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LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY IN KOSOVO

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Abstract: *Community development is vital in networking and creating social capital. Local governments in Kosovo cooperate closely with their communities by offering public and social services, inclusivity, and social integration. This cooperation increases active citizenship, community development, social welfare, and local democracy. This paper aims to research and analyze the relationship between local governments and their communities, focusing on providing social services. The applied methodology included a quantitative survey of 300 respondents from three municipalities: Pristina, Fushe Kosove, and Obilic, targeting citizens aged 18 and above of both genders. The results show that local authorities in these municipalities offer community services and include their communities in policy-making and decision-making. While they also offer social services, community-based services should be restructured, and local authorities should pay more attention to empowering the community more comprehensively.*

Keywords: *Local Government; Community; Social Services; Delivery; Kosovo*

INTRODUCTION

The term and concept of local government primarily relate to exercising authoritative power within a specific territory. Local self-government can be viewed as the initial stage of democracy, as it is the primary avenue through which citizens can access public services. In fact, "local government can be described as some government bodies elected by the people that have administrative, legislative, and executive functions on the territories under their jurisdiction. It is defined as an authority that decides or determines certain measures within a given territory" (Thapa 2020, 4). According to Myrtezani (2022), "a political system cannot be accepted without the involvement of local self-government" (pp. 47-62). On the one hand, the local self-government has a degree of independence from the central government, as it is an authority that has social, factual, cultural, administrative, and geographical control over a given territory.

On the other hand, local self-government can serve as a "connecting bridge" between communities, ethnicities, cultures, and other social groups and structures living and operating within a certain territory. This observation highlights that local self-government, employing diverse democratic governance models, effectively involves their constituents in decision-making and policy-making. As a result, it nurtures the development of democracy and instills a sense of ownership among citizens regarding local public affairs. Alexis de Tocqueville has a point when he underlines that: people's tendency to protect political rights can be strengthened under certain circumstances. In this context, the local self-government plays a major role. People

who participate in local politics are much more likely to preserve the right to participate than those who vote only at the time of the general elections" (Malnes 2007,196-197). In other words, Morina et al. (2021) stressed that:

> Through it, we can build mutual communication between the citizens, on the one hand, and local government bodies, on the other hand. Legitimizing the representative bodies of local government through local government illustrated this communication better. Local elections enable the political accountability of elected representatives at the local level of government, which is an important factor in ensuring transparency, accountability, and public participation in decision-making (p. 21).

On the other hand, the community is fluid, it is variable, and usually, when we speak about it, we mean a group of people, who have a common purpose, a mutual trust, according to Anthony Giddens, and a sense of social belonging, because they belong to a certain community. It could be a virtual community with a purpose, trust, sense of social and identity affiliation, interaction, and social capital through which they are mentioned. It could be a business community, religious community, sports community, ethnic community, or any other type of community that does not only define the geographical aspect. Definitions of "community in sociological literature are varied but, in general, show three ideas essential to the concept, namely, first, the community is a human group; second, the people in it have common activities and experiences; and, third, it occupies a definite territorial area" (Hoffer 1931). Aristotle described the community as a compound of parts having functions and interests in common. However, in the 19th century, the German philosopher and sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies differentiated between community and society (1957). According to Tönnies (1957), the community is represented by individuals' close social ties (e.g., family, friends, and neighbors), whereas society refers to abstract associations among individuals who do not share feelings and do not necessarily share space and time" (Cobigo et al. 2016, 181-203). Consequently, it can be seen that communities are pervasive and, as a result, play a crucial role in connection to local governance.

The key finding of Fals Borda "is that participation is a real and endogenous experience of and for the common people that reduces the differences between experts and community and between mental and manual labor" (Claridge 2004, 20). The community is the one that often plays the role of the connecting bridge between local self-government and their members or other citizens in that region. This is because the community is diverse, has many members, and cannot engage in local acts for various issues and needs, including social services, as a whole; instead, only community representatives who represent their interests participate.

