



UNIVERSITY OF
LATVIA

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

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**ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE IN
LATVIA'S MUNICIPALITIES**

DOCTORAL THESIS

This thesis is written for the degree of Doctor of Political Science (Ph.D.) in the field of Political Science, subfield of Public Administration and Management

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ANNOTATION

Title of thesis: Analysis of Leadership and Governance in Latvia's Municipalities

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The subject of the study is local political leadership and local governance. The study is based on questions concerning the role of local political leaders in the local governance system and the possibilities of ensuring and, if necessary, improving the performance of the tasks assigned to the city council in Latvian municipalities. The research examines local political leaders' role in Latvian municipalities. The second aim is to provide a comprehensive evaluation of political leadership in Latvian municipalities, as well as potential enhancements to the functioning of local governments. Latvia's local governance has evolved significantly since independence, with a shift from centralized to decentralized approach, granting mayors significant political leadership roles. Despite these opportunities, a mayor's influence is often constrained by external factors, shared governance, and the need to engage diverse stakeholders. Leadership in municipalities depends on the ability to navigate budgetary challenges, foster collaboration with national-level actors, and align policies with community priorities.

The study uses secondary data analysis, case studies, observation methods of data collection and primary data were also used.

Keywords: political leader, political leadership, municipalities.

ANOTĀCIJA

Promocijas darba nosaukums: “Līderības un pārvaldības izvērtējums Latvijas pašvaldībās”.

Promocijas darba autore: Mg. sc. pol. Malvīne Stučka.

Promocijas darba vadītāja: profesore Dr. sc. pol. Iveta Reinholde.

Pētījuma tēma ir saistīta ar politisko līderību un līderi. Pētījuma pamatā ir problēmjautājumi par vietējo politisko līderu lomu pārvaldības sistēmā un par iespējām nodrošināt un nepieciešamības gadījumā uzlabot pašvaldības domes priekšsēdētājam noteikto uzdevumu izpildi Latvijas pašvaldībās. Promocijas darba mērķis ir, pirmkārt, noskaidrot, kāda ir vietējo politisko līderu loma Latvijas pašvaldībās, otrkārt, sniegt analītisku vērtējumu par politisko līderību Latvijas pašvaldībās un iespējamus uzlabojumus pašvaldības darbību regulēšanā. Latvijas vietējā pārvaldība ir būtiski attīstījusies kopš neatkarības iegūšanas, pārejot no centralizētas uz decentralizētu pieeju, piešķirot domes priekšsēdētājiem politiskās līderības elementus. Neskatoties uz sniegtajām iespējām, domes priekšsēdētāja ietekmi bieži ierobežo ārējie faktori, proti, dalīta pārvaldība un nepieciešamība sadarboties ar dažādām ieinteresētajām pusēm. Līderības īstenošana pašvaldībās ir atkarīga no spējas pārvarēt budžeta izaicinājumus, veicināt sadarbību ar valsts līmeņa dalībniekiem un saskaņot rīcībpolitiku ar iedzīvotāju interesēm.

Darbā izmantota gadījumu analīzes metode, sekundāro datu analīze un novērojumu metode. Tostarp izmantoti arī oriģinālie dati.

Atslēgas vārdi: politiskais līderis, politiskā līderība, pašvaldības

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

The thesis is based on original publications. The publications are listed in order to be discussed in the thesis. Publications I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, and X have been published, and XI have been accepted to be published. The thesis includes the following eight publications: I, II, III, IV, V, VIII, IX, X. The total number of characters are 416,119 (with spaces).

- I. Stučka, M. (2018). Perception of Political Leadership in Local Governments in Latvia. *Socialiniai tyrimai / Social Research*. 2018, Vol. 41 (2), 112–123. ISSN 2351-6712
- II. Reinholde, I., Stučka, M. (2022). Latvia: Electoral drama in local governments. In: Gendzwill, A., Kjaer, U., & Steyvers, K. (Eds.). *The Routledge handbook of local elections and voting in Europe*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003009672>
- III. Reinholde, I., Stučka, M. (2018). La Remuneration du travail politique en Lettonie. Entre cadre national et adaptations locales. (Compensation of Political Work between national level and local level in Latvia)
- IV. Reinholde, I., Āboliņa, I., Stučka, M. (2021). Local State-Society Relations in Latvia. In: Teles F., Gendźwiłł A., Stănuș C., Heinelt H. (eds) *Close Ties in European Local Governance*. Palgrave Studies in Sub-National Governance. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44794-6_16
- V. Reinholde, I., Stučka, M. (2019). Urban governance in Latvia: feeling urban and thinking rural. In: Armondi S., De Gregorio Hurtado S., *Foregrounding Urban Agendas: The New Urban Issue in European Experiences of Policy Making*, (The Urban Books Series) Springer, Switzerland.
- VI. Stučka, M., Oztulis, V. (2021). Politiskā drošība. No: Latvijas iedzīvotāju subjektīvā drošības uztvere: ietekme uz drošības politikas veidošanu. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds. Zinātniskās redaktors: prof. Dr. paed. Žaneta Ozoliņa, prof. Dr. Sc. pol. Iveta Reinholde, Mg. Sc. Pol. Sigita Struberga.

- VII. Stučka, M., Kārklīņš, H. (2021). Vides drošība. No: Latvijas iedzīvotāju subjektīvā drošības uztvere: ietekme uz drošības politikas veidošanu. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds. Zinātniskās redaktore: prof. Dr. paed. Žaneta Ozoliņa, prof. Dr. Sc. pol. Iveta Reinholde, Mg. Sc. Pol. Sigita Struberga.
- VIII. Stučka, M. (2024). Political Budget Cycles and Mayoral Influence in Latvian Municipalities: An Examination of Revenue, Expenditure, and Electoral Dynamics. *Viešoji politika ir administravimas (Public policy and Administration)*.
- IX. Stučka, M. (2023). Local Leadership During the Territorial Amalgamation Process – The Case of Latvia. *Central European Public Administration Review*, 21(1), 61–84. <https://doi.org/10.17573/cepar.2023.1.03>
- X. Reinholde, I., Āboliņa, I., Stučka, M. (2022). Advisory councils at the local level: Do they add value for participation? In: Egner, B., Heinelt, H., Lysek, J., Silva, P., Teles, F. (eds) *Perspectives on Local Governance Across Europe*. Palgrave Studies in Sub-National Governance. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15000-5_12.
- XI. Reinholde, I., Stučka, M., Āboliņa, I. (forthcoming). *Coordination at the Top: Latvian case*. Palgrave.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the complex system of local governments, leadership and governance at the local level are critical factors in determining the effectiveness, responsiveness, and resilience of local governments. This thesis analyzes the intricate dynamics of leadership and its influence on governance in Latvian municipalities. Significantly, the political leader's image and their portrayal through television, which is a primary source of daily information for many, are crucial factors for Latvian voters.^{1 2} Each election can bring forth varying voting patterns as different politicians emerge as party representatives or leaders, often changing parties, thus reflecting a dynamic political landscape. This study aims to explore how local leadership influences governance in Latvia, including the role of mayors, election procedures, and relations between elected officials and civil society. However, it should be noted that Latvia, with its relatively recent tradition of democracy, faces unique challenges. Civic participation remains low^{3 4}, impacting how political parties select leaders not only at the national level but also at the local level, underlining the importance of studying mayors as local political leaders.

The 2009 and 2021 territorial reforms have changed how municipalities operate as organizations. Such changes require different skills and capacities for a political leader to drive the development of a municipality. The difficulty of political parties in choosing leaders is compounded further at the local level. Older people, who are the most frequent voters and the primary consumers of television, often determine the outcome of these local elections. A political leader in a municipality needs to manage a complex network of organizations and relationships between the municipality and the state and between the municipality and private and non-governmental organizations. In

¹ Kultūras ministrija (2017). Pētījums par Latvijas iedzīvotāju medijpratību 2017: Rezultātu izvērtējums. <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/media/392/download> ; Latvijas fakti. (2021). Pētījums par Latvijas iedzīvotāju medijpratību un mediju satura lietošanas paradumiem.

http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/title_file/iedz_medijpratiba_PETIJUMS.pdf

² Aarts, K., Blais, A., Schmitt, H. (Eds.). (2013). Political leaders and democratic elections. OUP Oxford.

https://books.google.lv/books?hl=lv&lr=&id=LiVwAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&ots=WkAIo278AJ&sig=h7sbwd1RpT6dNgM8UJ2xmJsCNu8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

³ Latvijas Universitāte (2022). Vēlētāju aktivitātes samazināšanās cēloņu un to ietekmējošo faktoru izvērtējums. 1. posms.

https://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/title_file/Veletaju%20lidzdalibas%20petijums%20LU_PE_TIJUMS.pdf

⁴ Ņikišins, J. (2016). *Politiskā līdzdalība Eiropā: salīdzinoša analīze* (Promocijas darbs). Latvijas Universitātes Sociālo zinātņu fakultātes Socioloģijas nodaļa.

addition, the political leader must promote or ensure the professional development of internal organizations and local government staff.

Additionally, the global financial crisis, which affected many countries between 2007 and 2010, has led to a debate on whether, during and after the crisis, municipalities found it challenging to perform their tasks due to a lack of resources. One option suggested by researcher S. Kuhlmann was to merge municipalities and reduce their number as part of an administrative-territorial reform. At the beginning of the crisis, Latvia was one of the few countries (together with Greece, Ireland, and Turkey) that reduced the number of municipalities.⁵ As a result of the mergers, the municipalities are in a better financial position than before the reform.

