

## ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ ҚАТЫНАСТАР

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ

AN OVERVIEW OF THE OF MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE CONCEPT:  
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**Abstract.** In this article, based on international recommendations and scientific literature, the concept of multilevel governance, the features of cross-sectoral and multi-layer governance are analysed, highlighting the advantages it creates, and the possible risks associated with the involvement of different actors in decision making process. To better illustrate this in practice, the paper presents a case study of youth policy formulation and implementation in Lithuania, which can be considered as one of the most successful examples of multilevel governance in practice.

The article aims to identify: how the youth policy framework fits into the concept of multi-level governance; what actors operate in this network; reveal why this particular area is identified as a good example of multilevel governance; and what has contributed to its implementation success.

**Keywords:** multilevel governance, Lithuania, Youth policy, citizen participation, democratisation.

**Аңдатпа.** Бұл мақалада халықаралық ұсыныстар мен ғылыми әдебиеттерге сүйене отырып, көп деңгейлі басқару тұжырымдамасы, салалық және көп деңгейлі басқарудың ерекшеліктері талданады, оның артықшылықтары мен шешім қабылдау процесіне әр түрлі субъектілердің қатысуымен байланысты ықтимал тәуекелдер көрсетілген. Мақалада Литвадағы жастар саясатын тұжырымдау мен жүзеге асыру зерттеуі келтірілген, оны іс жүзінде көп деңгейлі басқарудың ең сәтті мысалдарының бірі ретінде қарастыруға болады. Мақаланың мақсаты: жастар саясатының шеңбері көп деңгейлі басқару тұжырымдамасына қалай сәйкес келетінін анықтау; осы желіде қандай субъектілер жұмыс істейді; нәтижесінде бұл нақты сала көп деңгейлі басқарудың жақсы үлгісі ретінде анықталғанын және оны жүзеге асырудың сәттілігіне не ықпал еткенін анықтау.

Түйінді сөздер: көп деңгейлі басқару, Литва, Жастар саясаты, азаматтардың қатысуы, демократияландыру.

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**Аннотация.** В этой статье, основанной на международных рекомендациях и научной литературе, анализируется концепция многоуровневого управления, особенности ОЦР - секторальное и многоуровневое управление, выделяются преимущества, которые оно создает, и возможные риски, связанные с вовлечением различных субъектов в процесс принятия решений. Чтобы лучше проиллюстрировать это на практике, в статье представлен пример разработки и реализации молодежной политики в Литве, который можно рассматривать как один из наиболее успешных примеров многоуровневого управления на практике.

Цель статьи - определить, как структура молодежной политики вписывается в концепцию многоуровневого управления; какие субъекты действуют в этой сети; раскрыть, почему именно эта область считается хорошим примером многоуровневого управления; и что способствовало успеху ее реализации.

**Ключевые слова:** многоуровневое управление, Литва, молодежная политика, гражданское участие, демократизация.

## Introduction

In traditional democratic theory, participation has mostly been analysed and conceptualised as the legitimisation of political decision-makers and government policy-makers [1], but changes in public governance over the past decades have altered the structure of the public sector's decision-making process and procedures, and have correspondingly changed why, how and which interest groups are involved in public governance. The aim of these changes is to make democracy not only essential at political level, but also to extend it to all spheres of public administration, helping to ensure a more equal society and to ensure the distribution of powers.

Trends in public governance, driven by the participation of citizens and other stakeholders, are creating networked structures and require new involvement mechanisms for their engagement. In this context, public sector institutions must ensure professionalization of their management and become more open and flexible [2]. This issue is high on the agendas of academics and expert organisations, seeking to create recommendations how this could (should) be implemented in practice.

In this study, multilevel governance is understood and analysed as it is described in recommendations of Council of Europe: "a cooperative model of governance which may embrace international, supranational, cross-border, national and subnational (regional, intermediate, and local) levels of governance, delivered with participation of the people, civil society, and other organisations and stakeholders" [3] and one of the essential purpose of it is to "ensure coherent, effective and efficient policy- and decision-making, and the exercise of public duties" [3], based on the principles of good democratic governance. So, as M. Saito-Jensen describes, structure of public governance like this is no longer monopolised by the state, opposite it is shared between different actors at multiple levels [4].

