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of Local Self-Government Bodies*

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Secção I

Investigação Científica*

* Os artigos presentes nesta secção foram sujeitos a processo de revisão segundo o método *blind peer review*.

State Control Mechanisms as Means of Improving the Quality of Public Services of Local Self-Government Bodies

Mecanismos de Controle Estatal Como Meio de Melhorar a Qualidade dos Serviços Públicos dos Órgãos de Governo Autônomo Locais

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ABSTRACT: The article deals with the state control mechanisms and their role in improving the quality of public services provided by local self-government bodies. The aim of the article is to identify key state control mechanisms, opportunities for improving the level of public services of local self-government bodies, and provide recommendations for improving the system of state control. Different state control mechanisms were studied, including inspections, performance evaluation, financial audit, quality standards, legal oversight, and citizen feedback mechanisms. Contextual analysis, comparison, and graphic methods were used as research methods. Satisfaction with services in the EU countries was determined by different areas of public services. The study emphasizes the importance of state control in promoting transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in local government service delivery. The results of the study demonstrate ways of optimization of state control mechanisms by public authorities to improve the overall quality of public services. Attention is focused on the need for effective state control to increase the level of satisfaction and well-being of citizens at the local level. A model of comprehensive implementation of state control mechanisms over the quality of public services of local self-government bodies was developed.

KEYWORDS: public administration; state control; public services; quality of services; mechanisms; local self-government bodies.

RESUMO: O artigo trata dos mecanismos de controle estatal e seu papel na melhoria da qualidade dos serviços públicos prestados pelos órgãos de governo autônomo locais. O objetivo do artigo é identificar os principais mecanismos de controle estatal, oportunidades para melhorar o nível de serviços públicos dos órgãos de governo autônomo locais e fornecer recomendações para melhorar o sistema de controle

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estatal. Foram estudados diferentes mecanismos de controle estatal, incluindo inspeções, avaliação de desempenho, auditoria financeira, padrões de qualidade, supervisão legal e mecanismos de feedback dos cidadãos. Análise contextual, comparação e métodos gráficos foram utilizados como métodos de pesquisa. A satisfação com os serviços nos países da UE foi determinada por diferentes áreas dos serviços públicos. O estudo enfatiza a importância do controle estatal na promoção da transparência, responsabilização e melhoria contínua na prestação de serviços do governo local. Os resultados do estudo demonstram formas de otimização dos mecanismos de controle estatal pelas autoridades públicas para melhorar a qualidade global dos serviços públicos. A atenção está centrada na necessidade de um controle estatal eficaz para aumentar o nível de satisfação e bem-estar dos cidadãos a nível local. Foi desenvolvido um modelo de implementação abrangente de mecanismos de controle estatal sobre a qualidade dos serviços públicos dos órgãos de governos autónomos locais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: administração pública; controle estatal; serviços públicos; qualidade dos serviços; mecanismos; órgãos de governo autónomo locais.

Introduction

State control mechanisms play a decisive role in ensuring the provision of quality public services by local self-government bodies. Effective management at the local level requires the implementation of management processes that ensure monitoring, evaluating and regulating the activities of service providers, thereby promoting transparency, accountability and improvement of administrative and technological processes. An important issue is the study of state control mechanisms and their role in improving the quality of public services provided by local self-government bodies. Studying different mechanisms of control, their effectiveness and problems that prevent the implementation of mechanisms, it is necessary to understand how the state control system can be used to improve the quality of public services of local self-government bodies. The provision of public services by local self-government bodies is important for ensuring the well-being and development of territorial communities. However, the efficiency and effectiveness of these services can differ significantly, which leads to disparities in the quality of services provided in different territorial entities. These disparities shall be eliminated through the introduction of state control mechanisms that allow monitoring the activities of local self-government bodies, service providers, identifying deficiencies, and implementing corrective measures.

The state applies different control mechanisms to assess and regulate the activities of local self-government bodies. These mechanisms may include

regular inspections, performance evaluations, financial audits, and legal oversight. Evaluating the available capabilities of the specified control mechanisms provides an idea of their impact on the quality of public services and enables identifying opportunities for improvement.

So, the aim of the article is to study the features of state control mechanisms and their role in improving the quality of public services provided by local self-government bodies and develop recommendations for their optimization.

The main research objectives are the following:

1. Identify state control mechanisms applied to local self-government bodies with the aim of determining their role and effectiveness in improving the quality of public services.

2. Analyse the issues of institutional, administrative, and organizational support for quality assurance of public services.

3. Provide recommendations for improvement of state control mechanisms in order to ensure the highest quality of public services of local self-government bodies, taking into account the existing problems and challenges.

Literature Review

State control involves the use of regulatory and supervisory functions of the state, which are used to monitor, evaluate and regulate the activities of sectors and public authorities and other subjects involved in the provision of public services in the country. This is a fundamental aspect of public administration aimed at ensuring compliance with regulations, standards and policies, as well as promoting transparency, accountability and effective delivery of public services. The goals of state control are many-sided:

- protection of public interests by preventing corruption, abuse of official position and power;
- ensuring fair distribution of national resources;
- promoting the provision of quality services;
- protecting the rights and well-being of citizens and maintaining public trust in state institutions.

