

The Way of Enabling Social Actors to Participate in decision-Making Processes in Local Communities

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to introduce the methodology and the results of educational pilot projects implemented in Lithuania in 2020. The results of the educational pilot projects confirmed the scientific hypothesis raised by the authors of this article that more active civil participation in decision-making processes in the local communities can be expected while recognizing the objective differences of the social actors (local stakeholders) and according to that the most appropriate forms of civil participation in decision-making processes would be selected as well as the accurate information for social actors (local stakeholders) classified into some groups would be provided.

Keywords: civil society, civil participation, civil participation in a local community, local stakeholder, social actor.

Introduction

According to the sources of scientific literature and various science research reports authors [1,3,5] of this article reasonably state that despite using various forms and methods of involvement of civil society in decision-making processes the level of civil participation in decision-making processes in various countries (particularly in Lithuania) remains low. For example, in Lithuania, despite the fact that there are created legal conditions to apply practically all forms of direct participatory democracy, such as local surveys, public deliberation, consultations, meetings, participation in special commissions and working groups, activities through elected community representatives or non-governmental organizations, petitions, etc., but only less than 10 percent of the municipal inhabitants are actively involved in decision-making in local affairs [4]. The authors of this article have a hypothesis that the different characteristics of social actors (local stakeholders) are not sufficiently recognized when applying the forms of civil participation in decision-making processes and providing necessary information for them. Positive changes in civil participation in decision-making processes can be expected by objectively acknowledging the differences of social actors (local stakeholders). It all depends on what different forms of civil participation as well as what different forms/channels of information can be used into involving social actors (local stakeholders) in the decision-making processes.

The authors of this article decided to verify their scientific hypothesis – during participation in educational pilot projects (in 2020) implemented at six local Lithuanian municipalities. At the time of the educational pilot projects, there were applied the technique and recommendations on civil participation in decision-making processes (hereinafter referred to

as the Civil Participation Tool) developed by the Council of Europe Center for Good Governance Expertise [2] following these aspects: 1) to select, evaluate and classify social actors (local stakeholders) into four groups and 2) to select the most appropriate forms of civil participation in decision-making processes and providing the accurate information for classified social actors (local stakeholders).

The results of the pilot projects confirm the scientific hypothesis and allow the authors of this article to state reasonably that more active civil participation in decision-making processes in the local communities can be expected while recognizing the differences of the social actors (local stakeholders) and classifying them into some groups the most appropriate forms of civil participation in decision-making processes for them would be selected as well as accurate information for social actors (local stakeholders) from each group would be provided.

Methodology

As it was mentioned above, the methodological basis of the educational pilot projects (in 2020) implemented at six local Lithuanian municipalities consisted of the Civil Participation Tool which provides:

- 1) a framework that allows to select, evaluate and classify social actors(local stakeholders) according to certain selected criteria and actions;
- 2) the guidelines on how to select the most appropriate forms of civil participation in decision-making processes and provide accurate information for classified social actors (local stakeholders).

Techniques for selecting, evaluating, and classifying social actors (local stakeholders)in decision-making processes

This is a special Tool for selecting, evaluating, and categorizing civil participation entities into four groups which 1) are important (ready, able) and 2) has an interest (is interested, willing) in participating in decision making or implementing decisions that are important to the local community. There are three steps that must be performed to use this tool (see **Figure 1**).