When analysing the characteristics of multilevel governance, it is also important that it should be understood not as a strict instruction or tool for states, but like The Committee of the Regions [5] describes it as „a dynamic process with a horizontal and vertical dimension, which does not in any way dilute political responsibility” and it helps to increase joint ownership and implementation of the policies. Main advantages of multilevel governance can be summarized as:

- Provision of opportunities for capacity-building and learning among different levels of government [5].
- Encouragement of local experimentation and innovation in policy design and implementation, fostering diverse approaches to problem-solving and policy development” [5].
- Involvement of citizens at their interest groups contributes to the formation of stronger civil society, builds links and trust between different sectors and shapes democratic governance in countries [6] [7] [8].
- Institutions (government) gain legitimacy of decisions and improve quality of their performance [8].
- Multilevel governance can be evaluated as a democratic opportunity offering alternatives for the parliamentary and representative modes of accountability [9].

But, as in every case, the implementation of multilevel governance requires careful attention to the “small details” of the process to avoid the potential risks in the policy formulation and implementation. Authors states, that worse policy decisions also can be as one of the consequence of citizen participation, if they are too much influenced by opposing, marginal or very narrow interest groups and coordinators of whole process lose control of decision-making. Also, the process of decisions in multilevel governance is (can be) limited by some disadvantages, for example process is time consuming, costly and less budget is left for implementation of actual projects [8].

Failure to take this into account may lead to the negative effects of the multilevel governance approach. For example, analysing citizens control over decisions S. Arnstein [10] points out that in addition negative aspects can be: increased societal fragmentation, reduced effectiveness of decisions, possible opportunistic behaviour of certain groups of individuals towards the disempowered, a lack of professionalism and the inclusion of interest groups, that may only serve as form of manipulation of the power. So, in the multilevel governance certain participatory practices may differ from the conventional understanding of policy, i.e. participation may not be about changing policy itself, but about changing the attitudes of actors, involved in the process [9].

Implementation of multilevel governance in Lithuania is not a new and untested practice. Good examples of multilevel governance implementation can be found in various areas of public policy, such as regional, social, NGO policy formulation and implementation and etc. Also, its added value and practical potential are clearly seen in crisis management or situations requiring commitment and involvement of all state actors, for example support for each other and coproduction activities during Covid-19 pandemic situation, civil protection, actions dealing with the illegal migrant crisis, reception of war refugees and etc.

However, these practices are not analysed in detail, identifying the reasons for success in particular policy areas, which could contribute to the development of general guidelines for its sustainable implementation. Given this context and the literature review, the study aims to present good practices of multilevel governance in Lithuania through the case of youth policy. The case of youth policy was chosen as the best illustration of multilevel governance in Lithuania, because the policy formulation and implementation based to multilevel governance since 1996, when the National Youth Policy Concept [11] was adopted.

## Materials and methods

The chosen research methodology is based on the approach that, for a long time, public administration research has been dominated by statistical research methods, but there has been a significant shift from qualitative to quantitative work since around 2007 [12]. The reasons for this change are,

that qualitative research seeks not only to describe the current situation and identify the entities involved in it, but also to explain the interaction between those entities, the factors and causes that affect it.

Qualitative research is often referred to as case study research, which emphasises that the research is based on individual perspective and case-by-case analysis. This type of research approach (also referred to as interpretive research) emphasises the researchers' desire to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings given to them by the people/cases they study [13]. Like other social science research, case studies always aim to study a single case or cases rather than the whole. Then the researchers' goal is to describe the phenomenon or explain why it exists or occurs. Unlike other methods, case study researchers also examine the context of the phenomenon: the complex set of relationships surrounding it [14], which means that this method is suitable for investigating phenomena, when large variety of relationships are included and their interactions must be identified.