State control mechanisms differ in different countries and sectors, reflecting the specifics of the regulatory framework and priorities of each

jurisdiction. Although the nature and degree of government control may vary, its main purpose remains the same maintaining a system of checks and balances that affirms the principles of good governance, accountability, and the effective functioning of public administration bodies. The national public administration bodies of many countries have delegated a significant part of the responsibility and resources from the central to the local level for improving the efficiency of the provision of public services. This fits into the modern paradigm of public management (decentralization of power) in terms of improving efficiency, supporting management capabilities by expanding citizen participation in the policy-making processes of local authorities⁶. Administrative decentralization is considered as the level of autonomy of sub-national entities with respect to the functions of central control, in particular through supervision carried out by central authorities^{7,8}.

Some New Public Management studies suggest that citizens' evaluation of public services will improve if local governments adopt performance management practices that involve citizen participation, accountability and feedback, as well as information openness⁹. In democratically decentralized systems, local governments are elected by citizens, which provides the accountability mechanisms needed to incentivize the provision of desired public goods¹⁰.

As the functional theory predicts, the effectiveness of governance results increases in countries that use the advantages and balance of two different units of public administration (central and local authorities) in those areas where they can work best, thereby increasing citizen satisfaction with public services

⁶ SHIN, G., JHEE, B.-K. Better service delivery, more satisfied citizens? The mediating effects of local government management capacity in South Korea. *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 2021, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 42-67. <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.316>

⁷ EUROPEAN UNION. Developing a Decentralisation Index for the Committee of the Regions Division of Powers Portal. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2863/841455>

⁸ OECD. Making Decentralisation Work: A Handbook for Policy-Makers. Paris: OECD Publishing, OECD Multi-level Governance Studies, 2019b. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/g2g9faa7-en>

⁹ MA, L. Performance management and citizen satisfaction with the government: Evidence from Chinese municipalities. *Public Administration*, 2017, vol. 95, no. 1, pp. 39– 59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12275>

¹⁰ PONCE-RODRÍGUEZ, R. A., HANKLA, C. R., MARTINEZ-VAZQUEZ, J., HEREDIA-ORTIZ, E. Rethinking the political economy of decentralization: How elections and parties shape the provision of local public goods. *Publius*, 2018, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 523–558. <https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjy003>

regardless of the decentralization level¹¹. Local self-government bodies can provide high-quality public services provided transparency, fair local elections, public participation, the capacity of public officials and the appropriate infrastructure¹².

Service provision according to competitive approaches create an opportunity for citizens to choose service providers based on quality and their own benefit¹³. It is important to understand that the quality of public services can be improved by increasing the accountability of local self-government bodies due to the transparency of local taxes¹⁴. Similarly, the delegation of administrative powers to local self-government bodies, which will enables using the available information taking into account the consumers' needs at the local level, conducting monitoring, will contribute to the improvement of the provision of public services¹⁵.

Overall satisfaction with services has become the main indicator that determines their compliance with the users' needs and expectations. Satisfaction is related to trust in public institutions and the level of reliability of public institutions. The selection criteria are: adequacy; policy relevance; accessibility and coverage; possibility of data interpretation. The OECD¹⁶ uses quality, responsiveness, and availability as the main characteristics of public services. The quality of services reflects the degree of obtaining desired results and compliance with expectations.

The quality of education services can be measured by how effectively students acquire the skills needed to be prosperous in society. Access to the

¹¹ SHIN, G., JHEE, B.-K. Better service delivery, more satisfied citizens? The mediating effects of local government management capacity in South Korea. *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 2021, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 42-67. <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.316>

¹² SUJARWOTO, S. Why decentralization works and does not works? A systematic literature review. *Journal of Public Administration Studies*, 2017, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.jpas.2017.002.01.1>

¹³ MIHÁLIK, J., HORVÁTH, P., ŠVIKRUHA, M. Give me liberty or give me money: the fiscal decentralization and autonomy of regional governance in Slovakia. *European Journal of Government and Economics*, 2019, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 96-109. <https://doi.org/10.17979/ejge.2019.8.1.4573>

¹⁴ BIANCHI, N., GIORCELLI, M., MARTINO, E. M. The effects of fiscal decentralization on publicly provided services and labor markets. Working paper No. 29538. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021. Available from: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w29538>

¹⁵ CHAUDHARY, L., IYER, L. The Importance of Being Local: Administrative Decentralization and Human Development. 2022. Available from: http://sites.nd.edu/lakshmi-iyer/files/2022/10/Chaudhary_Iyer_AdministrativeDecentralization_2022Oct15.pdf

¹⁶ OECD. *Government at a Glance 2023*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en>

services of the justice system refers to the ability of people, businesses and communities to prevent conflict and obtain effective, fair and timely solutions to their legal and justice-related needs¹⁷. Another aspect is legal empowerment, which enables public services in the justice system and develops citizens' ability to understand and use the law. Delays in resolving court cases negatively affect citizens and destroy business. A strong justice system ensures that the relevant public services are delivered to the right consumers, in the right areas of law, in the right places¹⁸.

