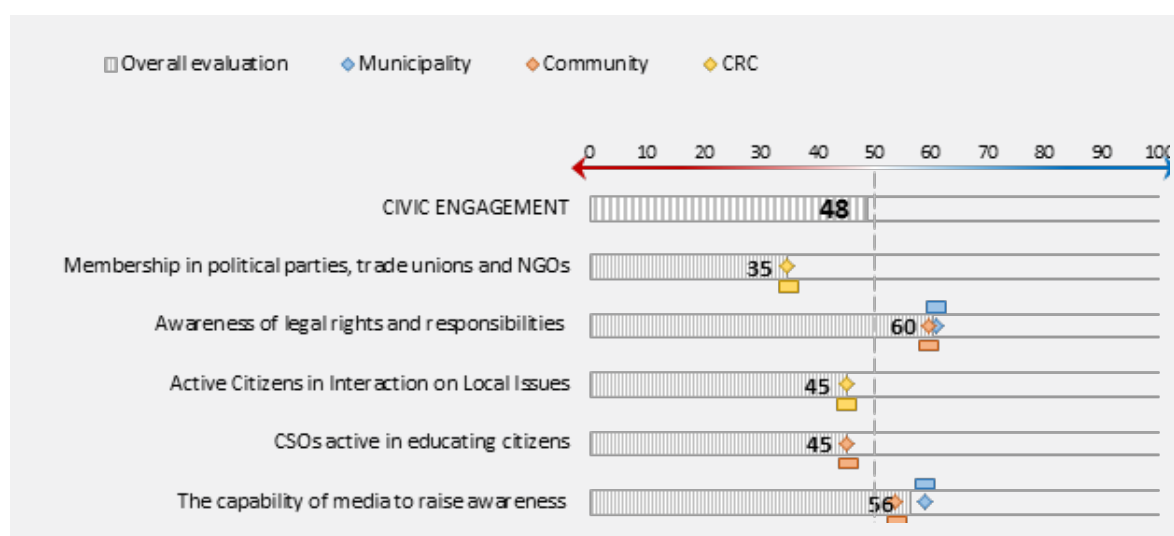


Source: Author's work

3.5.4 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement supports improvement in the state-society interaction and thus engagement of citizens and civil society with local administration is perceived as valuable. Similar to citizen engagement, the *civic engagement* sub-criterion, measuring the level of activity of citizens, CSOs, and media on local development issues, is rated with a low average score of *48 points* (Figure 71). Thus, the five indicators used to assess the above include: the level of citizen affiliation or membership in political parties, trade unions, NGOs and citizen awareness on their civil rights and responsibilities; the level of public expression of opinion on local/political/social issues; the effectiveness of CSOs in civic education regarding citizen's rights and responsibilities; and the capability of media to raise awareness about rights, responsibilities and key developmental issues. It appears that among the five indicators, citizen's awareness on their civil rights and responsibilities including media's role in raising this awareness are relatively better compared to the other three.

Figure 71. The level of civic engagement



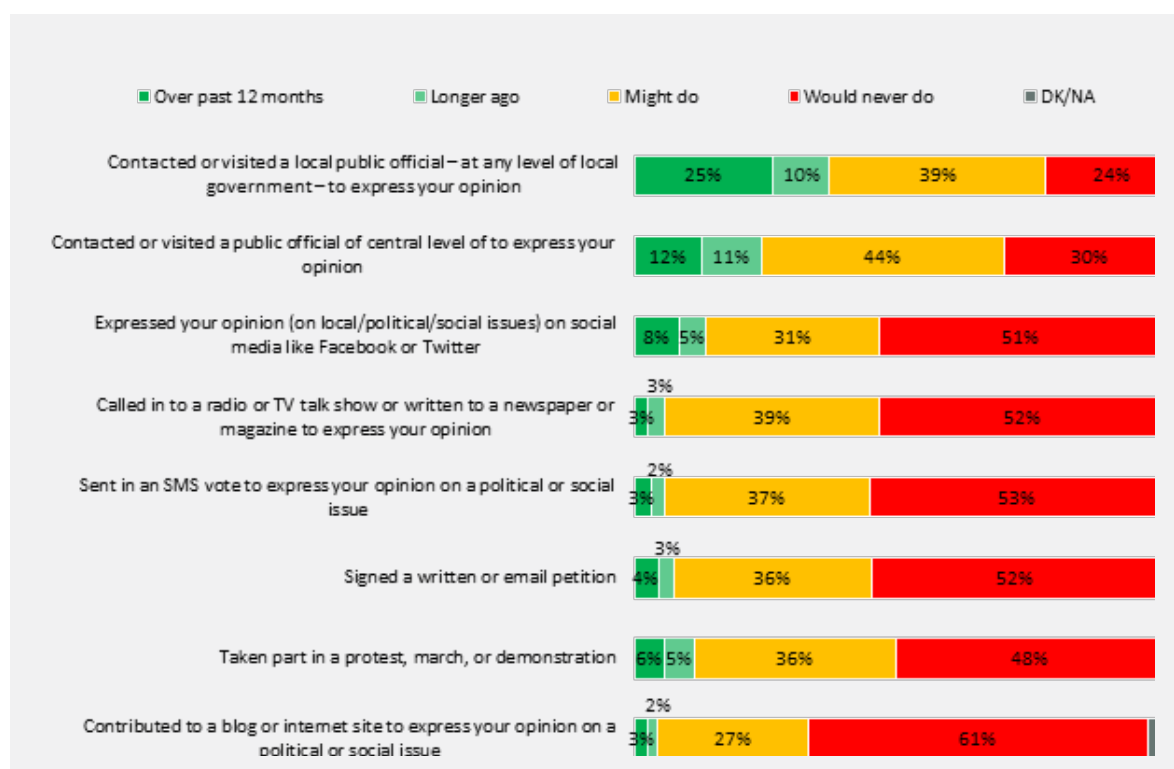
Source: Author's work

Very few citizens claim *affiliation to or membership of political parties, trade unions and NGOs*. Among all Albanian municipalities, only 35 percent of the citizens claimed membership of at least one structure. This perhaps reflects that the general public is not interested in being part of any formal grouping or institution. However due to data scarcity, little can be concluded. Seen from the larger perspective of citizens' engagement in local governance, this leads to a decline in their possibility for a deeper engagement with municipalities. Had they been part of any of the above structures, not necessarily political parties or trade unions, possibly their involvement in the local governance processes would be more meaningful.

In spite of some radical changes brought about by reforms in the recent years, *public expression of opinions about local, political, social issues* still stands at a low average level. Thus, 45 per cent of citizens admitted that they have publicly expressed their opinion on a local issue. The most common forms of communication are

contacting or visiting a local public official to express an opinion on local issues (35 per cent), contacting or visiting a central level public official to express an opinion on a local issue (23 per cent), expression of opinion on local issues on social media like Facebook or Twitter (13 per cent), taking part in a protest, march or demonstration (11 per cent), etc (Figure 72). While one-third took the opportunity to interact with the local administration, Central Government registered a lower percentage of people ready to interact with. What is most striking is that the percentage of citizens who stated they would never engage in expressing their views or personal opinions on any issue is very large (24-61%). The overall low average may imply either a lack of desire to express or a fear of repression.

Figure 72. Interaction with local administration and public expression of citizen opinion on a local, political, social or environmental issues

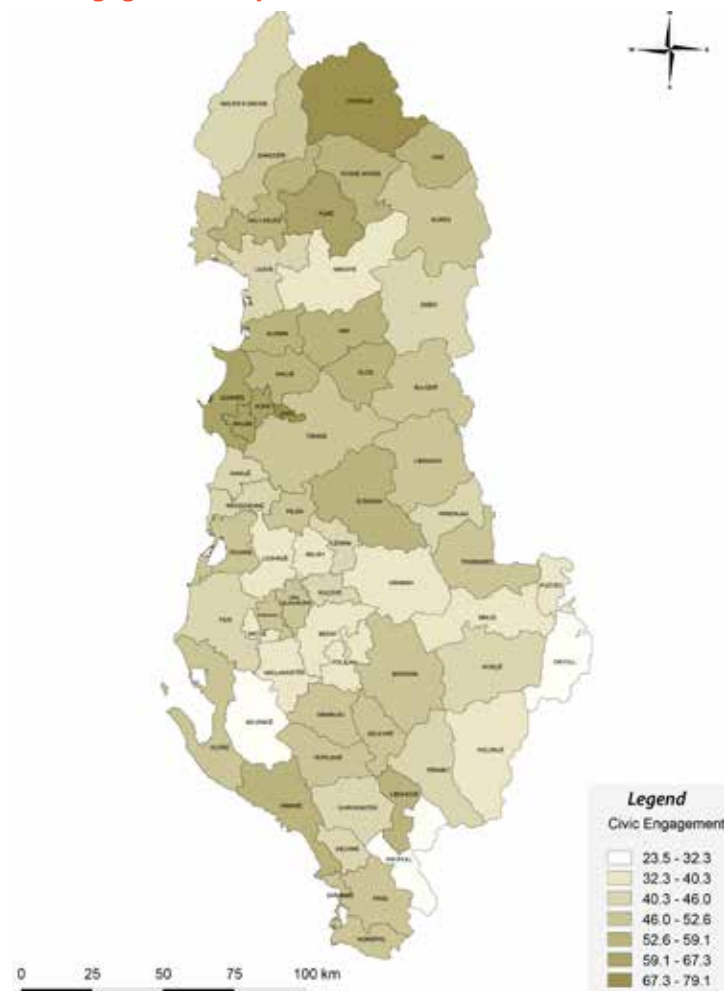


Source: Citizens Report Card

Citizens of all municipalities seem to have a *good-level of awareness regarding their civil rights and responsibilities*. Both municipal officials and citizens seem to believe that this awareness level is just above average scoring it with 61 and 59 points, respectively. However, the role of CSOs in *civic education on rights and responsibilities* is not considered very effective as citizens give this a rating of 45 points, which is consistent with what was stated in an earlier section. By contrast, the *media* is seen as having some *capacities when it comes to raising awareness on rights, responsibilities and key local developmental issues*. Municipal officials

have assessed their role to stand at a relatively average level with 59 points and the citizens have judged its capacity with 54 points in this regard. Consequently, municipalities that have local media, such as televisions, newspapers etc. are recognized as having higher capacities. In this regard, direct broadcasting of municipal council meetings in local television was considered a successful practice that was being followed by Shkodër municipality in four local TV stations and by the municipality of Tirana. In this way, media has played the key role of keeping the citizens well informed about the developments and decisions taken by the municipal council.