As already mentioned, to present good practices of multilevel governance in Lithuania the case of youth policy formulation and implementation were chosen for analysis. Youth policy is a cross-cutting policy that aims to address the needs of young people across different public policy fields. According to the Agency of Youth Affairs [15] it can be defined as a set of systems and measures aimed at creating the best possible conditions for a young people personal maturity and successful integration into society. This system is based on support structures (socialisation fields) that complement, in a subsidiary way, the efforts of the individual and the family in helping to prepare the young person for an autonomous life (for example friends, schools, universities, communities, NGOs, the youth activity system ant etc.). Accordingly to this concept, the case study design consists of:

1. Identification of how the youth policy framework fits into the concept of multi-level governance;
2. Identification of actors operating at different levels of governance and what their interactions are;
3. To illustrate why this particular area is identified as a good example of multilevel governance implementation in practice and what has contributed to its success.

The case study is based on the analysis of legal acts regulating youth policy, the structure of the network of organizations operating in it, and monitoring reports on the implementation of youth policy.

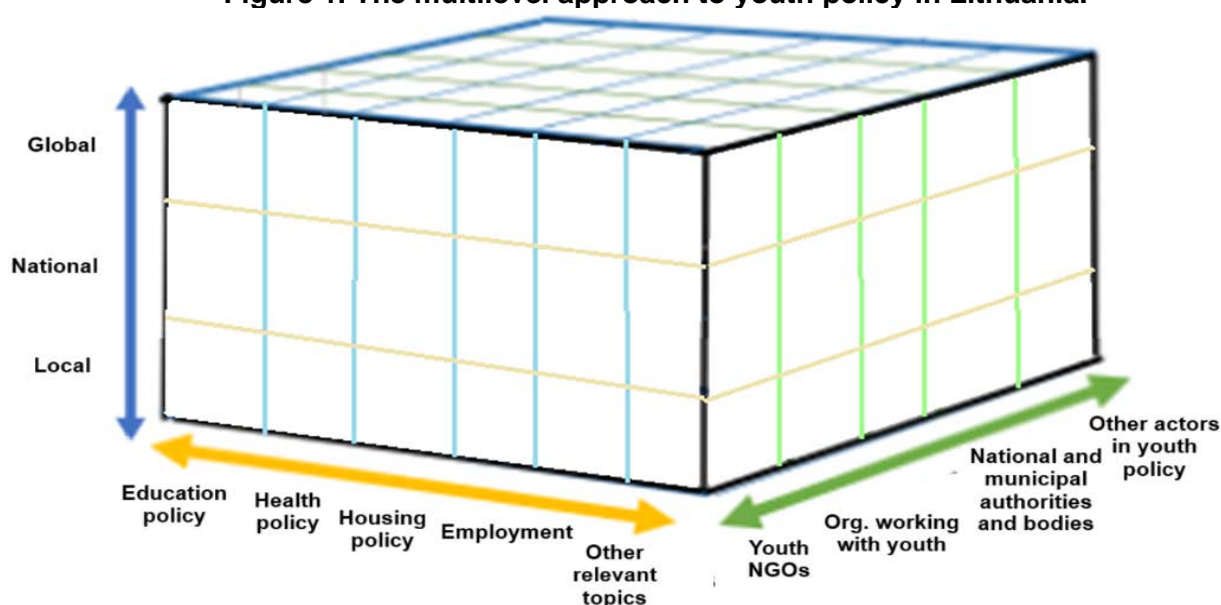
## Results

The European Commission White Paper on Youth [16], states that young people face particular socio-economic situations and conditions of the prolonged and more winded transitions to adulthood. They stress the need to put the open coordination method into practice and to promote in all member states solutions of youth problems involving all stakeholders and young people themselves. In accordance with this, EU Youth Strategies [17] are grounded on need to promote active youth citizenship, social inclusion, and solidarity, as well as for the improvement of the situation of young people. Strategies includes wide youth field, indicating eight areas of action: Education and training, Employment and entrepreneurship, Health and well-being, Participation, Voluntary activities, Social inclusion, Youth and the world, Creativity and culture [18]. That means, that “In the EU youth

policy planning documents, youth is defined as a priority from the social perspective, by emphasizing the need to care for them as the future human capital” [19], however, looking from the perspective of multilevel governance it can be stated, that young people should not be analysed as those who are in need of some kind intervention, but as those who, through their participation in the policy, ensure its relevance.

