

## The Singleness of Increasing the Involvement of the Deaf into Decision-Making in Municipalities in the Republic of Lithuania

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### Abstract

Surveys implemented in the municipalities of the biggest Lithuanian cities in 2013-2014 have indicated the main reasons for the insufficient inclusion of the deaf into the decision-making in municipalities in the Republic of Lithuania. The singleness for the improvement of the situation in municipalities has been modelled on the base of the mentioned results by activating all budgetary and public organisations operating under the Board of Municipality as well as Administration.

**Keywords:** participatory government, institutional mechanisms, legal mechanisms, participation of the deaf in decision-making

### Introduction

The participatory government within the context of the new public administration suggests the search for new forms enabling the participation of citizens in the process of decision-making as well as requires the assessment of the differences of social groups with a greater attention to the dispersion of the powers of the government and a reduction of the reasons for social inequality (C. Davies, 2007, p. 52). In the other words, the important premise for the participatory government is the *openness of the process of the decision-making for different interested parties* with the formation of favourable as well as equal possibilities for each person to form their own dispositions, include issues in the public agenda, and to state arguments for one or another decision. Empowering the exclusion groups to participate within the formation of the public policy reflects the aim of a good government – to ensure that the policy and state institutions respond to the needs of all citizens.

Today participation is perceived as an important aid attempting to ensure that interests of all groups (in this case the deaf) were considered upon the decision-making on the levels of the state and the local government, and different approaches were reconsidered. The policy of integrating the disabled into the public life, implemented in Lithuania, together with reforms of the public government of the last year

with an aim to develop the higher qualifications of staff in the public governance by responding to expectations of the society, partially evidence the approval of the attitude of scientists that the inclusion of citizens into the state government as well as the effectiveness of this process is determined by the *attitude of staff in government, self-government institutions towards interests of the society*, their activation, the wish of civil servants as well as their ability to communicate with citizens, spread information concerning activity of governmental institutions, and their problems by inviting citizens to discuss (Viesojos administravimo efektyvumas, 2007, p. 334); i.e. *the human factor is not less important next to institutional and legal mechanisms* upon the organisation of the processes of participation.

Upon recognition of participation as the tool for the formation of the social capital as well as one of the main conditions for the promotion of the sociality and the development of vertical and horizontal links in the society, this process often offers and stresses the importance of the activity of NGOs and other public organisations (Revuckaite, 2013, p. 7), as well as *mutual interaction between governmental and public institutions*. Public organisations as the organised networked expression of the social actions (Pilietskumas ir pilietinė visuomenė, 2012, p.11) can implement what cannot be done by other operating institutions and networks. They, in collaboration with support from international foundations for support and cooperation, information and other resources, encourage social changes (Helmut, 1990, p. 9; Bebbington, 2004). When working on international, national and/or local levels, they, being less dependent from processes and regulated by legal acts, may help the local-government institutions implement processes of inclusion of the disabled into the political life in a more rapid and flexible way. Firstly, by gathering, educating, informing, and activating the deaf as well as representing them if needed. When perceiving this, the municipalities should be interested

in strengthening non-governmental organisations, gathering and activating the disabled.

Even though the participation of citizens in the local-governance in Lithuania as one of the priority issues is openly encouraged, **the deaf as the special cultural/linguistic minority** is not given a sufficient amount of attention. This topic has not been developed in scientific research. Upon generalisation of scientific works that are prepared on the issues of the deaf, we can state that there are many works analysing reasons of deafness and the education of the deaf within educational system (Alisauskas, 1996; 2003; Morozova, 1996; Barzdonyte-Morkeviciene, 2000; Burkauskiene, 2008; Mitkus, 2008 et al.); however, issues of their integration into the civil life, politics, and decision-making as the right given to all citizens of the democratic state have just recently attracted the attention of scientists (Mejere, Petrylaite, 2012; Petrylaite, 2012; Kvietkiene, 2014); these surveys are supported by international foundations and the Board of Science of the Republic of Lithuania.

Following the example of other democratic states, the Republic of Lithuania has recently developed rather favourable legal and institutional mechanisms for the integration of the deaf into public life, and positive experiences are observed (Vilnius, Kaunas). Are they effective, are they enough, and do they satisfy the need of the community of the deaf to feel full? How do institutions of the local governance participate in these processes? Have all possibilities been used in order to achieve the inclusion of this part of the society into the decision-making? The presentation of these and similar questions in the scientific environment, answers to which required scientific surveys, could contribute to the further development of the participatory government in municipalities. Upon selecting the level of the municipality for the survey, we pay attention to institutions that are the closest to the disabled that, from one point, are enabled and interested in the activation of the participatory government of citizens, but on the other hand, can get the fastest feedback concerning the effectiveness of applied aids, depending on the size of the deaf community and to look for ways to improve their activeness.

*Aim of this article* is to model trends for the development of the participatory government in municipalities on the basis of generalised results that were obtained upon the assessment of working conditions and possibilities of the institution of different levels operating in the territory of the municipality for the encouragement of the participation of the deaf in the civil activity.

In order to attain the aim, the following *tasks* have been formed:

1. To generalise the insights of scientists as well as the legal base of the Republic of Lithuania on empowering the participation of the deaf in local self-government.
2. After the generalisation of scientific surveys on the issue of the participation of the deaf in the civil life as well as problems of the poor participation, to analyse the interactions of structures (sign language interpretation centres, municipality and other public institutions), operating in municipalities of the Republic of Lithuania by encouraging and gathering the deaf to participate in civil and municipal institutional activity.

**The presented surveys covered the following methods:** scientific literature analysis as well as analysis of legal acts, generalisation, complex survey of the deaf in city municipalities of the Republic of Lithuania (anonymous questionnaire for the deaf with the data processing by aids of SPSS 20,0; partially structured expert interview the data of which was analysed by aids of the content analysis), modelling.

The article supports the systemic approach; i.e. decision-making on the integration of the deaf is perceived as the process containing features of a system (interrelated, constantly interacting components (their groups) for the achievement of the aim and affected by external micro as well as macro environments, where each component is important) and therefore the efficiency to be constantly developed on the basis of already used elements (in this case – legal and institutional mechanisms).

Conceptions of *the disabled* and *the disability* are treated in this article under *the Law of the Social Integration of the Disabled of the Republic of Lithuania* (Zin., 2004, No 83-2983). *The hearing impairment*, according to Hallahan and Kauffman, (2003, p. 203) is the relatively constant, perceptible disruption of the heard perception and sense, limiting the spoken interaction. Here, in this survey, *the person with hearing impairment* is a person whose capacity of hearing varies from 30dB to 80 dB and *the deaf* – a person whose deafness is 120 dB with no capacity of hearing even with a deaf-aid (Mitkus, 2008, p. 8).

### **The possibilities of participation of the deaf in the decision-making on the legal aspect and specific features of this process**

Knowing that participation of citizens in the decision-making is one of the indicators of the civil society (Smith, 2009, p. 67; Petukiene, Tijunaitiene, 2007, p. 230; Buskeviciute, Raipa, 2011, p.27; Pivoras, Visockyte, 2011, p. 32), that upon increasing the inclusion of society into the decision-making, politicians and administrators ensure the greater legitimacy of the confirmed decisions and get citizens

closer to the elite of governance, it is perceived that the full representation and inclusion of every citizen into processes can be hardly implemented in practice (J. O'Neill, 2001, p.485 ). The reasons are objective and subjective (Dalton, 1996). The deaf and people with hearing impairment, as well as other citizens, having a right of participation in the decision-making by *direct* (elections; meetings, demonstrations, public discussions; movements, based on the voluntary activity, gathering to communities, associations, non-governmental organisations, participation in activity of political parties; petitions and etc.) and *indirect* (case analysis, public speeches and discussions, presenting offers by e-mail; public information; consulting) forms, do not often actively use this right. From one hand, they, as other members of the society, are rather indifferent to the political life. On the other hand, it is observed because institutions within the public sector are not always interested, if the way of spreading information in the state and municipality is effective or if prior to the consultations of persons on some specific issues they have some information presented in advance (Kiskis et al., 2006, p. 210), if upon announcing the possibility to offer suggestions concerning the better integration and the mechanism for the better integration of the expressed ideas to the decisions making is presented (E-democracy in gol countries – project description, 2001). We speak of the specific features of the integration of the social group of the deaf into the political life: next to ordinary aids for the activation of the participation of the society, this group needs additional, specific competences, empathy from staff in governmental institutions, and very often aids requiring greater finances and institutional cooperation.

