

# CITIZENS' TRUST IN PUBLIC AUTHORITIES OF LATVIA AND PARTICIPATION PARADIGM

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## Abstract

The lack of trust in public authorities is a major problem not only in Latvia but in countries all over the world. However, Latvian government and the parliament enjoy an extremely low level of trust. According to the Eurobarometer 79<sup>8</sup> data of Spring 2013, only 15 % of respondents tend to trust in the parliament of Latvia, and 20 % of respondents have tend to trust in national government. The gap between the society and political power has grown considerably. The majority of electors are neither satisfied with the democracy form of the parties, nor do they approve of their activities in the state and local governments. However, at the same time, citizens' trust in local governments is much higher than in the national government and parliament, namely, 42% of residents trust in local public authorities.

Therefore, this article deals with the theoretical aspects of public trust, as well as, on the basis of survey, it analyzes public opinion about various public authorities in Latvia. This publication aims to explore whether there is any coherence between the levels of trust that the public expresses in various public institutions; or whether citizens' positive assessment of the performance of local authorities has a positive impact on the evaluation of the national parliament and government. Therefore, in local authorities where citizens are more satisfied with local authorities' work, the citizen participation is also higher.

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**Keywords:** Citizens' trust, local governments, national government, parliament, participation

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<sup>8</sup> Standart Eurobarometer 79, *Public Opinion in the European Union, Fieldwork: May 2013*. Available: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb79/eb79\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb79/eb79_en.htm)

## Introduction

The decrease of public trust in governments is a problem in the last decade, which has attracted huge attention from public administration researchers all over the world. The explicit decrease of public trust in governments and national parliaments is observed in so called developed democracies – the USA, Canada, Sweden, Great Britain and other EU member states. Thus, the renewal or increase of public trust is an urgent question for many countries in the world.

In Latvia too for the last 20 years, explicit public trust decrease to parliament and government has been observed, but, in comparison with the above mentioned states, the public trust indicators are critically low and indicate fundamental problems in the state administration. The majority of population is not satisfied with previous political parties' activities and political culture. Unlike in the other states, although the problem of public trust in Latvia was admitted by both researchers of the politics and politicians themselves, yet there was no research carried out in systematical and extended manner that would examine the relationship between society and government as well as the causes for public trust decrease.

According to the latest Eurobarometer<sup>1</sup> data, only 15% of the population of Latvia tends to trust the parliament of Latvia (Saeima), while 85% tends not to trust the parliament. Thus, this signifies that only every sixth inhabitant of Latvia trusts the work of the parliament. Trust level for the government is higher for 5 percentage points; hence, the government is trusted by 20% or each 5th inhabitant. Citizens' trust in political parties is critically low. In Latvia, only 9% of the population trusted in political parties which are one of the lowest indicators among the European Union member states. At the same time, comparatively higher level of trust in local authorities was observed in Latvia – 42% of Latvia's population trust in local authorities which is the only trust indicator that corresponds to the EU average level – 43%.<sup>9</sup>

If trust indicators at the local level are satisfactory, then public trust indicators at the national level are alarming and shows that majority of the Latvia's society does not trust public administration institutions and its representatives at the level of national administration already for longer time period. National sustainability cannot be imaginable without the renewal of society's trust in public authority institutions as society's trust reflects population's attitude towards the situation in the country and creates conditions for the state to exist, for example, grounds necessity to pay taxes, engage in business and after all, grounds the choice to live in that particular

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<sup>9</sup> *Standart Eurobarometer 79, Public Opinion in the European Union, Fieldwork: May 2013.* Available: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb79/eb79\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb79/eb79_en.htm)

country. Till now, neither politicians nor political scientists have found the solution to the renewal of public trust in government and the parliament in Latvia.

As a result of economical and far-gone public trust crisis, the consequences of public trust is observed – citizens emigrate to other countries in search for better life conditions and do not associate themselves with Latvia any more. The remaining part of the society of Latvia still distrust the fact that politicians are able to direct the country in the direction of development, that citizens' needs correspond with politicians' comprehension about citizens' needs, that the aim of the ruling coalition is to serve the interests of all society rather than active lobby of certain interests or interests of narrow group of the society. Therefore, the trust of the remaining population is decreased by the domination of negative information in media sphere about professional activity of public authority officials, as well as politicians' inability to balance contradictions between citizens' immediate social needs and national financial resources.