Figure 73. Civic Engagement Map



Source: Author's work

Summing up, few citizens claim affiliation to or membership in structures such as political parties, trade unions and NGOs. Similarly, 45 per cent of citizens admit that they have interacted with local government or have publicly expressed their opinion about a local, political, social issue. However, citizens seem to have good levels of awareness about their civil rights and responsibilities, which they attribute more to the media than to the CSOs.



→ 3.6 General Overview on the differences in assessments made by municipal officials and community representatives

This section aims at providing a comparative overview between the assessments obtained from the Community Dialogues and the assessments given by the municipal officials in the Municipal Focus Groups, across all the 61 municipalities. For this purpose, in order to measure the deviation in the assessments made from these two parties, the *difference index* was developed.

To obtain such a comparison, only those indicators of the analytical framework were taken into consideration and selected which were assessed from both parties, municipal officials and community representatives. Thus, this preselection of indicators increases the level and quality of the comparison between the two estimates. In addition, those indicators corresponding to the above condition were separated and their arithmetic average was calculated by keeping the two categories: the Municipality and the Community. This procedure was further applied for the four criteria of the analytical framework.

$$Criteria_i = \frac{1}{n} \times \sum_{j=1}^n Indicator_j$$

Where n - indicates the number of elements or indicators included in the assessment

Firstly, an aggregate in the form of an index was built that summarized all the criteria taken together. This index is calculated as the arithmetic average of all the indicators that were separated above, again by performing averages within the same source of information (municipality or community).

$$AGGREGATE_v = \frac{1}{4} \times \sum_{i=1}^4 Criteria_i$$

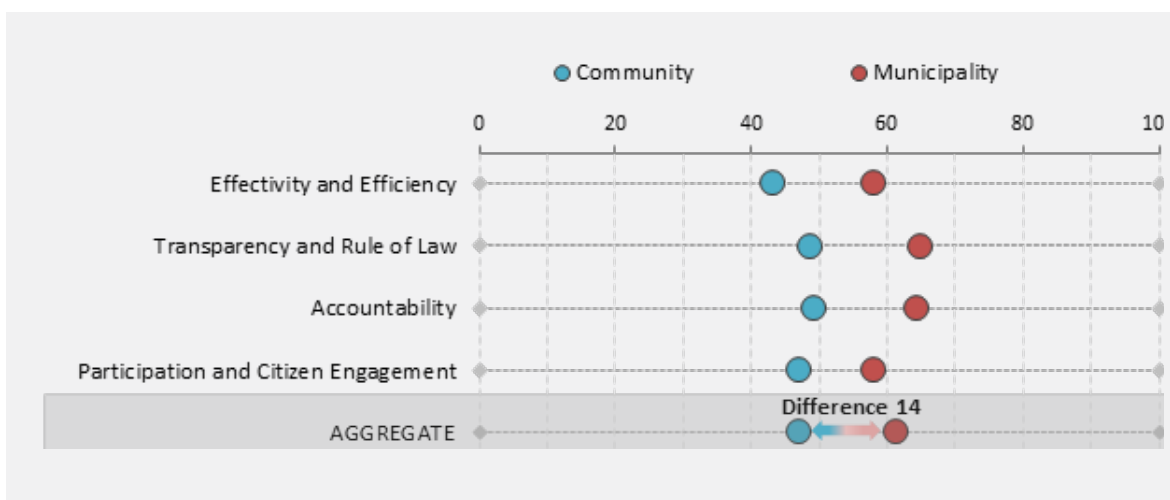
Where v - tells the assessor, the community or the Municipality.

Based on this calculated aggregate, the index is computed which compares the ratings between the two parties: the Municipality and the community. The index is illustrated with an arrow whose length is represented by difference between the two parties.

$$Index = Aggregate_{municipality} - Aggregate_{community}$$

The following illustration shows the differences in the assessments expressed by the community and the Municipality for each criterion based on the methodology outlined above.

Figure 74. The difference index in assessments made by the Municipality and the community

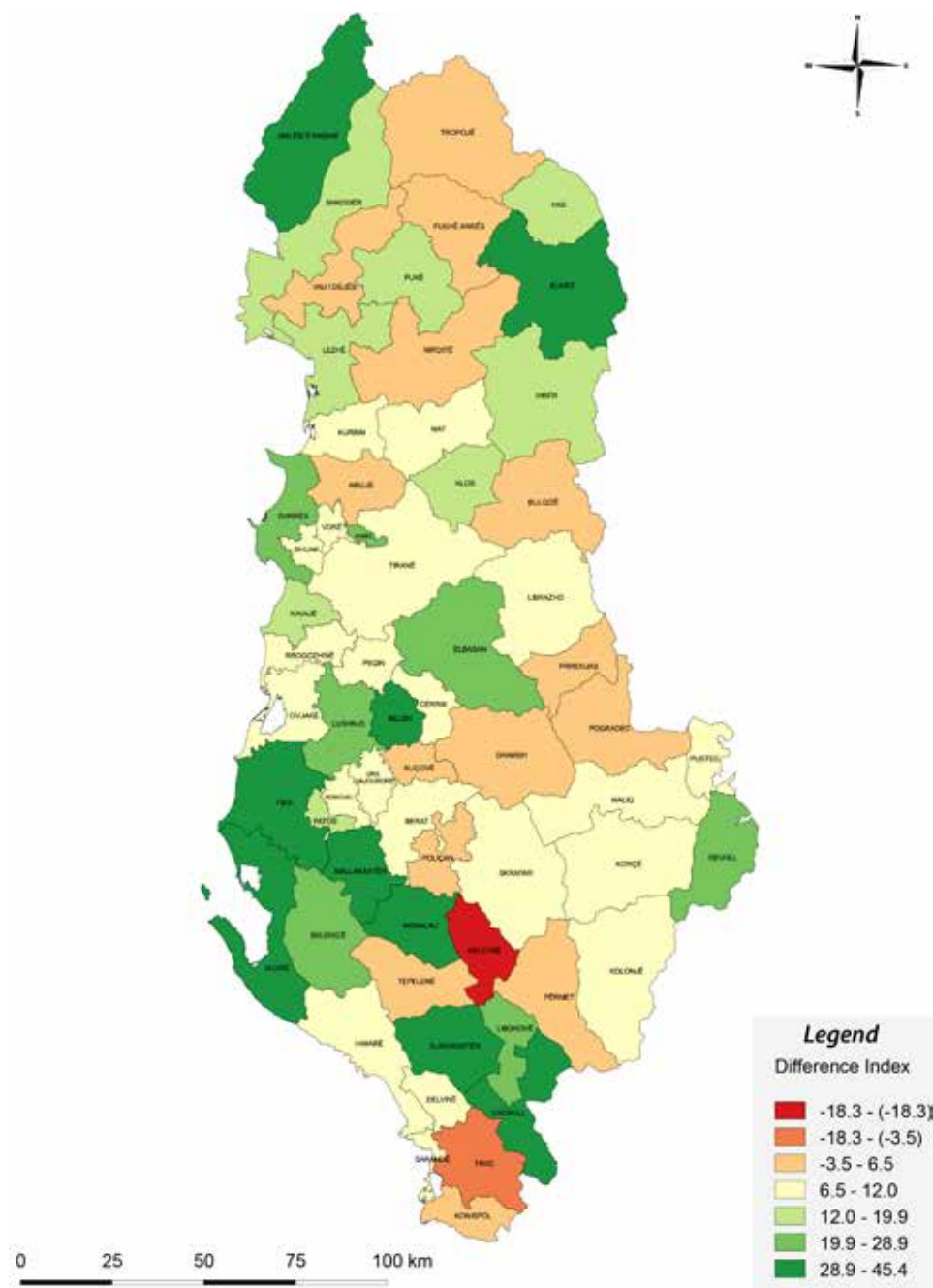


Source: Author's work

There are identified significant differences between the assessment made by municipal officials on different aspects of their work and the functioning of the local administration in the rule of law and in its relations with the community and citizens, and the perception of the community itself and citizens on the same issues. The difference rating score obtained by the Municipality and the community is 14 points, according to calculations of this study. This difference results even higher for the criteria of Accountability and Transparency (16 points) and Rule of Law (15 points).

In addition, in Figure 75, it is provided the difference index map, with the aim of offering a national overview of municipality and community assessments deviation across all 61 municipalities. This map serves as an indicative picture, showing on which municipality and community perspective seem to be more distant. As it can be seen below, for municipalities such as Malësi e Madhe, Kukës, Belsh, Fier, Vlorë, Mallakastër, Memaliaj, Gjirokastër and Dropull, the difference index is rather considerable, with municipal officials that tend to evaluate higher than community representatives, consisting in a difference higher than 28 points. On the other hand, there are however identified opposite cases such as in the municipality of Këlcyrë and Finiq, where community representatives seem to be more positive towards their local government performance, evaluating same indicators more than municipal officials.

