

# *Enhancing Local Governance in Kazakhstan: Leveraging International Experience and Decentralisation*

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This article examines the relevance of improving local self-government as a crucial element in the development of public administration in Kazakhstan amidst global integration. The study explores the experiences and mechanisms of decentralisation in certain European countries, highlighting valuable insights that can be adapted to Kazakhstan's local government system. By analysing existing legis-

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lation and gaps in the current model, the article proposes measures to address these shortcomings. The successful implementation of Denmark and Germany's municipal association mechanism is identified as a valuable approach in the context of modern-day Kazakhstan. Additionally, the Finnish experience of an Internet portal for civil initiatives is considered for its potential inclusion in Kazakhstan's local self-government system. The article emphasizes the importance of citizen engagement to effectively develop the local self-government system. Thus, implementing these improvement strategies through decentralised mechanisms has the potential to significantly transform Kazakhstan's existing local self-government system.

*Keywords:* municipality, local governance, decentralisation, management functions, Kazakhstan

## 1. Introduction

At the present stage, most states use decentralisation as an effective mechanism for managing and solving problems at the local level. The es-

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sence of decentralisation is its main advantage that lies in the transfer of most of the socially important functions and tasks from national (central) public authorities to local governments (Roman, 2014; Vojtyk, 2023). According to the law, such a redistribution of power allows certain territories (villages, cities, districts) to independently deal with the management of topical issues in the fields of education, culture, medicine, ecology, etc., which, in turn, increases the level of citizens' trust in the supreme bodies of state power, as well as recognition of their authority and legitimacy (Denega, 2022; Jatkiewicz, 2013). Increasing confidence in the existing government system and confidence in its inclusiveness and fairness is also facilitated by the ability of representatives of various political parties who have not received a seat in the central government to exercise power at a lower level (Demchyshak, Shvets & Mamchuk, 2017).

The topic of improving local self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan has already been considered by many Kazakh scientists. Aubakirova and Aimagambetov (2020), studying the local self-government system in Kazakhstan at the present stage, note a great number of problematic issues affecting the development of this area particularly in rural areas. In the context of studying the directions of development of the local self-government system in the Republic of Kazakhstan in modern conditions, Esbergen (2019) explores the issue of forming local budgets with the help of tax and non-tax revenues. Zhanuzakova (2021) puts forward specific comments and proposals for the development of local self-government in Kazakhstan. Obviously, the areas of improvement proposed by the researchers are based on international experience in this area, but Zhanuzakova (2021) does not indicate this in her work, thus only indirectly touching on the topic of strategic application of international experience. Yuvica (2019) compares the leading characteristics of international local self-government models and draws general conclusions about territories as government objects, and also analyses internal and external factors that may affect the development of local self-government in Kazakhstan. She notes the need to take into account the experience of the main strategic allies of the state, mainly in terms of creating an updated model for the development of regions. Kemel and Bakirbekova (2019) also note the importance of applying international experience, considering the state structure of Kazakhstan and its regional characteristics, but they do not consider it in detail.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to analyse international experience potentially applicable in the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of local self-government and decentralisation mechanisms and, based on the re-

sults obtained, determine the leading directions for improving the local self-government system in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The materials of this research are the provisions of the *Concept for Kazakhstan's entry into the ranks of the 30 most developed countries in the world*, approved by Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 732 (2014), the *Concept for the Development of Local Self-Government in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2025*, approved by Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 639 (2021) and the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 148 On local government and self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2001).

The study of regulations governing the sphere of local self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan was carried out by applying the dogmatic method of research. The *Concept for Kazakhstan's entry into the ranks of the 30 most developed countries in the world* (Decree of the President, 2014) is analysed in terms of measures being taken to develop local self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan. An analysis of the *Concept until 2025* (2021) was also carried out, especially in terms of applying international experience. The subject of the research of the Law No. 148 On local government and self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2001) was Art. 1, which consolidates the basic concepts in the field of local government and self-government, as well as Art. 5–6, 26–27, 30–31, regulating the formation and competence of *maslikhats* (representative bodies) of cities, districts of regions, the capital and *akimats* (collective executive bodies) of cities, districts, regional levels, as well as of the capital. The dogmatic method made it possible to identify the key issues of the local self-government system in the Republic of Kazakhstan, for which solutions were offered based on a study of the current management system in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

In order to understand the international experience in the sphere of local self-governance, the following documents were analysed: Art. 28 of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (1949), Local Government Act (1995) of Finland, and Consolidated Act on Local Government (2019) of Denmark. In addition, the Law on Local Self-Government (1993) of the Republic of Slovenia and the Croatian Law on Local and Regional Self-Government (2001) were also considered.