## **Theoretical framework and research hypothesis**

### **Definition of trust**

Trust is a complex concept and its comprehension depends on factors that are being researched<sup>10</sup>. Psychology defines trust as a cognitive notion among those who are being trusted and those who trust. (Rotter, 1967)<sup>11</sup>. Economists define trust according to calculations and rational expectations from a party or an organization (Williamson, 1993)<sup>12</sup>. Sociologists see trust as totality of relations between a person and institutions (Lewis & Weigert)<sup>13</sup>. Researchers of public administration justify the meaning of trust with the necessity to acquire public trust at least in the minimal level for those programmes, which political parties decide to implement (Ruscio, 1997)<sup>14</sup>.

Trust is formed from one person's assumptions about another person and/or the process in which she/he trusts. The author Margaret Levi emphasizes – the more a person intends to trust, the less he/she would try to

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<sup>10</sup> Kim, Seok-Eun *The Role of Trust in the Modern Administrative State :An integrative Model* In: Administration & Society 2005 November, Kansas State University, 2005. 611-617.p.

<sup>11</sup> Rotter, J.B. (1967) *A new scale for the mesurement of interpersonal trust*. In: Journal of Personality, 35, 651-660.p.

<sup>12</sup> Williamson, O.E. (1993) *Cultiveness, trust, and economic organization*. In: journal of Law & Economics, 36, 453-458.p.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, J.G. & Weigert, A. (1985) *Trust as a social reality*. In: Social Force, 36, 967-985.p.

<sup>14</sup> Ruscio, K.P. (1997) *Trust in the adminstartive state*. In: Public Administration Review, 57, 454-458.p.

acquire additional information about the person who is to be trusted and about his/her reliability.<sup>15</sup> People trust because they consider that through positive cooperation, their trust use in a positive sense can be beneficial to a person. The author Margaret Levi considers knowledge as one of the main trust factors: “Although a reasonable belief that the trustee will act consistently with the truster’s interests depends on the knowledge of the trustee, thus this can but need not be a detailed, personal knowledge.”<sup>16</sup> In case a person does not have the right knowledge or right information about another person, he/she cannot trust that person.

The researcher Russell Hardin has generally defined public trust where he explained that trust has three parts: A trusts B to do X (or respect to matter X).<sup>17</sup> Hardin describes trust as a form of encapsulated interest. For instance, A trust in B is typically encapsulated in A’s interest in fulfilling B’s trust. Thus, A trusts B because A presumes it is in B’s interest to act in a way that is conformable with A’s interest.

Examining various definitions of public trust, the authors concluded that some authors incline more on psychological aspects of the concept, for example, by defining trust as „A psychological construct, the experience is an outcome of the interaction of people’s values, attitudes, and moods and emotions.” (Jones and George, 1998).<sup>18</sup>

Others – in their turn consider that formation of trust is more affected by conclusions about previous deeds and rational considerations, - as “an expectation about outcomes based on perceptions and life experiences” (Golembiewski, R.T. and McConkie, M.L., 1975).<sup>19</sup>

Also on the basis of the formation of citizens’ opinion about ruling politicians, there are various considerations such as evaluating the government, parliament or local authorities’ work, through rational arguments. Such people adopt decisions by analysing particular facts, calculating expenses and benefits which they acquire from events and this decisions can influence them. But there is also an irrational part of people

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<sup>15</sup> Levi, M. *A State of Trust* In: Braithwaite, V. and Levi, M. (Editors.) *Trust & Government*, Volume I in the Russell Sage Foundation Series on Trust, Russel Sage Foundation, New York, 1998. 78. p.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 78.p.

<sup>17</sup> Hardin, R. *Trust in Government* In: Braithwaite, V. and Levi, M. (Editors.) *Trust & Government* Volume I in the Russell Sage Foundation Series on Trust, Russel Sage Foundation, New York.1998. 12. p.