This shift in municipal structures and resources during the financial crisis sets the stage for a broader discussion on political leadership and its dynamics in a democratic setting, as explored by P. Tales. His analysis delves into the strategies, influence, and motivations of political leaders, highlighting the pivotal role of the electorate in shaping their actions and decisions.⁶ Emphasizing the role of followers is important in this study because the council leader, as a political leader, can be constrained by the electorate through elections. This constraint can also be conceptualized within the framework of the thesis.

Following the debate of P. Tales, the researcher J. Blondel also points out that "leadership cannot be separated from the environment in which it exists and operates."⁷ To fully understand the role of the council chairperson in Latvia, it is important to consider both the normative background and the activities of the society. The council chairperson, who is sometimes referred to as a mayor, even though Latvia does not have a formal mayor, holds a significant position in the municipality. It is crucial to examine factors such as voter turnout, the specifics of voting, the leader's motives (including remuneration), and their relationships with other institutions (including municipalities, national level institutions), and civil society.

Internationally, academic research on political leadership and governance in local government encompasses various perspectives and methodologies. J. Masciulli,

⁵ Schwab, C., Bouckaert, G., & Kuhlmann, S. (2017). *The future of local government in Europe: lessons from research and practice in 31 countries* (1st ed.). Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv941qjd>

⁶ Tales, P. (2012). Political leaders: the paradox of freedom and democracy. *Revista Enfoques*, 10, 113-131. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/3991963.pdf>

⁷ Blondel, J. (1987). *Political leadership: Towards a general analysis*. SAGE.

M. Molchanov, and W. Knight explore the situational dynamics of leadership⁸, while H. Bochel and C. Bochel assess the impact of modernization on local governance.⁹ S. Leach and D. Wilson's research stands out as a focused investigation into the complexities of local political leadership.¹⁰ Often, the study of local leadership is based on case studies. For example, D. Sweeting evaluates urban leadership through the lens of the London mayoral model.¹¹ E. Rapoport, M. Acuto, and L. Grcheva provide a global overview of city leadership, identifying overarching patterns and unique approaches.¹² M. Haus and D. Sweeting chart the interaction between political leaders and democratic processes¹³, and H. Wollmann examines the reformative trajectories of local leadership in different European countries.¹⁴ The examination of mayoral influence within issue-specific networks by B. Denters et al. and the comparative study of European mayors underline the adaptive and contextual nature.¹⁵ Finally, J. Svava and P. E. Mouritzen provide insight into the dynamics between politicians and administrators at the local level, further highlighting the complex interplay of political, institutional, and administrative factors in local governance.¹⁶ These scholarly contributions create a detailed pattern of the evolving role of political leadership in local government at the international level.

Although the Latvian scientific community is small, it has been capable of producing significant research on local governance. The work of Inese Āboliņa has significantly advanced the study of leadership in Latvia. Her doctoral thesis investigates

⁸ Masciulli, J., Molchanov, M., & Knight, W. (2009). *Political Leadership in Context*. http://www.academia.edu/22206512/Political_Leadership_in_Context

⁹ Bochel, H., & Bochel, C. (2010). Local Political Leadership and the Modernisation of Local Government. *Local Government Studies*, 36 (6), 723-737. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2010.523199>

¹⁰ Leach, S., & Wilson, D. (2000). *Local Political Leadership*. Bristol: Policy Press.

¹¹ Sweeting, D. (2002). Leadership in Urban Governance: The Mayor of London. *Local Government Studies*, 28(1), 3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/714004134>

¹² Rapoport, E., Acuto, M., & Grcheva, L. (2019). *Leading Cities: A Global Review of City Leadership*. UCL Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv8jp0qg>

¹³ Haus, M., & Sweeting, D. (2006). *Local Democracy and Political Leadership: Drawing a Map*. 54(2), 267-288. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2006.00605.x>

¹⁴ Wollmann, H. (2008). Reforming local leadership and local democracy: The cases of England, Sweden, Germany and France in comparative perspective. *Local Government Studies*, 34(2), 279-298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930701852344>

¹⁵ Denters, B., Steyvers, K., Klok, P. J., & Cermak, D. (2018). Political Leadership in Issue Networks: How Mayors Rule Their World? In H. Heinelt, A. Magnier, M. Cabria, & H. Reynaert (Eds.), *Political Leaders and Changing Local Democracy* (pp. 273-296). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67410-0_9

¹⁶ Svava, J., Mouritzen, P., E. (2002). Leadership at the apex: Politicians and Administrators in Western Local Governments. <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3A31735046143545/viewer#page/74/mode/2up>

the role of the President of Latvia in decision-making, including how the Presidents of Latvia leads and their power to request further review of laws by the Saeima. She also looks at the President as a leader and how the President exercises leadership in decision-making.¹⁷ Artis Stucka, with his 2012 thesis, provided valuable insights into the structure of local governments. He looked at how municipalities have changed since Latvia's independence from Soviet rule until 2012, assessing the significant changes and offering ideas on improving the system.¹⁸ Lilita Seimuškāne examined citizen participation in local government decisions in Latvia and its influencing factors in her doctoral thesis. She develops a model to assess how different socio-economic factors influence citizen participation.¹⁹ There is also a thesis on local government cooperation in Latvia by Dina Bite. She concludes that forms of cooperation are unstable and without long-term goals.²⁰ Latvian academics such as Iveta Reinholde, Māris Pūķis, Lilita Seimuškāne, Visvaldis Valtenbergs, Edvīns Vanags, Inga Vilka have also contributed to research on local government and governance in Latvia.

Despite these extensive studies, it becomes apparent that there is a gap in research, specifically on leadership at the municipal level. The absence of an in-depth analysis of Latvian mayors as political leaders indicates a valuable opportunity for future studies. The data and analysis of Latvian mayors as political leaders and their roles in local governance will enhance further studies of Latvian municipalities and contribute to research on similar municipal systems in other countries and various aspects of political leadership. Municipal elections, voting aspects, elected officials' remuneration, and the relationship between local government and civil society have also not been described in recent years.

By exploring the dynamics mentioned above, this thesis explores how local leadership influences policy-making processes, economic development, and service delivery to improve municipal performance and the quality of life. It also provides critical insights into administrative reforms and leadership styles relevant to Latvia's political context. The thesis reflects the current academic debates at the European Union

¹⁷ Āboliņa, I. (2019). *Suspensīvā veto prakse pārvaldībā Latvijā (1993-2018)* (Promocijas darbs). Latvijas Universitātes Sociālo zinātņu fakultāte Politikas zinātnes nodaļa.

¹⁸ Stucka, A. (2012). *Latvijas pašvaldību sistēmas pilnveidošanas aktuālie valststiesību jautājumi* (Promocijas darbs). Latvijas Universitātes Juridiskā fakultāte.

¹⁹ Seimuškāne, L. (2015). *Iedzīvotāju līdzdalība lēmumu pieņemšanas procesā pašvaldībā un to ietekmējošo faktoru izvērtējums* (Promocijas darbs). Latvijas Universitāte Ekonomikas un vadības fakultāte Publiskās pārvaldes, demogrāfijas un sociālekonomiskās statistikas katedra.

²⁰ Bite, D. (2012). *Pašvaldību sadarbība Latvijā* (Promocijas darbs). Latvijas Universitātes Sociālo zinātņu fakultāte Socioloģijas nodaļa.

level, highlighting the need for local council chairpersons to assume active roles and leadership in enhancing the economic situation in their municipalities. The importance of flexible and adaptive governance, wider stakeholder involvement, and local development planning that reflects the municipality's realities, capacities, and objectives are also emphasized.²¹ The thesis comprises a collection of scientific publications generated within European research networks and conforms to the current academic trends influencing the research activities of municipalities across EU member states. It addresses issues identified at the European Union level, including those prevalent in Latvia.

Therefore, the thesis will contribute in several ways. One objective is to enhance the understanding of political leaders within the theoretical framework of political leadership and governance, particularly in countries with a municipal system like Latvia's. Additionally, the aim is to facilitate the development of empirical studies on leadership within Latvian municipalities, using the established framework and methods as a foundation. The study of political leadership and governance in Latvia's municipalities is of social and academic relevance, especially given the Eastern European context with a marked north-south divide in local government expenditures.²² This study underscores the importance of financial autonomy and the broad scope of action that local governments, as seen in the Nordic model, such as Sweden, can exercise in shaping municipal governance.²³ Although Latvia shares many structural similarities with the northern European local government type, there is a distinctive interaction between its post-Soviet governance structures and the developed democracy of the Nordic countries. This thesis will contribute to the international discourse on local leadership by exploring these dynamics. It will align Latvian case studies with global trends, thus situating the national narrative within the broader context of local governance and policy-making. Comparative analysis will underscore political

²¹ European Commission. (2013). *Mobilising EU capital cities: Commissioner Hahn urges Mayors to lead Europe out of crisis*. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_13_161

²² Kuhlmann, S., Dumas, B., P., & Heuberger, M. (2020). *Local Governments' Capacity to Act: A European Comparison. Autonomy, Responsibilities and Reforms*. Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning, Bonn. https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/veroeffentlichungen/sonderveroeffentlichungen/2020/handlungsfuehigkeit-dl-en.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2

²³ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Baldersheim, H., Ladner, A., & Keuffer, N. (2016). *Self-rule index for local authorities (release 1.0) - Final report*. Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/432291>

leadership's adaptive and contextually driven nature, highlighting the variance in leadership styles in different municipalities.