As was indicated in the surveys, implemented in 2011-2013 (Petrylaite, Mejere), the legal base of the Republic of Lithuania guarantees rather favourable conditions for integration into the political life by the disabled, including the deaf and people with hearing impairments. Starting with *the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania* (Zin., 1992, No 33-1014), laws and legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania (*the Law on Equal Treatment of the Republic of Lithuania* (Zin., 2008, No 76-2998); *the Law on Social Integration of the Disabled* (Zin., 2004, No 83-2983), there are documents that directly deal with the integration of the deaf to the life in the society: the decision of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania “*Concerning Recognition of the Sign Language as the Native Language*” (Zin., 1995, No 38-948), *Lithuanian Programmes for Using the Sign Language and Rendering of Interpretation Services for 1999-2003*, confirmed the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in 1998 (Zin., 1998, 47-1300 ), and for

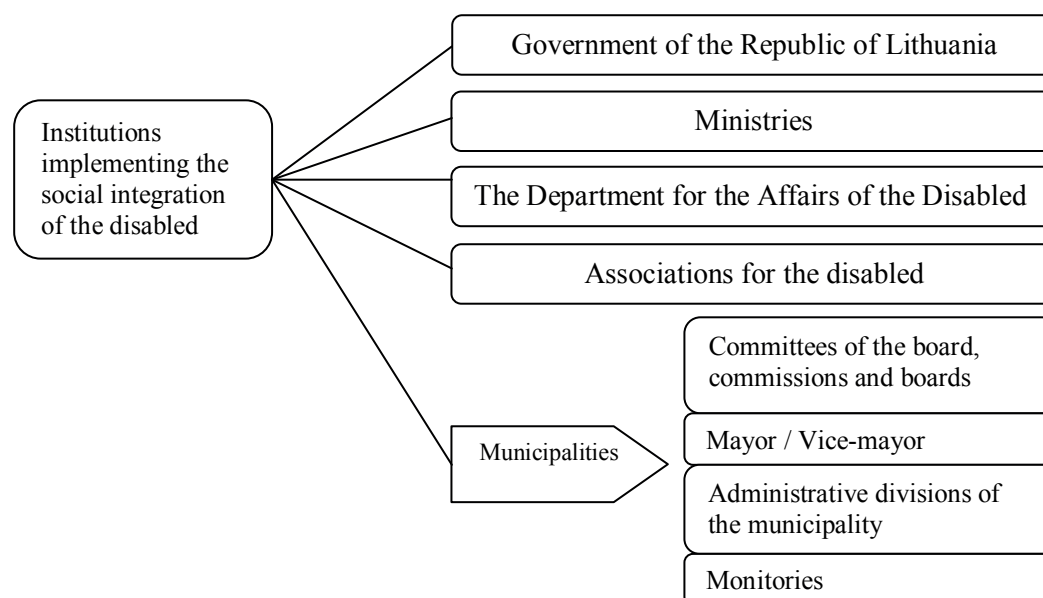
2005-2008 (Zin., 2005, 101-3745), 2009-2012 ( Zin., 2009, No70-2844), 2013 – 2017 (Zin., 2013, No: 20-990). Every municipality in the Republic of Lithuania has legal acts identifying aids for the integration of the disabled (including the deaf) into the life of the society. There the attention is given for the information and consultations next to the ordinary aspects of education and social support. When knowing the specifics of the communication as well as the behaviour of the deaf (language, culture), our surveys have indicated that there is still a lack of information and consultation aids on the local level (municipality, monitory) that would be matched to these specifics.

In other words, it is possible to state that the governmental institutions, when declaring the assurance of local possibilities for the disabled to get included into the decision-making, often do this on the declarative manner, when meanwhile from the attitude of scientists, upon ensuring the equal possibilities for the deaf and people with hearing impairments to participate within the formation of the public policy, active use of own rights, and to make important decisions, the significant role is given to the accessibility of information as well as communication (Rec, 2006), the implementation of which should be restricted to the well prepared legal acts and existing structures. Effective mutual interactions are needed between the decision-making communities and communities having a right to affect them. In this case – between the local government and the community of the deaf, operating in the territory of the municipality.

### **Institutional mechanisms, intended for the representation of the interests of the disabled as well as for the protection of their rights in municipalities**

Structures are identified by legal acts in Lithuania that are to ensure the public quality of the disabled (Picture 1): The government of the Republic of Lithuania, ministries, the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled, municipalities, and associations for the disabled. The deaf is some separate group of the disabled and this institutional system is adapted to all disabled.

Within this system, *municipalities* prepare and implement programmes for the social integration of the disabled, are responsible for meeting special needs of the disabled upon rendering general and special social services, for offering conditions for the disabled to integrate into the community, and for cooperation with associations for the disabled. *Associations for the disabled* represent interests of the disabled, help upon the implementation of aids for the social integration of the disabled: organise rendering of social services



**Picture 1.** The main institutions implementing the social integration of the disabled in the Republic of Lithuania; Source: composed by authors of the work under the Law on Social Integration of the Disabled (Zin., 2004, No 83-2983)

for the disabled and recreation for the disabled as well as sports, tourism, cultural activity, and international cooperation. When organising their own activity, associations for the disabled cooperate with state and municipal institutions and organisations, and can get the financial support from these institutions. Associations for the disabled participate in the formation and implementation of the social policy of the country (Zin., 2004, No 83-2983).

The activity of *the Board of the Municipality* in committees, commissions and boards is very important within the activity of municipalities. Firstly, *the Committee for Social Affairs, the Committee for Affairs of the Disabled or the Board* can act as the significant intermediary between the disabled and people supporting their interests and can affect the decisions on the local level. In municipalities with greater communities of the deaf, the Centres for the Rehabilitation of the Deaf as well as Sign Language Interpretation Centres, coordinated by the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled are operating – institutions, directly working with the deaf, are able to participate in increasing the participation of the deaf in government more actively because of available qualifications.

**Committees, commissions and boards of the Board of the Municipality.** Municipalities that are responsible for the preparation and implementation of the municipality programmes for the social integration of the disabled as well as for the formation of conditions for the disabled to integrate to the community, development of cooperation with

associations for the disabled, etc. (*the Law on Social Integration of the Disabled*, 2004, No 83-2983), are **permitted by law, but not obliged** to form committees or commissions, that would contribute to the quality implementation of the identified responsibilities of municipalities. There are *Committees for Social Affairs* (further – Committees)<sup>1</sup> operating in the majority of municipalities of the Republic of Lithuania, the competence of which covers not only the occupation of citizens, issues on the subsidised housing, custody, care and handout, but also issues of the disabled as well as cooperation with non-governmental organisations, representing interests of the disabled. Such committees implement a double role: 1) *the role of an advisor* – they are formed for the preliminary analysis and conclusions as well as suggestions on social and other issues, presented to the Board of Municipality and the Mayor; committees prepare decisions with recommendations under the own competence; 2) *the role of a controller* – whereas committees also control how laws and other legal acts are followed, how decisions of the Board of Municipality as well as decisions by the Mayor and the Director of the Municipality Administration on issues of the activity of the committee are implemented.

On the basis of *the Law on Local Governance* (Zin., 2011, No 45), committees are composed of members

<sup>1</sup> Titles of these committees may differ in the municipalities of cities and districts of the Republic of Lithuania, e.g. Kaunas City Municipality has the Committee for Social, Health and Family Affairs, in the Board of Klaipeda City Municipality it is the Committee for Social Affairs.

of the Board of the Municipality only; meanwhile representatives of the society – monitors, experts, civil servants and other interested parties – can participate in the work of committees with an advisory right under the order defined by the regulation (cl. 14, parts 2 and 6). Therefore it is important that leaders, representing the disabled, competent on different disabilities could participate in meetings of the committee or the Board of Municipality that would be capable in the strategic decision-making.

**Boards for the Affairs of the Deaf** are closely linked to committees and boards operating under Boards of Municipalities that are directly linked with integrations of the deaf. As it is described in *the Law on Local Governance of the Republic of Lithuania*, the main aim of these structures is the analysis of the most important issues on the social integration of the disabled upon cooperation with the Administration of the Municipality, NGOs for the disabled, communities and related persons. Upon implementation of this aim **Boards for the Affairs of the Disabled** implement the following functions:

- Analyse social problems and the needs of the disabled of the city/district;
- Analyse legal acts prepared by the municipality and its institutions as well as their effect on the disabled;
- Encourage the disabled and their NGOs to participate in solving issues linked with their life and activity;
- Gather information concerning problems of the disabled;
- Solve other issues under the competence of the board.