<sup>18</sup> Jones, G.R.and George J.M. (1998) *The experience and evolution of trust: Implications for cooperation and teamwork*. In: *Academy of Management Review*, 23, 532.p.

<sup>19</sup> Golembiewski, R. T., & McConkie, M. L. (1975). *The centrality of interpersonal trust in group processes*. In: C. L. Cooper (Ed.), *Theories of group processes*. New York: John Wiley. 131-185.p.

which draw conclusions based on various social groups or the general opinion of society.<sup>20</sup>

Speaking about trust in the context of society, the authors divided it into 2 aspects. One is known as political trust, and the other is regarded as – social trust. Political trust clearly manifests itself, when citizens evaluate the work of government and its institutions, as government’s implemented policy (it is called macro-level trust or organization trust); and also, the work of individual leaders, honesty and abiding by ones’ promises is known as individual political trust or micro-level trust. Political trust can be defined as the “judgment of the citizenry that the system and the political incumbents are responsive, and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny” (Miller and Listhaug, 1990).<sup>21</sup>

The political trust does not exist outside society and its established norms; therefore, an important role is played by social trust. Social trust is a trust among the members of society. Majority of theoreticians admit that social and political trust does not exclude one another, however, the theoreticians have different opinions whether political trust is going to increase, if social trust increases and vice versa. Public administration researchers, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba have emphasized that: “Belief in the benignity of one’s fellow citizen is directly related to one’s propensity to join with others in political activity. Hence, general social trust is translated into politically relevant trust.”<sup>22</sup> Also, sociologists associate with an increasing social distrust, with a more active political involvement, and eventually with an enhanced political trust (Gamson, 1968)<sup>23</sup>.

### **Public trust and participation**

Just as the same way theoretical literature does not comprises of united opinion about the interaction of social and political trust, the political researchers have various opinions about the importance and necessity of participation as well as the influence of participation on the formation of public trust.

Political researchers who have admitted elections as the only important instrument of democracy (Dahl,1956, Sartori, 1987), considered that the use of other participation forms are not necessary, it is even obstructive and can result to threats for the stability of democracy. Whereas at the end of 20th century, the participatory democracy theory was topical

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<sup>20</sup> Houghton, Patrick, Political Psychology Routledge, 2009, New York. 6.p.

<sup>21</sup> Miller, A. H. and Listhaug, O. *Political Parties and Confidence in Government: A Comparison of Norway, Sweden and the United States*. In: British Journal of Political Science 20, 3(July 1990), 358.p.

<sup>22</sup> Almond, G., & Verba, S. (1965). *The civic culture*. Boston, MA: Little-Brown. 228.p.

<sup>23</sup> Gamson, W.A. *Power and Discontent*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey, 1968.

(Almond&Verba, 1963, Pateman, 1975), where participation was evaluated as important part of democracy, as participation creates understanding for citizens about democratic procedures, teaches tolerance, responsibility, develops skills, enhance interest about political processes, and makes public administrators accountable to citizens.

Sociologist and politologist Robert Putnam was one of the first who admitted the necessity for organizations to socialize their members, by teaching them trust, cooperation and solidarity. According to him, the political and civic culture of society is characterized by knowledge about political events, interest and also attitude towards political life in general. <sup>24</sup>

Trust according to Inglehart ensures authorities' legitimacy, but not only – Putnam declared that trust also establishes individual's readiness to adopt and realize decisions adopted by state authority. Putnam believed that political participation and activity depends on the role of an individual in taking part in a political organization. Whether or not an individual takes part in any activity related to politics depends on motivation such as whether or not his/her activity would be beneficial and profitable as well as other factors. The lack of motivation is observed in cases when an individual considers it impossible to change anything, or does not see meaning to his/her political activity. Although in democracy where an individual has the most chances to influence the political situation as well as the situation in the country, often it is not used.<sup>25</sup> As democracy defends individuals' rights, and takes into account their interests, there is no real necessity for someone to get involved as regards introducing or passing legislation.

Other political researchers studying the link between participation and public trust are not so optimistic. For example, political researcher Zmerli (2007) in his research concluded, that although in theoretical literature, there is evidence that a close link exists between participation in voluntary organizations and trust; thus in his opinion, this link is very weak and fragmentary, and has been proved only in some particular countries.