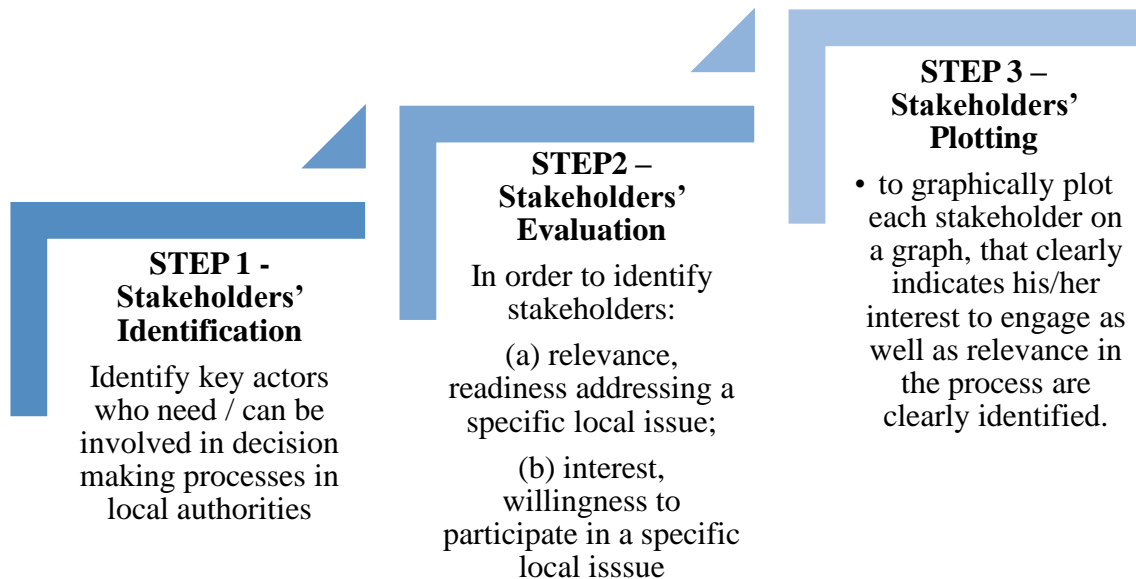


Figure1 -Three steps of Civil Participation Tool(source: Training on Tool for Civil Participation)

In the first step an optimal list of social actors (local stakeholders) for civil participation has to be established: natural or legal persons relevant to civil participation/decision-making in a given situation. These persons must be selected from three categories of entities: a) institutional entities (e.g. governmental institutions (e.g. territorial labor exchanges) that can have a significant influence (impact) on the decision-making process; b) civil society actors (e.g. non-governmental organizations, national minority organizations, etc. that can have a significant influence (impact) on decision-making) and c) private sector actors (e.g. business associations, regional chambers of commerce, commerce and crafts, etc., which may have a significant influence on the decision-making process.

The second step of the action assesses all social actors (local stakeholders) selected in the first step ("step") according to two aspects: (a) their relevance, readiness to address a specific local issue; and b) their interest, willingness to participate in a specific decision-making process. The assessment of each of the above-mentioned aspects is carried out using 40 criteria, which are divided into four groups: a) Social capital dimension, b) Economic capital dimension, c) Human capital dimension and d) Political capital dimensions. The evaluators (group of experts) using the tool, are asked to identify, for each social actors' (local stakeholders') potential interest and relevance (Very Positively, Positively, Negatively, Very negatively) by co-decision:

1) the significance of the evaluation in the first list of criteria (evaluating each of the 20 criteria) shows how important it is for the local authority to have the specific selected social actor (local stakeholder) on board, based on his (her) importance, readiness, ability to participate in local affairs;

2) the significance of the evaluation in the second list of criteria (evaluating each of the 20) shows how important it is for the local authority to have the specific selected social

actor (local stakeholder) on board, based on his (her) interest, and willingness to participate in solving a specific local issue.

As far as the civil participation tool has been created and developed using mathematical models (or mathematical formulas) and information technology (applying the EXCELL and other programs) it means that assigning one of the four possible values to the criteria (factors) in both lists automatically calculates and quantifies (number from 0 to 1) expresses the influence (impact) of each of the two lists of criteria (factors) on a particular selected stakeholder: a) relevance, readiness to address a specific local issue; and b) their interest, willingness to participate in a specific decision making processes of local affairs.

In the third step of action according to the results of the evaluation in the second step, all selected social actors (local stakeholders) are divided into four groups. Each group represents a different level of potential involvement of the social actors (local stakeholders): a) Information group; b) Advisory Group; c) Dialogue Group and d) Partnership Group (see **Figure 2**).