Digital transformation of public administration has become one of the comprehensive areas of development of the public services system. Digitization is one of the keyways in which the government improves public services from the user's perspective. The OECD¹⁹ Digital Government Policy states that competent digital governments are those that are able to use digital technologies and use data about citizen and user experiences to transform and improve services.

The public sector provides a wide range of services, so it is difficult to ensure the consistency of all areas that are provided at the local level and are not fully controlled by central authorities. For this reason, there is a need to regularly monitor the effectiveness of public services and guarantee their high quality for consumers. So, countries have implemented citizen satisfaction measurement systems to enable users to report their expectations and provide feedback on the effectiveness and adequacy of services to their needs²⁰. In 2019, 51% of OECD²¹ countries assessed user satisfaction based on indicators, 49% measured consumer satisfaction with digital public services, and 12% made them mandatory at all levels of government.

¹⁷ OECD. *Government at a Glance 2023*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en>

¹⁸ OECD. *Equal Access to Justice for Inclusive Growth: Putting People at the Centre*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019a. <https://doi.org/10.1787/597f5b7f-en>

¹⁹ OECD. *The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework: Six Dimensions of a Digital Government*. OECD Public Governance Policy Papers, 2020b. Vol. 2. <https://doi.org/10.1787/f64fed2a-en>

²⁰ OECD. *Serving Citizens: Measuring the Performance of Services for a Better User Experience*. 2022. Available from: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/65223af7-en.pdf?expires=1688842197&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=A409045962BAC3C8FF5AB90CA830A9C6>

²¹ OECD. *Digital Government Index: 2019 results*. OECD Public Governance Policy Papers, No. 03. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020a. <https://doi.org/10.1787/4de9f5bb-en>

Methods

The research design involves several stages:

1) Identification of the main mechanisms of state control applied to local self-government bodies of different European countries²²;

2) Identification of the main features of quality control of public services (methodology of procedures, institutional control body, service level ranking) in some EU countries^{23,24};

3) Assessment of the completeness of electronic public services as a modern approach in the public administration system²⁵;

4) analysis of satisfaction with the quality of public services in certain spheres of activity (education, health care, legal system)²⁶.

The main state control mechanisms were analysed on the basis of the review of several European countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden)²⁷ and the study of special systems of public administration and mechanisms for providing public services in OECD²⁸ countries. Data from some European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Austria, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Spain) were used in the analysis of the quality control system of public services^{29,30}. The availability of digital public services for citizens and

²² BREZOVNIK, B., HOFFMAN, I., KOSTRUBIEC, J. Local Self-Government in Europe. Institute for Local Self-Government Maribor, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4335/978-961-7124-00-2>

²³ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. A comparative overview of public administration characteristics and performance in EU28. 2018. Available from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3e89d981-48fc-11e8-be1d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

²⁴ OECD. Serving Citizens: Measuring the Performance of Services for a Better User Experience. 2022. Available from: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/65223af7-en.pdf?expires=1688842197&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=A409045962BAC3C8FF5AB90CA830A9C6>

²⁵ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022. Digital public services, 2023. Available from: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/desi-digital-public-services>

²⁶ OECD. Government at a Glance 2023. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en>

²⁷ BREZOVNIK, B., HOFFMAN, I., KOSTRUBIEC, J. Local Self-Government in Europe. Institute for Local Self-Government Maribor, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4335/978-961-7124-00-2>

²⁸ OECD. Government at a Glance 2023. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en>

²⁹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. A comparative overview of public administration characteristics and performance in EU28. 2018. Available from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3e89d981-48fc-11e8-be1d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

³⁰ OECD. Serving Citizens: Measuring the Performance of Services for a Better User Experience. 2022. Available from: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/65223af7-en.pdf?expires=1688842197&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=A409045962BAC3C8FF5AB90CA830A9C6>

businesses and the degree of satisfaction with the quality of public services were analysed on the basis of open data from EU member states^{31,32}.

The research methodology provided for the use of methods of contextual analysis of EU legislation in the field of public administration, the method of comparison and graphical methods, which were applied to identify the existing models of state control over the quality of public services, the level of their completeness and consumer satisfaction with these services.

Results

There are various types of state control mechanisms in the practical activity of state authorities that can affect the quality of public services provided by local self-government bodies. The study of the peculiarities of the system of local self-government in 13 European countries³³, the system of public administration in the EU countries^{34,35} and existing studies on the issue under research revealed the main approaches to the implementation of state control mechanisms. It should be noted that according to Article 8 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, administrative control over the activities of local self-government bodies is exercised in accordance with the Constitution of countries and legislative acts and is aimed at ensuring legality and constitutionality³⁶. So, the process of state control over the quality of public services in the EU countries may employ the following mechanisms: performance evaluation, financial audit, legal supervision, feedback from citizens, standardization, and certification. Table 1 details the mechanisms of state control.