Comparative legal research method involves a detailed comparison of the local self-government models in Finland and Kazakhstan. Through this approach, the study identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the reforms implemented in both countries. By conducting a comparative analysis, the research aims to pinpoint areas where Kazakhstan's local self-government system can benefit from adopting successful practices observed in Finland. This method allows for a nuanced understanding of the legal frameworks, administrative structures, and practical implementations of decentralisation mechanisms in both contexts. Ultimately, it facilitates the identification of best practices that can be adopted to enhance Kazakhstan's local self-government system.

The modelling method employed in this study involves a forward-looking analysis of how international experiences and decentralisation mechanisms can be applied within the specific context of Kazakhstan. Through this approach, the research seeks to envision potential mechanisms for integrating successful practices from other countries into Kazakhstan's existing management system. By modelling potential scenarios, the study explores the feasibility and effectiveness of adopting specific decentralisation mechanisms tailored to Kazakhstan's local self-government model. This method allows for the exploration of innovative solutions and the development of strategic recommendations for reform.

The application of these research methods contributed to the consistent study of the topic of improving local self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan through a strategic use of international experience and decentralisation mechanisms. The article highlights the main directions of the transition of the local self-government system to a decentralised system in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

### 3. Results

Kazakhstan, being a unitary state, has a centralised system of government, with local government units largely dependent on the central government for their powers and resources. One of the main elements of local government in Kazakhstan is the territorial-administrative division, which consists of regions (*oblasts*), cities of republican significance (like Astana and Almaty), and districts. These local government units are led by *akims* (governors or mayors), who are appointed by the President of Kazakhstan (Tleuken et al., 2022; Karassayev et al., 2021). The current

local government model in Kazakhstan has been criticized for its lack of democratic representation and accountability, as the *akims* are not directly elected by the local population. This has led to concerns about the responsiveness of local authorities to the needs and demands of the people they serve. Kazakhstan is particularly interested in the continental model of local self-government, which is implemented in Scandinavia and characterized by the rationalization of the distribution of powers between authorities at all levels, the transfer of important state social functions to local authorities, and an independent body that oversees the activities of local authorities (Sheriyazdanov et al., 2022). The steps taken by the authorities show a continuation of the Soviet model, which may lead to an increase in the number of regions relying on support from the central level of government.

The local governance models in Kazakhstan have been shaped by the Soviet heritage, resulting in a “quasi” model, where local self-government is guaranteed by the state, but its functions are performed by local authorities. This has led to inefficiencies and the need for further improvement in the system. The current model does not fit into any of the traditional models of local self-government, such as the Anglo-continental or mixed models (Zhumagulov et al., 2022; Karasayev et al., 2023). One of the main challenges for local self-government in Kazakhstan is the lack of stable and sufficient financial sources, which are essential for its effectiveness and viability. The formation and financial support of local self-government are crucial tasks for modern local self-government in Kazakhstan (Onalbaiuly, 2019). The interdependence of organisations and forms of interdependence between central government agencies and local authorities largely depend on historical and geographical factors, socio-economic status, traditional and cultural values, etc.

The Concept until 2025 (2021) marks several positive developments in the field of international experience (Poland, France, Germany, Finland, Canada, Australia), which can be practically implemented in the local self-government system in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Analysing the tools for the development of local self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan, defined by the Concept until 2025, in general, it is necessary to note their orientation towards the transition to a decentralisation mechanism. One of these tools is the establishment of a representative body (*maslikhat*), in addition to the levels of the region, cities of republican significance and the capital of district (city of regional significance), also at the level of cities of district significance, villages, towns and rural districts. This is a positive direction towards improving local self-government, since

the fundamental basic decentralisation is the provision of rights and resources to local, regional authorities to manage a separate territory. At the same time, it should be considered that decentralisation lies not only in the establishment of new local representative bodies to which certain government functions can be transferred, but mainly in a qualitative change in the system of state regulation and the system for solving problems at the local level. Given the need to improve public administration in general and local self-government in particular, as well as the fact that the tools presented in the Concept until 2025 require additions in this context, it seems appropriate to study in more detail the experience of some countries and assess the possibility of strategically applying these models in modern realities of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The correct distribution of functions and tasks at all government levels, as well as empowering the lower levels (local governments) with the greatest powers, with the possibility of forming their own resources for their proper implementation, will allow building an effective system of interconnection between public administration and local government. Section 2 of the Concept until 2025 notes the issues of the existing local self-government model in the Republic of Kazakhstan related to the functions and powers of local self-government bodies and local government bodies.