When talking about social services, even though they are within the competencies of the local level of government, through social welfare centers, the community is the initiator that influences the strengthening of interpersonal relationships between its members and the relationship with the local self-government, thus influencing each member about feeling an important part of the community and an equal part in contributing to the public life of local self-government. In Kosovo, local self-government is organized according to a one-tier system (central and local level), and the community is an integral part of policy-making and decision-

making through participation in local democracy through legal mechanisms defined by law. While the local self-government has the competence through the directorates to provide social services, the community can further strengthen relations with the local level through cooperation in various projects to have social inclusion for the entire community and social services to focus on the community's needs. Considering the role and importance of this triangle of components in the relationship: local self-government, community, and social services, this paper aims to research and analyze the relationships between the three components that focus on community development, respectively, marginalized groups through the provision of community-based social services. The municipalities in Kosovo can play an important role in building inter-societal relations within the community through participation and support of concrete projects, focusing on the values and social capital of the community, especially through social services where the community can offer such.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local self-government is crucial in organizing and providing public and social services. Recently, studies have brought attention to the dynamic interaction between local communities and local self-government. The theory that focuses on this is "Empowering Theories: Participatory, Deliberative, and Constructionist Democracy". The common theme "in participatory theories is maximizing the participation of citizens in public decisions. Participatory democracy originates in Rousseau's preference for direct democracy, with modern articulations coming from Benjamin Barber, who calls his participatory model "strong democracy" (Garlick 2020, 10). This theory primarily emphasizes community involvement in local decision-making processes, particularly within social service issues in the public services sector. In practice, participatory theories strive for empowerment as their ultimate objective, recognizing the value of political participation in establishing individuals as active citizens of the state.

Furthermore,

> Participatory theories have empowerment as their end goal, with engaging in the political sphere being worthwhile because participation transforms individuals into public citizens. Deliberative democracy advocates for authentic discussion to precede decision-making. This involves recognizing and reconciling divergent views from one's own through dialogue and mutual respect (Garlick 2020, 10).

On the other hand, the theory of communitarianism, which is also a political program, plays an important role as well. The way the community is organized "is a conscious process of social interaction and a method of social work, related to any objective or to meet multiple needs and maintain the smooth running of the process, to help people effectively cope with their problems and objectives, to bring changes in the community and group relations, as well as in the distribution of power in decision-making" (Dragoti 2009, 88-90). In this segment, the community has an important role in the social inclusion of all members within it, because the focus is on the "common good", which reflects on inter-societal relations, interaction, and strengthening of social cohesion. According to Etzioni, quoted by (Kiçmari 2004, 147-148) there

are two important aspects: "first, a network of effective relationships between the individuals of a group, which strengthens each other, secondly, a sense of obligation in front of common values, norms, and meanings, in front of a common history and identity". It should be noted that the community emphasizes the social aspects of local self-government services more than the local self-government does on providing services within its purview. The coordination of their activities can be reflected in reciprocity, where the local self-government benefits in terms of raising the participation of the community in public policies and public life, which is a strong signal for local democracy.

On the other hand, the community, due to reciprocity, benefits from the local self-government in fulfilling their needs, which, according to researcher Jonathan Bradshaw, fall into four main categories: Normative needs - needs identified according to a norm or set of standards; Comparative needs - needs relating to those that arise from the comparison of an individual/group with others in a community or society; Felt needs - needs that people feel from an individual perspective; and Expressed need - the need that people say they have, where people can feel needs that they do not express, as well as express needs that they do not feel" (Xhumari 2009, 13). Local communities in Kosovo have recently gained greater influence over local policy and decision-making, both passively and aggressively. In recent years, local communities in Kosovo have become more empowered, not only passively but also actively, in local policy-making and decision-making. As a result, the relationship between local communities and government has significantly strengthened. This has benefited the community regarding public services, especially since social services are provided through municipalities, specifically municipal directorates. This has drawn societal attention to underrepresented groups, increasing communal well-being and enhancing public safety.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