Interestingly, researchers HiaoHu Wang and Montgomery Wan Wart (2007) studied about participation's influence in public trust. The authors concluded that trust formation is influenced by behavioural factors of two main public administrators.

First, participation affects trust when it produces high-quality services that the public wants. Second, enhanced ethical behavior on the part of administration is another reason that participation leads to trust. Public trust increases when public officials demonstrate integrity, honesty, and moral

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<sup>24</sup> Putnam, R. America's *Declining Social Capital*. In: Journal of Democracy 6:1, Jan 1995, 65-66.p.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 65-66.p.

leadership and when ethics are institutionalized in the government through the process of participation.”<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, we have to take into account to what extent the administrators themselves are ready to trust and trust their citizens. The author Kaifen Yang admits that large part of theories that explain increase of public trust in governments is insufficient, as they overlook the fact that trust is mutual and reciprocal. Citizens would not trust public administrators and would not want to take part, if they knew and/ or feel that public administrators have no trust in them.

Mutual trust between citizens and public administrators is a part of democratic governance, and is necessary so that society might develop, thus it is a precondition for collective action and learning.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the more qualitatively and ethically public administrators exercise their functions, the more citizens would trust them. If citizens themselves feel efficacious and more trusting, the more they are going to participate in democratic processes.

Although in democratic societies, the public trust is important in order to ensure the legitimacy of authority, yet in the context of representative democracy also, public scepticism brings some benefits as it shows citizens’ ability to assess the events and requires the involvement of society. For example, researcher Russel Hardin in his studies concludes that the reasonable distrust of citizens may bring some benefits to the state administration - “First, citizens might actually constrain their government by distrusting it with various reasons. Second, by cooperating with their government - also within reason - citizens generally enhance the effectiveness of the government.”<sup>28</sup>

By decreasing citizens’ support in political parties, democratic institutions and diminishing activity at the elections, the efficiency of representative democracy is being criticized. As a solution to diminish trust, representative democracies offer to introduce instruments of direct democracy and allow citizens to be more involved in the processes of decision making.

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<sup>26</sup> XiaoHu, Wang, *When Public Participation in Administration Leads to Trust: An Empirical Assessment of Managers’ Perceptions* In: *Public Administration Review*, March /April 2007, 276.p.

<sup>27</sup> Kaifeng, Y, *Public Administrators’ Trust in Citizens: A Missing Link in Citizens Involvement Efforts* In: *Public Administration Review*, Volume 65, number 3, May/June 2005, ISSN 0033-3352, Print in the USA by American Society for Public Administration. 273.p.

<sup>28</sup> Hardin, R. (2013). *Government without trust*, In: *Journal of Trust Research*, 3:1, 32-52, DOI: 10.1080/21515581.2013.771502 Publisher: Routledge, Published online: 29 April 2013. Available <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21515581.2013.771502> 33-34.p.

## Research design

The basis of the research is citizens' survey carried out in Latvia in July, 2012 by the author and Marketing and Public Opinion Research Centre (SKDS).

## Research hypothesis

- (1) Citizens' positive assessment of the performance of local government has positive impact on evaluation of the national parliament and government.
- (2) Citizens' satisfaction with local authority's work enables more trust in local authority and more active level of participation.

Using stratified random sampling, 1050 permanent residents of Latvia aged 15-74 were surveyed, which is the representative sample of the general population. All regions of Latvia were included in the polling. The survey data was analysed using SPSS statistics program.

By elaborating the theoretical framework of the research, the authors used the methods of scientific literature and statistics data analysis, as well as the research of European Commission's Standard Eurobarometer on citizens' trust in public authorities in time period of 2003 -2014.