This thesis will provide detailed information and context on the local political leader, the type of political leaders who are mayors in Latvian municipalities, and the role of local political leaders in the municipality (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
The impact of local leadership dynamics on local governance in Latvia
 Source: author



2. PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

The thesis aims to identify the role of local political leaders in Latvian municipalities and, secondly, to provide an analytical assessment of political leadership in Latvian municipalities and possible improvements in the regulation of municipal activities.

The following research questions are related to the aim of the thesis, and accordingly, the research questions determine the structure of the thesis.

1) What is the role of local political leaders in the system of governance?

Articles I²⁴ and V²⁵, both reflecting the case of Latvia, discuss municipal political leaders in the context of the European Union member states. The article on European mayors was published in 2017 (*Political Leaders and Changing Local Democracy: The European Mayor*). This study examined 29 EU municipalities with over 10,000 inhabitants, including seven in Latvia, which were further detailed in a Master's thesis. Therefore, it is necessary to continue the ongoing research on political leaders in Latvian municipalities to obtain a more accurate viewpoint and to identify and understand the type of local political leader clearly.

As a political leader, the mayor needs to achieve a majority in the municipality to manage his interests. Still, he must also be able to work with all political parties at the local level, as they represent the interests of the population. The mayor must implement the policies necessary for the development of the municipality, which may have already been established in previous municipal elections.

The local political leaders in Latvian municipalities have various responsibilities reflected in laws and regulations. The council chairperson can be considered a political leader with executive and decision-making functions. In the Latvian case, the council chairperson may not influence decision-making much unless his party has a majority in the council (see publications I, V, VIII, IX).

2) How can the duties of the mayor be ensured and, where appropriate, improved in Latvia's local authorities?

²⁴ Stučka, M. (2018). Perception of Political Leadership in Local Governments in Latvia. *Social Research*, 41(2), 112–123. <https://doi.org/10.21277/st.v41i2.257>

²⁵ Reinholde, I., Stučka, M. (2019). Urban governance in Latvia: feeling urban and thinking rural. In: Armondi S., De Gregorio Hurtado S., *Foregrounding Urban Agendas: The New Urban Issue in European Experiences of Policy Making*, (The Urban Books Series) Springer, Switzerland.

The Law "On Municipalities" (in force until 31 December 2022) does not provide an exhaustive definition of the tasks of political leaders of municipalities. Various normative acts provide council chairpersons with political leadership opportunities. An analytical perspective is required to enhance the council chairperson's tasks. Additionally, it may be necessary to improve the structure of local government to ensure that different local authorities and their political leaders have a clear understanding of their tasks and capabilities. There have been varying interpretations of the tasks and possibilities of different local authorities and their political leaders, which have caused confusion and may necessitate an increase in tasks. Political leadership and leadership are challenging to define – each academic author has a different definition. The concept of leadership in Latvia has not yet been studied in detail at the municipal level, so the data and analysis of Latvian mayors as local political leaders will be an important contribution to future research on other municipalities and provide information on other aspects of political leadership.

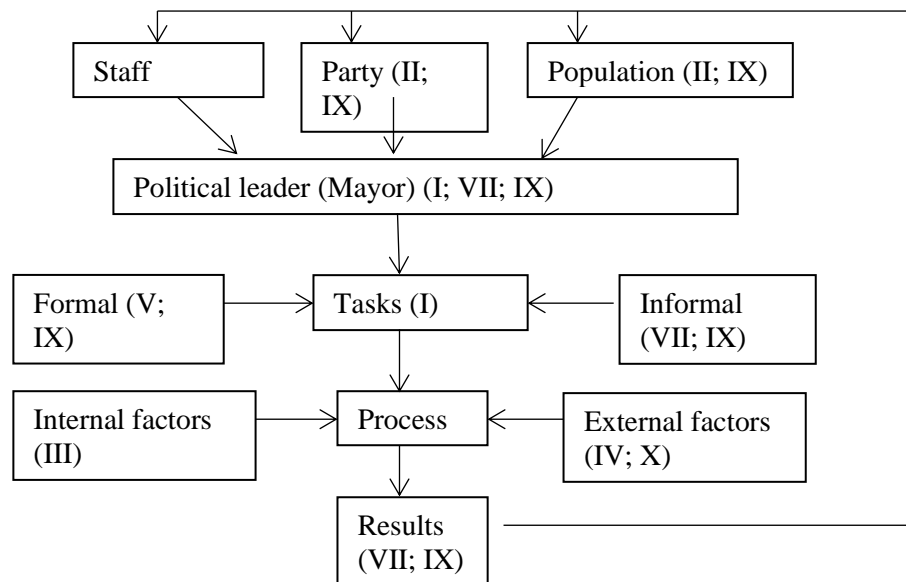
The thesis is based on eight academic publications that provide an analytical overview of the topics covered about Latvian municipalities. They examine the Latvian municipal system from various perspectives relevant to the study and analysis of the political leader as mayor and the definition of leadership. The third chapter of the thesis provides information on the methods used in the thesis and the relationship of the publications included in the thesis to local political leadership and local governance. The fourth chapter presents the theoretical background used in the thesis and the central theoretical positions on political leadership, local political leadership, and leadership. It also discusses in detail and presents theoretical and empirical information on Latvian municipalities and the local political leaders. The conclusion describes the main findings presented in the scientific publications and provides recommendations for improving the institution of the council chairperson.

The theoretical framework of the thesis is based on the current academic literature on political leadership, leadership, and local leadership, its types, and the factors that influence the role of local leaders and their ability to achieve their goals. Thus, the main piece of academic frames comes from local governance studies. The different types of theoretical perspectives under the local governance studies provide a broader way of assessing the role of local leadership and the context in which it operates.

3. METHODOLOGY

Leadership scholars believe that the society in which a leader is situated, the social and political institutions, and the leader's relationships with smaller and larger groups of followers and supporters are all important to the study of leadership.²⁶ The researcher J. Blondel also argues that leadership should be seen concerning its environment, and W. A. Knight points out that one cannot look at leadership without looking at the different kinds of networks available to the leader to ensure the effective functioning of the organization.²⁷²⁸ L. Dion stresses the importance of the relationship between the leader and his followers, suggesting that “leadership is a relationship between one or more people who exercise influence (the leader) and one or more people who yield to that influence (the followers), and leadership is best studied by looking at group processes.”²⁹ Consequently, the role of the local political leader is also defined by looking at the network of relationships shown in Figure 3.1. The academic articles in the thesis discuss almost all the actors involved and how they influence the local political leader.

Figure 3.1.
Conceptual model of the thesis
 Source: author



²⁶ Blondel, J. (1987). *Political leadership: Towards a general analysis*. SAGE.

²⁷ Elgie, R. (2015). *Studying political leadership: Foundations and contending accounts*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Dion, L. (1968). *The Concept of Political Leadership: An Analysis*. Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne De Science Politique, 1(1), 2-17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3231692>

A comprehensive overview of the factors and elements outlined in these publications is presented in Table 4.1.1. The table serves as a visual summary that aligns the empirical findings from the literature review with the conceptual frameworks addressed in the theoretical section of the thesis.

The study of political leadership mainly uses case studies combined with qualitative and quantitative analysis methods to examine and compare different groups.³⁰ The publications that are included here have used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis.

Qualitative methods of analysis are combined to achieve better results. The literature review considers the original and still relevant research on political leadership and the results of recent studies on local political leadership and local governance. The studies presented a chance to evaluate the significance of the local political leader in terms of identifying the mayor's type, function, and position within the municipal system. They also shed light on the factors taken into consideration and how they are related to the local political leader.

In addition to the network of relationships (staff, political party, citizens, local political leader), the thesis also looks at the leader's relationship with civil society, remuneration, elections, and governance. Remuneration is an internal factor as it is determined within the organization and is linked to the professionalization of politics. Elections are linked to citizens, and governance is one of the tasks of the local leader. The relationship of these identified elements to the local political leader is discussed in more detail in fourth chapter.

The robustness of the research presented in this thesis is greatly enhanced by including articles containing primary data (IV; X) collected by the author(s). Each article contributes unique empirical evidence collected accurately using systematic methodologies tailored to the research questions. Whether through surveys, interviews, or direct observation, this primary data lends credibility and depth to the findings discussed. It also provides a valuable basis for comparative analysis, allowing for a more detailed understanding of the issues. By integrating empirical and theoretical data, the study gains a comprehensive and evidence-based approach, ensuring grounded conclusions.

³⁰ Masciulli, J., Molchanov, M., & Knight, W. (2009). *Political Leadership in Context*. http://www.academia.edu/22206512/Political_Leadership_in_Context

The scientific publications included in the thesis also use secondary data. The publications used secondary data such as laws and regulations, previous surveys, available municipal budgets, statistics, and other documents that provided the necessary information were used in the publications. All the publications used secondary data. The researchers believe that secondary data requires that the data user does not base conclusions solely on this data alone but checks different sources to confirm or deny the conclusions.³¹ Secondary data provides a broader perspective and leads to more accurate conclusions. When working with secondary data, it's important to consider the following characteristics to ensure the appropriateness of the data: reliability, relevance, and sufficiency. The reliability aspect involves evaluating the quality of the data and understanding the individuals who collected it and the methods used for data collection. The relevance aspect requires identifying which data will be used and how they will be utilized. The sufficiency framework should assess whether the selected secondary data aligns with the study's objectives.³² The data collection process has been carried out using these criteria to ensure that the data is the necessary input to the design process.³³³⁴

Observation is also an appropriate method of data collection.³⁵ Therefore, the author's experience is also relevant, from working in the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, where she had meetings with representatives of various municipalities, and from conducting interviews with mayors as part of her Master's thesis and the research under Latvian Science Council project No. LZP-2018/1-0480 "Subjective security perception of Latvian citizens: impact on security policy-making." These observations have provided knowledge about how the mayor operates, how the work in municipalities is organized, and their role.