³¹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022. Digital public services, 2023. Available from: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/desi-digital-public-services>

³² OECD. Government at a Glance 2023. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en>

³³ BREZOVNIK, B., HOFFMAN, I., KOSTRUBIEC, J. Local Self-Government in Europe. Institute for Local Self-Government Maribor, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4335/978-961-7124-00-2>

³⁴ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. A comparative overview of public administration characteristics and performance in EU28. 2018. Available from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3e89d981-48fc-11e8-be1d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

³⁵ OECD. Government at a Glance 2023. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en>

³⁶ COUNCIL OF EUROPE. European Charter of Local Self-Government. 1985. Available from: <https://rm.coe.int/168007a088>

Table 1. Features of the main mechanisms of state quality control of public services provided by local self-government bodies in EU the countries

Mechanism	Content	Consequences/Results
Performance evaluation (administrative and organizational monitoring)	Determining the effectiveness, efficiency, and achievement of predetermined goals in the relevant field. Performance indicators and benchmarks are established to measure the quality of public services and track progress over time.	Performance measurement has a significant relationship with local government service delivery and influences local government service delivery. If efficiency is improved, the provision of services by local self-government bodies will improve accordingly. If feedback (feedback on results) is improved, the provision of services by local self-government bodies will improve ³⁷ . A positive influence on the efficiency and effectiveness of the quality of employees, planning and support of network interaction, and a strategy ³⁸ were revealed.
Financial audit (financial monitoring)	Audit of financial management and accountability of local self-government bodies in the relevant field, proper distribution and use of public funds.	Ensuring transparency, identifying improper use of budget funds, preventing financial abuse ³⁹ .
Legal oversight (legal monitoring)	Supervision of the application of laws and by-laws. Inspection of local self-government bodies in order to assess compliance with regulatory and legal acts and procedures for ensuring the quality of services.	The procedure is part of the concept of accountability, but the main problem may be the lack of qualitative methods of accountability (for example, determining the appropriateness of budget expenditures to obtain a certain quality of public services) ⁴⁰ . Local self-government bodies are obliged to comply with legal provisions governing the quality of services, and violations may entail legal implications. Effective enforcement of binding court decisions is a fundamental element of the rule of law and a key

³⁷ TUMWEBAZE, R. Performance management systems and local government service delivery in Uganda: A Case of Bushenyi District. Doctoral dissertation. Uganda Management Institute, 2015. Available from:

<http://uminspace.umi.ac.ug/bitstream/handle/20.500.12305/751/ROBINAH%20TUMWEBAZE%20PAM%2013.MMSPAM.007.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

³⁸ WALKER, R. M., ANDREWS, R. Local government management and performance: A review of evidence. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 2015, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 101-133. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mut038>

³⁹ NERANTZIDIS, M., PAZARSKIS, M., DROGALAS, G., GALANIS, S. Internal auditing in the public sector: a systematic literature review and future research agenda. *Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting & Financial Management*, 2022, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 189-209. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBAFM-02-2020-0015>

⁴⁰ BELL, E., FOURTON, C., SOWELS, N. Public Services in the UK: the Ongoing Challenges of Delivery and Public Accountability. *French Journal of British Studies*, 2021, vol. 26, no. XXVI-2. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.7803>

		requirement for the functioning of the European Area of Freedom Security & Justice (AFSJ) ⁴¹ .
Involvement of citizens by state bodies in the evaluation of public services and public control over the provision of services (feedback)	Operation of a state portal/network through which citizens can provide feedback, file complaints, or participate in surveys or other actions regarding issues of service provision and their quality.	Identifying areas that need improvement and ensuring responsiveness to society's needs. Citizens' opinions about their satisfaction with public services can provide public authorities with feedback on their management and inform them about priorities, consumers, and ways to redistribute resources ⁴²
Supervision of standardization and certification (technological monitoring)	Verification of compliance with existing standards and certification, which ensures consistent provision of high-quality services.	High standards that are difficult to meet may be detrimental to the service provider, even if the pursuit of higher quality services is beneficial to citizens. Decentralized standard setting can encourage the use of low standards with harmful consequences for policy outcomes. Quality standards should be set centrally to ensure greater transparency and accountability ⁴³

The state control mechanisms indicated in Table 1 work together to monitor, assess, and regulate the quality of public services provided by local self-government bodies. A combination of inspections, evaluations, audits, legal oversight, citizen feedback and quality standards helps increase accountability, transparency and improve the delivery of public services. Data on the existing approaches to determining the quality of services, state control bodies and evaluation of public services (rating) can be provided as a characteristic of the features of the quality control of public services in some EU countries (Table 2).