As well as the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled under the Ministry of Social Protection and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania (further – MSPL), **Boards for the Affairs of the Disabled** in the municipalities are formed and operate on a voluntary basis. After analysis of web pages<sup>1</sup> of 60 Lithuanian municipalities, it appeared that only 9 municipalities (Vilnius, Kaunas, Siauliai cities, Kaunas, Utena, Vilkaviskis, Trakai, Anyksciai, Joniskis districts) have **Boards (Commissions) for the Affairs of the Disabled** formed. Members to these boards were delegated by the Board of Municipality, administration, institutions of municipality and NGOs with one representative under the nature of disability (vision, hearing, movement, psychical, mental disabilities, other diseases and disabled sportsmen). Such composition of the boards allows not only for discussing relevant issues, but also to hear the attitude of competent specialists, finding real ways for the solution of problems. The given information concerning members of the board

<sup>1</sup> Internet source: [www.vilnius.lt](http://www.vilnius.lt), [www.kaunas.lt](http://www.kaunas.lt), [www.siauliai.lt](http://www.siauliai.lt), [www.krs.lt](http://www.krs.lt), [www.utena.lt](http://www.utena.lt), [www.vilkaviskis.lt](http://www.vilkaviskis.lt), [www.trakai.lt](http://www.trakai.lt), [www.anyksciai.lt](http://www.anyksciai.lt), [www.joniskis.lt](http://www.joniskis.lt).

indicates that only the municipalities of Vilnius and Kaunas have representatives of the deaf in Boards for the Affairs of the Disabled. There are no deaf in the municipalities of other cities; however the available information indicates that there are people with hearing impairments in these municipalities; centres for the deaf are operating here.

Boards of Municipalities have other committees, such as the Committee for the Self-governance and Development of Communities (Kaunas City Municipality) and Committee for Education and Youth Affairs (Klaipeda City Municipality), constantly operating commissions and boards (NGO Support Service, Board for the Youth Affairs, Board for the Community Health and etc.), that, under the aims of the activity, solve issues on the integration of the disabled into social and political life; however this aspect of the integration of the disabled is often not stressed. Municipalities of big cities have one vice-mayor who is often responsible for the social issues in the community as well as for the activation of the community via NGO (Vilnius, Kaunas, Siauliai and other municipalities), but it is the decision of the Board of Municipality and this is not obligatory. Therefore we are able to state that the **social integration of the disabled or people under some other social exclusion is not one of the horizontal principles within the activity of committees of the Board of Municipality as well as other commissions.**

The issues of integration of the disabled (including the deaf) in municipalities are indirectly dealt with by the **Administration of the Municipality**, according to the singleness of the own activity: the Department of Education (implementation of formal and informal education, integration of people with special needs to the system of education), the Department for Social Services (identification of the need for social services and their allocation, organisation of the social work), the Department for Social Support (social benefits), the Department for the Health Protection (health protection and improvement) and others. **Monitories** get greater rights for the decision-making. Monitors, having people with hearing impairments in own communities, could become leaders, activating the political activity of the deaf.

As can be seen from the analysis of legal acts and information from municipalities, available in the virtual space, currently the order defined in *the Law on Local Governance of the Republic of Lithuania* and other legal acts presents a sufficient amount of legal and institutional possibilities to attend the more active participation of the deaf in government. In order to attain the effectiveness of this process, it is necessary that the principle of integration of the disabled into the social and political life becomes the horizontal

principle in all institutions, making and implementing decisions in municipalities. Upon treating the hearing impairment as the specific disability, it is important that the advisory right in boards or commissions is given to representatives of the society that are competent on issues of the disability. Municipalities could take care of the education of the leadership of representatives of the community and could teach them to participate in the decision-making thereby improving the participatory government of the society.

**Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf in municipalities.** The important role within the civil participation of the deaf as well as within the social integration is made by *the Lithuanian Association for the Deaf* – a voluntary, independent, non-political public organisation, gathering people with hearing impairments, representing their interests and legal needs, protecting their rights, and helping to implement needs for the social integration of its members. It is the umbrella organisation, uniting all *Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf*, and *associations for the deaf*, operating in Lithuanian (total – 12)<sup>2</sup>, the activity of which is actively supported by the MSPL. Lithuanian **Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf** not only represent rights of the deaf in various organisations, institutions, but also inform the society about the deaf, their culture, and work, participate in different conferences and seminars on issues of the deaf. These centres are the main institutions that maintain contacts with government (national and local) institutions when aiming for equal rights and full integration of the deaf into society.

The financing of projects for services of **Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf** in the community is implemented under “*The description of the financing of projects for social rehabilitation services for the disabled in communities*” by the *Minister of Social Protection and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania of 2012* (Zin., 2012, No 89-4661), that changed the previously valid order for the financing of Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf by delegating a part of functions previously financed on the national level (by the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled under MSPL) for the Administrations of Municipalities that became responsible for the assessment, selection of projects, distributions of funds and financing of projects, and implementation control. Meanwhile the Department for the Affairs

<sup>2</sup> Five of these centres operate in the biggest Lithuanian cities. Vilnius’ Rehabilitation Centre for the Deaf has Alytus’ Community of the Deaf under control. Kaunas’ Rehabilitation Centre for the Deaf has Kedainiai, Marijampole, and Vilkauskis Communities of the Deaf under control. There are Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf established in Siauliai and Klaipeda and Communities of the Deaf in Mazeikiai and Telsiai.

of the Disabled is obliged to initiate contracts with the Administrations of Municipalities concerning the financing and implementation of projects.

From one aspect, such a change of the order for financing obliges the local municipalities to give more attention for problems of the deaf and therefore encourages the more active cooperation of communities of the deaf with a local government. On the other hand, it is observed that the staff of rehabilitation centres operating in smaller municipalities often lacks competencies for the preparation and implementation of projects; therefore they, being unable to equally compete for the offered financing under the project active, become incapable of the quality implementation of their own activity.

Therefore, upon assessing the importance of these centres in the life of the deaf, we can state that the greater possibilities could be offered within interaction among *the community of the deaf – the Ministry – the Municipality – the community of the deaf*, if the Ministry and municipalities would be interested in the development of competences of the staff in Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf and communities of the deaf within the sphere of the project management, thereby ensuring the greater attraction of funds to municipalities in order to meet the needs of the deaf.

**Sign Language Interpretation Centres.** *Sign Language Interpretation Centres* coordinated by the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled offer services of the interpreters of the sign language. They are budgetary institutions, operating under MSPL. In 2014 the free services of the sign language interpretation were offered in the five biggest Lithuanian cities.

In 2010, when County Governance Administrations stopped their activity (Zin., 2010, No 54-2654), ownership of **regional Sign Language Interpretation Centres** (Kaunas, Klaipeda, Panevezys, Siauliai, Vilnius) was transferred to MSPL while Sign Language Interpretation Centres in Alytus and Marijampole were closed because of high administrative costs by establishing the divisions of bigger cities there: division of Vilnius’ centre in Alytus and division of Kaunas’ centre in Marijampole. The centre of Siauliai offers services to all previous Telsiai county, Klaipeda – Taurage county, and Panevezys – Utena county.

Currently Sign Language Interpretation Centres operate under *the Lithuanian Programme for Providing Services of the Sign Language Usage and Interpretation 2013-2017* (Zin., 2013, No: 20-990). The main tasks of **Sign Language Interpretation Centres** are to develop services of the sign language interpretation for the deaf; to improve the accessibility of these services and information; to form premises for the society and the deaf to communicate in the sign

as well as Lithuanian languages and to develop the mutual accessibility of the information environment. In 2012 services of the sign language interpretation in 5 sign language interpretation centres were offered by 96 employed interpreters of the sign language.

Centres, when implementing the own tasks, offer services of the sign language interpretation; analyse the need for the sign language interpretation services in the related counties; take care of the qualification development for the interpreters of the sign language; cooperate and organise meetings, discussions, and conferences with other institutions as well as organisations on issues of using and interpreting the sign language; cooperate with MSPL, the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled, and other state and municipality institutions and organisations as well as other state and international organisations; interpret sign and Lithuanian languages in different events and TV shows; and teach sign language to fully hearing people, people with hearing impairments, the deaf, etc. The named functions, regulated by the legal acts evidence that the Sign Language Interpretation Centres are given a very important role of a mediator between the fully hearing society and the community of the deaf, thereby developing and ensuring the mutual accessibility of information.