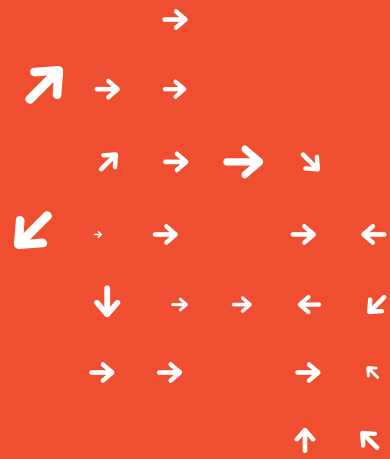
Figure 75. Difference Index Map



Source: Author's work



04. CONCLUSIONS





→ There are clear indications that the Territorial and Administrative Reform and other policy and strategic developments on local governance appear to have now become an integral part of Albanian communities at large and the policy makers in particular. The local government units are well set and are beginning to see a smooth transition from the earlier relatively smaller territory. The shift over to a larger administrative structure, however, has brought along with it its own managerial, administrative and financial issues apart from socio-political challenges and grounding of policy and regulatory reforms that need further attention and focused inputs. Some of these are listed below and, if the new structure is to be optimally effective, giving these critical issues more focused attention becomes not only strategic but even imperative.

Services – Quality, Access and Citizen Satisfaction Levels: An important aim of local governments is to provide effective public services to its citizens. Mapping results for quality of services show a low rating by citizens. The aggregate satisfaction level stands at 46 points out of maximum 100, meaning even below the midpoint of evaluation scale. As with the other variables outlined below, differences in perceptions regarding the various components of service delivery between the citizens and the authorities are very stark, clearly reflecting a deep divide between the officials and the community. On the other hand, while there are no gender differences detected in these perceptions, these differences are very substantial between urban and rural/remote municipalities, clearly indicating that access to and quality of services are not up to the expected levels in rural and remote areas. Similarly, wealthier citizens – those belonging to the higher income groups – appear to be better served than their poorer counterparts. The perception is however, relatively better in accessing administrative services. Overall, municipal capacity to provide services has been constrained by infrastructure challenges, service delivery systems, human resource capacities and necessary financial resources. This is also linked to the fact that municipalities do not appear to have a clear vision on development and service delivery in their municipality.

Perception gaps between the Community and the Municipal Authorities: This is a major lacuna as substantial perception gaps between the demand (community) and the supply (municipal authorities), is seen across the governance dimensions. In almost all the municipalities, the community appears to be not fully aware of the plans drafted and developed at the municipal level. This was observed for the GLP and it is not very different with regard to the sectoral plans either. Apart from resulting in poor project implementation and follow up, this also accounted for the vast differences in the performance rating between the authorities and the community. A key reason for this major gap is that the information sharing systems in place were not being appropriately operationalized. This divergence was also evident with respect to community participation and engagement in planning and decision making, institutional consultation mechanisms, citizens' legal awareness measures, etc. It is more than apparent that in none of the municipalities did the citizens see themselves as partners, neither in governance nor in any of the development processes. On the contrary, they feel themselves distanced from

the municipal authorities as is evident from the vast differences in the ratings given by the local authorities and the citizens, where, on an average the citizens have rated 14 points lower than municipal officials across all the variables.

Gender Gap: In general, the findings have thrown up no significant gender differences across all the services and other relevant criteria on the governance dimension. Hence, whether male or female, it does not appear to make any significant difference to the access and use of services provided by the municipality. Nor does this variable have any significant impact on the level of participation in the governance and administrative set up of the municipality. However, the issue arises only at the higher echelons of governance, where women's representation and participation is substantially less than expected which has implications for influencing strategic decisions.

Plan implementation: It is interesting to note that the authorities and the functionaries rate this variable -- as they do with other variables which come directly under their supervision, control or general purview -- comparatively higher than the general population. Overall plan implementation has received an average rating with a significant margin of 19 points between the authorities and the community. The causes however, for the low level of implementation are several, key among them being lack of appropriate plans, low finances to fund these plans, and lack of active community participation and engagement. More importantly, most municipalities do not appear to have a clear long-term vision about their future development. Either the plans are missing or if they do exist they do not seem to be the moving force for the municipal operations.

Inter and Intra-Municipal coordination and cooperation: With regard to municipal coordination and cooperation, both horizontal cooperation and vertical cooperation are rather problematic and need specific intervention to reach optimal levels. The cooperation within the municipality lacks in terms of an integrated sectoral performance. Most departments are unaware of works done in other sectors, thus creating a vacuum in their potential collaboration.

Staff Capacity and Relevant Competencies: Insufficient human resources and lack of relevant competencies is a major concern across the board, particularly in the newly constituted municipalities post the territorial and administrative reform process. This, for obvious reasons, has had negative impact on the efficient and effective implementation of the plans and other operational issues. Among the key competency requirements in the newly established municipalities are: financial capacities, development and drafting of the GLPs, statistical and data analytical capacities, drafting of reports and project proposals and development of effective service delivery systems. In some cases, it is noted that due to emigration of the more qualified members of the local community, it is difficult to locally recruit the required staff to key administrative positions, which has direct impact on the quality of local governance.

Revenue Generation: There is a distinct wide variation in revenue generation among the municipalities. While some municipalities are doing well and generate as much as 88 per cent of their total revenue, there are others that do not even account for 10 per cent of theirs. Contributing factors to this weak fiscal autonomy include changes in tax regulations, lack of effective regulations for revenue generation, lack of trained and competent

staff within the municipalities to collect property tax and other taxes and local fees. This is more so in the newer and smaller municipalities. Another equally critical and contributing factor to the poor generation of local revenue is the poor and inaccurate maintenance of land records. Improvement in this area would naturally result in improvement in revenue collection from property and land assets. Further linked to this critical issue of tax collection is the poor and insufficient use of the GIS platform.

Insufficient Data and Statistics: This is a major gap in the administrative set up and appears to be another weak point in terms of managing and planning local affairs. Municipalities have a huge lack of data about their territory, their people, profile of local businesses, industry, agriculture etc. Even where there is some data, it is often found to be incomplete, insufficient and outdated for any well-informed decision making. Moreover, there is no system for their integration/linkage or a smooth way to retrieve them when needed. This, has long-term impact on land and property tax collection and revenue generation of the municipality from the larger perspective. The below par use of the GIS platform mentioned earlier reflects both the lack of proper infrastructure and lack of internal capacities (human resources) to put this facility to full use. Ensuring good statistics with suitable linkage to the GIS at each municipal level will have wide implications not only for providing reliable and accurate real time data (through data collection, data analysis and data utilization) for decision making but also for improving the overall quotient of local governance.

Transparency and Information flow: Albania has adopted one of the most ambitious legal frameworks in the world, regarding the right to information. However, the implementation of this legal framework remains problematic. There is a need to enforce this legislation and the role of the Coordinator for the Right of Information.⁵³ The appointment, according to the legislation, of the Coordinator of Notification and Public Consultation at the local level, is crucial in this aspect. For information sharing, several municipalities do have municipal official websites and use social media and other internet based mechanisms. The use and impact of these systems however varies from municipality to municipality. The urban-rural divide here is also very apparent in the ratings given, with the latter being less informed than the former. Lack of internet infrastructure and human capacities in the rural and remote areas need to be addressed.

It is also worth noting that while not optimal, wherever the administrative services are rendered transparently, people's experience with corruption seems lower indicating higher levels of integrity within the municipality. Hence, a high correlation was observed between transparency and lower levels of corruption. In recent years, the central government has undertaken several efforts to fight against corruption both in terms of national policies and strategies⁵⁴ as well as actual implementation of concrete steps (designing an online anti-corruption platform⁵⁵, approving the Law on Whistleblowers⁵⁶, the Integrated Citizens Service Centers etc.).

Accountability system: The oversight and control mechanisms over the local administration are rather insuffi-

53. <http://www.idp.al>

54. Crosscutting Strategy Against Corruption, 2015-2020, http://www.ceshtjetvendore.gov.al/files/pages_files/15-04-01-05-52-47Strategjia_antikorrupsion_2015-2020_dhe_plani_i_veprimit.pdf

55. www.stopkorrupsionin.al

56. Law No. 60/2016, on 'Whistleblowing and Whistleblowers Protection', <https://www.parlament.al/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ligj-nr.-60-dt.-2.6.2016.pdf>

cient especially with regard to the Citizen/Community/Civil Society dimension of the control. While Municipalities appear to rather “fear” and follow recommendations of the State Supreme Audit, there is little or no “fear” from the CSOs which can monitor and act like watchdogs for the local government activity. Municipal Councils have an important role in supervising the municipal activity. Overall this role is positively evaluated across municipalities although there is still room for improvement.

While the reporting lines are fairly well defined particularly in the larger municipalities – to some extent these are less so in the smaller municipalities, where there is no system to track the performance of the municipalities. The prevalent line reporting system, however laudable, has its own limitations as it is limited to merely reporting to the respective higher authorities with the sole purpose of assessing the performance of the specific individuals, and hence has little or no bearing on the assessment of project and service delivery performance. What is rather required is a system that helps assess and track the progress of project implementation as envisaged in the Annual Plans or Sector Plans and keep citizens informed. This system would be much in line with the provisions of the Transparency Law on Right to Information that requires the municipalities to use any or all forms of media to keep citizens informed about the plans and progress of implementation of these plans and services.