As previously mentioned, a survey was conducted to analyze the relationship between local self-government, the community, and the provision of community-based social services. The survey included interviews with 300 respondents (N=300) in Pristina, Obilic, and Fushe Kosova (Pristina region) from January to February 2023. The questionnaire was administered in person, ensuring a representative and randomly selected sample. The sample distribution was 45% in Pristina, 20% in Obilic, and 35% in Fushe Kosova. The participants represented a range of ages from 18 to 65 and above, with the following breakdown by age groups: 18-25 years (24.3%), 26-35 years (23.4%), 36-45 years (20.1%), 46-55 years (17%), and 56 years and above (15.4%). The gender ratio was 55% men and 45% women. In terms of ethnicity, the breakdown was as follows: Albanian (85%), Serbs (3%), Ashkali (4%), Egyptians (4%), Roma (1%), and others (3%) - the survey aimed to be inclusive, encompassing a wide range of the sample population. The sample was representative and specifically tailored to the study. The survey utilized a questionnaire as the data collection tool and employed a direct and face-to-face approach.

Based on the sample size (N=300), the study aimed to answer the following questions: What is the relationship between local self-government and the community in these municipalities? How much impact does community empowerment have on local policy-making and decision-making? In which areas does the community cooperate with local authorities? How

much influence does the provision of public services, specifically social services through centers for social work, have on the community? What are the benefits of social services provision for the community?

The survey encompassed additional inquiries about the subject matter. Other methodologies employed included a literature review, a comparison of target municipalities, content analysis, an analysis of the legal framework, and statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sphere of local governance holds significant importance, as local authorities possess local and financial independence, autonomy in delivering public services within their jurisdictions, and the ability to impact the socio-economic development of their territories. This influence serves to enhance relationships within the community and foster social well-being. Alternatively, author White (2022) acknowledged:

> Many common themes describe why local governments are interested in developing the economy. Here are some of the ones I find most common: to increase the number and quality of local employment opportunities, to expand the services and products available to residents and visitors, create a more liveable community for people of all ages and walks of life, and to increase local investment to achieve the above - jobs, business, products, and services (pp. 3-4).

All of these themes are important and fall under the domain of local governance, and on the other hand, they also reflect on local communities, due to public services, including the issue of employment in the community. Meanwhile, the community is fluid, and it is the one that has common sense among the members of the social group they belong to or believe they belong to, a community that is known today as a type of social capital due to social networking. Therefore, according to sociologist James Coleman, "Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors - within the structure" (Claridge 2004, 7). Therefore, it can be said that "social capital refers to a network of relationships created by a group of people that helps them achieve common goals and lead a comfortable life. Humans are social creatures, and such a voluntary association benefits the members in the long run, adding value that an individual cannot otherwise achieve" (Wallstreetmojo Team 2023). This social capital plays an important role in developing local communities, transforming them into active citizens concerning local governance. The more cohesive the community is, the more involved they are in local policy-making and decision-making processes.

In this aspect, the relationships between the local self-government and the community are strengthened because the local self-government provides public services, as well as social services, through social work centers, while the community participates in partnership with the local self-government by giving their contribution. In the case of Kosovo, "the local government of Kosovo is unitary, a one-level system of decentralization, based on the 2008 Ahtisaari

proposal. There are two levels of governance, the central level and the local level, also called the municipal level. In Kosovo, there are 38 municipalities, of which 27 are administered by the majority Albanian community and ten other municipalities by the Serb community, with only one by the Turkish community" (Kamberi 2021, 263).