During the last years, upon searches for the more effective forms for the information presentation, services of the interpreters of the sign language have been initiated to be offered in a distant manner; however, practical observations allow us to state that due to the insufficient number of the interpreters as well as the lack in their professional qualification, possibilities of using this exceptional offer for persons with hearing impairments in municipalities are rather limited: often they have to wait for the interpretation services for a couple of days and the great part of interpreters are self-educated.

After perceiving that municipalities in the territory of which the Sign Language Interpretation Centres have been established have favourable conditions to increase the inclusion of the deaf into the participatory government, it is obvious that this possibility is not used enough. There is a lack of the sign language interpretation in the local televisions of cities and important events; staff in municipalities are not taught sign language. Universities, preparing special pedagogues, that have the needed specialists, are not included into the preparation of the sign language interpreters (volunteers and specialists), and their qualification development. This can be identified as **the consequence of insufficient cooperation of the municipality with other institutions as well as the passiveness of the sign language centres to present their own possibilities.**

## **Interactions between institutions within the local government**

It is well known that communication between the government institutions and the society is really important within the formation of the public policy; therefore, when aiming to represent interests of citizens and to make the favourable decisions, the local government is to closely cooperate with organisations operating in the city and district. W. Parsons (2001, p. 210) notes that the situation, when the development of the public policy theory insufficiently considers the institutional aspect of the politics, the role of institutions is not assessed within the increasing inclusion of the society into the political life and this can negatively affect the processes of the public policy. Public management institutions are to be primarily perceived as developers of the public politics.

Supporting Lithuanian and foreign scientists (Laurinaviciute, 2010; Ribasauskiene, Salengaite, 2013; Brandshaw, 2007; Vilkas and Bucaite-Vilke, 2009), we agree that upon implementation of the public politics, next to the legal acts, regulating the inclusion of the disabled into life, the developed structures and funds, intended in programmes as well as other resources for the implementation of processes, “the soft factors” are important on the state and self government levels: *interactions* (cooperation, networking, groups of interests) between government institutions of various levels, *competences* of staff, *activeness* of NGOs, etc.

*Cooperation* is actualised in *the Law on Local Government of the Republic of Lithuania* (Zin., 2011, No 45), by foreseeing not only the cooperation with founders of municipalities, but with all budgetary institutions, operating in the municipality as well as citizens, and NGOs. This initiative should come from institutions, established by the municipality or the Government, in this concrete case – from MSPL, the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled under MSPL and its divisions within territories of municipalities and also from Sign Language Interpretation Centres financed from the state budget.

When we are speaking of *joining the groups of interests and the establishment of NGO* for the protection of own interests, interactions may be mutual: coming from the interested groups in the society or people who are keen on protecting their interests as well as coming from the municipality perceiving that the representation of interests of the disabled is a part of the public policy. The *improvement of the NGO sector* in this case becomes a very important factor in seeking the greater inclusion of residents of the municipality into the decision-making (*Cooperation of municipalities and non-governmental organisations*, 2013, p. 8), because NGOs, working on issues of the

disabled are often motivated, have knowledge and competences in the represented sphere; there is a great spread of information via them as well as the feedback concerning the gained services, the need for them, etc.

Operation under aims in constantly modified **networks** (inter-institutional formal, interpersonal formal and informal, of specialists') today becomes a very important aid in seeking previously mentioned interactions; i.e. cooperation and gathering groups of interests to solve issues. They are important within interaction with other institutions on the governmental level: for the municipality with politicians in the Seimas, Government, and for local NGOs with umbrella public organisations, with EU institutions, foundations, etc.

After analysis of the situation in the Republic of Lithuania from the aspect of the **cooperation between municipalities and NGOs for the disabled** (Kvietkiene, 2014), it can be stated, that:

- 9 municipalities (Vilnius, Kaunas, Siauliai cities, Kaunas, Utena, Vilkaviskis, Trakai, Anyksciai, Joniskis districts), where commissions or Boards for the Affairs of the Disabled have been formed, suppose the cooperation within informal networks because of the mixed structure of these boards (commissions) as well as gathering people into groups. These boards (commissions) directly participate in analysis of issues of the disabled in municipalities, cooperating with respective administrative divisions (usually departments for social services, social support, and education), can prepare necessary documents and affect the plan of intended aids and funds.
- The representation of the deaf is successful when is implemented by organised structures (Vilnius, Kaunas) – in this case – rehabilitation centres of the deaf, actively cooperating with municipalities. In other municipalities the interests of the deaf are represented by separate persons.
- Sign Language Interpretation Centres operating in regions and funded from the state budget have the opportunity to cooperate with the local government, but under their statute and reports for the activity<sup>1</sup>, it is obvious that they are limited to the rendering of services of the interpretation of the sign language only.

Next to the previously mentioned public organisations and representing interests of the deaf, no NGOs were observed in the analysed municipalities that would gather this social group; however, it is obvious that issues of the integration of the deaf are solved in educational institutions: in kindergartens

<sup>1</sup> Sign language interpretation centre in Klaipeda district [www.gestuvertimocentras.lt](http://www.gestuvertimocentras.lt), Sign language interpretation centre in Siauliai district [www.gestukalba.lt](http://www.gestukalba.lt), Sign language interpretation centre in Panevezys district [www.paneveziogestucentras.lt](http://www.paneveziogestucentras.lt).

or their groups in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, and Marijampole; there are schools for children with hearing impairments, day centres, art studios, etc.

In general, it is possible to state that together with the more active community of the deaf, more aids and possibilities appear in municipalities that increase their integration into public life. Here the human factor is really important: the wish of municipality staff and the community of the deaf as well as the ability to cooperate.

### **Results of the survey on the civil participation of the deaf in the local government activity**

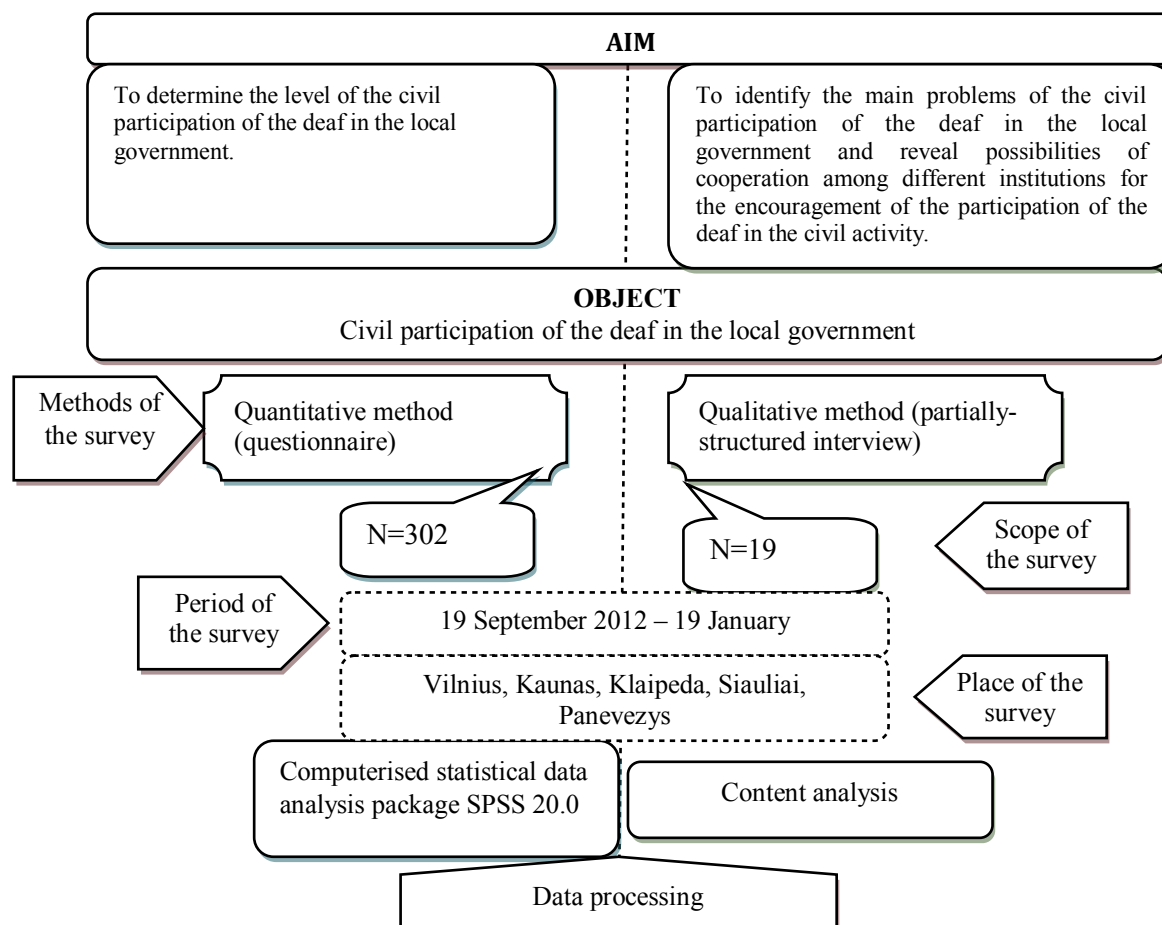
In 2011-2013 the survey "*Legal and Institutional Mechanisms of the Civil Participation of the Deaf in the Local Government*" (financed from funds from the ESF and the budget of the Republic of Lithuania under implementation of the project by the Lithuanian Board of Science "Development of the Scientific Activity of Students" (VP1-3.1-SMM-01-V-02-003), was implemented, the design of which is presented in Picture 2.