The Recourse Mechanism that is currently in place is given a rating that ranges from “average” to “good”. This system allows for filing of citizens’ complaints and assures a response to these complains. This system is, however, a bit weak in the smaller municipalities, which calls for a more structured process. At the same time, citizens’ accountability mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of public sector performance should be institutionalized. Mechanisms such as these would not only help improve compliance with the provisions of the Law, but it would also go a long way in enhancing citizens’ influence on decision making. In general, a variety of effective accountability systems need to be put in place for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

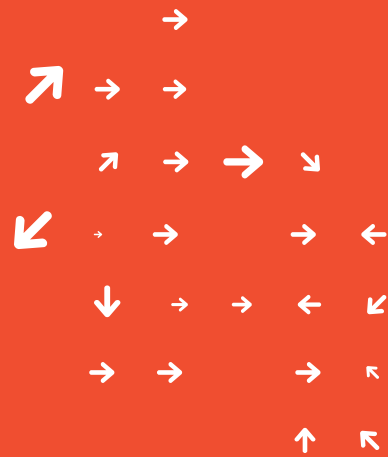
Participation and Citizen Engagement: The institutional framework for ensuring citizen participation in decision-making is not optimal. While there are laws in place, which emphasize and require citizen engagement in decision-making⁵⁷, there are issues with implementation at the institutional level. Community Councils, structures that are also required by the Law on Local Government, are not operational in many Municipalities.

Civil society Organizations and local governance: As far as CSOs are concerned, the ways of mutual cooperation with local governments on addressing specific local issues and contribute in local decision making are still very limited. For all practical purposes, first of all there are very few open forums within the municipalities in which CSOs can engage themselves and voice the concerns of the citizens. Secondly, in the smaller municipalities there appears to be a total absence of CSOs. This definitely is a major gap within the new structural set up and needs to be addressed by way of proactively filling this with viable alternatives, where both CSOs and local governments are coached, skilled and empowered to work together for stronger local good governance outcomes.

57. The law on the Right to Information and the Law on Public Consultation and Notification



05. RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD





→ Enhancing governance, popular engagement, transparency and accountability is a fundamental policy priority for any government. Albania also needs to strengthen institutions and overcome local governance gaps.

To actualize this vision, the National Cross-cutting Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance (NCS-DLG) 2015-2020 outlines among others enhancing effectiveness and efficiency of public services, transparency and accountability of the local government towards the community and increasing participation of the citizens and interest groups in the local government decision-making process. The Law on Local Self-Government puts a renewed emphasis on these principles and the responsibilities of the LGUs for enhancing local democracy and good governance. The Public Administration Reform strategy 2015-2020 provides the additional basis for advancing administrative efficiency and promotes adherence of public sector officials to principles of good governance to meet EU administrative standards. Other related regulatory reforms on Right to Information and Public Consultation reinforce the enabling environment.

Notwithstanding the efforts by the local administrations and the municipal authorities since the launch of the reform process, the nation-wide local governance mapping findings provide evidence of gaps in municipal planning, functional assignment, fiscal decentralization framework, local administration capacities and challenges faced in implementation. It also reveals inadequacies in delivery of quality services, inability of the administration to meet the growing expectations of citizens for public services and lack of performance standards as well as inadequacies in the level of information flow and access to information and accountability mechanisms. While few positive examples exist, the Government of Albania should take the local governance reforms and development to the next level for making LGUs effective, responsive and accountable institutions.

Given the Context and Conclusions of the Local Government Procurement, the four main areas identified, along which to address the findings in a structured way are the following:

1. Policy and regulatory reform related interventions
2. Local governments' capacities for improved service delivery
3. Bottom-up transparency and accountability mechanisms
4. Sustainable and effective mechanism for citizen engagement

I. Policy and regulatory reform related interventions

The development outcomes are linked with municipal competencies and hence efforts may be required for a fair distribution of competencies along with resources for better planning and impact.

Firstly, fiscal decentralization reforms need to be advanced. Local government resources/funds should be commensurate with their function and weaker local government units should be protected through fiscal equalization measures by intergovernmental transfers to compensate for the unequal revenue potential

and to rectify imbalances across municipalities. The municipal fiscal space needs to be enhanced to create equitable and predictable financial resources for implementation of municipal plans and projects. The adoption of the new Law on Local Finances is a major contribution in this direction, however, its implementation and effect should be closely monitored.

There is also a need for creating better linkages between municipal development plans, MTBP and the Regional Development Fund for realistic planning. Thus, the allocation of the Regional Development Fund, which provides for a large number of competencies held by the local governments should be addressed. This may need to be coupled with other reforms on land registry system and use of GIS for better appreciation and harnessing of local revenue potentials.

Secondly, for local administration to be effective, the full application of the law on civil servants needs to be ensured. There is a need to ensure optimal utilization of human resources in the administration of the restructured municipalities. Adequate resources are needed to implement the staff training plans in the newly restructured municipalities.

Thirdly, implementation mechanisms of the two critical legislations on Public Consultation and Right to Information must be reinforced through allocation of adequate financial resources, human resources, skill development and awareness raising about their implications at municipal and administrative unit levels.

II. Capacity strengthening strategies for local administration, councilors and Mayors in improving service delivery organization and performance management of key services.

Given the gaps between the perceptions of municipal officials and citizens about local governance and service delivery, improving the responsiveness of the local administration for provision of public services will enhance government-citizen interface. This will require overcoming institutional weaknesses, improving planning and use of public funds and efficiency in organization and delivery of services.

(i) Leadership development: An effective civil service is important to translate the goals of its political leaders into programmes of action and manage the implementation of the policies, front-line service provision and report on progress. Any capacity development effort for local governments and administration should call for engagement of national and international partners to have a coordinated approach based on new local government law, decentralization and public administration strategies as well as territorial and administrative reform.

Mapping results on capacity gaps of local administration need to be seen in light of the overall operating environment. It needs to be appropriately appreciated that the current crop of local authorities should align to a new culture of partnership and decentralization of power for people's empowerment. Any training, therefore, must aim at changing the attitudes and mind set of the local authorities. It should focus on the

development of new competencies within which municipalities and municipal councils must operate, the new roles to be played, and accountability and networking mechanisms.

Additionally, peer networks of cross-party mayors and departmental heads across the municipalities should be created to exchange notes and learn from each other about their different leadership styles or other innovations. It may also be worthwhile to invite influential and impactful municipal leaders from the neighboring countries for motivational dialogue with the Albanian municipal leaders.

The overall approach should entail greater use of the training system, leadership of domestic partners in mentoring (champions from within the government system), peer-to-peer support, use of regional and municipal association and increased exposure (through twinning arrangements) to local governance capacity development initiatives for service delivery models in other EU countries.

Further, inter-municipal common knowledge sharing dialogue platform should be institutionalized. As some municipalities or local authority champions within municipalities have higher capacity or demonstrated service delivery models, transparency initiatives implemented in municipalities, they could create peer-to-peer networks and support in mentoring other municipalities. The accumulated knowledge and skills in the partner local governments will be strengthened by their continuous application in practice and expanding transfer of the knowledge and experience to a broader group of local governments.

(ii) Participatory planning and budgeting skills and systems: As planning, implementation and monitoring of the exercise of its own functions is an exclusive competence of the municipality, it needs to have full capacity to deliver on the same. The mindset of the civil servants needs to evolve to adjust to new ways of planning, budgeting and providing services. Preparation of effective plans, participatory planning and budgeting appear to be areas where they lack skills and require support for increasing effectiveness.

Building on previous initiatives in this area, training of key local administrative officials should be conducted in development of comprehensive local strategies (especially the general local plan, sectoral plans) and budgets based on the legal frameworks and municipality policies and procedures. Those municipalities that have not developed such Plans (GLP) should prioritize and prepare it with external support and resources. Those municipalities that have adopted such plans should develop adequate structures for their implementation, and give their own planning departments the required authority and resources to supervise its implementation. This may require additional support to the development of simplified and unified planning guidelines (if non-existent) for use by the local administration.

Development of capacities in preparing effective plans should include skill development on participatory planning processes and on engagement with CSOs, private sector and citizens (women, other vulnerable groups) as well as in participatory budgeting processes. Experiences in PB of Elbasan should be widely shared with other municipalities. This could also involve undertaking mock or real-life trainings in participatory budgeting approaches and enable discussion and voting on spending priorities, making spending proposals, as well as showing ways to give local people a role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the process

and results to inform subsequent decisions on an annual or recurrent basis. Capacity development support is also essential for good quality project preparation for accessing funding channels.

Additionally, for better planning, data gaps must be addressed. Linking the data with the territory has become a must in the decision making for all governments today. That is why a GIS system, which links the territory with the relevant databases should become a required norm by the municipalities. Hence, municipalities need to invest in creating a GIS platform integrated with the statistics they produce and own. Creating dedicated structure for data collection and processing should be a priority for municipalities. Such structure should be well organized and with a clear mandate to use other municipal resources to collect, verify and validate the required data. Each administrative unit should be responsible and required to “fuel” data from their units to the municipal sector of statistics. Such a structure that deal with statistical and GIS platform could be under the “same roof” in the municipal structure and closely linked with the implementation of the GLP.