⁴¹ MOUSMOUTI, M., MEIDANIS, H., UITDEHAAG, J. Civil enforcement in the EU: a comparative overview. Centre for European Constitutional Law; International Union of Judicial Officers, 2021. Available from: <https://www.enforcementatlas.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/EU-Enforcement-Atlas-Comparative-Report.pdf>

⁴² SONG, M., MEIER, K. J. Citizen satisfaction and the kaleidoscope of government performance: How multiple stakeholders see government performance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 2018, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 489-505. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muy006>

⁴³ SONG, M., AN, S.-H., MEIER, K. J. Quality standards, implementation autonomy, and citizen satisfaction with public services: cross-national evidence. *Public Management Review*, 2020, vol. 23, no. 6, pp. 906–928. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1730939>

Table 2. Main features of quality control of public services in some EU countries^{44,45}

Country	Services sector	Methodology for determining the quality of services	Institutional body that controls procedures for determining satisfaction with services	Rating of the level of online services (28 EU countries), 2018	Rating of the level of services for business (28 EU countries), 2018
Denmark	Digital services	Surveys, telephone interviews	Statistics Denmark and Digitaliseringsstyrelsen	14	6
France	Basic services	Surveys	Institut Delouvrier and Ministre de la Transformation et de la Fonction publiques	2	23
Germany	Services for citizens and businesses	Online surveys, telephone interviews	The Federal Statistical Office Initiative D21	11	13
Austria	Digital services	Online surveys	Initiative D21	5	16
Ireland	Services of public authorities	Surveys	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform	17	4
Italy	Municipal services	Surveys	Municipalities	9	28
Latvia	Basic services	Surveys	State Chancellery	12	4
Spain	Public services	Surveys	Observatorio de Servicios Urbanos, Dirección General de Gobernanza Pública	5	23

The possibility of providing various services to consumers (citizens and businesses) or information on the Internet and through the portal of public authorities is an important indicator given the wide distribution of public services based on digital technologies. Moreover, individual services may be provided in full, in part, or require physical presence. Services provided through the portal of public authorities are rated higher, while services that require the physical presence of a citizen or an authorized person are ranked lower (Figure 1). The

⁴⁴ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. A comparative overview of public administration characteristics and performance in EU28. 2018. Available from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3e89d981-48fc-11e8-be1d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁴⁵ OECD. Serving Citizens: Measuring the Performance of Services for a Better User Experience. 2022. Available from: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/65223af7-en.pdf?expires=1688842197&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=A409045962BAC3C8FF5AB90CA830A9C6>

graphical analysis of the completeness of the provision of e-public services reveals that Estonia, Luxembourg and Malta showed the best results, scoring more than 90 points out of 100 for a wide range of e-public services for citizens. Finland, Lithuania, Ireland, Spain, Estonia, Luxembourg and Malta scored more than 90 points in terms of the availability of electronic public services for business.

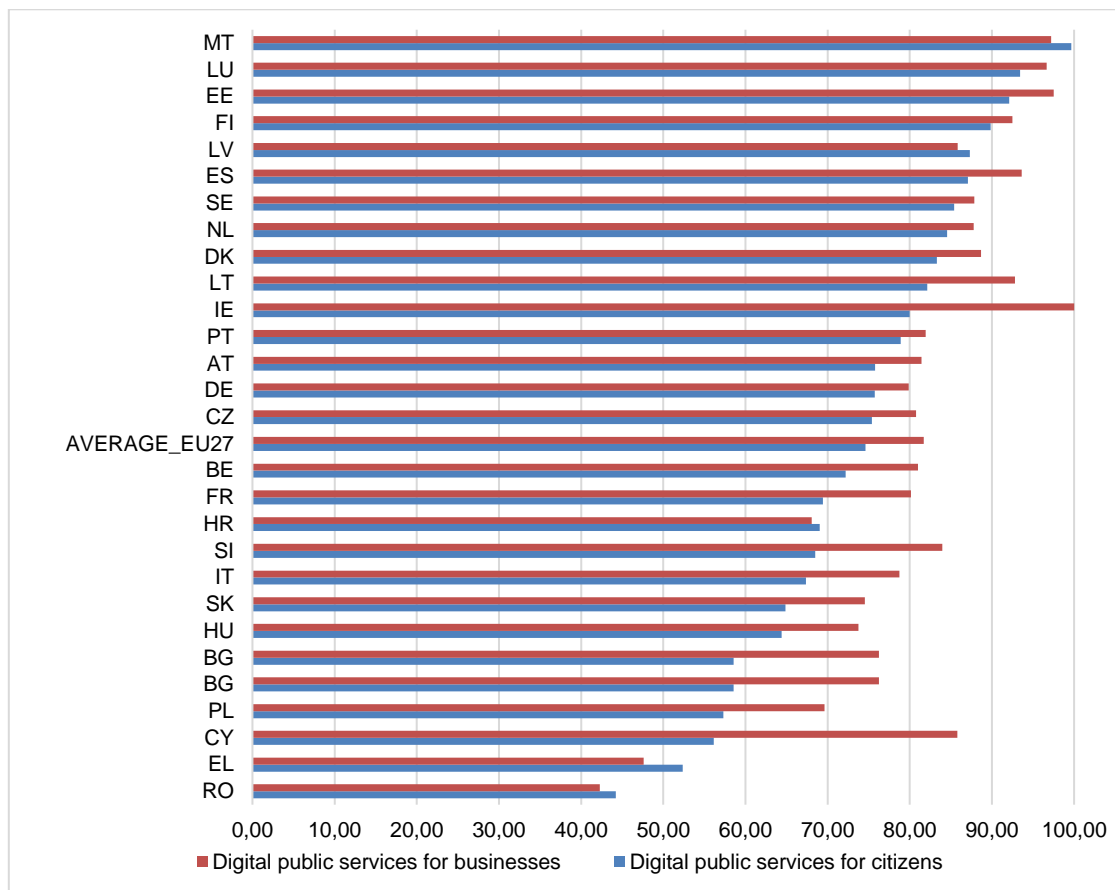


Figure 1. Availability of digital public services for citizens and businesses in the EU, 2022⁴⁶

The sectoral analysis of public services in the EU countries demonstrates a different level of satisfaction with the quality of public services in the field of health care, education, and the legal system (Figure 2), which is determined on a percentage scale.