Meanwhile, the organization of the community is regulated through subordinate acts which emphasize that "this administrative Instruction aims to regulate the organization, functioning and cooperation of the municipality with the villages, settlements and urban quarters, in the exercise of some activities that are under the responsibility and competence of the municipality" (MLGA 2019, Article 1). This administrative instruction also speaks to the nature of establishing local councils, which represent the local communities and their organizational nature. On the other hand, local self-government, in this case, refers to the municipalities, which are fundamental units of local self-government and are responsible for providing public services to citizens. Among these services are social services for different social categories, provided through social work centers under the respective health and social welfare directorates, although their organization, development, and implementation are done at the main level through the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. However, the local self-government's primary concern concerning the community is the continuation of communication through a variety of projects and programs based on the community, influencing the delivery of public and social services, social inclusion, the development of social and economic welfare, the return of social attention, and the strengthening of relationships between the community and local governance.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND THE COMMUNITY

Often "consideration of social elements has developed from the notion that a strong social base will lead to a stronger and healthier community, also referred to as social capital" (Vitartas 2006, 2). This social capital is important as it creates a social network among local community members. Furthermore, "community involvement is the level of activity an individual contributes to their local community. It plays an important part in communities as being involved in activities, particularly voluntarily, indicates a level of pride in and commitment to the community" (Vitartas 2006, 3).

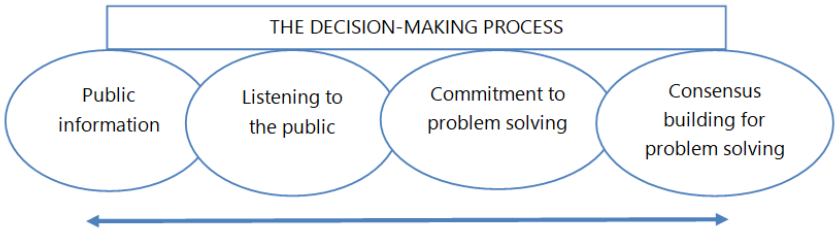


Figure 1: The Decision-Making Process (Source: Sutaj 2018,16)

Therefore, local communities offer an opportunity to strengthen relationships between them and local governance. In contrast, local governance must be responsible for their community's or citizens' welfare in that territory. However, an increase in the relationships

between local self-governments and the community has been observed in Kosovo in recent years. This relationship has been developed through partnerships and community participation in policy-making and decision-making, encompassing several crucial steps illustrated in Figure 1. This process holds significance in empowering the community and fostering a strong relationship with the local self-government.

On the one hand, the community actively participates, promoting active citizenship and safeguarding their interests. On the other hand, by establishing a partnership with the community, the local self-government cultivates democracy and paves the way for future re-election through such collaborative instances. The dynamics of this relationship are vividly illustrated in Figure 2.