(iii). Service delivery systems: Based on the competencies of the local governments, the local administration at the municipality level and in administrative units should be supported to develop service delivery standards and systems around key service priorities. A few illustrative elements are outlined below.

a. An outcome or result-oriented service delivery system should be developed to improve the effectiveness of the service competencies devolved to the local governments. A results-oriented approach would require orienting all aspects of planning and management on outcomes rather than on process. This represents a new way of thinking and managing that needs to be reflected in all aspects of local government management. It is also important to understand that performance-based transfers are effective in improving service delivery. Thus, performance indicators are required for a potential link to the financial transfer system. However, these systems should be properly balanced with other performance-enhancement instruments, good leadership and management.

b. There is a need for strategic assessment and planning of appropriate and effective forms of public and administrative service delivery mechanisms specific to each particular municipal territory. Municipal administrations must choose those delivery options that would ensure maximum benefit and efficiency within their unique context. They might need technical assistance for developing appropriate organizational models or appropriate delivery options such as PPP, corporatization, partnership with CBOs and NGOs, IMC or use of public enterprises as per their needs and resource availability with the restructured municipalities. Cooperation between local government units and a third party is provided for and encouraged under the law on local government for improving service delivery. The IMC has been an important instrument to drive reforms and service delivery in EU countries. It is critical for addressing issues of scale, learnings and supporting service delivery across differently sized municipalities. It can become a channel for accessing EU funds. More IMC initiatives could be supported based on similar municipal plan priorities of adjoining municipalities and could focus on mutual benefits in service delivery, local economic development or environment protection. Local innovations in service provisioning in the municipalities may translate or feed into nationwide reforms.

As part of this, e-services through one-stop-shop (OSS) should also be expanded in the local government units. The use of e-Governance tools for various aspects of public service delivery is a good option for countries that want to gain competitive advantage as such use provides faster and more reliable services for citizens and businesses and enhances the level of transparency.

c. Owing to lack of effective public service assessment systems, it is an important area for support. The local self-governance law underlines the need for service standards. The law on right to information also mandates services public authorities to inform public about the quality of service standards. To measure service delivery effectiveness, it will need to develop a performance standard system (with standards/indicators) covering for instance, level of reach and accessibility by the particular service, affordability and quality, equity (especially gender equity), overall satisfaction of citizens, financial and administrative cost effectiveness and sustainability including environmental sustainability. These measures are also in line with the Law on Local Self-government and the Strategy on Decentralization and Local Governance. For each of the indicators, a benchmark will need to be set and various parameters may need to be factored in.

Benchmarking is an important instrument for comparing and evaluating performance in a more objective way. It can also help in determining challenges between processes and performance of delivering services. The importance of good and reliable information systems cannot be emphasized for the operational effectiveness of benchmarking. It may be worthwhile for local governments to explore participation of civil society and business stakeholders in setting benchmarks. The local governments can repeat the assessment at suitable intervals to monitor performance as well as to determine if information gathered through benchmarking has been used to improve performance (monitoring of the implementation of improvements plans). The data can be used to conduct inter-municipal comparisons.

d. While gender equity in service access appears to be less of an issue, urban-rural polarity is substantial. Ensuring equity in provision of quality public goods and services can help equalize opportunities, allow individuals to increase human capital such as education, health and skills; and financial capital. Thus, once the rural inhabitants, minority groups or other vulnerable groups are provided with their equitable share of resources, they can utilize their skills to participate in the formal labor market. Similarly, the social protection systems including safety nets need to be better targeted as they act as mechanism of equity, redistributing resources to the most vulnerable to avoid extreme deprivation in outcomes as in the case of Roma and Egyptians, or the poor, disabled.

The municipality must look at the interests of all in their jurisdiction especially the former communes and any minority or vulnerable groups who may be left behind, else it could lead to inefficient allocation of resources and further entrenchment of existing inequalities over time. It has been proven that the provision of quality public goods and services as a means of leveling the playing field and reducing poverty has been unambiguous. Thus, it is essential that these marginalized groups are better represented in the participatory platforms for policy making, municipal planning, priority setting and spending plans. Any service delivery mechanisms must consider the special requirements of these groups and include equity indicators in service standards.

III. Transparency and integrity mechanisms within local administration and citizen accountability mechanisms.

To make the top-down and horizontal accountability more effective, bottom-up accountability is equally critical. Hence, improving citizen engagement and participation at the municipal and administrative unit levels need to be further reinforced and strengthened. The local governance findings further underline the need for strengthening transparency and accountability measures.

There is a strong need for creating a culture of accountability and learning through the formal institutionalization of an inbuilt tracking and monitoring system to ensure a regular and periodic review and assessment of performance progress on projects and plan implementation, followed by the application of the lessons learned through this mechanism. Additionally, training, coaching and mentoring to dedicated municipal staff need to be undertaken for promoting monitoring of results. Further, for the accountability system to be effective it is imperative to coordinate very closely with a statistical system.

Equally critical is the role of the municipal councilors who need to be actively involved in the periodic and regular review of the progress made on the implementation of the municipal plans. There is also a need to make municipal council meetings public through conventional or innovative channels.

Another dimension for improving accountability of municipal departments is citizen complaints management and redressal mechanisms. A unified form of complaints management system needs to be designed following a database system which allows not only to track the complaints but also to categorize and analyze their typology for future policy development.

In a decentralized system, it may be reiterated that one needs to recognize that vertical accountability is a reality and growing phenomenon, where ordinary citizens are increasingly involved in voicing their discontent and hold government accountable for their policies and programmes, whenever their confidence in public institutions is undermined. The crucial role that the citizens can play in supporting the local governments to monitor service delivery and plan implementation, can never be overestimated. This is because of the close proximity of the local municipal inhabitants to the ground realities. Voice and participation of such citizens' representations and forums like CSOs, citizen advisory commissions⁵⁸, women's groups, youth councils⁵⁹, minority rights groups, should be encouraged for making the governments/authorities accountable. In this regard, it will be good to learn from the citizen advisory commissions set up in a few Albanian municipalities, such as for example Korça.

Making information available through transparency initiatives is an important first step towards increasing accountability. Without the necessary information on government decisions or responsibilities, de-

58. Citizen Advisory Commissions established in Fier, Vlore, Patos, Korce, Elbasan can be further replicated.

59. The engagement of youth in decision making should be made on a regular basis through establishing a Youth Council in each municipality for monitoring local administration work and tackling relevant issues concerning youth.

velopment plans and budgets etc. citizens have no basis to hold government accountable. Increasing the availability of reliable information such as generating evidence on the performance of public services and increasing the accessibility of that information is fundamental to promoting greater accountability and government responsiveness. In this regard, the capacity and authority of the Coordinator for the Right to Information needs to be reinforced so that citizens have appropriate access to the relevant information. A systematic monitoring and positive pressure over the municipalities to implement the legal provision for the appointment of the Coordinator and the establishment of the Transparency Program should be conducted by the Commissioner for the Right to Information.

New digital technologies and social media platforms have amplified the possibilities for information dissemination. In rural areas, however, use of print media needs to be enhanced while internet infrastructure is being built and experiences of Korca and Elbasan municipalities in disseminating information through magazines and newspapers could be emulated. Digitalization of the municipal plans, budgets would also help to increase transparency of local governments.

The existence of the official municipal websites in 44 municipalities should be expanded to all municipalities through a possible coordinated effort, ensuring the finalization of these websites under a similar platform and similar standards. Information about local governance laws, municipal plans, projects, activities, budgets, expenditures, etc. should be published through several dissemination mechanisms but the website should be a focal point for such dissemination.

Local government units should use new and innovative local systems and mechanisms based on the national anti-corruption framework to further support their effectiveness in preventing any potential corrupt practice within the municipal structures. Besides, there are other equally effective mechanisms in place that can be emulated by other municipalities, for instance, municipalities could have a telephone number published so that citizens can denounce corrupt practices, while preserving anonymity.

IV. Creation of sustainable and effective mechanisms for citizen and CSO engagement with local authorities.

The *Legal Framework on the Notification and Public Consultation* has legislated development of participatory structures. The local government law also provides for community structures at local level. The Local Governance Mapping results shows citizen participation and civic engagement to be the weakest in the governance dimensions of Albanian municipalities.

Citizen participation through direct participation and deliberation or through social organizations can improve expressions of collective action. Firstly, given that the presence of CSOs/NGOs is limited outside the capital, it is important for local authorities to recognize that there are alternative ways, such as citizens' forums, community advisory councils, etc., that can be promoted.

Community councils and other citizen engagement mechanisms should be treated as an important vehicle to mobilize citizens around specific issues. The mobilization can bring in new demands and interests into the bargaining space, reshaping the preference of actors and expanding the boundaries of neglected issues. Unless these existing forums are empowered appropriately, improvements in service quality may just remain desirable. Mechanisms such as dedicated space in some municipalities official websites ('Improve my city')⁶⁰ or innovative smart phone applications ('My Tirana')⁶¹ could also be extended across all 61 municipalities covering all municipal territory for seeking citizen inputs.

Effective and inclusive participation should precede legal awareness of citizens on their rights and obligations and on various new regulatory reforms encouraging participation. Information and awareness raising campaigns should be organized periodically with this aim. Open public meetings with the municipality should also plan for special section/segments with the legal department where new legislation and regulatory changes are discussed with the public.

The existing CSOs' capacities should be strengthened to engage in a meaningful way with local governments, especially in smaller municipalities. There should be some mechanism to motivate and promote the CSOs in these areas. One such mechanism is the Agency for Support of Civil Society (AMSHC) which should prioritize the funding for capacity building of CSOs and also for supporting specific projects of CSOs in these areas. Also, Local administrations must have an exhaustive list of CSOs and groups operating within their territory and notify them about municipal public hearings or events. Such a practice can augment CSOs capability to lobby and advocate to influence local government planning and decision-making.