⁴⁶ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022. Digital public services, 2023. Available from: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/desi-digital-public-services>

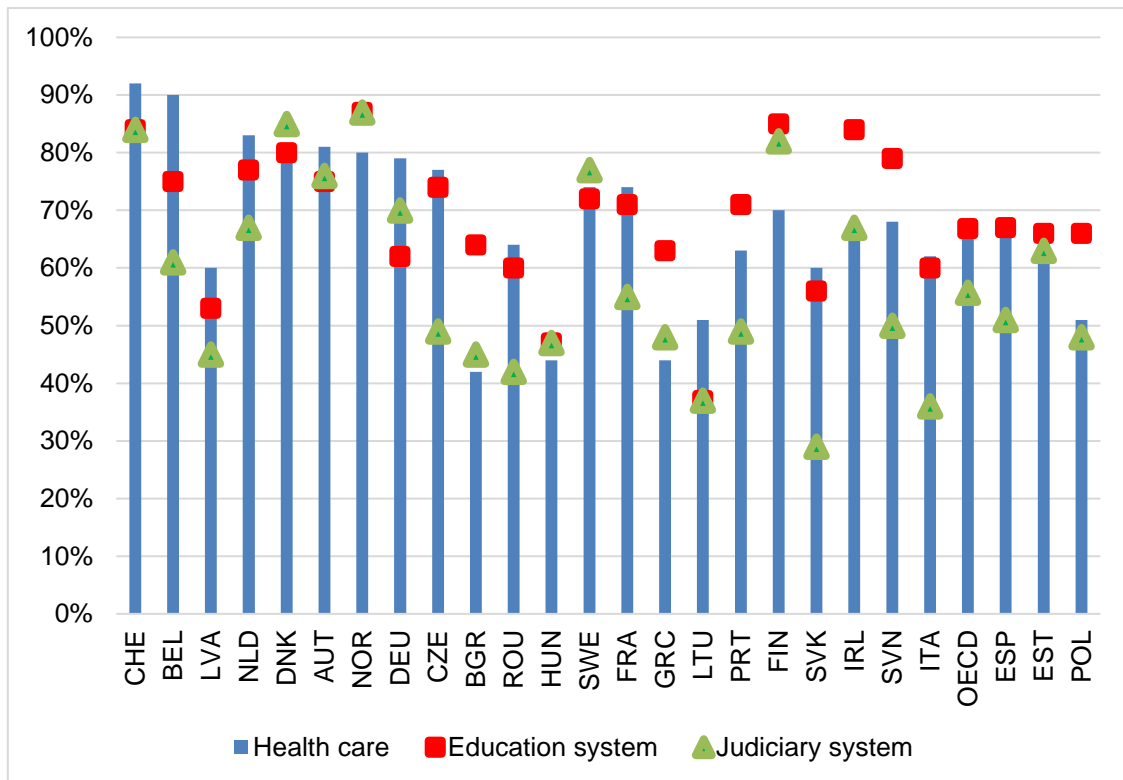


Figure 2. The degree of satisfaction with the quality of public services in some EU countries in 2023, %⁴⁷

Although most European countries have achieved almost universal coverage of basic public services in the field of health care, the issue of ensuring full accessibility remains. There is a need to ensure an even distribution of the required number of doctors across the territories of the countries. Local healthcare staff shortages increase waiting times or force patients to travel significant distances to access public services⁴⁸. Regarding educational services, for example, in 2018, students in the OECD scored an average of 487 points in Mathematics according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). In terms of the parameter of availability of public civil justice services, OECD countries scored an average of 0.65 out of a maximum of 1 point. Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands ranked the highest. On average, OECD⁴⁹ countries in 2020 needed 266 days to

⁴⁷ OECD. Government at a Glance 2023. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en>

⁴⁸ OECD. Health at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1787/ae3016b9-en>

⁴⁹ OECD. Government at a Glance 2023. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en>

resolve court cases. Lithuania (117 days), the Netherlands (127 days) and Estonia (135 days) showed the shortest time.

As Figure 2 shows, the degree of satisfaction with the quality of public services in the field of health care, education and the legal system varies a little, although there are countries where this assessment has almost a similar level (Hungary, Sweden, Denmark, and Estonia).

Discussion

Decentralization of public administration intensified the delegation of state functions to the local level, expanded the possibilities of providing public services, which improved results, based on increased responsibility, simplification of approaches, transparency and the use of mechanisms of state control over the quality of services.