The Law on Youth Policy Framework [20] describes the structure of youth policy formulation and implementation in Lithuania at the national and municipality level, identifies the actors and their interaction and responsibilities. As mentioned before, in this area not only the implementation in a multilevel governance and participatory manner is ensured, but also the horizontal nature of the policy-making process is emphasized. Also, in this process young people should be understood as active part of the civil society, which can be directly involved in solving issues they are concerned with and in the implementation of specific activities and projects [2]. The multidimensionality of this policy is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. The multilevel approach to youth policy in Lithuania.**



*Source: created by the authors in accordance with recommendations of Council of Europe [3]*

One of the best practices in youth policy is that in addition to all this involvement shown in Figure 1, actors are also empowered by the different structural units created jointly from the public sector institutions, organisations working with youth and the representatives of

the youth and youth NGOs sector. This is clearly represented in structure of youth policy at national and municipal level (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

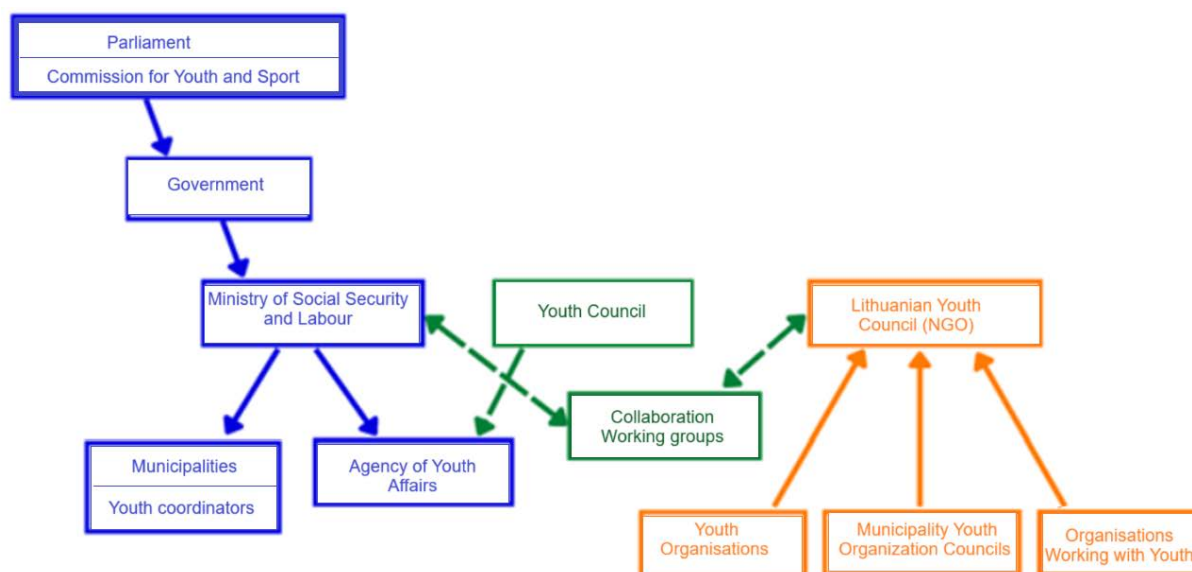
Structure of national youth policy in Lithuania (Figure 2) consist of is national



public authorities (entities in blue), youth NGOs (entities in orange) and structures for cooperation between national public

authorities and youth NGOs (entities in green) [21].