³¹ Kothari, C., R. (2014). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques*. New Delhi: New Age International.

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Johnston, M., P. (2014). *Secondary Data Analysis: A Method of which the Time Has Come*. <https://www.qqml-journal.net/index.php/qqml/article/view/169>

³⁵ Gillespie, A., & Michelson, M. (2011). *Participant Observation and the Political Scientist: Possibilities, Priorities, and Practicalities*. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 44(2), 261-265. www.jstor.org/stable/41319906

4. POLITICAL LEADER, LOCAL POLITICAL LEADER, AND LEADERSHIP

In the context of this thesis, the most important terms are political leader and leadership, so it is essential to distinguish between the two and explain their differences.

4.1 Framing political leadership

There are different definitions of political leaders in scientific literature. It should be noted that almost every author defines a political leader differently. However, there are common criteria: authority, power, and individual capacity.³⁶ A political leader is an individual chosen through democratic elections, with the possibility of reelection and removal, who plays a role in shaping and influencing the legal framework. Their power stems from their mandate, which allows them to lead and govern following established policies. It is the electorate that formally gives a political leader a mandate.³⁷ The followers of the leader can be both long-term and short-term. Their duration to follow depends on the nature of the leader's strategy and the context/environment in which they act. For example, the leader needs to mobilize the electorate to support him in the following elections. The electorate values a political leader's decision-making abilities and their willingness to present impactful policies for addressing problems and crises. The leader also acts as an "identity builder" because they have the power to transform and influence both national and local political cultures.

The researchers assert that a leader's responsibilities encompass the following:

1. Interpreting problems.
2. Offering the necessary resources for problem-solving.
3. Advocating for personal visions as solutions or, at the very least, addressing existing issues.
4. Rallying followers to execute the proposed solutions.³⁸

³⁶ Tales, P. (2012). Political leaders: the paradox of freedom and democracy. *Revista Enfoques*, 10, 113-131. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/3991963.pdf> ; Blondel, J., Thiebault, J., L., & Czernicka, K., F. (2009). *Political Leadership, Parties and Citizens: The Personalisation of Leadership*. Routledge. https://books.google.lv/books?id=7raLAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=lv&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

³⁷ Morrell, K., Hartley, J. (2006). A model of political leadership. *Human Relations*, 59(4), 483–504. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267060653>

³⁸ Heifetz, R., A. (1994). *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press/Belknap Press. https://www.academia.edu/1651329/Leadership_without_easy_answers

According to R. Heifetz, two types of leaders can be distinguished: adaptive and innovative. An adaptive leader reacts and responds to different challenges by introducing change. In contrast, an innovative leader seeks radical solutions to problems and is willing to change the rules of the game or even the way society responds to problems.³⁹

Leaders are almost always significant in political parties, both before and during elections, since they can successfully implement the party's electoral strategy and then lead, for example, a municipality with a particular leadership style. Taking the above into consideration, for the purposes of this thesis, **a political leader will be defined as a council chairperson who has secured a seat through municipal elections, garnered the support of the council, and has been elected as a councilor.** Therefore, it can be assumed that the mayor has been given authority and power and that his problem-solving ability has been recognized by the municipality's citizens – voters.

It is crucial to delve into the broader concept of leadership and expand the discussion beyond the realm of a political leader. The term “leadership” encompasses much more than an individual's capacity. While a political leader influences and directs local government, the concept of leadership goes beyond this and encompasses a broader range of activities and influences. Leadership is a recently coined term, and its definitions in the Oxford Dictionary are “the state or position of being a leader; the ability to be a leader or the qualities a good leader should have; a group of leaders of a particular organization, etc.”⁴⁰

In order to fully understand the multifaceted nature of leadership, it is imperative to explore many theories that delve into its diverse dimensions. These theories offer a comprehensive perspective on leadership, shedding light on the various facets that define effective leadership across different contexts. Whether examining traits, behaviors, or the influence of institutions, these theories collectively contribute to our understanding of leadership's intricate web (see Table 4.1.1).

Table 4.1.1
Leadership thematic categories⁴¹

³⁹ Heifetz, R., A. (1994). *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press/Belknap Press. https://www.academia.edu/1651329/Leadership_without_easy_answers

⁴⁰ *Leadership*. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/leadership?q=leadership>

⁴¹ Dinh, J. E., Lord, R. G., Gardner, W. L., Meuser, J. D., Liden, R. C., & Hu, J. (2014). Leadership theory and research in the new millennium: Current theoretical trends and changing perspectives. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(1), 36-62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.11.005>

<i>Theory thematic category</i>	<i>How do the theories included in these thematic categories explore leadership?</i>
Neo-Charismatic theories	These theories scrutinize leaders' capacity to inspire and transform followers by examining their charismatic qualities and behaviors.
Leadership and information processing	The focus is on leaders' information processing, decision-making, and effective communication within organizations to lead and guide their teams.
Social Exchange/Relational Leadership theories	These theories examine interpersonal relationships between leaders and followers, emphasizing reciprocity, trust, and resource exchange.
Dispositional/Trait theories	Leadership exploration centers on personal traits and characteristics of leaders, such as charisma, intelligence, and emotional intelligence.
Leadership and diversity: cross-cultural leadership	Cross-cultural leadership theories investigate how leaders navigate diverse cultural contexts and adapt their leadership styles to be effective across various groups, including women leaders, minorities, and different cultures.
Follower-centric leadership theories	The focus shifts from leaders to followers, exploring how followers' needs, expectations, and behaviors influence leadership dynamics.
Behavioral theories	These theories analyze leaders' actions and behaviors, assessing how their conduct impacts group dynamics and outcomes, including shared leadership and delegation.
Contingency theories	These theories examine the idea that effective leadership depends on situational factors, exploring how leaders adapt their approaches based on varying circumstances.
Power and influence of leadership	Investigation centers on the sources and mechanisms of power and influence employed by leaders to achieve their goals and objectives.
Strategic leadership	Exploration encompasses how leaders formulate and execute strategic plans to guide organizations toward long-term goals and their influence on organizational performance.
Team leadership	Focus is on how leaders manage and lead teams, emphasizing collaboration, coordination, and dynamics within group settings.
Contextual, complexity and system perspective of leadership	A holistic view considers the broader organizational and environmental contexts in which leadership operates, including complexities of systems and networks.
Leader emergence and development	Examination revolves around how individuals emerge as leaders and how they can develop their leadership skills and abilities over time.
Ethical/moral leadership theories	Investigation centers on the ethical dimensions of leadership, emphasizing principles, values, and an ethical approach to leadership.
Leading for creativity, innovation, and change	Exploration involves how leaders foster creativity, drive innovation, and manage organizational change.
Identity-based leadership theories	The focus is on how leaders draw upon and leverage their identities and the identities of their followers to shape leadership dynamics.
Other new theories	These theories may explore unique aspects of leadership, often adapting or combining elements from existing theories to provide fresh insights into leadership dynamics. Examples include e-leadership, entrepreneurial leadership, transformational-transactional leadership hybrids, place based leadership.

This thesis focuses on theories that delve deeply into the multifaceted aspects of leadership, particularly those that adopt a contextual, complex, and systemic perspective. This approach seeks to understand leadership not as an isolated phenomenon but as an intricate interplay of factors within the broader context of organizations, societies, and complex systems. By exploring leadership through this lens, it is possible to uncover the nuanced dynamics and intricate relationships that shape effective leadership in diverse and ever-changing environments.

Researchers also suggest that there are several types of leadership:

- Person-centered leadership (focusing on the leader's personality and character traits),
- Result-oriented leadership (focusing on the results achieved by the leader),
- Position-oriented leadership (focusing on the leadership)
- Goal-based leadership (focusing on the leader's goals),
- Process-based leadership (focusing on how the leader works).⁴²

Leadership can, therefore, be defined and characterized by looking at the leader's personality and the process and organization in which the leader operates. Leadership effectiveness, in turn, depends on the type of consequences – long-term or short-term – that a leader's actions have.⁴³ It's important to highlight that other stakeholders in the decision-making process play a critical role in shaping the outcomes. Decisions are not always solely made by the leader, and the involvement of others influences their impacts.