The primary results were presented in publications by E. Petrylaite (E. Kvietkiene). Instruments applied in the survey (the questionnaire from 14 closed-type questions, partially-structured interview) were approved in the Scientific Centre for Social Research at Siauliai University. 302 persons were interviewed under the objective selection (criterion – not less than 18 years old, a person with a hearing impairment) (under the data from the Sign Language Centre of 2012, there were 6202 persons with hearing impairments residing in the Republic of Lithuania) (Zin., 2013, No: 20 -990). The structure of respondents was 199 females and 103 males; 69 were from Vilnius city and district, 45 from Kaunas city and district, 50 from Klaipeda city and district, 82 from Siauliai city and district, and 50 from Panevezys city and district; almost one third of respondents were of 18-35 years old, one third was 36-50 years old and one third was over 50 years old; 13% had a college or higher education, over 40% had a secondary education, approximately 33% had basic education and the rest (10%) had a primary education. There were 131 deaf people and 155 persons with hearing impairments who participated in the survey. Such a great scope was attained by aid of the meeting of communities of the deaf, and the gathered statistical data was processed by aid for the computerised statistical data analysis SPSS 20.0.

Identification of the statistical significance of differences was done by chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) and degrees of freedom (df) of the criterion. The data disparity was statistically significant when  $p < 0.05$ .

Upon application of the partially-structured interview it was aimed to determine the main problems of the civil participation of the deaf in the local government and to reveal possibilities for cooperation between different institutions for the encouragement





**Picture 2.** The survey design on the civil participation of the deaf in the local government activity. Source: prepared by authors of the work under Kvietkiene, E. (2012)

of the participation of the deaf in the civil activity. The questionnaire was formed from three blocks of questions: the first one concerning the current situation of the participation of the deaf in the civil self-government activity, the second concerning obstacles and reasons and determining the low inclusion into the civil participation, and the third concerning the interaction between structures operating in municipalities (Sign Language Interpretation Centres, municipality and Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf) by encouraging and gathering the deaf to participate in civil and institutional activity in municipalities.

Upon selection of experts the staff structure in institutions existing within the territory of municipality was analysed under the publicly available information in the internet and after consultations with the management of institutions. It is important that part of experts had a hearing impairment; therefore the person who was carrying the survey had to be acquainted with the sign language. Experts from the biggest Lithuanian cities participated in the survey (Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, Siauliai, Panevezys) and their activity was directly related to issues of

the deaf: the president of the Lithuanian Association of the Deaf, 5 heads of Associations for the Deaf, 5 directors of Sign Language Interpretation Centres, and 8 representatives of the local government institutions (members of Committees for Social Affairs and Boards for Affairs of the Disabled); in total there were 19 persons<sup>1</sup>. The data obtained during conversations was analysed by aid of the content analysis by selecting the significant categories that best reflected the situation.

<sup>1</sup> 19 informants: the head of Vilnius Rehabilitation Centre for the Deaf, the member of the Board for the Affairs of the Deaf in Vilnius City Municipality, the member of the Board for the Affairs of the Deaf in Kaunas City Municipality, heads of Siauliai and Panevezys Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf, the president of the Lithuanian Association for the Deaf, directors of Sign Language Interpretation Centres in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, Siauliai and Panevezys, vice-heads of Committees for the Social Affairs in Vilnius, Klaipeda City Municipalities, the head of the Committee for Social, Health and Family Affairs in Kaunas City Municipality, the member of the Committee for the Social Affairs in Klaipeda City Municipality, 2 members of the Committee for Health and Social Affairs in Siauliai City Municipality, one of them – the member of the Board for Affairs of the Disabled, 2 members of the Committee for Health and Social Affairs in Panevezys City Municipality

**Situation of participation of the deaf in the civil life in municipalities of Lithuanian cities.**

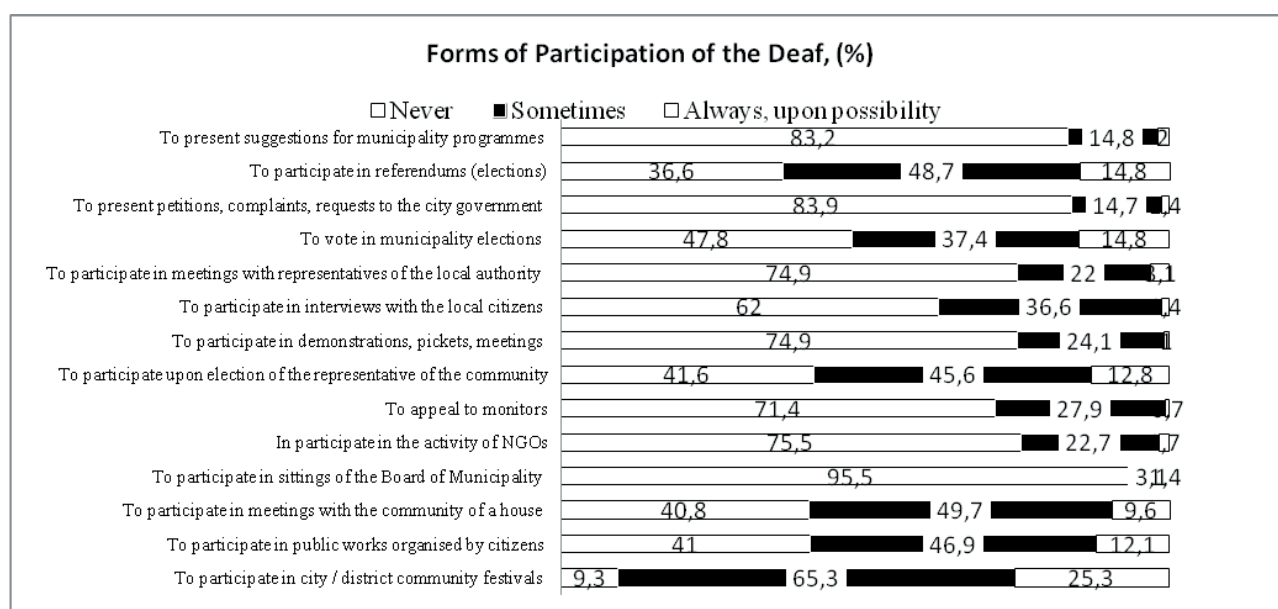
Analysis of results obtained during the complex survey shows the situation of the inclusion of the deaf into the participatory government in municipalities (Picture 3):

- **The deaf are rather passive when showing interest in public affairs.** The deaf are sceptical about their possibilities to affect the solving of problems in their area of residence. 43.7% of respondents indicated that the participation of the deaf in the civil activity in municipalities was not important. Such distrust in oneself or, in other words, political passiveness of the community of the deaf reduces the possibility to be heard and to affect decisions favourable for the community.
- **Participation of the deaf in the civil activity is insufficient.** According to experts from Vilnius and Kaunas, the most popular forms of such participation are *city festivals and artistic activity*, when the deaf introduce the community their own performances, artistic creations, etc.; the participation is also exposed via different manifestations and pickets. One of the most effective forms for getting attention to the problems of the deaf, according to the president of the Lithuanian Association for the Deaf and the head of the Panevezys Centre for the Deaf is the *picket, meetings, and inclusion into the political events organised on the EU level*, when issues concerning some part of the society are presented; e.g. the meeting of 7 February, 2012, near the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, or the meeting of 14 June, 2013, in Germany (www.lkd.

lt). Results of the questionnaire correlate with this attitude of experts when respondents indicated their activeness during public events (Picture 3).