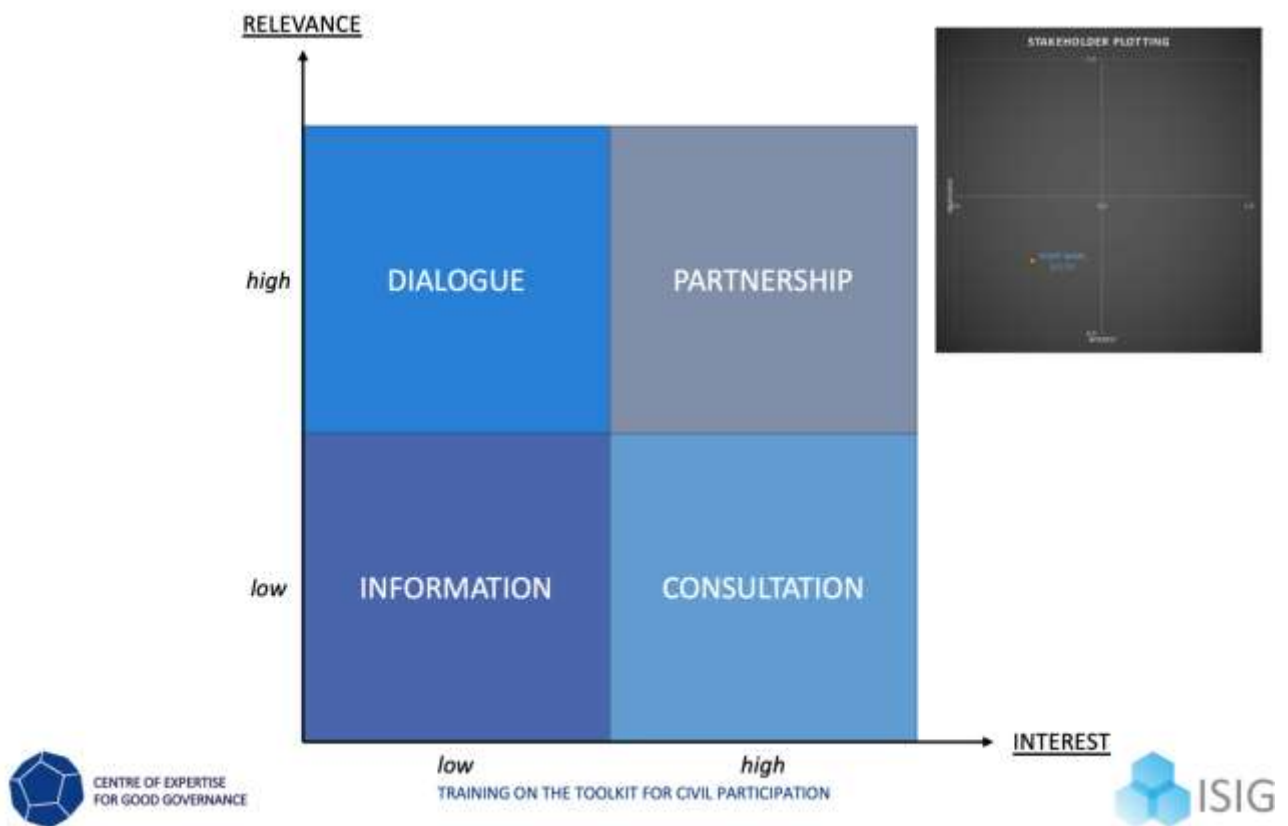


Figure 2 Classification of social actors (local stakeholders) into four groups according to two aspects of evaluation /“The Map of Civil Participation stakeholders”(source: Training on Tool for Civil Participation)

The social actors (local stakeholders) falling into the Information group are characterized by a perceived low readiness, ability as well as interest to deal with local affairs on the topic at hand (the numerical values of the evaluation are from 0 to 0.5 in both aspects). Social actors (local stakeholders) falling into the Consultation group are characterized by a perceived high interest (the numerical value of the evaluation is from 0.5 to 1), but a low level of relevance, readiness on the topic at hand (the numerical value of the evaluation is from 0 to 0.5). The Dialogue Group includes those social actors (local stakeholders) who are characterized by a perceived low interest (a numerical value of 0 to 0.5 but a high level of relevance, readiness on the topic at hand (a numerical value of 0.5 to 1). Social actors (local stakeholders) falling into the Partnership group are characterized by a perceived high interest as well as the relevance of social actors (local stakeholders) for the topic at hand (the numerical value of the evaluation is from 0.5 to 1 in both aspects) (see **Figure 3**).

It is important to mention, that the social actors (local stakeholders) are divided not even into four groups, but also graphically represented in a particular figure: each selected and evaluated social actor (local stakeholder) is placed in one of the four quadrants. Such a graph (taxonomy) is called the "The Map of Civil Participation social actors (local stakeholders)" (see **Figure 2**).