**Figure 2. Structure of national youth policy in Lithuania**

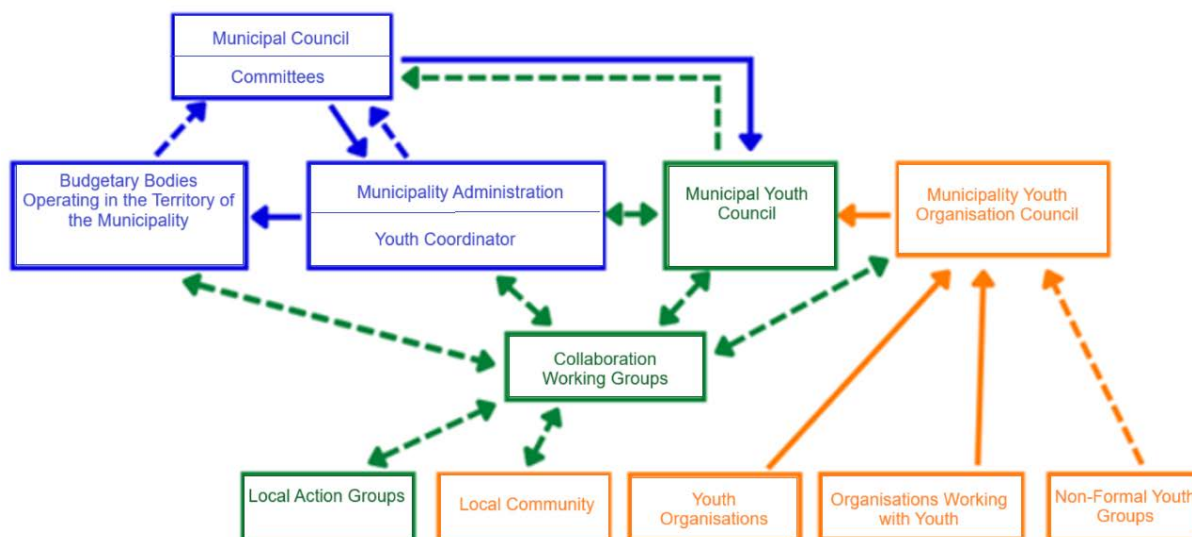


Source: Agency of Youth Affairs, 2024

Structure of regional youth policy in Lithuania (Figure 3) also follows the same logic: entities in blue are municipal authorities; entities in

orange are youth NGOs; entities in green are structures for cooperation between municipal authorities and youth NGOs [22].

**Figure 3. Structure of regional youth policy in Lithuania**



Source: Agency of Youth Affairs, 2024

So, summarising the figures and the responsibilities of the entities identified in the Law on Youth Policy Framework [20] and Figure 2-3:

- The Ministry of Social Security and Labour formulates youth policy, organizes,

coordinates and monitors its implementation. Youth policy is implemented by the Youth Affairs Agency, an institution authorised by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

- The State also has delegated the function of youth policy implementation to

municipal youth coordinators, who, in accordance with the national policy, prepare and implement youth policy programmes in the municipality, analyse the situation of youth, youth organisations and organisations working with youth in the municipality, develop cooperation between municipal institutions and all actors bodies working in the field of youth policy.

- The Lithuanian Youth Council and Municipal youth organisation councils, youth organisations and organisations working with youth shall contribute to the implementation of the youth policy by carrying out their activities.

The real tools for youth empowerment in this framework are not only the involvement of young people, but also formation of units such as Youth councils (at national and municipal levels), which gives a real power of decision making on the setting of youth policy priorities, allocation of funding, youth projects, proposals and legislation on youth-related issues etc. Of course, this requires additional attention from the coordinating institutions and the competences of young people.

Addressing the possible challenges of coordination, transparency and common understanding, youth policy has a specific focus on this. Interaction between different levels of government is ensured in several ways. First of all, in order to ensure the reflection of international strategies in the national agenda, a national working group on youth dialogue has been formed at the national level [23]. It consists of representatives of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Youth agency, youth organizations and youth researchers, who ensure not only information about goals of EU Youth Strategies and the administration of related activities, but also directly engage in consultations with young people, promote their participation and dialogue between politicians, young people, etc.

In order to ensure the sustainable

implementation of the youth policy and implementation of national level priorities in the regions, the Methodology for the Evaluation of the Implementation of the Youth Policy was adopted in 2018 [24]. The Methodology sets out the recommended youth policy tasks provision processes for municipalities and the criteria for their achieved results evaluation. These recommendations and evaluation criteria include aspects of youth work implementation, representation of young people interests, their participation and empowerment at the municipal level, etc.