The issue of the quality of public services by local self-government bodies and its different levels in European and OECD countries is important. As for the used research approaches, it should be noted that the significant factual material was used to single out the main mechanisms of state control over the quality of public services provided by local self-government bodies, identify the models and procedures of quality control and the general assessment of the main local-level public services.

It should be noted that the study was based on the available data of European countries, individual average indicators of OECD countries were partially taken into account. In general, this narrows the possibilities of a more complete analysis, where, in our opinion, it is necessary to study the experience of countries with different levels of development, the degree of decentralization of powers, mechanisms of state control, and models of providing public services.

The general situation regarding the studied issues confirms the findings of individual studies on the provision of public services. Existing inconsistencies in the provision of public services by local self-government bodies stem from the conditions for building a local fiscal model, the lack of effective accountability mechanisms, the need for subsidies and transfers, inconsistencies in

infrastructure provision, etc.⁵⁰. Local self-government bodies should apply different approaches, methods, models and strategies for the implementation of public services in the relevant territory⁵¹, taking into account the available methods of state control of improving the quality of services. Although the existing models do not fully comply with the established tasks. The results of models used by local self-government bodies to provide services at the local level (own capabilities, municipal enterprises, public-private partnership⁵², inter-municipal cooperation)⁵³ are significant.

Similarly, the successful implementation of changes in the system of providing public services by local self-government bodies requires institutional and administrative capacity and the implementation of modern tools of planning, organization, and state control. In order to provide high-quality services in the public administration system at the local level, it is necessary to improve the regulatory legal acts governing the relevant sphere of local administration; provide relevant specialists; increase the economic efficiency of public services⁵⁴.

Based on the identified problems, a comprehensive model that should improve the system of control over the quality of public services provided by local self-government bodies is proposed (Figure 3). The conceptual foundations of the model should provide for the establishment of clear and measurable quality standards for various public services; availability of performance indicators and benchmarks for evaluating the quality of services; regulatory framework that determines the duties, powers and accountability of

⁵⁰ ARENDS, H. The Dangers of Fiscal Decentralization and Public Service Delivery: a Review of Arguments. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 2020, vol. 61, no. 3, pp. 599–622. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11615-020-00233-7>

⁵¹ BOSTANCI, B., ERDEM, N. Investigating the satisfaction of citizens in municipality services using fuzzy modelling. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*, 2020, vol. 69, pp. 100754. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.seps.2019.100754>

⁵² KRUHLOV, V. V., TERESHCHENKO, D. A. Public-private partnership as tool for developing regional labor potential. *Science Innovations*, 2019, vol. 15, no. 6, pp. 5–13. <https://doi.org/10.15407/scine15.06.005>

⁵³ SCHOUTE, M., BUDDING, T., GRADUS, R. Municipalities' choices of service delivery modes: The influence of service, political, governance, and financial characteristics. *International Public Management Journal*, 2018, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 502–532. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2017.1297337>

⁵⁴ SABIR, B. Y., OTHMAN, B. J., GARDI, B., ISMAEL, N. B., HAMZA, P. A., SORGULI, S., AZIZ, H. M., AHMED, S. A., ALI, B. J., ANWAR, G. Administrative Decentralization: The Transfer of Competency from the Ministry of Education to General Directorates. *International Journal of Rural Development, Environment and Health Research*, 2021, vol. 5, no. 3. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijreh.5.3.1>

local self-government bodies. Inspections by state authorities should focus on assessing compliance with quality standards and regulatory legal acts; use of standardized protocols and inspection methodology; involvement of independent experts and representatives of relevant stakeholders (civil society) in the inspection process.