<p>DIALOGUE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low interest of stakeholder • High relevance perceived 	<p>PARTNERSHIP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High interest of stakeholder • High relevance perceived
<p>INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low interest of stakeholder • Low relevance perceived 	<p>CONSULTATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low relevance perceived • High interest of stakeholder

Figure 3. The graph of the social actors (local stakeholders) is classified into four groups according to the two aspects of evaluation: degree of perceived actor’s interest and degree of functionality perceived by the public authority of the social actors (local stakeholders) (source: Training material on Tool for Civil Participation)

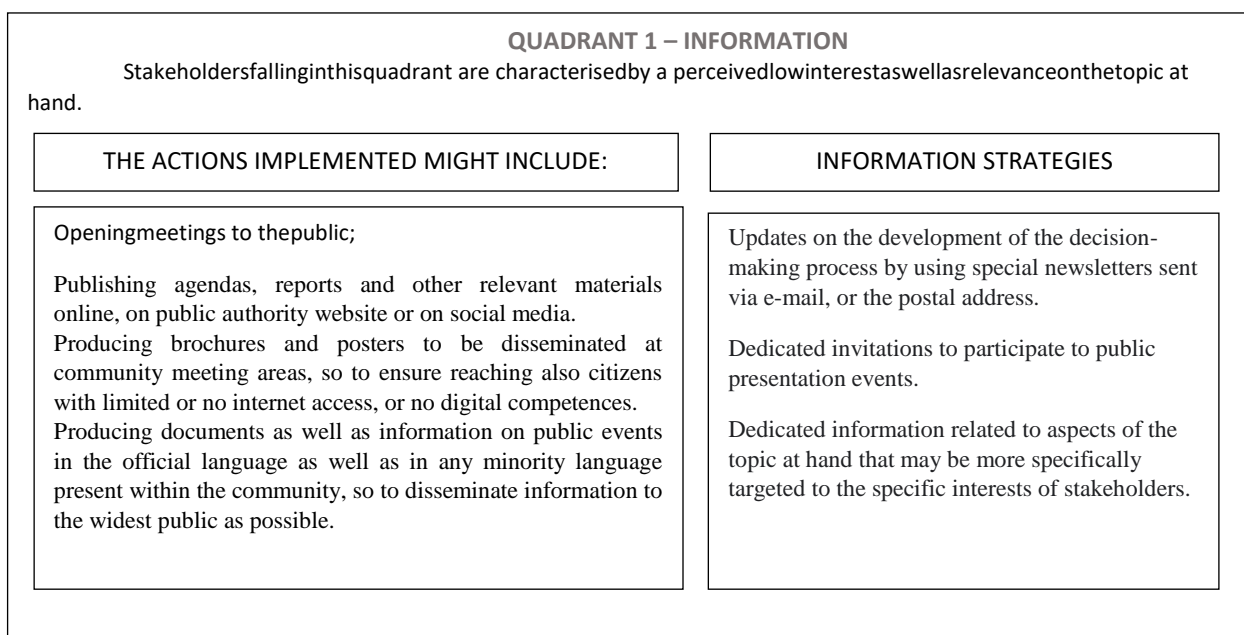
Guidelines on how to select the most appropriate forms of civil participation in decision-making processes and provide accurate information for classified social actors (local stakeholders).

The Civil Participation Tool also provides guidelines on the most appropriate forms of civil participation and information provision for social actors (local stakeholders) stakeholders in

decision-making processes according to the information provided on the graph of four quadrants.

The forms and methods of involvement of social actors (local stakeholders) into decision-making processes directly depend on the group (quadrant) to which a particular social actor (local stakeholder) belongs. For example, in order to involve social actors (local stakeholders) into decision-making processes who belong to the Information Group (Information's quadrant of the "Map of Civic Participants"), the actions might be such as opening meetings, publishing agendas or reports, producing brochures and posters etc. It is recommended that for these specific stakeholders' information should be provided through special newsletters, invitations to public presentations, etc. (see Figure 4).

To involve other groups of social actors (local stakeholders) in decision-making processes that fall into Partnership, Consultation, or Dialogue quadrants, it is recommended to use other forms, methods, actions, or channels that are most suitable for them.



Training material on Tool for Civil Participation)

Results

As it is already mentioned, educational pilot projects took place in six local municipalities of Lithuania in 2020 in October-November. They were prepared the Maps of the Civil participation social actors (local stakeholders) and the strategies of Participation implementation (list of the appropriate forms of civil participation in decision-making processes and channels of the accurate information to social actors (local stakeholders) as the results of the projects by using Tool of Civil participation. These maps and strategies have been developed not only to acquire the necessary administrative capacity but also to apply them in practice.