Thus, *maslikhats* as local representative bodies in Kazakhstan play a pivotal role in decentralised governance through the regulation and oversight of local policies and budgets that align with community needs. They possess the authority to enact local legislation, approve local executive appointments, and manage fiscal resources by setting taxes and allocating funds for social and infrastructure projects (Law No. 148). Despite these competencies, *maslikhats* face several constraints that affect their functionality. They operate under strict national laws, limiting their ability to implement unique local initiatives. Financial dependency on the national government curtails their ability to independently fund projects, making them less responsive to local demands. Political influences and limited administrative capacities also pose significant challenges, impacting their independence and effectiveness in policy implementation.

Recent legislative reforms aim to enhance the autonomy and efficiency of *maslikhats* by providing clearer legal frameworks and expanded authorities. These improvements are designed to bolster their governance capabilities, allowing for better management of local resources and more effective community service. However, ongoing efforts are essential to further empower *maslikhats*, particularly by fostering financial independence and

enhancing participatory governance mechanisms. These changes are critical for ensuring that *maslikhats* can more effectively meet the evolving needs of their constituencies and promote robust local governance.

Fiscal decentralisation in Kazakhstan remains relatively low. Local government revenues account for around 20–25% of total public revenues, according to estimates from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2016). The share of local government expenditures in total public expenditures is also quite low, estimated to around 15–20%. In terms of administrative-territorial structure, Kazakhstan has 14 regions and three cities with special status (Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent). Within these regions, there are approximately 200 districts and cities of regional significance. At the lowest level of local government, the country has over 6,000 rural districts (*aul okrugs*) and villages. Regarding local government representation, local *maslikhats* have around 3,000 elected representatives across the country (World Bank, 2023). However, their powers are relatively limited compared to the central government and the appointed *akims*. A significant aspect highlighting the limited fiscal autonomy is the high dependence of local governments on transfers and subsidies from the central government. Some estimates suggest that around 60–70% of local government budgets in Kazakhstan come from such central transfers.

One of the countries successfully implementing decentralisation mechanisms in the public administration system is Finland. The basis of local self-government in this country are Finnish municipalities, endowed with large powers, both in comparison with the central government of the state, and in comparison with similar bodies in other countries. In the process of development of the local government system in Finland, the scope of municipal competences continues to expand. About two-thirds of all expenditures are annually allocated from the state budget for the development and ensuring the full functioning of local government in Finland, which includes about 20% of the country's employed labour force (Anttiroiko, 2005). In order to improve the quality of public services, pool resources to meet the needs of citizens, and create large and economically stable local governments, the Finnish government has legislated the possibility of voluntary association of municipalities. In total, 176 municipal mergers took place in Finland in the 1947–2017 period, while some of the local authorities underwent up to three or four mergers during the stated period (Meklin et al., 2020). In Kazakhstan, as a part of raising the socio-economic level of the rural population and expanding the scope of local governments, attempts were made to unite rural settlements into



localities with a population of more than 10,000 people (Aubakirova & Aimagambetov, 2020). Such associations contributed to the growth in the number of localities with sufficient development potential, with a progressive social and industrial infrastructure. At the same time, the level of development of the local self-government system in the newly established localities remained low due to the lack of the necessary amount of own resources for solving local issues (Fedorenko, 2023). The inability to form their own budgets and their excessive centralisation contradict the principles of developing an effective local self-government system based on the decentralisation mechanism.

Reforms in Finland led to a reduction in the number of local governments (452 in 2000; 309 in 2021) (Shumlyayeva, 2021). The main drawback of the Finnish system might be the empowerment of municipalities with a wide range of powers legally, which leads to the fact that local authorities do not actually have a real opportunity to independently choose the way of performing the entrusted tasks, but instead follow strict regulations (Ryynanen, 2011). In addition, the Finnish government has not placed restrictions on the voluntary amalgamation of municipalities. This has led to their significant heterogeneity and complicated the implementation of a common policy on issues that affect merged municipalities differently depending on their size, circumstances and the situation as a whole (Brezovnik, Hoffman & Kostrubiec, 2021). In this aspect, the experience of Denmark can be considered positive. The reform aimed at the voluntary creation of large municipalities with significant economic and competence advantages has been completed successfully. This result of the reform of the amalgamation of local governments was largely influenced by the policy of the central government of Denmark, according to which only inter-municipal cooperation could ensure an effective and proper performance of the functions of local government, since the lower level, unlike the regional level, received maximum powers (Shumlyayeva, 2021).