## Analysis of Latvia's case

During the last ten years, the split between the society and public authority institutions in Latvia has increased considerably; it is characterized by citizens' trust indicators. In comparison with the time period ten years ago, i.e. 2003, citizens' trust level in government has decreased for 26 percentage points, but trust level in the Parliament (Saeima) – has shrunk for 24 percentage points (see Fig.1)

Trust in political parties historically in Latvia has been low.<sup>29</sup> In 2003, only 12% of Latvia's population trusted in political parties, but in 2013, 9% (-3%) of them trusted in them. It has to be admitted that in the last Eurobarometer survey (spring 2013) the trust level has increased to 3% in comparison with autumn 2012, when trust level in political parties in Latvia was only 6%, which was one of the lowest trust level in political parties among all European Union member states.<sup>18</sup>

Data about trust in local authorities are not examined in this period. First data about trust in local authorities are summarized, beginning with the autumn 2008 and it shows that local authorities in Latvia trust 44% of Latvia's population.

Trust in local authorities' work in 2013 has remained comparatively steady without large variations with previous periods – 42% (-2%). If

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<sup>29</sup> *Standard Eurobarometer 79, Public Opinion in the European Union, Fieldwork: May 2013.* Available: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb79/eb79\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb79/eb79_en.htm)



comparing citizens’ trust level in institutions in Latvia with the average indicators in European Union member states, then only trust in local authorities (42%) correspond with the average level in EU member states (43%). Citizens’ trust in parliament, government and political parties in Latvia is lower than average in EU.

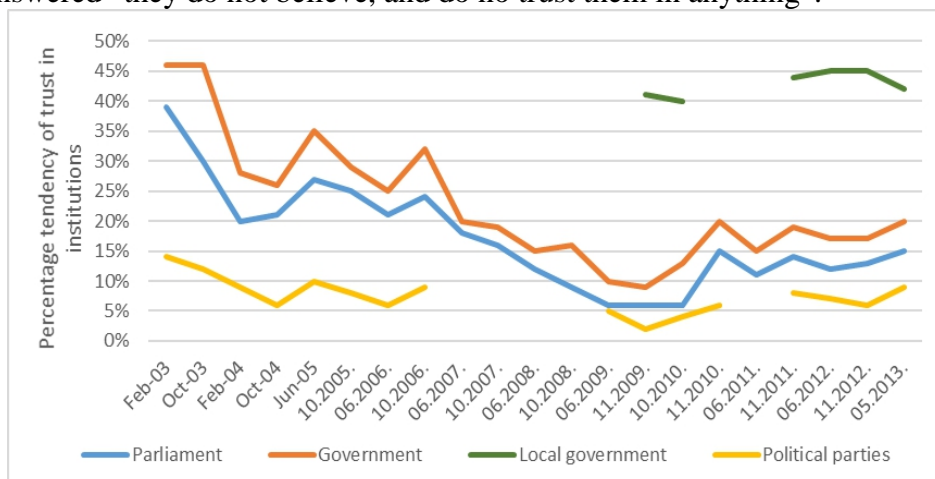
Although trust in local authorities in Latvia is higher when compared with trust in parliament and government, yet citizens’ activity at local elections in comparison with parliament elections is lower (See Table 1). Moreover, at the last local authorities’ election which took place on 1st June 2013, the citizens’ activity has been the lowest during the 23 years of the renewed Latvia’s state.

**Table 1** Voters turnout in the parliamentary and local elections in Latvia (1993 – 2013), (%)

Year	1993	1994	1995	1997	1998	2001	2002	2005	2006	2009	2010	2011	2013
Parliamentary elections	89.9		71.9		71.9		71.5		60.9		63.1	59.4	
Local elections		58.5		56.8		61.9		52.8		53.8			46.0

Source: *The Central Election Commission of Latvia, 2013*

In the research<sup>30</sup> of the electoral attitude after the local authorities’ elections, the respondents who did not vote at the elections were asked the reasons for their inactivity, 18% answered “there is no point” and 12% answered “they do not believe, and do no trust them in anything”.



**Figure 1** Citizens’ trust in public authorities (percent, %) <sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Public opinion survey *Electoral Attitude Research 2013* in Latvian. (June 2013). The Central Election Commission of Latvia. Available at: [http://cvk.lv/pub/upload\\_file/Petijumi/atskaite\\_CVK\\_062013.pdf](http://cvk.lv/pub/upload_file/Petijumi/atskaite_CVK_062013.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> *Standart Eurobarometer* (2003.-2013.) Available: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb\\_arch\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm)

Apart from parliament and local authorities' elections, the legislation of the Republic of Latvia provides various ways by which citizens can be involved in the adoption of decisions of the state administration and local authorities. Moreover, for cooperation with residents, the local authorities in their administrative territories can realize volunteering initiatives regarding any question which is in their competence and are not prohibited by law. However, the author's research carried out in 2012 revealed an explicit tendency that citizens rarely takes part in officially regulated participation forms. More popular are those cooperation and communication forms that are outside the official participation framework (for example, the use of social media etc.), which means that a considerable revision is needed throughout the regulated participation mechanisms.