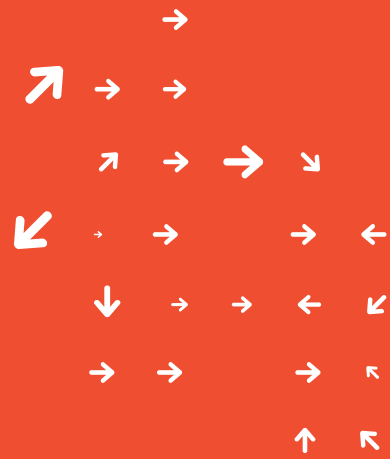
Participatory budgeting, earlier referred to should be pursued building on best practices (for instance, Elbasan municipality). This process will help CSOs and citizens to participate in the allocation of at least part of the local government's available financial resources or participate in scoring of schemes of the local governments to decide on most relevant priorities. Use of internet may also be tried out in some municipalities where it is feasible. However, offline participation is also important to ensure that rural inhabitants, women, other vulnerable groups are able to effectively participate in influencing the local budgeting process. These processes would help the local administrators to support inclusive planning and consultative processes and determine citizens'/peoples' priorities and reflect the same in the local plans and budget allocations.

60. 'Improve my municipality' would be a more appropriate term

61. <http://www.tirana.al/aplikacioni-tirana-ime/>



Annexes



→ Annex A: Key demographic indicators of Albanian Municipalities

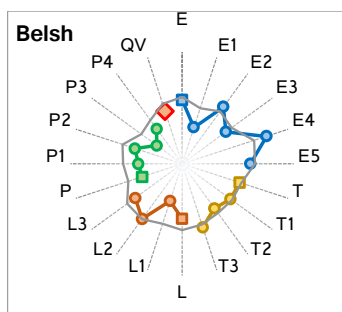
Table 5. Key Demographic indicators of Albanian Municipalities

	Number of Administrative Units	Number of Cities	Number of Villages	Surface (km ²)	Population – Census 2011	Density (people per km ²)
Cluster 1 - Nord	137	32	1,055	10,781	964,199	89
1 Bulqizë	8	2	63	710	31,210	44
2 Dibër	15	1	141	881	61,619	70
3 Durrës	6	3	39	331	175,110	529
4 Fushë Arrës	5	1	35	534	7,405	14
5 Kamëz	2	1	14	38	104,190	2,742
6 Klos	4	1	30	331	16,618	50
7 Krujë	6	2	50	357	59,814	168
8 Krumë	4	1	29	400	16,790	42
9 Kukës	15	1	87	928	47,985	52
10 Kurbin	4	3	27	291	46,291	159
11 Lezhë	10	2	65	506	65,633	130
12 Malësi e Madhe	6	2	56	961	30,823	32
13 Mat	8	1	46	516	27,600	53
14 Mirditë	7	4	81	909	22,103	24
15 Pukë	5	1	41	505	11,069	22
16 Shijak	4	1	25	93	27,861	300
17 Shkodër	11	1	93	879	135,612	154
18 Tropojë	8	2	68	1,042	20,517	20
19 Vau i Dejës	6	1	47	491	30,438	62
20 Vorë	3	1	18	80	25,511	319
Cluster 2 - Center	135	22	1,170	10,123	1,259,440	124
21 Belsh	5	1	34	187	19,503	104
22 Berat	5	1	50	416	60,031	144
23 Cërrik	5	1	28	174	27,445	158
24 Devoll	5	1	44	456	26,716	59
25 Elbasan	13	1	116	857	141,714	165
26 Gramsh	10	1	94	730	24,231	33
27 Kolonjë	8	2	76	806	11,070	14
28 Korçë	8	1	62	815	75,994	93
29 Kucovë	4	1	31	178	31,262	176

30	Librazhd	7	1	52	810	31,892	39
31	Maliq	7	1	80	697	41,757	60
32	Peqin	6	1	50	204	26,136	128
33	Pogradec	8	1	72	609	61,530	101
34	Polican	3	1	26	286	10,953	38
35	Prrenjas	4	1	25	323	24,906	77
36	Pustec	1	-	9	179	3,290	18
37	Roskovec	4	1	14	120	21,742	181
38	Rrogozhinë	5	1	32	230	22,148	96
39	Skrapar	9	1	106	801	12,403	15
40	Tiranë	14	2	135	1,089	557,422	512
41	Ura Vajgurore	4	1	34	157	27,295	174
Cluster 3 - South		101	19	773	7,439	576,499	77
42	Delvinë	2	1	17	200	7,598	38
43	Divjakë	5	1	39	283	34,254	121
44	Dropull	3	-	41	448	3,503	8
45	Fier	10	1	85	636	120,655	190
46	Finiq	5	-	58	437	10,529	24
47	Gjirokastrë	7	1	38	473	28,673	61
48	Himarë	3	1	24	536	7,818	15
49	Kavajë	5	1	32	206	40,094	195
50	Këlcyrë	4	1	48	271	6,113	23
51	Konispol	3	1	13	229	8,245	36
52	Libohovë	3	1	17	227	3,667	16
53	Lushnje	11	1	85	380	83,659	220
54	Mallakastër	9	1	41	337	27,062	80
55	Memaliaj	6	1	53	374	10,657	28
56	Patos	3	1	18	90	22,959	255
57	Përmet	5	1	51	608	10,614	17
58	Sarandë	2	1	5	51	20,227	397
59	Selenicë	6	1	47	595	16,396	28
60	Tepelenë	4	1	24	446	8,949	20
61	Vlorë	5	2	37	614	104,827	171
TOTAL		373	73	2,998	28,343	2,800,138	99

Source: Author's work

→ Annex B. Municipalities Score versus Average Score

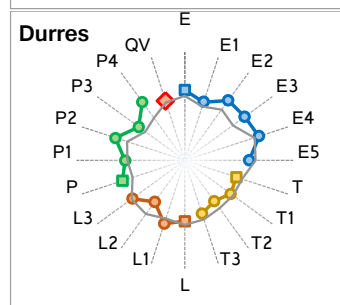
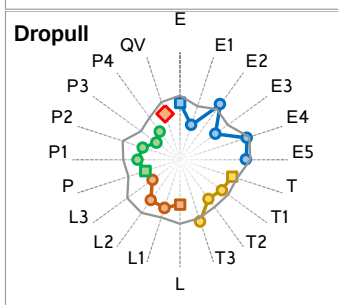
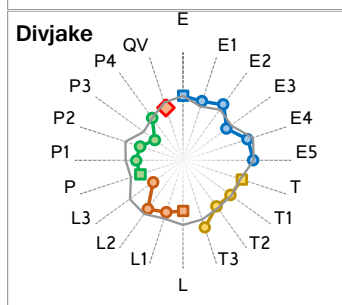
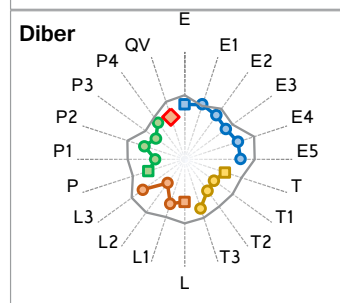
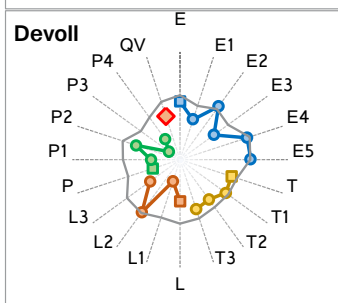
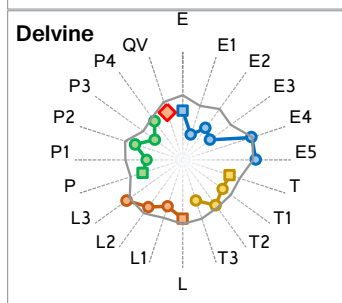
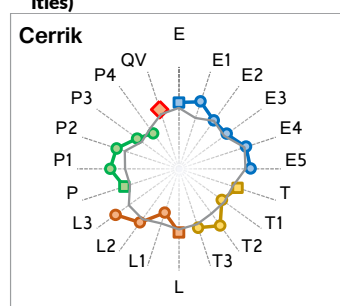
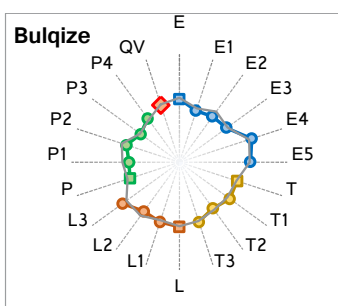
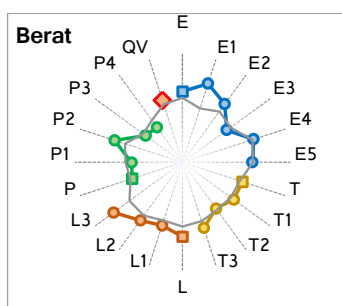