This article presents the results of a training pilot project implemented by only one of the six Lithuanian municipalities - Tauragė district municipality. It is important to mention that the results obtained in other Lithuanian municipalities are analogous, only the cases (the specific local issue) differed, as a context according to the Maps of the Civil participation social actors (local stakeholders) and strategies of Participation implementation and Participation enhancement were prepared.

Implementing the training pilot project in Tauragė district municipality:

1) The was chosen case of civil participation in decision-making in local affairs - the reconstruction of a potentially renovated market in Tauragė city center, next to residential houses, to make it more attractive and serve not only as a trading place but also as a space for cultural events. The case was called "Change in the functionality of the market: from trade to culture";

2) in order to achieve the set of goals (to find the ways and methods to reconstruct the market in the center of Tauragė (to change the functionality of the market), it was decided to involve the social actors (local stakeholders) interested in the reconstruction of the market - residents of the surrounding territories, non-governmental - cultural organizations and interest groups, as well as market traders, owners and users of property in this area:

2.1) the group of institutional entities: a) Tauragė County State Food and Veterinary Service, b) market administrator;

2.2) the group of stakeholders from civil society: a) residents of the surrounding housing association, b) NGOs whose main activity is the organization of cultural events;

2.3) the group of private (economic) sector entities: a) market traders (representatives representing their interests, b) buyers of market goods (persons representing the interests of buyers), c) other markets of Tauragė city (business partners);

3) there was formed an expert group of municipal politicians and civil servants: Deputy Mayor of the Municipality, Director of the Municipal Administration, Head of the Strategic Planning and Investment Division of the Municipal Administration, which was responsible for the selection, evaluation and classification of stakeholders, as well as for the preparation of the map of stakeholders and strategies.

4) the local group of experts, following the list of social actors (local stakeholders), constructed by the tool of Civil participation, evaluated all selected stakeholders (into two aspects were evaluated according to 40 criteria) and prepared the map of civil participation (see **Figure 5**):

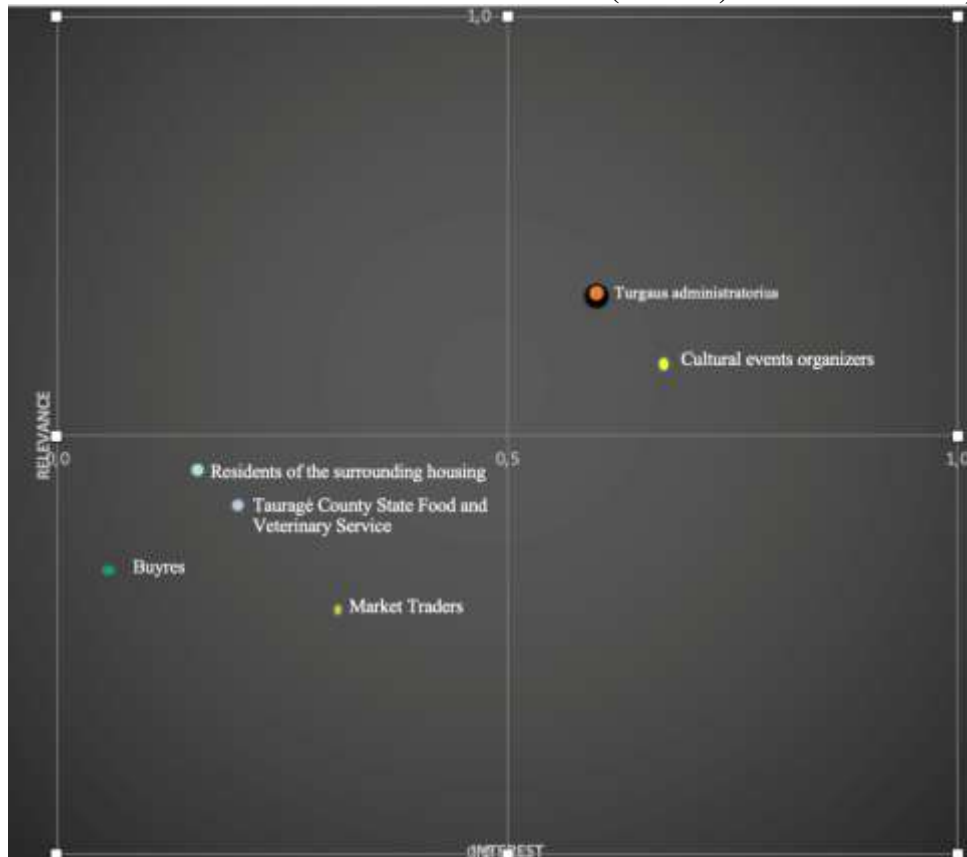


Figure 5 “Market functional adaptation: from trade to cultural events” distribution of social actors (local stakeholders) in quadrants.