### **Citizens' satisfaction with local authorities work and citizens' trust in national public authorities**

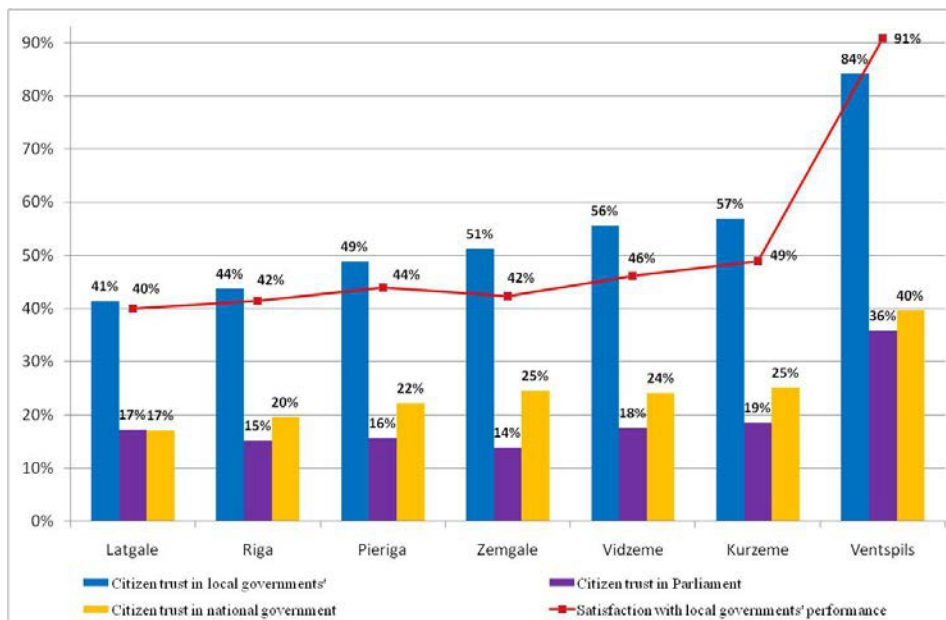
One of the aims of the publication was to examine if residents' satisfaction level with the performance of local authorities leave a positive impact also on trust indicators to the central power institutions. Also, the publication aid to ascertain whether resident's positive assessment on the work of local authorities correlates in the evaluation of national parliament and government?

In inspecting acquired data in regional distribution, this hypothesis proved true in Kurzeme and Vidzeme – in regions where respondents are most satisfied with their local authorities' performance and trust them the most (see Fig.2). Respondents from both regions who are relatively higher assessed also their trust in national parliament and government (see Fig.2). However, acquired data do not allow this conclusion generalize regarding all statistical regions. For example, respondents in Latgale region in comparison with respondents from other regions assessed both their satisfaction with local authorities work at the lowest and their trust in local authorities, yet they trust in the Parliament even more than respondents from Zemgale, Riga and Pieriga, who assessed the performance of their local authorities and their trust in them higher.

By comparing two municipal governments in Latvia (see Fig.2), whose work was the most satisfying for citizens – Riga and Ventspils, two different sceneries were revealed: Riga has the lowest trust indicators in Latvia's parliament and government, whereas Ventspils has one of the highest trust indicator.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Seimuskane, L., Market and Public Opinion Research Centre (SKDS), 2012. Public opinion survey: *The Evaluation of Citizen Participation Process in Latvia*.