The experience of Germany can be a positive and applicable model of distributing functions between government levels in Kazakhstan, where municipalities, cities and districts are endowed with a wide range of tasks and are also responsible for the implementation of a predominant part of federal and state laws. In Germany, two management models can be distinguished: the central authorities transfer tasks to local authorities to perform them as their own, or local authorities perform the transferred tasks as external ones, thus acting on behalf of the state (Kuhlmann et al., 2021). The result of both models is the formation of high-quality decentralised management. Employees of local authorities in Germany

make up 30% of the employees of the entire public administration system, which is a sufficiently large number to provide most public services in direct contact with citizens (Weiss & Schubert, 2020).

One of the main aspects of decentralisation is the legal supervision of public authorities over local governments, i.e., the state level can control the implementation of tasks at the local level and oblige them to perform certain tasks (Gavkalova & Kyrychenko, 2023; Sinaj & Robert Dumi, 2015). However, the central authorities do not dictate the form of their implementation. The local government has the right to choose the manner and method of solving the problem. Thus, local governments in Germany have been granted certain autonomy, including financial autonomy, which is limited to state control within the law without taking a direct part in local affairs. In addition, a two-stage decision-making procedure is organised at the local level as a part of the implementation of democracy in Germany. The first stage is the manifestation of civil initiative, which, if supported by a certain number of citizens, is sent to the local representative body for permission to be implemented. In case the initiative is accepted, it is prepared for implementation and implemented at the second stage. In case of rejection, the issue can be resolved through a referendum. However, there are certain issues that cannot be resolved through civil initiatives and referendums. Such issues may include staffing and internal organisation of the local administration, provisions related to the budget, etc. (Kuhlmann et al., 2021).

In the process of involving citizens in the local self-government system, the Concept until 2025 notes the electronic portal for civil initiatives in Finland as a positive international experience. Until 2025, Kazakhstan plans to launch its own Internet portal, which will cover all socially significant events in each territory and the activities of local governments, including information on budget expenditures. It is worth emphasizing the need for the bilateralism of the Kazakh portal, since the key factor in the implementation of such a tool is a high degree of citizens' participation in the development at the local level, as well as the opportunity to take initiative and express their own opinion on the activities implemented by local governments. For the successful implementation of the planned electronic portal, it is also necessary to take into account the age profile of the residents and additionally organise the promotion of the portal and local government on social networks and modern Internet resources for the younger generation and encourage the involvement of the adult generation in the activities of local authorities outside the Internet (Shevchen-

ko, 2023; Auanassova et al., 2018). Involving citizens interested in local development might be the best path to improving local self-government. Thus, the development of local self-government occurs on the basis of objective and subjective factors (Bimendeyev, Seydinbekuly & Saduakasuly, 2016). The strategic application of international models of decentralisation, based on a deep analysis of the factors affecting the application of new tools in the modern realities of the state, will ensure effective functioning of the local self-government system in the Republic of Kazakhstan, increasing the degree of the role of the population, its participation in resolving issues of local importance, as well as rising the standard of living of the population in each locality.

## 4. Discussion

Exploring the current state of the legal framework for the formation of the local self-government system in the Republic of Kazakhstan, Zhanuzakova (2021) proposes to legislatively grant citizens the right to hold referendums at the local level to resolve the most significant local issues in order to fully and effectively implement the provisions of the Concept until 2025 in practice. At the same time, same researcher notes the need to legally fix the list of issues that cannot be resolved through such referendums. The proposed mechanism for holding local referendums is similar to the German experience discussed in this article. The involvement of citizens in the work of the local self-government system is the key to its effectiveness and the transition to decentralisation. Thus, the holding of referendums is a positive trend on the way to democratization and improvement of local self-government. It seems that this international experience can be implemented in the Republic of Kazakhstan, but not at this stage of development, since such significant changes require gradual and planned transitions. Currently, one of these is the introduction of the possibility for the citizens to choose an *akim* directly into the system of local government in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