As revealed by the research conducted at the initiative of the Youth Agency [25], the provision of these recommendations has significantly contributed to ensuring targeted and consistent implementation of planned activities at national or international level. Although respondents differently identified significance of recommendations in implementing youth policy, there is common understanding, that these recommendations allowed municipalities to assess which activities should be developed the most and helped different municipalities to understand in which direction they should move forward, to achieve common goals. Another factor contributing to success is that these recommendations often became the annual tasks of the municipal youth affairs coordinator and their implementation was (is) used to evaluate his, as a civil servant, performance. Also, recommendations as an official document helps to ensure to ensure sustainable development of this area and funding, in the absence of political will to initiate or finance activities related to the youth policy.

Analysing the practical implementation of these recommendations in the field of youth empowerment, although it is possible to see positive changes compared to the first assessments, there are some aspects to note (Table 1).

**Table 1 - Assessment of youth representation, participation and empowerment promotion at municipalities**

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Scoring according to the Methodology (max 4,6)</b>	2,45	2,64	2,72	3,07	3,21
<b>Percentage of implemented recommendations</b>	No data	No data	70,7	72,2	77

*Source: Compiled by the author according to the Youth Agency*

In 2023, the average score of youth participation, empowerment and representation in municipalities evaluation was 3.21 out of a possible 4.6, compared to 3.07 in 2022. On average, in this area municipalities have implemented 77% of the tasks recommended to them in 2023, compared to 72.2% in 2022. Though these seem to be positive trends (35 municipalities out of 60 have improved their scores), there has not been a significant change in comparison with 2022 because institutions are orientated to maintain current situation rather than to develop this area [26]. Therefore, it is likely that although there are many good practices and high results in different municipalities are demonstrated in this area, it must be remembered that it also depends on the political agenda and whether other actors will be able to influence it.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

As previously stated, changes in public governance, moving from the centralisation of power in institutions towards to the distribution of power and the democratisation of governance in all areas of public policy, are raising new issues for governments, how to implement this, ensuring transparency, accountability and solutions that meet citizens' expectations. In this context, as one of the most actively debated frameworks in practice and academic literature multilevel governance concept should be highlighted. Multilevel governance helps to create the systems essential for capacity building, mutual learning, fostering innovation and making decisions that properly reflect the needs of citizens. However, this approach requires openness and willingness from all actors (including public sector organisations), as well as the readiness to participate actively in these processes (commonly agreed rules of participation and coordination, transparency, human and financial resources, etc.).

Youth policy formulation and implementation in Lithuania is an excellent illustration of multilevel governance, not only because of the youth policy structure itself, which reflects the integration of different levels and actors, but also because of the content of the policy design and implementation, which emphasizes the development of young people's capacities through inclusiveness, joint activities with "adults", and the real possibility for them to have a direct influence on the issues of direct relevance to them.

The success of it is determined by many factors: first, it is an area in which multi-level approach has been established for a relatively long time, compared to other policy areas in Lithuania; second - consistent work to ensure the representation of different interests in youth policy has been carried out, which is/was implemented through the openness of the process, the creation of formal structure, clear determination of the process and conditions for participation; third – clear links between different levels of management and monitoring of policy implementation results is ensured.

However, despite all the advantages and examples of good practices presented, this does not mean that developing multilevel governance in all areas in Lithuania (or other countries) it is necessary to create new mechanisms for their involvement, special tools, etc. The most important thing is to use the already existing structure to focus on encouragement of the cross-sectoral cooperation and the formation of social capital based on trust.

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#### ОБЗОР КОНЦЕПЦИИ МНОГОУРОВНЕВОГО УПРАВЛЕНИЯ: ТЕМАТИЧЕСКОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ РАЗРАБОТКИ И РЕАЛИЗАЦИИ МОЛОДЕЖНОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ В ЛИТВЕ

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#### КӨП ДЕҢГЕЙЛІ БАСҚАРУ ТҰЖЫРЫМДАМАСЫНА ШОЛУ: ЛИТВАДА ЖАСТАР САЯСАТЫН ҚАЛЫПТАСТЫРУ МЕН ЖҮЗЕГЕ АСЫРУДЫҢ (ЖАҒДАЙЛЫҚ) ЗЕРТТЕУІ

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