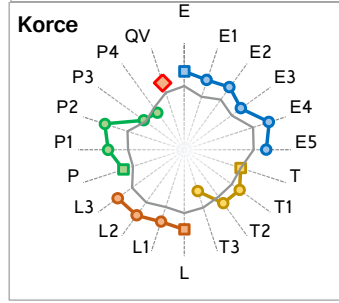
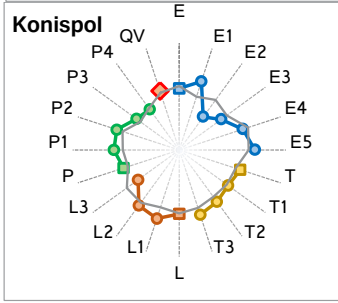
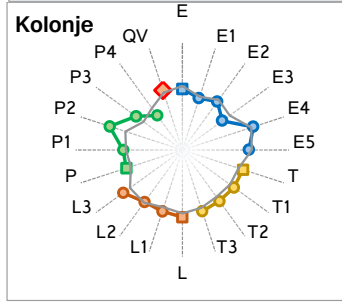
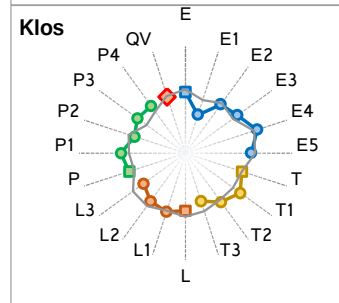
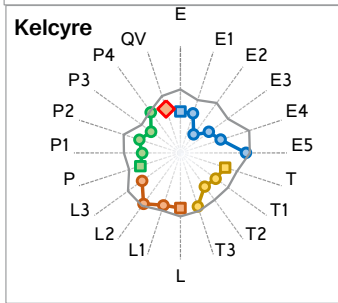
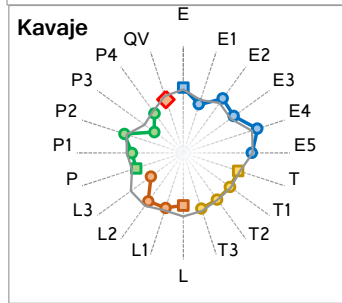
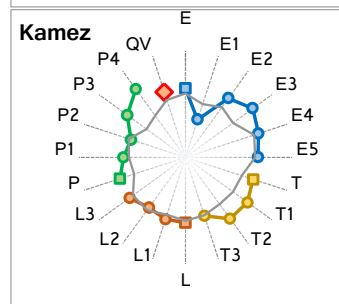
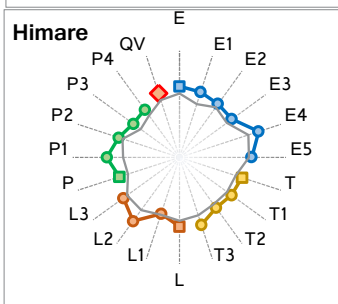
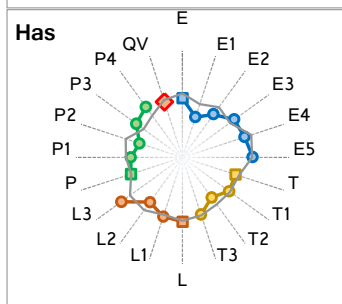
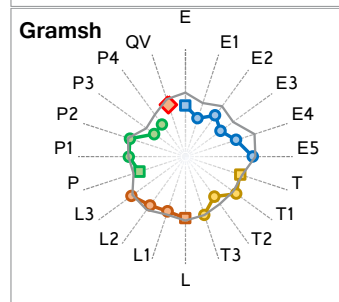
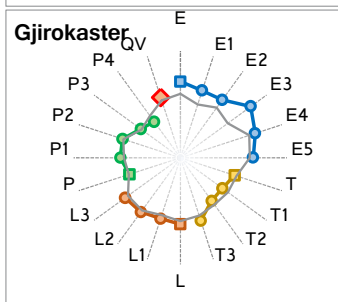
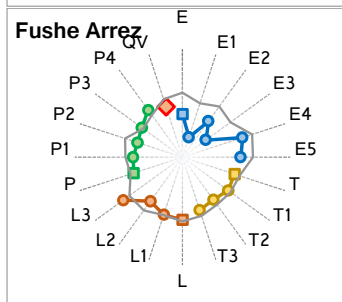
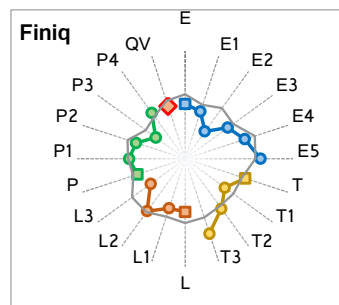
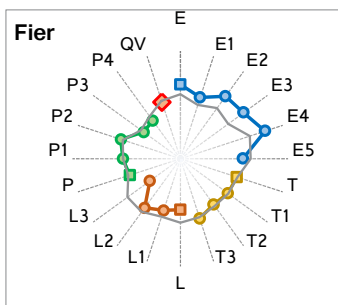
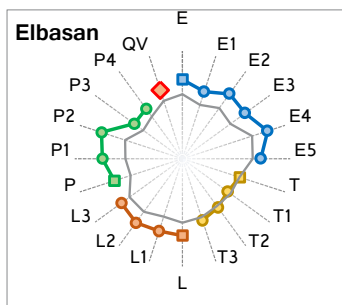
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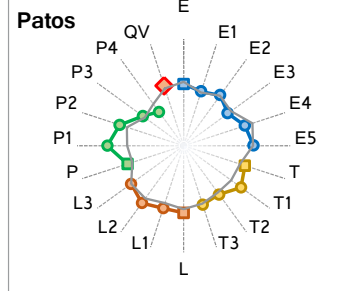
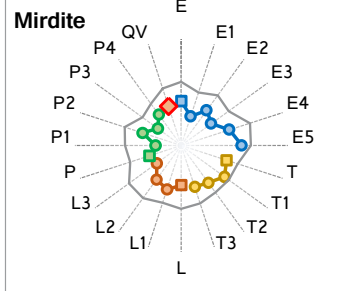
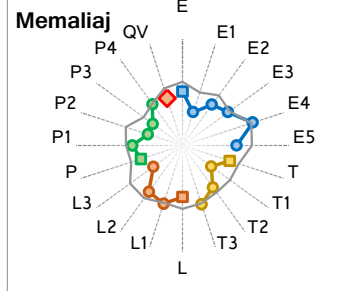
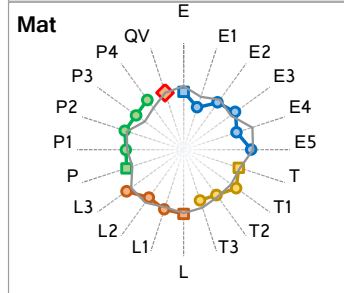
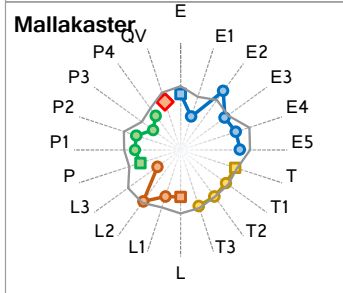
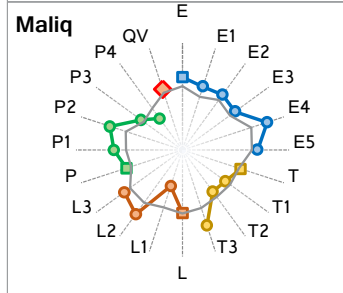
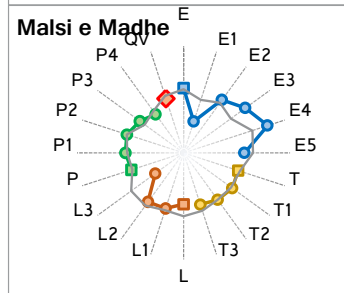
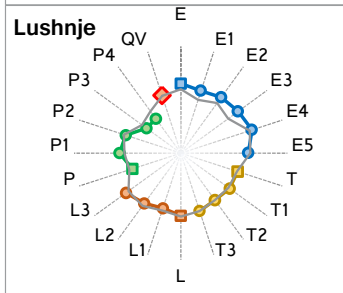
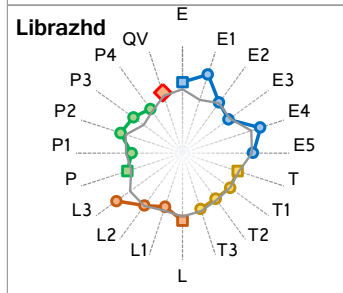
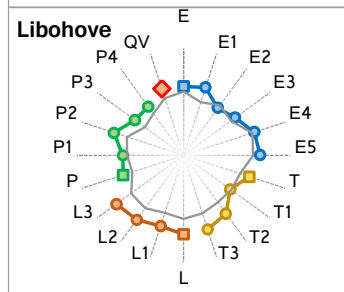
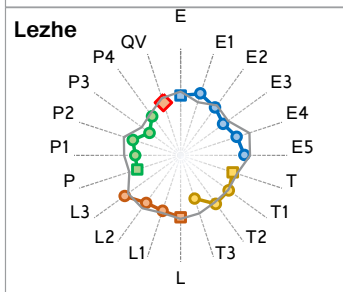
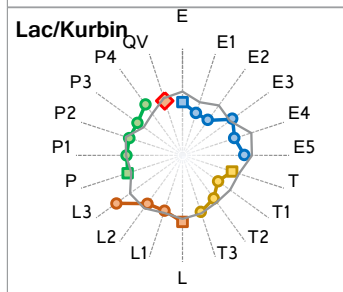
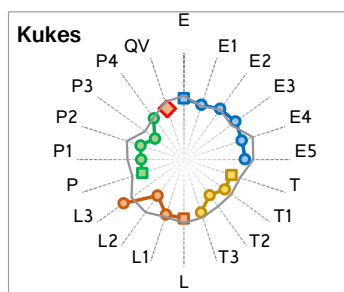
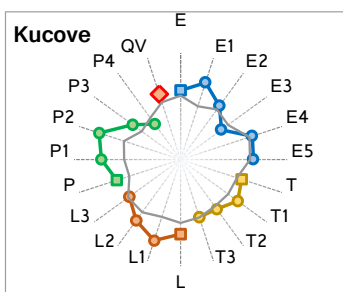
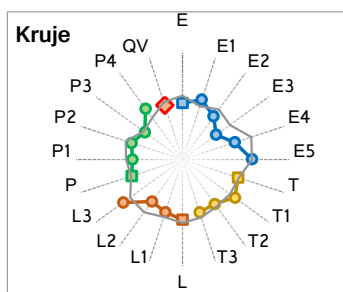
E - Effectiveness & Efficiency
E1 - Clear vision and participatory and inclusive planning
E2 - Financial Management
E3 - Informed Decision-Making
E4 - Cooperation with third parties
E5 - Satisfaction towards services
T - Transparency & Rule of Law
T1 - Transparent and accessible information
T2 - Rule of Law
T3 - Corruption