Political leadership is also a multidimensional phenomenon. It is part of the many social processes that produce specific political outcomes, such as electoral results.⁴⁴ Political leadership was first discussed in modern literature by M. Weber in 1922, and since then, various definitions and attempts to define political leadership have appeared.⁴⁵ Early studies on political leaders have focused on the leader's personality, analyzing historically significant politicians and the relationship between the leader's behavior and roles in a specific system or organization. These studies have also defined key processes, described the relationship between leaders and their followers or potential voters⁴⁶, and explored how different situations affect a leader's personality

⁴² Grint, K., Smolović Jones, O., & Holt, C. (2016). What is leadership: person, result, position, purpose or process, or all or none of these?, in J. Storey, J. Hartley, J.-L. Denis, P. 't Hart and D. Ulrich (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Leadership*, London: Routledge, pp 3–20.
http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/79774/7/WRAP_0772658-wbs-010716-chapter_final%20%281%29.pdf

⁴³ Masciulli, J., Molchanov, M., & Knight, W. (2009). *Political Leadership in Context*.
http://www.academia.edu/22206512/Political_Leadership_in_Context

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Masciulli, J., Molchanov, M., & Knight, W. (2009). *Political Leadership in Context*.
http://www.academia.edu/22206512/Political_Leadership_in_Context;

Nye, J., S. (2013). *Presidential Leadership and the Creation of the American Era*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁴⁶ Burns, J.M. (1978). *Leadership*. N.Y, Harper and Row.

and behavior, such as the reasons behind their decisiveness in some scenarios and hesitancy in others.⁴⁷

According to J. Masciulli, M. Molchanov, and W. Knight, political leadership is characterized by the leaders' capacity to encourage an active involvement of followers in political matters, attentively consider their insights and recommendations regarding prevailing societal issues, both within and outside the organization, as well as ongoing crises.⁴⁸ J. Masciulli, M. Molchanov, and W. Knight define political leadership as “a unique set of power relations and influences that is exercised over a broad range of nationally and globally salient issue areas and from a position of authoritative preponderance involving ideologies and ethics.”⁴⁹ Political leadership also involves exercising power. Unlike the authors who introduced the term, such as M. Weber, theorists closer to the 21st century see political leadership as a discursive exercise of power rather than a coercive power model.⁵⁰ Robert C. Tucker criticizes M. Weber's views, arguing that political leadership is not only a factor of power, authority, and incumbency but also involves building a political community, giving it direction, and participating in its implementation.⁵¹ The researchers also argue that issues are interpreted differently by the opposition, political leaders, advisors, and followers so that political leadership can be seen as a competitive business in which different ideas and values emerge.⁵² Consequently, leadership in this thesis is seen as a process in which a political leader leads an organization and a team in a direction that is necessary, predetermined, and specific to that organization while also respecting ideological and ethical principles in the current context.

However, political leadership is difficult to define in its essence and give a general definition because, as mentioned above, it depends on the institutional, cultural,

⁴⁷ Bochel, H., & Bochel, C. (2010). *Local Political Leadership and the Modernisation of Local Government*. *Local Government Studies*, 36 (6), 723-737.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2010.523199>

⁴⁸ Masciulli, J., Molchanov, M., & Knight, W. (2009). *Political Leadership in Context*.
http://www.academia.edu/22206512/Political_Leadership_in_Context

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Nye, J. (1990). *Soft Power*. *Foreign Policy*, (80), 153–171.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/1148580?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents ; Rhodes, R. A., & Hart, P, ‘t. (2016). *The Oxford handbook of political leadership*.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199653881.001.0001>

⁵¹ Rhodes, R. A., & Hart, P, ‘t. (2016). *The Oxford handbook of political leadership*.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199653881.001.0001>

⁵² Ibid

and historical context – both specific and general – and the situation.⁵³ This should be admitted as a constraint of the thesis.

Political leadership is often defined by specific normative prescriptions that determine its design and application. It is necessary to analyze values and their perception, characters, power relations, attitudes, and actions of the leader and his followers, as well as the historical and cultural context to characterize political leadership.⁵⁴ Recognizing these complexities and contextual dependencies is crucial for developing a nuanced understanding of local political leader and leadership within the scope of this thesis.

4.2 Local political leader and leadership

Local political leadership has changed because those involved in politics today face different challenges than local political leaders did 20 years ago. For example, EU accession and enlargement since 2004 and 2007 have led to greater integration within the EU, so local leaders need to choose/develop more active urban politics.⁵⁵

Consequently, in recent years, there has been an academic focus on the transformation of local political leadership in Western Europe, for example by S. Leach, D. Wilson, and D. Sweeting. D. Sweeting argues that local political leadership has shifted from simply trying to gain control of local government services to also encompassing community leadership. Leadership in local government now requires the leader to collaborate and consult with stakeholders to identify and solve problems of local concern, whether these problems can be solved at the local level or are the local authority's responsibility.⁵⁶ Leadership is shared among many actors and institutions – it is not an individual activity. Urban leadership involves both individuals as well as local government structures and institutions. The structure and type of local government, the local decision-making process, and the electoral process are essential elements in characterizing and defining leadership.⁵⁷ It can, therefore, be concluded that

⁵³ Masciulli, J., Molchanov, M., & Knight, W. (2009). *Political Leadership in Context*. http://www.academia.edu/22206512/Political_Leadership_in_Context

⁵⁴ Nye, J. S. (2008). *The powers to lead*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵⁵ Martins, L., & Alvarez, J., M., R. (2007). Towards glocal leadership: taking up the challenge of new local governance in Europe? *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 25, 391-409. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c0641>

⁵⁶ Leach, S., & Wilson, D. (2000). *Local Political Leadership*. Bristol: Policy Press; Sweeting, D. (2002). *Leadership in Urban Governance: The Mayor of London*, *Local Government Studies*, 28(1), 3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/714004134>

⁵⁷ Rapoport, E., Acuto, M., & Grcheva, L. (2019). *Leading Cities: A Global Review of City Leadership*. UCL Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv8jp0qg>

the process and the actors involved are also crucial in assessing local leadership, as they all impact local leadership.

Researchers M. Haus and D. Sweeting emphasize that local political leadership is linked to issues of local governance, in which there is a network of many actors who seek to highlight social problems and thus the role of leadership by pointing to its successes or less successful actions.⁵⁸ Researchers distinguish between different actions of a leader, such as systematic attempts to reach a collective agreement, joint action, and leadership positions, which are characterized by the opportunities and expectations to use the resources at their disposal. Leaders combine different roles in an organization and promote innovative processes, providing them with essential resources to bring about change in local authorities.⁵⁹ This multifaceted perspective underscores the dynamic and influential nature of local political leadership within the broader context of local governance.

H. Wollmann suggests that the ongoing reform debates in Europe stem from broad concerns about insufficient transparency and accountability within municipalities, coupled with a decline in voter engagement in local elections. These issues are compounded by local governments increasingly struggling to manage the complex social, economic, and environmental challenges they face.⁶⁰ Consequently, these challenges also require different solutions from local leadership and governance and a different decision-making process to increase participation and improve transparency and responsible use of financial resources.

Researchers consider that local political leadership can be analyzed in many different ways. One approach is to assume the leader is the head of a network. In this role, he or she connects and builds relationships with other network actors, e.g., organizations and business partners. Other approaches focus more on the type of style a leader adopts and the type of leadership through which they express their power. It should be noted that all approaches to analysis indicate that the context of the municipality determines the leadership role and its formation.⁶¹ Therefore, attention

⁵⁸ Haus, M., & Sweeting, D. (2006). *Local Democracy and Political Leadership: Drawing a Map*. 54(2), 267–288. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2006.00605.x>

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Wollmann, H. (2008). Reforming local leadership and local democracy: The cases of England, Sweden, Germany and France in comparative perspective. *Local Government Studies*, 34(2), 279–298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930701852344>

⁶¹ Martins, L., & Alvarez, J., M., R. (2007). Towards glocal leadership: taking up the challenge of new local governance in Europe? *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 25, 391-409. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c0641>

should be paid to the context and its elements in the municipality to define more precisely the approach needed to analyze the leader and leadership.

Given the challenges outlined above, there is no doubt that the context is changing and continues to change almost everywhere in Europe, where it is driven by, for example, new public administration reforms, decentralization reforms, the declining power of the party system, the shift from local government to the local governance, globalization and the process of Europeanisation. All these changes contribute to changes in the context/environment, affecting the construction and performance of the political leadership role.⁶² Similarly, the role of the local political leader is highlighted by researchers S. Kuhlmann and H. Wollmann, who argue that there is an increasing demand for institutional reforms to improve democratic accountability by increasing the operational (executive) capacity of local leadership.⁶³ Giving more power to the local political leader is likely to increase the involvement of local citizens in the decision-making process and the life of the municipality.

D. Sweeting argues that four factors influence local political leadership:

- 1) The external environment (international institutions, national and international processes, economics, national policies).
- 2) Institutional arrangements (collaboration and informal networks).
- 3) Local agenda/issues on the agenda.
- 4) Leadership traits/personal characteristics.⁶⁴

Researchers B. Denters, K. Steyvers, P. J. Klok, and D. Cermak believe that mayors are important in addressing social inclusion, poverty, climate change, environmental sustainability, and public safety.⁶⁵ In addition to the researchers already mentioned, A. Magnier, C. Navarro, and P. Russo points out that in rural areas, council members primarily depend on strong connections with the business sector and other public bodies, whereas in urban settings, councilors' work is deeply influenced by the

⁶² Martins, L., Alvarez, J., M., R. (2007). Towards glocal leadership: taking up the challenge of new local governance in Europe? *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 25, 391-409. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c0641>

⁶³ Kuhlmann, S., & Wollmann, H. (2019). *Introduction to comparative public administration: Administrative systems and reform in Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

⁶⁴ Sweeting, D. (2002). Leadership in Urban Governance: The Mayor of London. *Local Government Studies*, 28 (1), 3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/714004134>

⁶⁵ Denters, B., Steyvers, K., Klok, P. J., & Cermak, D. (2018). Political Leadership in Issue Networks: How Mayors Rule Their World? In H. Heinelt, A. Magnier, M. Cabria, & H. Reynaert (Eds.), *Political Leaders and Changing Local Democracy* (pp. 273-296). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67410-0_9

constant involvement of various associations and organizations in everyday activities.⁶⁶ A few of these problems can be solved within the municipality. It is clear from the tasks assigned to the council chairpersons in the laws and regulations. However, as researchers have also pointed out, solving such problems requires help from outside and the state.⁶⁷ The local political leader needs to build networks/relationships, e.g., with the political party and civil society, through which these problems can be addressed more successfully, not only at the national level. One way of doing this is to involve civil society in local decision-making to understand better how specific policies should be made.