When generalising the situation, presented in Picture 3, under forms of participation of the deaf in the political life and separating those that require *the active interaction with the local government upon the decision-making* (participation in municipality sittings, appeals to monitors, participation in meetings with representatives of the local government, presentation of petitions, appeals, requests for the local authority, and presenting suggestions for the municipality programmes), it can be seen that the interaction between the community of the deaf and the local government on this aspect is rather weak, whereas the greater part of respondent do not participate in this process at all. Scientists, when dealing with this issue, offer the premise that the participation of citizens is the additional task for civil servants, because the determination of priorities as well as the needs of the society takes time and the attention is often given to secondary issues with the growing hostility between the government and citizens and increasing short-term administrative expenses (Nefas, 2010, p. 14).

**Spread of information concerning issues of the city/district.** The distribution of the answer of respondents to the question “How do they get information concerning issues of their own city/district?” indicated that the most rarely aid that cause difficulties to use (TV when there is no interpretation to sign language or subtitles) are used by the respondents. The more popular way is to get the information from newspapers (37%); internet is also rather popular (51%). The most often source of such



Picture 3. Forms of participation of the deaf, (%); Source: E. Kvietkiene (2014).

information is friends and acquaintances (70.5%). This indicator evidences that the communities of the deaf remain specific, actively communicating inside. Being “unheard” and “invisible” for a long time they got used to sharing information with each other; therefore, these traditions of the spread of information should be maintained and used upon gathering to NGOs under the sphere of interests, inviting the members of families of the deaf to the voluntary activities, and by teaching the sign language interpretation for those who have a wish in schools and institutions, whereas the lack of specialists is observed.

Generalising the situation of the participation of the deaf in the process of making solutions on the local level, the main further trends for the activity improvement for competent institutions, aiming to increase the inclusion of these people into the civil life, are observed: to use the tradition of the community of the deaf to exchange the information by including them into various networks and groups of interests, to use sign language interpreters for the spread of information linked with issues important for the disabled, to increase the trust of the deaf in themselves, and to teach the participation in the decision-making.

**Problems of the participation of the deaf in the civil activity in municipalities.** It appeared during the survey that one of the reasons of passive participation in the political local life is unawareness how people can participate in the political life; i.e., we see the *problem of the spread of information*. This problem was mentioned by 49.6% of the deaf and 33.5% of people with hearing impairments ( $\chi^2=7,584$ ,  $df= 1$ ,  $p = .004$ ). These results confirmed the general situation in Lithuania: in 2010 the study “Participation of Citizens in Local Governance” was performed by the order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania and it indicated that very often the members of the community do not participate in the activity because they lack information on the solving of problems or cannot imagine their own role in solving some problems. Additionally, communities do not trust their own possibilities to influence issues of the local government. “There is no sufficient link between residents and staff of the local authority” (2010, p. 14). Though *the Law on Provision of Information to the Public of the Republic of Lithuania* (Zin., 2006, No 82-3254, 34 cl. 1 part) ensures that the spread of public information is to be accessible to the disabled and *the Law on the National Radio and Television of the Republic of Lithuania* (Zin., 2005, No 153-5639, 5 cl. 9 part) suggests that the National Radio and Television is to prepare programmes for people with sight and hearing impairments, there is still a lack of such aids for the inclusion of the deaf into public life.

After application of the partially-structured interview and interviewing 19 experts, other problems and reasons for the rather passive inclusion of the deaf into the political life were to be identified. An analysis of the results evidences that the problems are of several types:

1. **Subjective**, coming from the deaf:
  - Indifference and passiveness of the community of the deaf (stressed by 6 experts from Panevezys, Kaunas and Klaipeda);
  - A lack of education by the deaf (mentioned by 2 experts from Vilnius and Siauliai);
  - Disappointment with political leaders (mentioned by 2 experts from Panevezys and Siauliai).
2. **Objective**, coming from the institutions of government, bearing some powers:
  - The problem of the accessibility of information for the deaf (mentioned by 4 experts from Vilnius, Klaipeda, Kaunas and Siauliai);
  - A lack of sign language interpreters (mentioned by 2 experts from Kaunas and Klaipeda);
  - A financing of structures and the caring of issues of the deaf (mentioned by 2 experts from Vilnius and Siauliai).
3. **Requiring positive interactions**, higher competences:
  - A lack of leaders in communities of the deaf (mentioned by 4 experts from Vilnius, Siauliai, Klaipeda);
  - Undeveloped cooperation between the community of the deaf and heads of other local organisations (mentioned by 2 experts from Vilnius and Klaipeda) (Kvietkiene, 2014, p. 15-16).

As can be observed, experts see more subjective reasons that are also characteristic to other groups of the community, but today there are various aids for the increase of the citizens’ activeness and this can be done by the cooperation of different institutions. Experts confirmed the problem of the information accessibility and the lack of sign language interpreters. Results of the quantitative survey also indicated the lack of sign language interpreters: there is the greatest lack of them in Vilnius (mentioned by 25.7% of the deaf interviewed in Vilnius); though the greatest number of sign language interpreters works. Meanwhile this problem in Kaunas has already been solved, as this issue was relevant for only 3.7% of the deaf ( $\chi^2=18,739$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p = .002$ ).

Issues of the integration of the deaf into public life as well as financial issues of rehabilitation are to be maintained relevant in future, because the community of the deaf lacks leaders as well as skills to participate in the decision-making, to use the funds coming via the project for the development and improvement of their situation. After changes in the financing order for

Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf in municipalities (now the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled signs contracts with Administrations of Municipalities for the financing and implementation of projects and the latter organises the selection of projects, give funds, and control the implementation), the need for the greater interaction between the Centres for the Deaf and the municipality appeared, skills for the preparation and implementation of projects became very relevant, and the staff of rehabilitation centres operating in smaller municipalities lack these skills.

Interviews with experts indicated that the participation of the deaf in the political local life could grow upon the increasing competences of all institutions interested in the integration of the deaf into the participatory government on these issues, also upon the improved competences of the participatory government of communities of the deaf, including competences of the leadership and representation. Committees for Social Affairs are operating in the Boards of Municipalities in the analysed five cities; in three of them (Vilnius, Kaunas, Siauliai) on Services for the Affairs of the Disabled; Rehabilitation Centres for the Disabled are located in the territories of all of these municipalities and sign language interpreters are working. These are the main institutions for the integration of the deaf into the public life, defined by the legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania. The survey indicated that the cooperation between the *municipality* and *sign language interpretation centre* is insufficient, including Vilnius and Kaunas municipalities, where there is some cooperation, joint events between staff in Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf and Sign Language Interpretation Centres. The possibilities for joint projects between the municipality and Sign Language Interpretation Centres are not fully used. There are no joint projects observed between those institutions of the local government, public institutions, and government-financed institutions. Based on the attitude of experts, reasons may lie in the *legal indetermination* of cooperation, as an essential *interaction between institutions with a different management* (who is to do what) and in the *incompetence of the staff*.

Sign Language Interpretation Centres are financed from the state budget and their functions are strictly identified. Financing of Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf is organised under projects; therefore, if the project is successful, the financing is received; all other issues depend on the initiatives of the members of the organisation. Some municipality institutions (committees of the board, commissions and boards) participate more upon the formation of policy while others (divisions of administration and institutions of the municipality) do so upon implementation, and

the interaction between them is not always effective. Results of the work of municipality staff are difficult to measure, especially if they are implemented via cooperation with public organisations. As well as in other activities within the public sector, this can be characterised by stagnation (Savivaldybiu ir nevyriausybinu organizaciju bendradarbiavimas, 2013, p. 23).