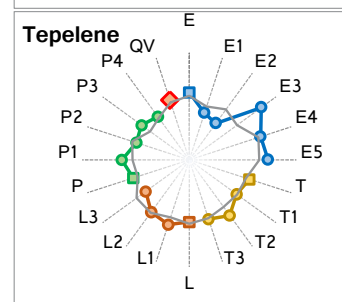
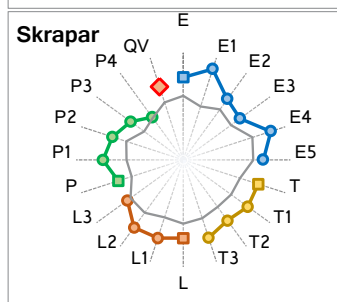
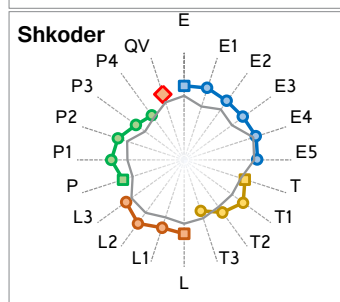
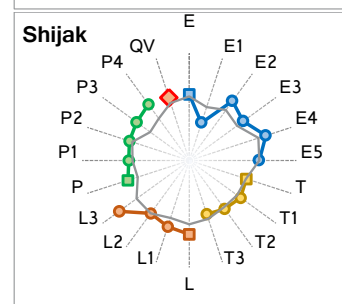
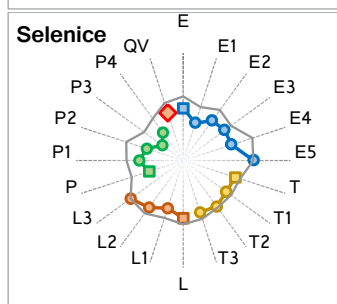
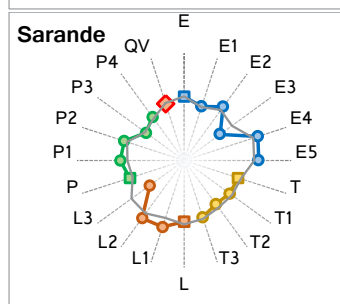
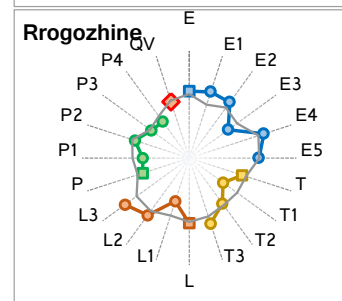
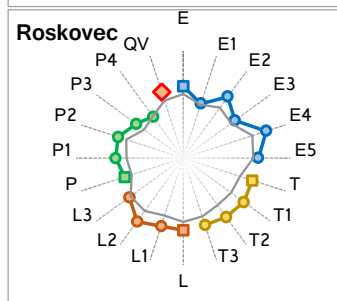
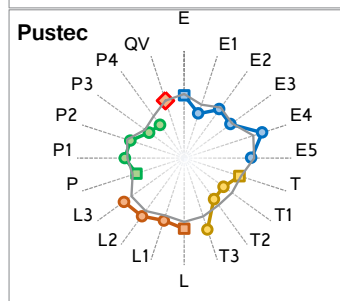
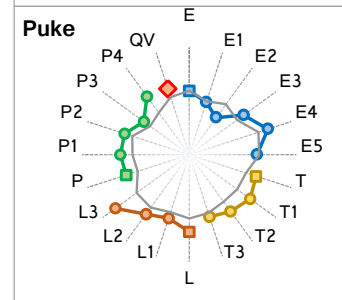
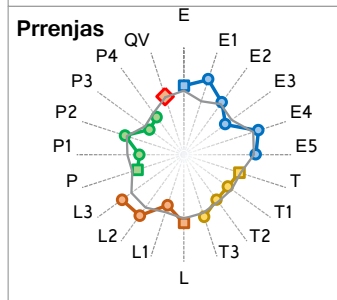
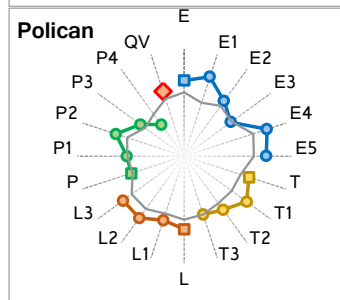
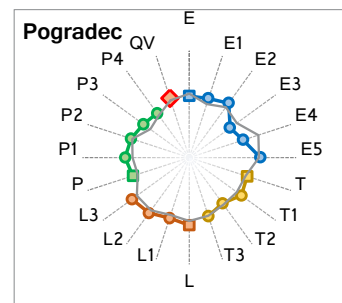
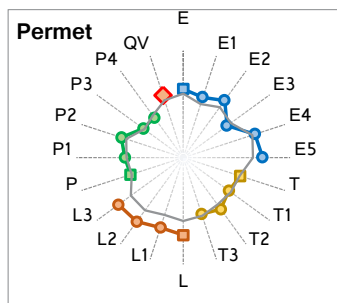
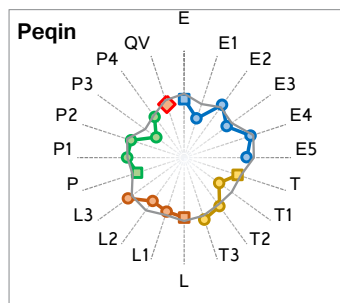
L - Accountability
L1 - Control mechanisms
L2 - Communication and Reaction
L3 - Government's Responsiveness
P - Participation and Citizen Engagement
P1 - Institutional Framework
P2 - Involvement of all stakeholders
P3 - Citizen Engagement
P4 - Civic Engagement
QV - Overall score: Local Government Mapping

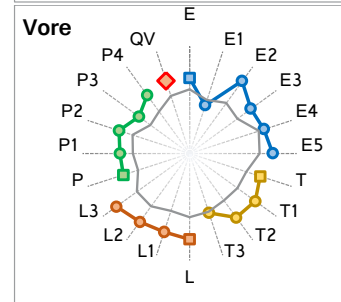
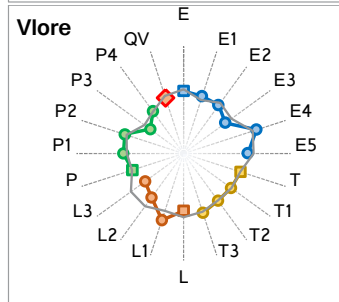
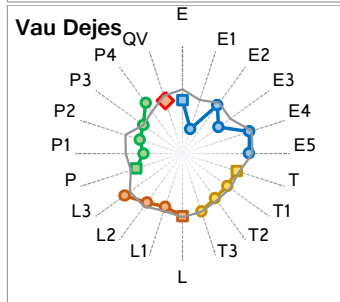
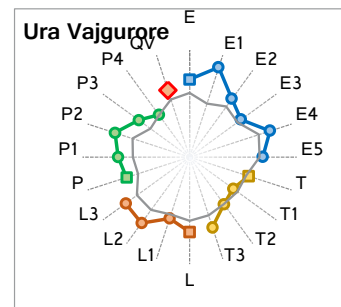
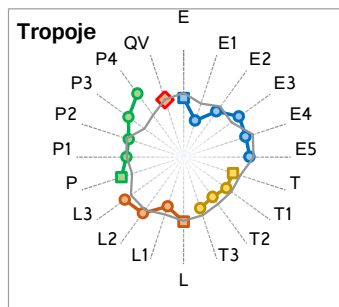
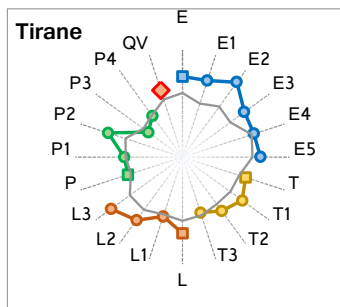
— Average National Score (61 Municipalities)











→ Annex C. Overall Municipalities Dashboard

Municipality	Effectiveness & Efficiency	Vision and strategic planning	Financial Management	Informed Decision-Making	Cooperation with third parties	Satisfaction towards services	Transparency & Rule of Law	Transparent and accessible information	Rule of Law	Corruption	Accountability	Control mechanisms	Communication and Reaction	Government's Responsiveness	Participation and Citizen Engagement	Institutional Framework	Involvement of all stakeholders	Citizen Engagement	Civic engagement	Overall score: Local Government Mapping
Belsh																				
Berat																				
Bulqizë																				
Cerrik																				
Delvine																				
Devoll																				
Diber																				
Divjake																				
Dropull																				
Durres																				
Elbasan																				
Fier																				
Finiq																				
Fushe Arrez																				
Gjirokastr																				
Gramsh																				
Has																				
Himare																				
Kamez																				
Kavajë																				
Kelcyre																				
Klos																				
Kolonje																				
Konispol																				
Korce																				
Kruje																				
Kucove																				
Kukes																				
Lac																				
Lezhe																				
Libohovë																				
Librazhd																				
Lushnje																				
Malesie e Madhe																				
Maliq																				
Mallakastr																				
Mat																				
Memaliaj																				
Mirdite																				
Patos																				
Peqin																				
Permet																				
Pogradec																				
Polican																				
Prrerjas																				
Puke																				
Pustec																				
Roskovec																				
Rrogozhine																				
Sarandë																				
Selenice																				
Shijak																				
Shkoder																				
Skrapar																				
Tepelene																				
Tirane																				
Tropoje																				
Ura e Vajgurore																				
Vau Dejës																				
Vlore																				
Vore																				

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