In a paper devoted to the consideration of some constitutional and legal issues of the development of local self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan, Duisenov and colleagues (2015) write that although, in accordance with the legislation of Kazakhstan, the powers of local state bodies and local self-government bodies are separated, local self-government bodies can in fact be considered state administration bodies, since

they are also empowered to perform state functions. In addition, the researchers propose to amend the existing government concept, according to which state bodies operate at levels from regional to republican. These scholars believe that the recognition of local self-government bodies as state bodies and the independent election of an executive body by a local collegial representative body could contribute to democracy and the development of a common government system in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The statement of researchers about the similarity of the powers of local governments was confirmed when identifying issues of the existing self-government model in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The analysis of the legal framework governing the sphere of local authorities in Kazakhstan showed that, in fact, local governments do not perform the functions of direct self-government, since their competence, enshrined in law, is not wide enough, and is in most cases nominal, since decisions on important issues of local level are mainly adopted by *akimats*. The existing hierarchical structure of the system of governing bodies in the Republic of Kazakhstan needs to be improved. However, the actual abolition of existing local governments and the establishment of new ones does not seem appropriate in modern realities. In order to improve the quality of self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the article proposes to expand the competence of existing local governments, both legally and practically, as well as to use the experience of Denmark and Germany in terms of uniting local governments – municipalities (creating associations of municipalities). The implementation of these mechanisms in the Republic of Kazakhstan will effectively resolve issues at the local level without the participation of state bodies, leaving the latter with a controlling function, which, in turn, should not be limited to influencing decisions made by local governments and their associations.

When determining the main directions for improving local self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kemel and Bakirbekova (2019) propose to fix the rules in the relevant legislation for granting the local population the right to participate in monitoring the use of budget funds allocated for resolving local issues, which will increase the role of the population in resolving local issues, help stimulate the participation, interest and responsibility of citizens in decision-making and enhance trust in the existing government system. These activities are practiced in many local self-government models that are foreign to the Republic of Kazakhstan. The introduction of such experience in the Republic of Kazakhstan is provided by the Concept until 2025 as a way of attracting citizens to partic-

ipate in local self-government. This article is considered in the context of creating a portal for civil initiatives and seems to have a positive impact on the existing local self-government system. At the same time, it can be assumed that this direction of improvement will have a more promising development in the case of spending the funds of their own budgets formed at the local level at the expense of tax and non-tax revenues.

In order to implement the principles of democracy and organise direct participation of citizens in local self-government, Koprić (2018) proposes to amend the legislation by adding the procedure for responding to petitions and complaints from citizens. In addition to the Internet portal for initiatives, the researcher suggests using the most modern forms of interaction with the population, i.e., through civil forums, focus groups, discussions on online platforms, social networks, etc., already successfully implemented in European countries. This position is similar to that presented in the results of the study on the application of the Finnish experience in the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of creating a civil initiatives portal. At the current stage of development of local self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan, it is proposed to additionally use modern forms of interaction with citizens, which can increase the interest and civic awareness of the issues concerning the local population. In their paper, Kukovič and Brezovšek (2015) analyse the European experience in the field of local self-government and also note the need to use all the possibilities of modern digital technologies to attract the largest number of citizens to local political processes, as well as the new participation opportunities offered by this technology.

In the context of studying international experience for potential application in the Republic of Kazakhstan, it is advisable to indicate the level of compliance of the local self-government system of Kazakhstan with the fundamental principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985). Zhanuzakova (2021) writes that the local self-government system in the Republic of Kazakhstan is based on the generally recognized values of municipal democracy and municipal government, enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which is an important legal basis for self-government in all European countries. It provides a common, universal definition of local self-government, which has become accepted by all democratic states. At the same time, Aubakirova and Aimagambetov (2020) note that the local self-government system in modern conditions in the Republic of Kazakhstan does not fully comply with the classical principles of local self-government of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Comparison of the modern local self-government

model in the Republic of Kazakhstan with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985) showed some differences from international standards, namely:

1. The purpose of local self-government as a mechanism for the decentralisation of power is not sufficiently indicated.
2. Lack of own sources of funding of the local government bodies, as well as the lack of the ability to independently manage the local budget. Aubaikirova and Aimagambetov (2020) write that modern Kazakhstan is characterized by complex interbudgetary relations and transfers. In addition, their excessive centralisation is emphasized, which hinders the development of local self-government as a system of regulation and development of socio-economic relations in order to resolve local issues, relying more on their own resources.
3. Control of state authorities over the activities and decisions of local governments. According to the European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985), the controlling function of the state in relation to local self-government bodies should be implemented solely in order to ensure compliance with the rule of law.