The statements of experts evidence that next to institutional aids, the human factor is not less important. The community of the deaf lacks leaders who are able to represent their interests in a competitive manner and increase the trust in politicians. *Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf* in Vilnius and Kaunas have strong *leaders* who are actively fighting and protecting the own community and their representatives are active in the activity of Committee for Social Affairs under the Board of Municipality and activity of the Board for the Affairs of the Disabled; therefore, the problems are public and they are solved in a more rapid manner. Experts – heads of Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf in Vilnius and Kaunas – stressed the importance of institutional mechanisms (municipality, Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf, Board for the Affairs of the Disabled, Sign Language Interpretation Centre) and cooperation between these institutions as well as importance of their leaders by including the disabled into the decision-making in the local self-government. E.g., Vilnius City Municipality, because of institutions that were operating and working together, started the interpretation of the official speeches during the state events and after the approval by the Board this became a new clause in the *Rules for the Management and Order of Vilnius City Municipality* (Zin., 2012 m, No 1-670).

Experts – representatives of municipality – stated that the cooperation between all institutions is possible in cases where the community of the deaf expresses the more active wish for cooperation (“*they must come to us with problems and let us know. Then, I believe, the municipality would look for and would possibly find the joint solutions; however it may be that the municipality is unaware of their problems...*”; “*they should show more initiative, [...] I believe they have leaders and maybe they would invite those politicians more*”). This evidences that the municipality lacks the feedback from the community concerning the effectiveness of the implemented activity as well as motivation and competences upon taking care of communities with specific cultures, as it is in this case – people with hearing impairments and competences to activate communities by using some appropriate institutional and personal networks and inviting volunteers and NGOs operating in the

territory of the Municipality, educational institutions, and youth organisations.

Experts – heads of Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf – stated they wished to cooperate with the local authority, but were disappointed by promises of politicians and believed that their needs would not be considered. The head of the Sign Language Interpretation Centres stated that centres are ready to provide services of interpretation for representatives of local government as well as for the members of communities of the deaf; however, the centres dissociate from some active encouragement for the deaf to involve into the active civil activity, because the primary function of these centres is to provide services of the sign language interpretation. This evidences a rather big problem – **the lack of motivation for action and the lack of a systemic approach.**

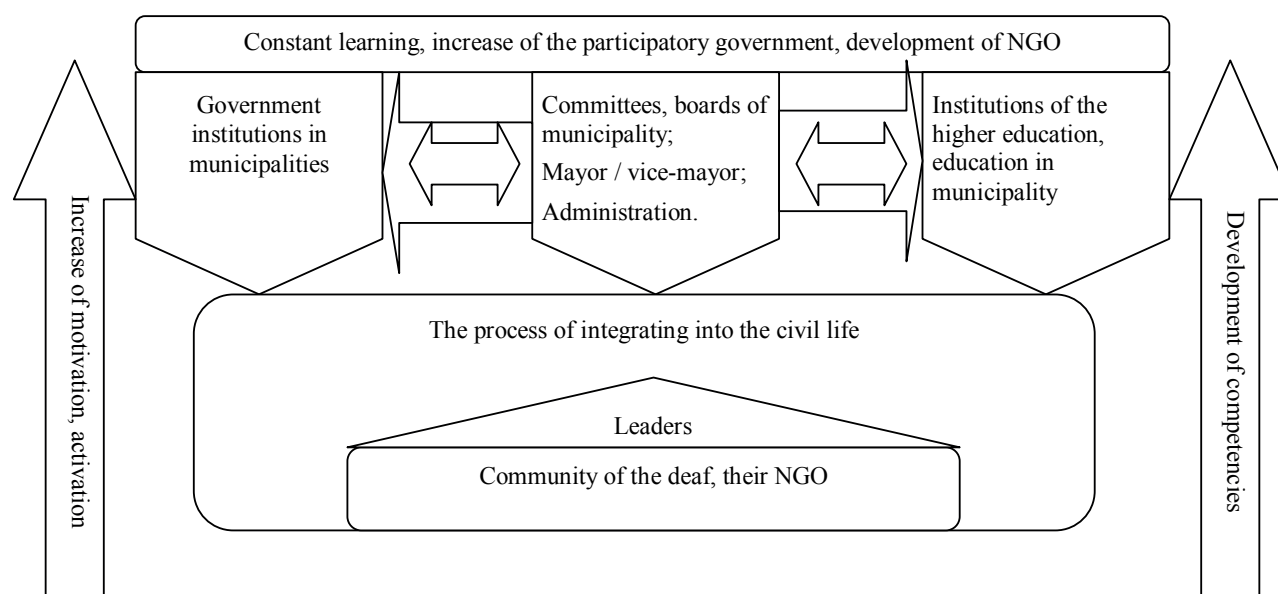
### Singleness of the development of the civil participation of the deaf in Lithuanian municipalities

Generalising the results of the presented survey, it is seen that upon having structures for the improvement of the integration of the deaf into the public life in municipalities of the Republic of Lithuania, described by laws and legal acts, there is a need for: 1) the encouragement of horizontal interactions (cooperation, networking, information exchange, constant feedback concerning the effectiveness of aids and needs) between all institutions; 2) the presentation of information on issues of the local self-government for the deaf in an acceptable form (TV shows, board sessions on issues of the disabled with a sign language

interpretation, video material presented on the basis of the Mayor’s activity report concerning initiatives of citizens, questions-answers forums of members of the Committee for Social Affairs, blogs in the website of the municipality, etc.); 3) mediators-leaders between institutions and communities of the deaf; 4) higher qualifications of staff in municipalities for work with the disabled; 5) courses and training for the disabled on how to participate in solving problems of the city, integrate into international movements of the disabled, etc.; and 6) the corrections of legal acts obliging the state established Sign Language Interpretation Centres and partially financed Rehabilitation Centres for the Disabled to cooperate with other local institutions in order to attain the higher civil integration of the deaf. Cooperation is needed not only between different institutions, but also with an aim to achieve joint results and between structures of the same level; e.g., among the Committee for Social Affairs under the Board of the Municipality, the Board for the Affairs of the Disabled, other boards, the mayor (vice-mayor on social issues), and divisions of the Administration of the Municipality, and between Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf and Sign Language Interpretation Centres.

According to the attitude of scientists working with problem issues of the integration of the disabled into the society, it is clear that some other initiatives and aids, usually existing in every municipality, are not used: institutions for formal and informal education, higher education, volunteers, and family members of people with hearing impairments.

When improving the integration of the deaf into political life in municipalities in this way, we can observe this via constantly activated interaction



**Picture 4.** Interactions of the integration of the participating deaf into the civil life in municipalities

among institutions operating there and the community of the deaf (Picture 4).

The growing participation of the community of the deaf within the local decision-making is possible by developing their leaders and including them into all existing boards, inviting to committees, and giving funds and attention for the transformations of information relevant for the deaf into the acceptable form. Here great importance should be given to Sign Language Interpretation Centres that communicate directly with them as well as for Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf.

## Conclusions

1. The implemented survey indicated that the integration of the deaf into the civil life in the municipalities of the Republic of Lithuania and the decisions made there have a rather favourable legal system; the respective institutional system is operating: Boards for the Social Affairs are operating under Boards of all municipalities; there are Boards for the Affairs of the Disabled under Boards of Municipalities, Rehabilitation Centres for the Deaf that receive the financial support from the Government under the successful projects and protect interests of the deaf in part of municipalities; in the 5 biggest Lithuanian cities and in their districts – Sign Language Interpretation Centres and their divisions, financed by the Republic of Lithuania. Under rather similar possibilities, the situation in municipalities is rather different: problems of the deaf are better understood in those municipalities where there are Boards for Affairs of the Disabled established with representatives of the deaf.
2. The complex survey in the five biggest Lithuanian cities (302 persons not younger than 18 years old with hearing impairments and 19 experts directly solving issues of the deaf on the institutional level were interviewed) indicated that the inclusion of the deaf into the participatory government is rather poor. As was indicated by the survey results, a rather passive inclusion of the community of the deaf into the participatory government is influenced by the main reasons: subjective (indifference and passiveness of the community of the deaf; lack of education of the deaf; disappointment with political leaders), objective, coming from the institutions of government, bearing some powers (the problem of the accessibility of information for the deaf, the lack of sign language interpreters, financing of structures, caring of issues of the deaf) and positive interactions between municipality institutions and the community of the deaf as well as a lack of competences to increase the inclusion

of the society and to take leadership responsibility when representing interests of the deaf.