It is also necessary to look at the typology developed by P. E. Mouritzen and J. H. Svava, which looks at horizontal power relations, to assess local governments. The framework analyzes power distribution at the municipal level, including the roles and functions of the council chairperson, deputies, commissions, and municipal administration.⁶⁸ Thus, by looking at this typology and identifying the type in Latvia, then verifying it in existing legal settings and secondary data, the council chairperson's role and the existing horizontal power relations in the municipality are identified.

This typology highlights the main differences between the power of the mayors of the different systems in the municipality they represent. Considering the power influence/power of the councilor, the researchers mentioned above have distinguished four models of municipalities:

1. the council-manager model;
2. the collective model,
3. the committee-leader model;
4. the strong mayor model.⁶⁹

The council-manager model of local government is characterized by a professional manager appointed by the council rather than elected by the people. In this

⁶⁶ Magnier, A., Navarro, C., & Russo, P. (2006). Urban Systems as Growth Machines? Mayors' Governing Networks against Global Indeterminacy. In H. Bäck, H. Heinelt, & A. Magnier (Eds.), *The European Mayor* (pp. 201-219). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90005-6_9 s

⁶⁷ Denters, B., Steyvers, K., Klok, P. J., & Cermak, D. (2018). Political Leadership in Issue Networks: How Mayors Rule Their World? In H. Heinelt, A. Magnier, M. Cabria, & H. Reynaert (Eds.), *Political Leaders and Changing Local Democracy* (pp. 273-296). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67410-0_9

⁶⁸ Heinelt, H., Magnier, A., Cabria, M., & Reynaert, H. (2018). *Political Leaders and Changing Local Democracy: The European Mayor*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶⁹ Ibid

model, the leader is not a political figure but considerably influences the municipality's development. In the collective model, the council chairperson has a strong influence through which he can exercise leadership. In the committee-leader model, the council chairperson may not have much influence, and his executive functions are mostly shared with other institutions in the municipality, such as commissions. Power distribution may also not be equal, as the council leader may also chair one of the commissions. The power distribution needs to be further assessed if his/her party has a majority. In this form, the council chairperson usually performs a few classic administrative functions but instead maintains and strengthens a network of relationships with other stakeholders in the municipality's work. In the strong mayor model, the mayor has the most significant support from members and is also responsible for executive functions.⁷⁰

Researchers have focused on the relationship between the local leader and other stakeholders in recent years. In this context, researchers emphasize the shift from the traditional view of leadership (individualistic leaders) to collective, shared, and network leadership.⁷¹ These concepts of leadership are equally relevant in the context of local government, where present-day challenges influence the roles of local leaders. Today, leaders in local government must engage in collaboration, consult with stakeholders, conduct research, and address local issues, regardless of whether these challenges can be resolved at the local level or fall within the scope of local government to resolve. Research shows that leadership is an important element in a complex system of local government to deliver public goods,^{72 73} and explain policy failures. In addition, high levels of trust and frequent communication between stakeholders can contribute to leadership development, even when no identifiable leader exists.⁷⁴ Local leaders are important in networking as they are directly linked to the local decision-making

⁷⁰ Mouritzen, P. E., & Svava, J. H. (2002). *Leadership at the apex: Politicians and Administrators in Western Local Governments*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3A31735046143545/viewer#page/74/mode/2up>

⁷¹ Cristofoli, D., Trivellato, B., Sancino, A., Maccio, L., & Markovic, J. (2021). Public network leadership and the ties that lead. *Journal of Management and Governance*, 25, 251-274. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10997-020-09505-1>

⁷² Ospina, S.M. (2017). Bridging Public Leadership Research and Leadership Studies. *Public Administration Review*, 77 (2), 275–287. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12706>

⁷³ Coulson, A. (2007). *Local Government Leadership: The New Public Management, and Politics in the UK and USA*. Birmingham: Institute of Local Government Studies.

⁷⁴ Cristofoli, D., Trivellato, B., Sancino, A., Maccio, L., & Markovic, J. (2021). Public network leadership and the ties that lead. *Journal of Management and Governance*, 25, 251-274. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10997-020-09505-1>

process. They also play a coordinating role, building consensus among all stakeholders.

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Local leaders are also considered to have integrative public leadership, which entails connecting various groups and organizations to address intricate public issues and work towards the collective benefit.⁷⁸ Another aspect to consider when defining local leadership is that the local leader relies heavily on close relationships with businesses and other public institutions in rural areas. In contrast, in urban areas, the local leader's work is described as saturated with the daily presence of various associations and non-governmental organizations.⁷⁹

Place-based leadership, which combines network theory, leadership, and place-based governance, is a current trend. It focuses on the network developing within a given territorial unit and includes local and non-local organizations.⁸⁰ Research has been developed on the role of place-based leadership in the development of innovation in public services⁸¹, the socio-economic development of regions and their resilience⁸², and the creation of smart cities.⁸³ However, place-based leadership is still seen as a new concept that has yet to be fully understood. Nevertheless, researchers emphasize that one of the important advantages is the combination of several theories.

⁷⁵ Haus, M. & Sweeting, D. (2006). Local Democracy and Political Leadership: Drawing a Map. *Political Studies*, 54(2), 267–288. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2006.00605.x>

⁷⁶ Haus, M., Heinelt, H., & Stewart, M. (Eds.). (2005). *Urban Governance and Democracy: Leadership and Community Involvement*. Routledge.

⁷⁷ Svara, J. H. (2009). Are elected executives needed to achieve accountability to citizens? Performance issues and form of government in large US cities. In J. A. Raffel, P. Leisink, & A. E. Middlebrooks (Eds.), *Public sector leadership: International challenges and perspectives* (pp. 109–124). Edward Elgar Publishing.

⁷⁸ Crosby, B. & Bryson, J. (2010). Special issue on public integrative leadership: multiple turns of a kaleidoscope. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21(2), 205–208. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2010.01.001>

⁷⁹ Magnier, A., Navarro, C., & Russo, P. (2006). Urban systems as growth machines? Mayors' governing networks against global indeterminacy. In H. Bäck, H. Heinelt, & A. Magnier (Eds.), *The European Mayor* (pp. 201–219). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

⁸⁰ Beer, A., & Clower, T. (2014). Mobilizing leadership in cities and regions. *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 1(1), 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2013.869428>

⁸¹ Sotarauta, M., & Beer, A. (2017). Governance, agency and place leadership: lessons from a cross-national analysis. *Regional Studies*, 51(2), 210–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2015.1119265>

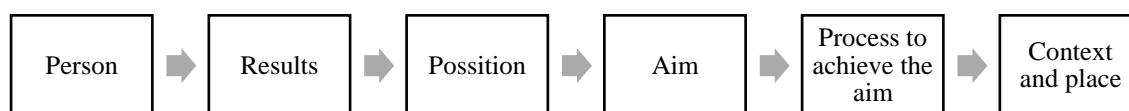
⁸² Budd, L., Sancino, A., Pagani, M., Kristmundsson, Ó., Roncevic, B., & Steiner, M. (2017). Sport as a complex adaptive system for place leadership: comparing five European cities with different administrative and socio-cultural traditions. *Local Economy*, 32(4), 316–335.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/02690942177094> ; Sotarauta, M., & Beer, A. (2017). Governance, agency and place leadership: lessons from a cross-national analysis. *Regional Studies*, 51(2), 210–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2015.1119265>

⁸³ Nicholds, A., Gibney, J., Mabey, C., & Hart, D. (2017). Making sense of variety in place leadership: The case of England's smart cities. *Regional Studies*, 51(2), 249–259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2016.1232482>

Researchers point out that the definition of leadership depends mainly on the type of leadership being studied and the perspective and context used. Given the types of leadership described in subsection 4.1., the researchers suggest that leadership can be assessed by identifying the elements shown in Figure 4.2.1.⁸⁴

Figure 4.2.1.
Elements of leadership
Source: author



Once the local political leader has been identified and defined, the next step is to assess the leadership and define the context – one of the following approaches can be used to assess it:

- the individual approach (studying an individual);
- the relational or network approach (examining the leader's relationship with other community stakeholders);
- the collective approach (examining collective leadership).⁸⁵

The articles in this thesis consider the local political leader from a relational or network approach, looking at how the leader interacts with both the national level and local institutions, and a collective approach, looking at several municipalities and the role of their council leaders.

In the light of what has been described so far, the main factors influencing local political leadership are:

- the external environment;
- the institutional arrangements;
- the local agenda;
- leader self.

Each of these factors encompasses specific elements that provide a more precise understanding of their impact on the role of the council chairperson as a local political leader. The influence of the external environment is characterized by factors such as

⁸⁴ Grint, K., Smolović Jones, O., & Holt, C. (2016). What is leadership: Person, result, position, purpose or process, or all or none of these? In J. Storey, J. Hartley, J.-L. Denis, P. 't Hart, & D. Ulrich (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Leadership* (pp. 3–20). Routledge.

⁸⁵ Pagani, M., Sancino, A., & Budd, L. (2021). Essential, complex, and multi-form: the local leadership of civil society from an Anglo-Italian perspective. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 12(1), 41-58.
<https://doi.org/10.1332/204080520X15902277850841>

the international agenda and national policies related to local government. Additionally, the mayor's participation in national decision-making processes and the local government's structural framework can be identified as key elements.

Institutional arrangements are equally vital factors influencing political leadership. The development of municipalities and the evaluation of their effectiveness by citizens can be influenced by the mayor's collaborations with various stakeholders within the municipality, including advisory councils, as well as with other institutions at the national level. These institutional arrangements also encompass the significance of the political party that represents the council chairperson in their work, including factors like council majority composition. Furthermore, it is essential to consider whether there are advantages at the national level, such as the mayor's party being a national party or holding representation in the national government.