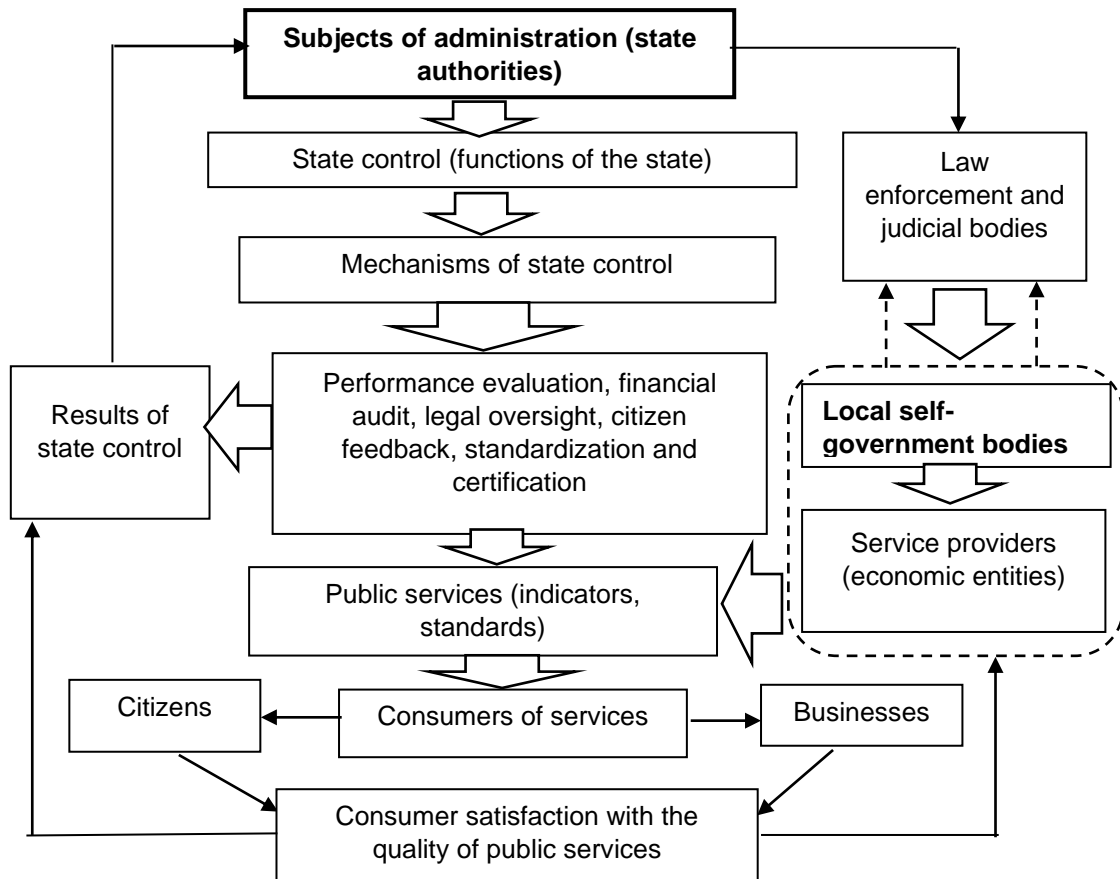


Figure 3. Model of complex implementation of state control mechanisms of the quality of public services provided by local self-government bodies

Key performance indicators (KPIs) aligned with the targets for the quality of services should be established for evaluation of the results of the activities of local self-government bodies regarding the provision of public services. A combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators should also be used to assess performance. A financial audit should include an assessment of the proper distribution and use of public funds; assessment of practical results of financial management and compliance with budgetary principles; focus on ensuring financial transparency and accountability of local self-government bodies. Legal oversight should determine the level of ensuring compliance with the existing legal framework for regulating the quality of services, compensation in court for damages caused to the state as a result of improper quality of

provided services, compliance with the principles of impartiality and the rule of law. Feedback from citizens will require the expansion of two-way communication channels for the participation of citizens in relevant procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of public services, conducting extensive surveys on internet platforms regarding satisfaction, public consultations and handling complaints, conducting feedback analysis.

The effectiveness of state control mechanisms in improving the quality of public services provided by local self-government bodies requires constant improvement. Balancing the need for state control and the autonomy of local self-government bodies is a complex task that requires careful study and adaptation to local conditions. Limited resources and bureaucratic obstacles create significant obstacles to the implementation and effectiveness of state control mechanisms, emphasizing the need for strategic allocation of resources and optimization of processes. Political influence and interference can weaken the integrity and impartiality of government oversight mechanisms, which requires reliable guarantees to ensure independence and accountability.

Harmonization of state control mechanisms with the structures and priorities of local self-government is important to ensure their relevance, legitimacy, and acceptance by local self-government bodies. It is important to study the long-term impact and sustainability of state control mechanisms on improving the quality of services in order to assess their effectiveness and identify areas that require continuous improvement. A comprehensive and integrated approach to public control, covering different control mechanisms and facilitating cooperation between relevant stakeholders can lead to more effective public administration and improved quality of services at the local level.

Conclusions

The study of different state control mechanisms, their effectiveness and the problems they face provided an insight into how the control system can be used to improve the overall quality of public services provided by local self-government bodies. The results of the study demonstrate that inspections, evaluations, financial audits, legal oversight, citizen feedback mechanisms and quality standards play a vital role in monitoring, evaluating and regulating the activities of local self-government bodies. The specified mechanisms contribute

to transparency, accountability and continuous improvement of public services. Furthermore, general problems that can weaken state control mechanisms were identified, including limited capabilities, political influence, and the need for harmonization with local self-government bodies. Solving existing problems is essential for optimizing state control mechanisms and promoting the provision of high-quality public services.

Deepening the understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of various control mechanisms and policies, stakeholders can develop strategies aimed at improving the overall quality of public services provided by local self-government bodies, contributing to transparency, accountability and continuous improvement of local government that will benefit the community. Studying the European experience, assessing the long-term effects of control mechanisms, and studying innovative approaches to public control can contribute to a more complete understanding of how to optimize the quality of public services at the local level.

The study proves that the further implementation of the decentralization reform ensures the improvement of the quality of service provision in territorial communities in the long run only, relying on the improvement of the legislative framework, strengthening of fiscal capacity, creation of innovative models of interaction with local self-government bodies. But it is also important to take into account the peculiarities of each specific country, which are determined by the general level of economic development, the peculiarities of their economic activities, the institutional environment, the development of the e-government system, the transparency and accountability of the public administration system, the effective anti-corruption policy, etc.

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