3. In order to see the possible projections for the situation improvement, it is obvious that the majority of efforts may be offered by institutions already operating in the territory of municipalities, including those on the self-government and national authority levels, by the active cooperation in between an inclusion of institutions of the higher education, and NGOs that are competent on this issue. First of all, the motivation and wish for the participation of people with hearing impairments in the local decision-making should increase. Further, the competence, knowledge and understanding of how to do this by perceiving that this group of the society by its culture and ways of accepting and rendering information is different and communication with it, its consulting, and periodical feedback require specific competences and finances for the development of required aids. Joint projects and constant learning by rendering each other the available skills (staff of the municipality for the deaf – skills of the project management, inclusion into the decision-making, e-government; members of families of the deaf, Sign Language Interpretation Centres, institutions of the higher education for staff in municipalities – skills of the sign language; NGOs, institutions of the higher education for the deaf – skills of leadership, project management, participatory government) are not less important in the development and improvement of the situation.
4. The survey revealed a rather great stagnation in municipalities and in Sign Language Interpretation Centres financed from the state budget upon increasing the more active inclusion of the deaf into the political life. Correction of legal acts foreseeing not only functions, but also striving for the joint result – to increase the integration of the deaf to the decision-making in municipalities within cooperation with local institutions – would be one of the directions for the development and improvement of the situation.

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## Kurčiųjų įtraukimo į sprendimų priėmimą Lietuvos Respublikos savivaldybėse didinimo kryptingumas

### Santrauka

Piliečių dalyvavimas Lietuvos vietos savivaldoje, kaip vienas iš prioritetinių dalykų, yra atvirai skatinamas, bet atskirų socialinių grupių, tarp jų neįgaliųjų, įtraukimas į dalyvaujimąjį valdymą politikoje ir moksle vis dar diskutuojamas retai. Šiuo straipsniu siekiama apibendrinti 2011–2013 m. LR penkiuose didžiuosiuose miestuose atliktų kurčiųjų dalyvavimo vietos savivaldoje situacijos ir jos gerinimo galimybių tyrimų rezultatus ir modeliuoti dalyvaujamojo valdymo tobulinimo kryptis savivaldybėje. Siekiant numatyto tikslo, apibendrintos mokslininkų išvalgos apie kurčiųjų įgalinimą dalyvauti vietos savivaldoje ir su tuo susijusi LR teisinė bazė. Taip pat remiantis atliktu kompleksiniu tyrimu siūlomos galimos LR savivaldybėse veikiančių struktūrų (gestų kalbos vertėjų centrų, savivaldybių ir visuomeninių institucijų) aktyvesnės sąveikos su kurčiųjų bendruomene projekcijos.

Straipsnyje pristatomuose tyrimuose taikyti mokslinės literatūros ir teisės aktų analizės, apibendrinimo, kompleksinio LR miesto savivaldybių kurčiųjų tyrimo (anoniminė kurčiųjų apklausa, duomenų analizei naudojant SPSS 20.0 paketą; pusiau struktūrizuotas ekspertinis interviu, kurio medžiaga analizuota pasitelkus turinio analizę, išskiriant reikšmingas kategorijas), modeliavimo metodai. Straipsnyje laikomasi sisteminės prieigos, t. y. neįgaliųjų integravimas į sprendimų priėmimą laikomas procesu, turinčiu sistemos požymių (tarpusavyje susijusių, siekiant tikslo nuolat tarpusavyje sąveikaujančių ir išorinės makroaplinkos bei mikroaplinkos veikiamų komponentų (jų grupių) visuma, kurioje svarbus kiekvienas komponentas) ir nuolat tobulintinu, atsižvelgiant į jau naudojamų elementų (šiuo atveju – teisinių ir institucinių mechanizmų) veiksmingumą.

Atliktas tyrimas parodė, kad yra gana palanki teisinė sistema kurtiesiems integruoti į pilietinį gyvenimą LR savivaldybėse, į jų sprendimų priėmimo procesus ir veikia atitinkama institucinė sistema: visų savivaldybių tarybose – socialinių reikalų komitetai, dalyje savivaldybių tarybų – neįgaliųjų reikalų tarybos, finansinę paramą iš Vyriausybės per savivaldybę pagal laimėtus projektus gaunantys ir kurčiųjų interesus ginantys kurčiųjų reabilitacijos centrai, 5 didžiuosiuose Lietuvos miestuose, jungiant ir greta esančius kitų rajonų padalinius, – LR Vyriausybės finansuojami gestų kalbos vertėjų centrai. Turint gana panašias galimybes, situacija savivaldybėse skirtinga: kurčiųjų problemos geriau girdimos neįgaliųjų

tarybas, kurių sudėtyje yra kurtiesiems atstovaujantys asmenys, įsteigusiose savivaldybių tarybose, kurčiųjų interesams sėkmingiau atstovauja visuomeninės organizacijos, turinčios strateginį valdymą, sprendimų priėmimą išmanančių lyderių.

Penkiuose didžiuosiuose Lietuvos miestuose atliktas tyrimas (apklausti 302 ne jaunesni kaip 18 m. amžiaus klausos negalią turintys žmonės ir 19 tiesiogiai kurčiųjų klausimus instituciniu lygiu sprendžiančių ekspertų) parodė, kad kurčiųjų įsitraukimas į dalyvaujimąjį valdymą yra gana menkas. Tokį pasyvumą lemiančios pagrindinės priežastys: *subjektyvios* (kurčiųjų bendruomenės abejingumas ir pasyvumas; kurčiųjų išsilavinimo stoka; nusivylimas politiniais lyderiais), *objektyvios*, priklausančios nuo galią ir valdžią turinčių institucijų (informacijos prieinamumo problema, gestų kalbos vertėjų trūkumas, pasikeitęs kurčiųjų interesus ginančių struktūrų finansavimas), *pozityvių sąveikų* tarp savivaldybėje įsikūrusių institucijų ir kurčiųjų bendruomenės bei *lyderystės kompetencijų* trūkumas.

Tyrimas parodė, kad neįgaliųjų ar kitaip socialiai atskirtų asmenų socialinė integracija dar netapo vienu iš horizontaliųjų principų savivaldybės tarybos ir administracijos padalinių veikloje, savivaldybėse nepakankamai išnaudojami „minkštieji“ veiksniai: *sąveikos (bendradarbiavimas, tinklaveika, interesų grupės)* tarp skirtingo lygio valdymo institucijų, darbuotojų *kompetencijos*, NVO *aktyvumas* ir pan.

Modeliuojant situacijos gerinimo projekcijas, akivaizdu, kad daugiausia pastangų gali įdėti jau veikiančios savivaldybių teritorijose institucijos, tiek savivaldos, tiek nacionalinės valdžios, aktyviai bendradarbiaudamos tarpusavyje ir įtraukdamos tuo klausimu kompetentingai galinčias prisidėti aukštojo mokslo, švietimo ir ugdymo institucijas, NVO. Svarbiausia yra *motyvacija*, noras, kad didėtų klausos negalią turinčių asmenų dalyvavimas sprendimų priėmime. Toliau – *kompetencija*, išmanymas, kaip tai daryti, suvokiant, kad ši visuomenės grupė savo kultūra, informacijos priėmimo ir perdavimo būdais yra skirtinga ir komunikacija su ja, jos konsultavimas, periodiškas grįžtamasis ryšys reikalauja specifinių kompetencijų ir finansų reikiamoms priemonėms kurti. Bendri projektai, *nuolatinis mokymasis*, kai proceso dalyviai perduoda vieni kitiems turimus gebėjimus (savivaldybės darbuotojai kurtiesiems – projektų valdymo, įsitraukimo į sprendimų priėmimą, e. valdžios gebėjimus; kurčiųjų šeimos nariai, gestų



kalbos vertimo centrai, aukštosios mokyklos savivaldybės darbuotojams – gestų kalbos gebėjimus; NVO, aukštosios mokyklos kurtiesiems – lyderystės, projektų valdymo, dalyvaujamojo valdymo gebėjimus), yra ne mažiau svarbios priemonės situacijai gerinti.

Tyrimas parodė dar gana didelę stagnaciją savivaldybėse, gestų kalbos vertimo centruose – būtų galima aktyviau įsitraukti į kurčiųjų integracijos į politinį gyvenimą

didinimą. Dar viena situacijos gerinimo kryptis būtų teisės aktų korekcija, numatant ne vien funkcijas, bet ir bendro rezultato – bendradarbiaujant su vietos institucijomis didinti kurčiųjų integraciją į sprendimų priėmimą savivaldybėse – siekimą.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** dalyvaujamasis valdymas, instituciniai mechanizmai, teisiniai mechanizmai, kurčiųjų dalyvavimas sprendimų priėmime.

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