5) as it can be seen from the Map of Civil participation social actors (local stakeholders), stakeholders fell into two quadrants:

5.1) into the Information Quadrant and at the same time to the Information Group (social actors (local stakeholders) with a numerical value of 0 to 0.5 in both aspects, low readiness, ability to deal with local affairs, and low relevance to participate in decision-making processes at hand- 5 out of 7 evaluated civic participation subjects: a) Tauragė County State Food and Veterinary Service, b) residents of the surrounding housing association, c) market traders (representatives of their interests, d) buyers of market goods (representatives of buyers) persons), e) other markets of Tauragė city (business partners);

5.2) into the Partnership Quadrant and at the same time to the Partnership Group (stakeholders with a numerical value of 0.5 to 1 in both aspects their relevance to deal with local issues and their high interest, willingness to participate in local affairs) 2 out of 7 subjects of stakeholder fell in this quadrant: a) market administrator and b) NGOs whose main activity is the organization of cultural events.

6) in accordance with the recommendations provided by the Civil Participation Tool, strategies for the implementation were prepared as well:

There were planned to invite stakeholders, both from the Information and Partnership groups to participate directly in the presentation event under the idea of the market’s reconstruction in the center of Tauragė City in the Participation Implementation Strategy (Action Plan). For the invitation is intended to use the following tools: announcements in the local press,

information on the municipality's website, Cultural events for market traders and NGOs, information for managers and members (by e-mail), and invitations to the chairmen of surrounding housing associations on multi-apartment information boards. After the presentation event, it is planned to assess the level of interest of all stakeholders in the reconstruction of the market (change of functionality) and make appropriate decisions: either to prepare a technical project for the reconstruction of the market in Tauragė city center or to abandon the idea (idea to reconstruct the market). According to the information got during the presentation event, the decision made by the group of local experts on reconstruction / non-reconstruction of the market intends to be published on the municipal website and at the press conference of the municipal leaders.

As it is already mentioned, the educational pilot project in Tauragė district municipality was not only designed to strengthen administrative capacity but also have had practical benefits. Using the maps of Civil participation and the strategies (action plans) for the implementation and enhancement of civil participation, the technical project of the Tauragė market was prepared and a tender for construction works is going to be announced and reconstruction works will start in 2021. “Tauragė city market will change beyond recognition. The new attractive shopping places and the green zone will not only become a convenient shopping place for entrepreneurial and visitors but will also change the central face of the city, ”- Tauragė District Municipality announced in its 2020 report.

Conclusions

1. According to the sources of scientific literature and various science research reports authors of this article state that despite using various methods of involvement of civil society in decision-making processes the level of civil participation in decision-making processes in various countries (particularly in Lithuania) remains low.
2. The authors of this article have a hypothesis that the different characteristics of social actors (local stakeholders) are not sufficiently recognized when applying the forms of civil participation in decision-making processes and providing necessary information for them. Positive changes in civil participation in decision-making processes can be expected by objectively acknowledging the differences of social actors (local stakeholders), classifying them into some different groups, selecting the most appropriate forms of civil participation in decision-making processes and providing would accurate information for each group of social actors (local stakeholders).
3. The authors of this article decided to verify their scientific hypothesis – during participation in educational pilot projects (in 2020) implemented at six local Lithuanian municipalities. At the time of the educational pilot projects, there were applied the technique and guidelines on civil participation in decision-making processes developed by the Council of Europe Center for Good Governance Expertise provided: a) framework that allowed to selection, evaluate and classify social actors (local stakeholders) according to certain selected criteria and actions and 2) guidelines on how to select the most appropriate forms of civil participation in decision-making processes and provide the accurate information for classified social actors (local stakeholders).
4. The results of the pilot projects confirm the scientific hypothesis and allow the authors of this article to state reasonably that more active civil participation in decision-making

processes in the local communities can be expected while recognizing the differences of the social actors (local stakeholders) and classifying them into some groups the most appropriate forms of civil participation in decision-making processes for them would be selected as well as accurate information for social actors (local stakeholders) from each group would be provided.

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