**Source:** Author's calculations on survey conducted by Lilita Seimuškāne and SKDS, 2012 (n=1050).

**Figure 2** Coherence between public appraisal of local governments' performance and trust in different level of public authorities (local government, national parliament and government)

Therefore, it allows us to draw a conclusion that the satisfaction with one's local authority' performance and trust level is an important factor in forming attitude towards the activities of the central power institutions, but certainly, it is not the only influential factor.<sup>33</sup> The acquired research data in correlation with the nationality structure in statistical regions acquired in 2011 Population Census process in Latvia, has affirmed the already mentioned conclusion, that public power institutions in Latvia are more positively evaluated by respondents in regions with most number of Latvians, i.e. Vidzeme region (87% Latvians), Kurzeme region (76% Latvians).<sup>34</sup>

Whereas in regions where the proportion of Latvians are less than half – in Latgale (46%) and Riga (40%), respondents have assessed their trust in national government at the lowest (see Fig. 2).

<sup>33</sup> Seimuskane.L,Vilka,I(2013).*Relations between citizen's trust and participation in local governments in Latvia.*

NISPAcee 21th Annual Conference proceedings.

<sup>34</sup> Central statistical Bureau of Latvia. Central statistical Bureau of Latvia. 2011 Population census data in brief. Informative survey. Available at: [www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/publikacijas/nr\\_13\\_2011gada\\_tautas\\_skaitisanas\\_rezultati\\_isuma\\_12\\_00\\_lv.pdf](http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/publikacijas/nr_13_2011gada_tautas_skaitisanas_rezultati_isuma_12_00_lv.pdf)

### **Citizens' trust and participation**

In this research, the authors also tend to examine the hypothesis: whether in local authorities were citizens are more satisfied with the local authority' work, or if the level of citizens' participation is higher.

During a survey on different aspects of citizen participation in local governments, when asked what would be the respondent's reaction in case the local government council made a decision in conflict with the interests of the residents of the local government, half (50%) of the respondents said they would not engage in any activity, even if the local government council made a decision which interfered with their interests. Therefore, only one third or 35% of the respondents stated that they would actively respond to such doings of the local government<sup>35</sup>.

Examining research data in territorial division between statistical regions, it can be stated that most active respondents live in Vidzeme, almost 48% would be ready to take part in any activities, if local authority adopted a decision which interfered with citizen interests. In respect of activity, Zemgale and Pieriga follows (38%), then Riga (34%). Less active would be residents of Latgale (26%) and that of Kurzeme (30%) also.

By comparing research data in Riga and Ventspils, i.e. municipal governments were residents are very satisfied with local authority's work, the research data show that the level of citizens' participation is the lowest, even lower than the average activity level in Latvia. The lowest activity would be in Latgale region, characterized by the lowest socio-economic indicators. However, the interconnection between the activity of other regions and the level of regions' socio-economic development is not observed.

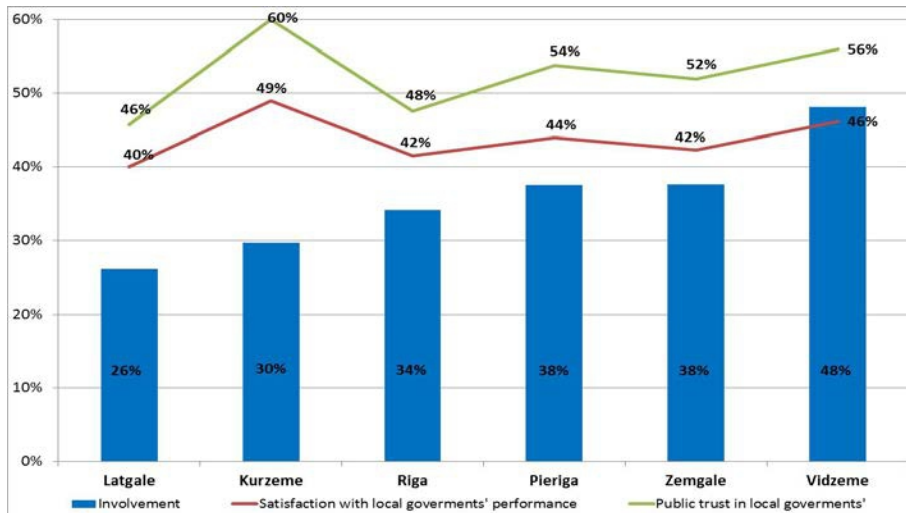
Verifying interconnection between answers about active performance and citizen trust indicators to local authorities, it was revealed that most that are inactive are residents in those regions, where they trust most in their local authorities – Kurzeme (60%) and the least – in Latgale (46%).