The indicated inconsistencies are highlighted in the article as areas requiring improvement, and the main tools for the development of local self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan are proposed using the strategic use of international experience and decentralisation mechanisms.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of domestic papers and international studies presents a nuanced perspective on the current management system in the Republic of Kazakhstan. While it is evident that the system predominantly adheres to centralised principles, the imperative for enhancing citizen services, resolving local issues effectively, nurturing a democratic society, and bolstering public trust in state policies necessitates a shift towards decentralisation. Drawing insights from European countries, particularly the experiences of Finland, Denmark, and Germany, reveals both pitfalls and successes in implementing decentralisation mechanisms. Finnish endeavours in voluntary municipal associations underscore the importance of learning from failed attempts to avoid replicating ineffective strategies. Conversely, the positive outcomes observed in Denmark and Germany regarding the amalgamation of local governments highlight viable ap-

proaches for Kazakhstan's local self-government model. These findings underscore the critical need for a strategic approach to decentralisation, leveraging international experiences to inform policy decisions.

Key areas for improvement emerge from the analysis, emphasizing the need for legislative consolidation and practical empowerment of local self-government bodies. Granting these bodies autonomy in resource allocation and decision-making processes is paramount. Clarity in legal frameworks delineating competencies is imperative, alongside amendments facilitating the redistribution of governmental functions. Moreover, expanding the functions and capacities of local self-government bodies while ensuring adequate oversight from higher authorities is crucial for effective governance. Strategically deploying decentralisation mechanisms should be guided by the overarching goal of enhancing public administration and local governance without compromising the vertical power structure or local order effectiveness. It is imperative to strike a balance between empowering local entities and maintaining a coherent governance framework. By synthesizing international experiences with domestic needs, Kazakhstan can chart a path towards a more responsive, efficient, and trusted system of public administration and local self-governance.

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## ENHANCING LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN KAZAKHSTAN: LEVERAGING INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND DECENTRALISATION

### *Summary*

*This article examines the relevance of improving local self-government as a crucial element in the development of public administration in Kazakhstan amidst global integration. The study explores the experiences and mechanisms of decentralisation in certain European countries, highlighting valuable insights that can be adapted to Kazakhstan's local government system. By analyzing existing legislation and gaps in the current model, the article proposes measures to address these shortcomings. The successful implementation of Denmark and Germany's municipal association mechanism is identified as a valuable approach in the context of modern-day Kazakhstan. Additionally, the Finnish experience of an Internet portal for civil initiatives is considered for its potential inclusion in Kazakhstan's local self-government system. The article emphasizes the importance of citizen engagement in order to effectively develop the local self-government system. Thus, implementing these improvement strategies through decentralised mechanisms has the potential to significantly transform Kazakhstan's existing local self-government system.*

*Keywords: municipality, local governance, decentralisation, management functions, Kazakhstan*

## JACĀNJE LOKALNE SAMOUPRAVE U KAZAHSTANU: KORIŠTENJE MEĐUNARODNOG ISKUSTVA I DECENTRALIZACIJA

### Sažetak

Ovaj članak ispituje važnost poboljšanja lokalne samouprave kao ključnog elementa u razvoju javne uprave u Kazahstanu usred globalne integracije. Studija istražuje iskustva i mehanizme decentralizacije u određenim europskim zemljama, ističući vrijedne uvide koji se mogu primijeniti u kazahstanskom sustavu lokalne samouprave. Analizirajući postojeće zakonodavstvo i nedostatke u postojećem modelu, u članku se predlažu mjere za otklanjanje tih nedostataka. Uspješna provedba mehanizma općinskog udruživanja Danske i Njemačke identificirana je kao vrijedan pristup za kontekst suvremenog Kazahstana. Uz to, finsko iskustvo internetskog portala za građanske inicijative razmatra se zbog njegova potencijalnog uključivanja u kazahstanski sustav lokalne samouprave. U članku se ističe važnost angažmana građana radi učinkovita razvoja sustava lokalne samouprave. Stoga provedba tih strategija poboljšanja kroz decentralizirane mehanizme ima potencijal znatno transformirati postojeći sustav lokalne samouprave u Kazahstanu.

Ključne riječi: jedinica lokalne samouprave, lokalno upravljanje, decentralizacija, upravne funkcije, Kazahstan