The local agenda plays a crucial role in shaping the mayor's function as a local leader within the municipality. The agenda can be established or altered following elections, and unexpected events can introduce changes. The context is another influential aspect, with each municipality featuring unique elements that can impact the agenda. While municipalities confront environmental, financial, and social challenges, they also share certain commonalities, particularly at the regional level.

Throughout all these factors and elements, the characteristics of the leader remain a fundamental consideration. These traits infiltrate aspects of local leadership dynamics. A schematic representation of these factors and elements is presented in Table 4.2.1.

Table 4.2.1

Publication coverage of factors and their elements

Factors	Elements	Article number							
		I	II	III	IV	V	VIII	IX	X
<i>External environment (international institutions, national policies)</i>	Involvement in national decision-making				X			X	
	Municipal structure	X	X	X				X	
<i>Institutional arrangements (cooperation partners, informal networks)</i>	Stakeholder consultation				X			X	X
	Role of the party		X					X	
<i>Local Agenda</i>	Local decision-making process				X	X	X	X	X

Factors	Elements	Article number							
		I	II	III	IV	V	VIII	IX	X
	Electoral process		X					X	
<i>Characteristics of the leader</i>	Characteristics of the leader	X		X	X		X	X	X

4.3 Local governance in Latvia: impact on local leadership and decision-making

In the context of examining local leadership, it is essential to consider the evolving landscape of local governance in Latvia, which underwent a significant transformation on July 1, 2021. This subchapter examines key elements such as autonomy, the electoral system, and the influence of mayors in local decision-making in Latvia to give the context of the local leadership in Latvia as well as the discussions on these topics.

Latvia's local governance has undergone a profound transformation. Before July 1, 2021, there were 119 municipalities of which 110 were counties, and nine were republican cities. After 1 July 2021, there are 43 municipalities in Latvia, of which 36 are counties and seven are state cities.⁸⁶ This transformation carries significant implications for the balance of power and control within these newly formed entities. However, the publications included in this thesis were written before this reform.

Researchers I. Kažoka and L. Stafecka, in their study "Balance of Power and Control in Latvian Municipalities", have concluded that Latvian municipalities give a significant role to the ruling party and the executive, which in turn reduces and complicates the activities of opposition parties (minority parties), leaving them with limited influence over decision-making processes and council activities.⁸⁷

In response to these challenges, a group of experts (Daina Bāra, Valts Kalniņš, Jānis Pleps, Inga Vilka) appointed by the President of Latvia, Andris Bērziņš, together with I. Kažoka and L. Stafecka recommended the introduction of direct mayoral elections. If the direct election of the mayor were to be introduced, there would also be no contradiction/inconsistency between the formally introduced representative model

⁸⁶ Vides aizsardzības un reģionālās attīstības ministrija (2021). *Pašvaldības*. http://www.varam.gov.lv/lat/darbibas_veidi/pasv/

⁸⁷ Kažoka, I., & Stafecka L. (2017). *Varas līdzsvars un kontrole Latvijas pašvaldībās*. https://www.lps.lv/uploads/docs_module/2017_7_p5.pdf

and the mayor's actual influence on the municipality's functioning.⁸⁸ It would, therefore, be relevant for the thesis to examine whether the assumption that the mayor has more informal power is confirmed.

Within this local government landscape, a crucial aspect to consider is the level of autonomy granted to municipalities. The Local Autonomy Index has been assessing Latvia since 1991, and the institutional depth it measures in Latvia is rated at the highest possible level – 3 – indicating that the local council is free to decide what new tasks it wants to take on beyond those defined by the state. Within the framework of this criterion, it is therefore also relevant to look at the autonomy of the mayor, i.e., who is given the most power to evaluate functions.⁸⁹

Latvia's electoral system is based on proportional representation, as the Saeima and local governments are elected by equal, universal, and direct suffrage. Every Latvian citizen aged 18 or over can vote. Citizens of the European Union who are not Latvian nationals but are registered on the electoral register may vote. There are some additional requirements for local elections. The local municipality must be where the person has lived for at least 90 days before the election date, or the person must own real estate in the municipality. These conditions express the person's connection with the local area. Non-citizens of Latvia who are not citizens of the European Union are not eligible to vote in local elections in Latvia.⁹⁰ This system has implications for the mayor's role and influence within the municipality.

The electoral register is the system that contains the data of citizens who are eligible to vote. In Latvia, the electoral register is used only for elections to the European Parliament or local elections. Based on the data contained in the electoral register, electoral rolls are drawn up and processed at polling stations. However, voters can change their polling station (i.e., vote either at their residence or where they own property) until the 25th day before the election. There are only three conditions that prohibit one from voting:

- 1) the person has been declared incapable by a court,
- 2) the person has been convicted and is serving a prison sentence, or

⁸⁸ Kažoka, I., & Stafecka L. (2017). *Varas līdzsvars un kontrole Latvijas pašvaldībās*. https://www.lps.lv/uploads/docs_module/2017_7_p5.pdf

⁸⁹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Baldersheim, H., Ladner, A., & Keuffer, N. (2016). *Self-rule index for local authorities (release 1.0) - Final report*. Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/432291>

⁹⁰ *Pašvaldības domes vēlēšanu likums*. (14.11.2022.). <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/57839-pasvaldibas-domes-velesanu-likums>

3) the person is not entitled to vote in another Member State of the European Union.⁹¹

The number of councilors is directly linked to the population of the municipality. Thus, after the 2021 administrative-territorial reform, the smallest municipality will have 15 councilors, while the largest - Riga City - will have 60.⁹²

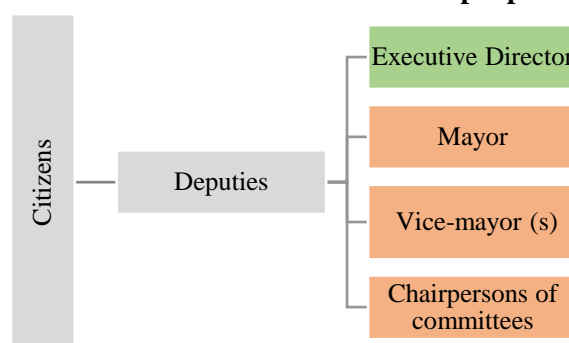
According to the IDEA typology, municipal councilors are elected based on a proportional list system. Citizens vote for a political party or a coalition of two or more parties. The voters can cross out or put a "+" for candidates, thus expressing their opinion on each candidate and changing their order in the list.⁹³

Each municipality is a separate constituency, regardless of its size. The administrative territory of a municipality thus constitutes a separate constituency. A five percent threshold is set for both local and national elections, which means that lists that obtain less than five percent of the total votes in the local elections are excluded from the allocation of seats in the municipality. The Sainte Laguë method is used to allocate council seats to lists.⁹⁴

The mayor's choice is not only made by the electorate but also by the members, who elect him or her at the first meeting of the Council (Figure 4.3.1).

Figure 4.3.1.

Procedure for the Election of municipal political office-holders⁹⁵



Considering the conclusions of P. E. Mouritzen and J. H. Svava, Latvia has the committee-leader model⁹⁶, and in scheme 4.3.1, the mayor does not have a dominant

⁹¹ Saeima (1994). *Pašvaldības domes vēlēšanu likums*. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/57839-pasvaldibas-domes-velesanu-likums>

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Saeima (2022). *Pašvaldību likums*. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/336956-pasvaldibu-likums>

⁹⁶ Mouritzen, P. E., & Svava, J. H. (2002). *Leadership at the Apex: Politicians and Administrators in Western Local Governments*. University of Pittsburgh Press. <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3A31735046143545/viewer#page/74/mode/2up>

position of power since he or she is not directly elected but is elected by the members in the same way as the executive director and the vice-mayor. Similarly, the executive functions are exercised by the executive director. It confirms that the mayor may not have much influence/power and shares most of the executive functions with other municipal bodies,⁹⁷ e.g., the executive director, vice-mayor, and chairpersons of committees. In the case of Latvia, there is also a difference from other countries. In Latvia, however, the mayor works full-time. The mayor is also the head of the finance committee, thus also being the head of the main committee and having the opportunity to regulate not only the administration and the work of the municipality but also the budget adoption process.