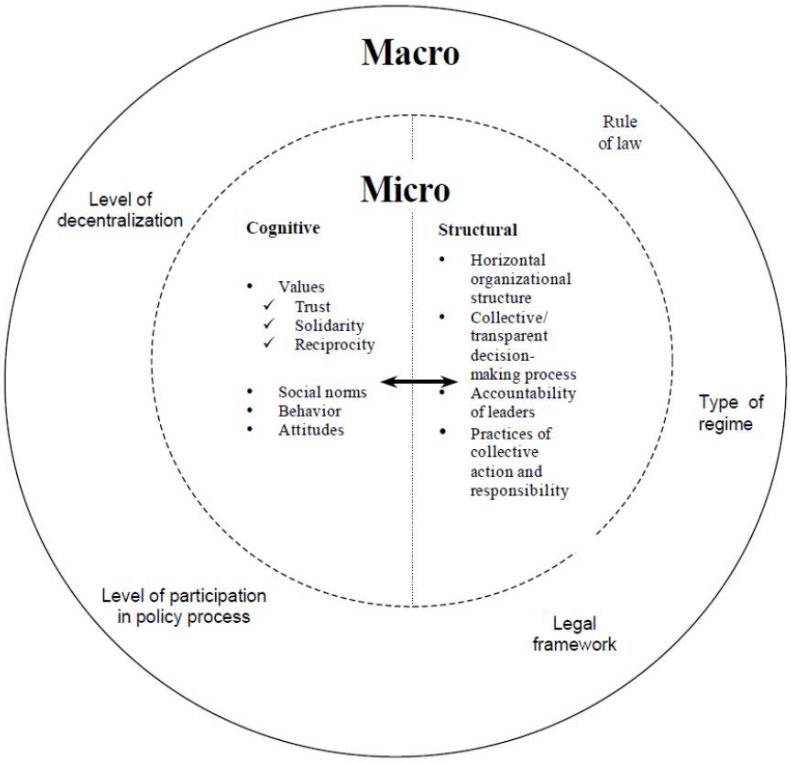


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework: Levels and Types of Social Capital (Claridge 2004, 13)

Figure 2 illustrates an existing conceptualization of social capital developed by Bain and Hicks (1998). The authors roughly divide social capital into two levels: the macro and the micro. The macro level refers to the institutional context in which organizations operate, while the micro level refers to the potential contribution that horizontal organizations and social networks make to development. In Kosovo, in addition to administrative guidance that addresses the relationship with councils, neighborhoods, and urban settlements that are inherently related to community empowerment, municipalities are also required to develop regulations for this purpose, taking into account the territory, number of residents, local communities, gender relations, and other important aspects. During the empirical research, we have addressed some important issues regarding the relationship between local governance and the community.

Table 1: What impact does community empowerment have on policy-making and decision-making? (Source: Authors' research)

What impact does community empowerment have on policy-making and decision-making?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Many	158	52.6	53	53
	Moderately	70	23.3	24	24
	Few	50	16.6	17	17
	Not at all	10	3.3	6	5
	Total	288	96	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	12	4		
Total		300	100.0		

Based on the data presented in Table 1, it is apparent that approximately 53% of respondents consider community empowerment in policy-making and decision-making to be of high importance. On average, 24% perceive it as moderately important, while 17% consider it minor. Only 6% indicated that they do not consider it important at all. Meanwhile, when queried about the areas in which the community collaborates most with local authorities, intriguing data emerged, which we have compiled and summarized below.

Table 2: In which areas does the community cooperate more with the local self-government? (Source: Authors' research)

In which areas does the community cooperate more with the local self-government?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Through public meetings	120	40	42	41
	Participation in commissions	20	6.6	7	7
	Through social services	49	16.3	17	17
	Through social audits	17	5.6	6	6
	Through public services	78	26	27	27
	Other	4	1.3	1	1.15
	Total	288	96	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	12	4		
Total		300	100.0		

Based on the data presented in Table 2, it is evident that approximately 42% of respondents have indicated that communities engage in greater collaboration with local authorities through participation in public meetings. These meetings serve as local decision-making mechanisms under the Law on Local Self-Government (2008). Despite legislation regulating this matter, participation in commissions is perceived as less favorable, as only 7% of respondents have expressed such a view. Furthermore, among those surveyed, 17% reported that they primarily collaborate through social services, specifically targeting marginalized groups, disadvantaged groups, and other social groups. The significance of collaboration through social audits has been highlighted; however, the achievement of such collaboration is limited to only 6%. This might be attributed to the relatively recent introduction of social audits

in Kosovo, which involve community monitoring of various local self-government programs. Consequently, there is limited community awareness and understanding of social audits. Author Eigman (2007) acknowledged that the local self-government and the community might work together most frequently in the area of public services, which includes:

> Things provided by local governments for and to citizens. We do not limit ourselves here to services of an individual character but also look at services in the interest of the citizen collective, groups of people. The local governments perform acts that are of service to citizens, which creates possibilities for citizens (including companies and organizations) to do things that would not have been possible without the municipality's involvement or that make it easier for them to do things (p. 11).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the focus of the relationship between local authorities and the community lies in their collaboration, encompassing interests in various fields and segments.

LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The municipalities, as basic units of local governance, have competencies within their jurisdiction: exclusive, delegated, and extended competencies. Thus, municipalities play an important role in providing social services through social work centers, but this can also be done through community-based civil society organizations. This implies that communitarianism "is an effort to unite and synthesize both aspects, individualism, and collectivism, respecting the basic rights of the individual as well as the well-being of the family and community" (Dragoti 1999, 275). Based on this approach, municipalities focus on developing social, economic, cultural, infrastructural, and security welfare, as well as a range of other issues that affect communities' individual and collective interests. Regard to Law No. 02/l-17 on Social and Family Services 2015 (amended on 2012):

> Each municipality, through its relevant directorate, is responsible for ensuring the provision of Social and Family Services within its territory to a standard specified by the Ministry. While they have general responsibility for the delivery of social and family services within their area, no elected member of the Municipal Council or Officer of the municipality is permitted to make directions to a Director of the Centre for Social Work or his staff concerning the professional management of any particular social and family services case, nor are they permitted to have access to confidential case records (Article 6).

Regarding the organization, usually, this is done through health and social welfare directorates, which require social services within their territory to be provided "through the activities of Centres for Social Work or by providing financial or other assistance to non-government organizations to enable them to do so" (Law No. 02/l-17 on Social and Family Services 2015, amended on 2012).

The Center for Social Work is, in fact, a professional public institution at the municipal level, competent for the protection of citizens in need of social support, which through the decentralization process of 2009, has a reporting relationship with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare as well as the municipality. The Center for Social Work in Kosovo is the main and authorized institution "for providing professional social services, the service of the Social Assistance Scheme, and other administrative matters. They provide services to all citizens of the Republic of Kosovo and other citizens who are temporarily or permanently in Kosovo with residence, work, or transit" (Mujku 2021, 7). Also, services

> under the territorial mandate and competence of the Center for Social Work - CSW are offered to all citizens regardless of nationality, age, language, race, or functional ability. Each CSW is obliged to provide services in the official languages provided by Article 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, while in the municipalities where other official languages such as Turkish, Roma, or Bosnian are also official, services must be provided in that language (Mujku 2021, 8).

However, CSW clients "may also be citizens from other countries for whom translation into their languages must be provided, as well as translation into sign language for deaf and dumb persons" (Mujku 2021, 8).

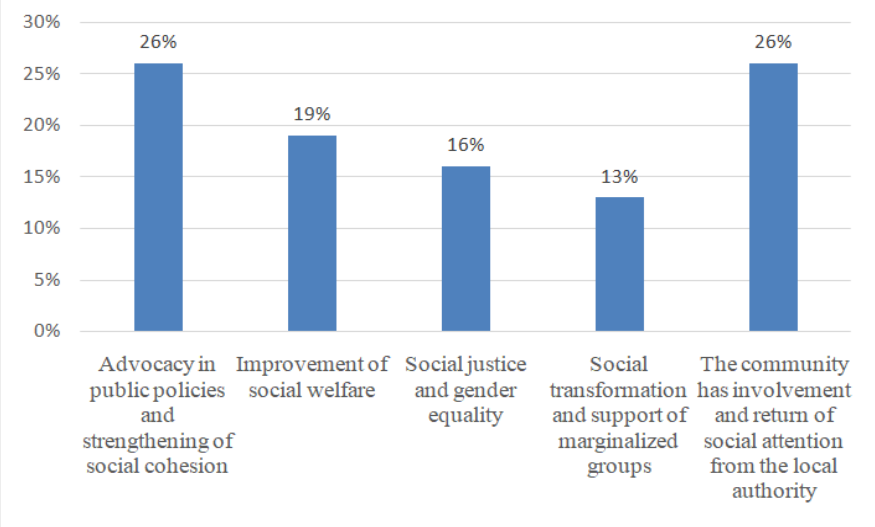
Within the 38 municipalities in Kosovo, each municipality has a social work center within its territory to cover the community's social needs, except for the capital - Pristina, which has a special status and has three units within the social work center. As for the provision of social services:

> They include a range of social services that are specified and divided according to different categories: legal protection, professional social services for children, professional social services for adults, temporary shelter for children without family care, a residential shelter for children, a residential shelter for adults, emergency assistance, family services, general services/assessment and planning services, after-hours care, administrative services, provision of social assistance and other unspecified services (Mujku 2021, 12-14).