The coherence between citizens' readiness to get involved in activities in case local authority adopts a decision which interfered with their interests, people's trust indicators and satisfaction with self-government work is shown in Figure 3.

Inspecting distribution of respondents' answers to similar question about citizen satisfaction with local authorities' work, the acquired data matches with the assessment in question about public trust – the most satisfied with the work of their local authority are residents of Kurzeme, but the most dissatisfied are the residents of Latgale.

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<sup>35</sup> Seimuskane, L., Market and Public Opinion Research Centre (SKDS), 2012. Public opinion survey: *The Evaluation of Citizen Participation Process in Latvia*.



**Source:** Author's calculations on survey conducted by Lilita Seimuskane and SKDS, 2012 (n=1050).

**Fig. 3** The coherence between residents' readiness to act in situation if local government adopts decision that interfered with residents' interests, citizen trust indicators and satisfaction with local government work

The acquired data of the research updates is necessary in studying residents' participation motivation, to pay more attention to this aspect, whether:

- residents' low participation level is related to discontent, and distrust in institutions of public authority;
- residents' low participation level is related to distrust, which is possible to change anything by participation, and lack of seeing the point of participation;
- the basis of low participation level is considered such that people's everyday life and well-being is not endangered in any way; thus, residents are convinced that their lives are well protected within the local authority.

## Conclusion

Although the local authorities in Latvia enjoy more citizens' trust in comparison with the national level authorities – Parliament and government, yet at the local level in the area of democratic participation, citizens are very passive. Moreover, this passivity has no connection with citizens being more or less satisfied with their local authorities' performance. The results of the research demonstrated that the most passivity in the area of participation is in those local authorities where citizens are most satisfied with the local authority' work (Kurzeme) and are also least satisfied (Latgale).

During the last elections which took place in Latvia in June 2013, the analysis of citizens' activity demonstrated that there is no explicit correlation between citizens' satisfaction with local authorities' work and electorate activity. So, for example, in Kurzeme region where citizens in authors' survey expressed the most satisfaction with the work of their local authority, the electorate activity during these elections was one of the lowest (41%), even lower than average in Latvia. Only for one percentage point it was higher in Latgale region (42%) where citizens were the least satisfied with their local authority's work.

Citizens' satisfaction with their local authority's work is an important factor in the formation of citizens' attitude towards authority. At the level of local authorities, citizens' satisfaction has the closest interconnection with the trust level, namely, the most satisfied citizens are with the work of the local authority, the higher the trust level. However, in formation of attitude against the state authority – i.e. parliament and government, the influence of this factor was not absolute. In the authors' research, certain local authorities demonstrated this influence, whereas in others, there were no interconnections. Thus, it can be concluded that trust in institutions of national level can be formed by other factors as well.

The majority of traditional forms of representation have become weaker. Thus, what is there to offer instead? How can trust in public authority institutions be renewed and how can citizens' interest in decision making be roused, especially if those decisions refer to the citizens themselves? Therefore, these are problem questions, easier to discuss than implement. The authors seeing one of the directions of possible action policy in Kaifen Yand's expressed conclusion – maybe, thinking about trust, it is worth to think about the development of mutual process – not only citizens' trust in public authorities administrators, but also public authority's trust in its citizens.

The profesor at the University of Pittsburgh, authority in the field of public administration, Guy Peters<sup>36</sup> admits that the wish of authority representatives to involve citizens in decision making is very formal not only in Latvia, but also in many other countries. Most often, it is based on requirements of legislation or good management. But in majority of cases, the agenda is already established – citizens simply have to render answers on the options which are already decided in administrative offices. But in fact, people have to be given chances to search and debate about their choices themselves. Because trust is never single-acting, it is reversible and mutual.

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<sup>36</sup> Ījabs I. *Pelēkā uzvalka bruņinieki*. Interview with B.Guy Peters. *Rīgas laiks*, 02.2011

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