The functions and duties of the mayor are laid down in Article 17, paragraph 3 of the Local Government Law:

- 1) direct the work of the council and represent the interests of the Municipality, including representing the council between meetings;
- 2) preside over the meetings of the council and sign its resolutions;
- 3) represents the Municipality in court and relations with the public administration and other public bodies without special authorization;
- 4) supervise the execution of court judgments in cases where the Municipality is a party;
- 5) issue powers of attorney, sign contracts and other legal documents by the Municipality's regulations;
- 6) initiate the consideration of matters by the council and its committees, including the submission of applications and requests received from public authorities;
- 7) if necessary, appoint an acting Head of Institution or Executive Director from among the administrative staff of the Municipality during the absence of the Head of Institution or Executive Director or until the council has decided on the appointment of a new Head of Institution or Executive Director;
- 8) to give instructions to the Executive Director, heads of municipal institutions, and other bodies insofar as this is necessary for the exercise of the powers of the council chairperson;
- 9) carry out other duties provided for by law, regulations, and council decisions.⁹⁸

If taking into account the functions/tasks assigned to the mayor, it can be concluded that he or she is also responsible for the administrative staff of the municipality and manages them in their daily routine, gives them binding orders, and manages the work of the council, which is an important task for him as a political leader, as he must be able to coordinate the work of the members of the different parties' members in a unified direction. The tasks of the executive director of a municipality

⁹⁷ Heinelt, H., Magnier, A., Cabria, M., Reynaert, H. (2018). *Political Leaders and Changing Local Democracy: The European Mayor*. (38. – 42.lpp)

⁹⁸ Saeima (2022). *Pašvaldību likums*. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/336956-pasvaldibu-likums>

are set out in Article 22 of the Local Government Law, which states that the executive director shall:

- 1) enforce the decisions of the council;
- 2) head the central administration, unless otherwise provided in the Statute of the Municipality, control and coordinate the work of the Municipality's administration, as well as issue orders to the Municipality's administration staff, who shall inform their superior thereof;
- 3) Recruit and dismiss the staff of the Central Administration by the procedure laid down in the Statute of the Municipality if the Executive Director is also the Head of the Central Administration;
- 4) propose to the City Council the appointment or dismissal of the heads of the municipal institutions and conclude employment contracts with the heads of the institutions;
- 5) submit proposals to the City Council on the establishment, reorganization, and liquidation of municipal institutions and other bodies, as well as municipal capital companies;
- 6) has the power to suspend and revoke unlawful and unnecessary decisions of the heads of the municipal authorities unless otherwise provided by law;
- 7) to dispose of the property and financial resources of the municipality and to conduct legal transactions by the procedure established by the Statute of the municipality;
- 8) by the Law on Management of Capital Shares and Capital Companies of Public Entities, perform the duties of a representative of a holder of capital shares in capital companies in which the Municipality is a holder of capital shares;
- 9) organizing the preparation of the Municipality's annual accounts, consolidated annual accounts, and public annual accounts;
- 10) organizing the transfer to the new council chairperson of the records and documents handed over to the Executive Director by the previous council chairperson;
- 11) Ensure the continuity of the work of the Municipal Administration in the event of a change of council;
- 12) to adopt administrative decisions within the scope of its competence and to exercise control over the legality of administrative decisions adopted by the Town Council;
- 13) organizing, monitoring, and improving the internal control system of the municipality;
- 14) To report on its activities in the manner prescribed by the Statute of the Municipality;
- 15) to perform other duties provided for by external laws, regulations, and decisions of the Town Council.⁹⁹

At the time of writing the thesis, the Local Government Act came into force on 1 January 2023.¹⁰⁰ Prior to this, the tasks of the municipality's mayor and executive director were defined by the Law on Local Governments.¹⁰¹ Among other things, the tasks previously defined in the new law have been expanded, e.g., the task of representing the council between its meetings has been added, and the task of

⁹⁹ Saeima (2022). *Pašvaldību likums*. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/336956-pasvaldibu-likums>

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Saeima (1994). *Likums "Par pašvaldībām"*. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/57255-par-pasvaldibam>

representation without a specific mandate has been expanded. There have also been name changes. For example, the council chairperson was previously responsible for enforcing court judgments but is now responsible for supervising their enforcement. The executive director has been given more responsibilities, which were previously broader but are now more clearly defined, so the number of responsibilities has also increased.

These changes in legislation have practical implications for the decision-making processes within local government. In the complex arena of public service, the need to make decisions that may be unpopular is inevitable, particularly as short-term challenges often overshadow long-term strategic benefits. In this context, a councilor's reputation is often judged by the electorate, which weighs heavily on the immediate results of these difficult decisions, especially in the tense period leading up to elections. Consequently, while the expanded roles and clearly defined responsibilities are intended to facilitate more transparent and effective governance, public perceptions remain heavily influenced by the direct impact of such decisions on their day-to-day lives.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since gaining independence in 1991, Latvia has undergone significant political, administrative, economic, and territorial reforms. The transition to a full democracy and a market economy necessitated substantial governance reforms, which were further advanced upon joining the European Union. The Latvian local government system, representative of the Central and Eastern European model, has been described as a highly centralized system established during the USSR occupation (1940-1990). Post-independence, local authorities were given a high degree of decentralization and a wide range of functions.

The role of a local government political leader, specifically the mayor, is defined in the Local Government Law and various normative acts. These provide mayors with many opportunities to act as political leaders. However, the perception of these roles and opportunities may vary across municipalities and political leaders. The mayor is primarily viewed as a political leader with executive and decision-making functions tasked with representing local interests and implementing policies for community and regional development.

As a political leader, the mayor plays a dominant role in the majority's interests. At the same time, he or she must be able to engage with all stakeholders at local and national levels, as he or she represents the interests of local people and implements policies necessary for the development of the community and even the region.

External and internal factors interact to limit the scope of action. Factors affect the ability to engage with stakeholders, participate in the budget process, and realize one's or the party's vision. Moreover, these factors make the job of a political leader multifaceted. As a result, the ability of a leader to quickly deliver on his or her priorities is diminished. At the same time, the multidimensionality of the process contributes to the development of the political leader's capacities and skills.

In Latvia, the formal role of the mayor within the municipality is not unilateral decision-making. Although mayors have numerous opportunities to exert political leadership, their influence is often contingent on shared governance with other municipal representatives. A mayor's impact on municipal operations can be significantly limited without a majority in the council.

Public opinion of a mayor's performance is generally favorable when their actions align with the sustainable development strategy, budget allocations reflect

community priorities, and the strategy aligns with the mayor's vision for their municipality. Citizen's vote using the possibilities offered by the proportional electoral system (with "+" and "-"), through which they can assess the ability of a political leader to achieve the desired result for the development of the municipality by implementing the necessary policies within a given budget.

Organizational culture varies from municipality to municipality so the political leader can be seen as a key figure. His or her main tasks are to create a vision for the staff and to lead the municipality towards development, not only to promote the confidence of the local population in him or her and the possibility of re-election but also to promote national confidence in him or her, thus ensuring that the municipality is better able to represent its interests at the national level.

The information gathered in the study shows that the leadership skills of the local councilor as a political leader are important. The results show that a successful leader has good skills in dealing with the national level, regardless of whether the (regional) party the chairperson represents agrees with a national party or the chairperson represents a national party. Similarly, the ability to move forward with an adequate budget and to implement visions for the future are essential leadership qualities, regardless of whether the party the mayor represents has a majority in the council.

A significant challenge for local authorities is adapting their planning approach to today's challenges to prevent the abandonment of large urban centers. Urban shrinkage is a multidimensional phenomenon involving many economic and social factors. In Latvia, there is also a political component. Urban development strategies are not coordinated; instead, dozens of local development plans focus on short-term solutions to the problems of a particular municipality. Strong policy coordination is needed, with the Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development having a leading role.

The involvement of interest groups and advisory councils and their ability to influence decisions in the work of the municipality is considered moderate compared to other local state-society networks with consultative functions (e.g., local action groups, youth organizations, organized business and trade unions), as the municipality has the discretion to decide on the acceptance of proposals and ideas. Consequently, the relevance of these groups in the context of the mayor's leadership is less relevant or may differ from municipality to municipality and should be further investigated. Local

leaders promote participation in local decision-making and local politics through participation and demonstration of leadership and networking. Even if local leaders can only partially participate in networks as members, they use their formal position and leadership skills in the council to lead networks in a top-down approach.

After almost 30 years of independence, Latvia's 8 municipalities face a generational political office change. It was typical in the 1990s and early 2000s when officials had Soviet-era professional experience. Local politics is thus personalized by the long tenure of local leaders and the low interest of national parties in contesting elections in smaller municipalities.

Suggested measures to enhance local governance

Improve transparency and accountability: Develop mechanisms to increase transparency in the decision-making process and accountability of local leaders – council chairpersons. This could involve more open public consultations, meetings, and platforms for citizen feedback. Foster high levels of trust and maintain frequent communication among stakeholders to facilitate leadership development, even when no clearly identifiable leader exists.

Foster community involvement: Encourage community involvement in local governance through public forums, citizen advisory boards, and participatory budgeting processes. This would help in making the governance more responsive and democratic.

Strengthen inter-municipal cooperation: There is a need to foster inter-municipal collaboration, particularly in the domains of resource allocation, joint infrastructure development, and regional economic initiatives. Such collaboration is essential for the optimization of resources and the attainment of shared objectives. Furthermore, the pivotal role of local leaders in facilitating these networks must be acknowledged. They are closely connected to the local decision-making process. These leaders also serve as coordinators, fostering consensus among all stakeholders.

Develop a sustainable urban planning framework: Address urban shrinkage and development issues by creating a comprehensive and sustainable urban planning framework that considers long-term demographic, economic, and environmental factors.

Integrate technology in governance: Utilize technology to improve governance efficiency, such as implementing e-governance solutions for better citizen engagement, simplifying administrative processes, and enhancing data-driven decision-making.

Additionally, there is a critical need to ensure the accessibility of historical data regarding local government councilors and council chairpersons, along with other documents utilized in local governments prior to the administrative-territorial reforms. This will facilitate transparency, informed decision-making, and a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of local governance.

Evaluate and Reform Electoral System: There is a public debate on the introduction of directly elected mayors. It could increase local leaders' political interest and motivation to stand for election and thus positively impact competition, at least in municipalities with higher development potential. Consider the potential benefits of introducing direct mayoral elections, as this could align the formally introduced representative model with the mayor's genuine influence on the municipality's functioning, reducing contradictions and inconsistencies.

These measures are vital in strengthening the role of local political leadership, particularly the mayors, who can be those persons who encourage positive change in their municipalities. Empowering these leaders with the right tools, resources, and autonomy is crucial for fostering a more proactive and engaged approach to governance. This ensures that leaders can effectively address their communities' unique challenges and opportunities and promotes a more participative and inclusive form of leadership.

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