From this, we can see that local self-government plays an important role in providing social services through social work centers and other civil society organizations that are specialized and licensed in this field. Local authorities, as well as central authorities, are at the forefront concerning community needs. In many other countries, social services are decentralized, where in addition to social work centers, and specialized civil society organizations, the community can also provide social services. Thus, "community has been a central focus of social work practice since its inception. Communities are among the many social systems that touch people's lives and shape their individual and group identities. People are born in social contexts; they grow, mature and learn about, and form perceptions of social structures" (Malathi 2010, 5). In other words, "community provides the context and setting for social work at all levels of intervention" (Malathi 2010, 6), so the focus of local authorities on the

community is done through social interventions offered by social work centers or other non-governmental organizations. In fact, "as service providers, local self-government can integrate service delivery more effectively. Most municipalities are involved - to varying degrees - in delivering a range of programs and services such as child care, social assistance, public health, and arts and recreation programs" (Torjman 2003, 7). The respondents' opinions regarding the role of community-based social services and their benefits have been considered in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1: What are the benefits of the community from the provision of social services in particular?



According to the findings in Diagram 1, it is evident that the surveyed respondents highly value the role of local authorities. Out of the respondents, approximately 26% have expressed that they perceive advocacy in public policies as a beneficial factor, indicating the strengthening of community cohesion. Additionally, 19% acknowledge the benefit of improving social well-being, 16% emphasize the importance of social justice and gender equality, 13% recognize the significance of social transformation and support for marginalized groups, and 26% highlight the value of social inclusion within the community and the attention received from local authorities. This suggests that while the respondents have acknowledged the significance of the local self-government concerning community benefits, there is a necessity to strengthen community engagement and organization further. Achieving this objective requires collaborative efforts involving local stakeholders, central authorities, civil society organizations, the media, and the community.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information gathered thus far, important conclusions can be drawn from a scientific perspective and for the actors involved in the focus of this work. In general, it can be said that there has been a significant strengthening of local governance and the relationship with the community in recent years, with communities being actively involved as partners by local authorities. Public meetings and other local mechanisms have been participated in by communities, thereby fostering the spirit of democratic development. Communities have also developed in Kosovo due to administrative rules governing the creation of village, neighborhood, and urban settlement councils. These councils contribute to the community by fostering the development of social networks, now more commonly referred to as "social capital" in sociological terms.

Additionally, during the elaboration of the article, municipalities have been observed as fundamental units of local self-government in Kosovo, with a role in providing social services, among other competencies. These services fall under the responsibility of the municipal directorates of health and social welfare. They are delivered by social work centers and civil society organizations, profiled and licensed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. All municipalities have established these centers, and Pristina Municipality, as the capital city, has three units due to its status as the capital city according to the law. The offered social services are diverse, aiming for central and local authorities to exert influence and provide special attention to vulnerable and oppressed communities. Such services assist the community in strengthening fair practices, social attention, social cohesion, community development, and promoting active citizenship. This benefits not only the community but also the local authority.

Based on the research, it is evident that the cooperation between the community and local governance focuses primarily on public services, public meetings, and the provision of social services, which fall under the jurisdiction of both the central and local levels. Consequently, in addition to its inherent benefits, this collaboration can impact fostering social transformations, promoting sustainable decisions by local authorities, and fostering more active citizenship. These factors ultimately reflect the development of democracy.

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Statement of Human Rights:
This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any authors.

Statement on the Welfare of Animals:
This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any authors.

Informed Consent:
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