

Analysis of the Principles and Tools of the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE)

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Abstract:

The issue of governance quality is among the most critical challenges addressed today by international and local organizations striving to adapt to the rapid processes of globalization or localized globalization. In Western countries or those with a Western orientation, efforts are being made to improve forms of democratic governance. The goal is to enhance government accountability and responsibility, promote citizen participation, strengthen relationships between governments and society, and increase public trust. To achieve this, the European Union proposes empowering local authorities, which are closest to citizens and best positioned to assess and effectively respond to their needs.

In this context, the twelve principles of good governance recommended by the Council of Europe are proposed, along with the application of the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE) as a tool to evaluate the implementation of these principles in local authorities. This paper aims to identify the factors that influence the application of these principles in municipalities and the key characteristics that can improve good governance in municipalities through the application of the ELoGE evaluation methodology.

Keywords: Good governance, principles of good governance, governance excellence, local governance, local citizens.

1. Introduction:

Since the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which established the European Union (1), EU member states have focused on building a "European model" of governance rooted in the values enshrined in Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty. This article affirms: "The values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities. These values are shared among member states in a society characterized by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality between women and men (2)."

In its efforts to maintain unity, the Valencia Declaration adopted the "Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at the Local Level" in 2007 (3), formally known as the "European Label of Governance Excellence" (ELoGE) (4). This initiative was officially endorsed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2008 (1022nd meeting – 26 March 2008). It serves as an operational framework composed of 12 principles aimed at improving local governance in the member states of the Council of Europe (5).

2. The 12 Principles of Democratic Good Governance

The ELoGE is an award granted by the Council of Europe to local authorities that have achieved a high level of good governance, based on the 12 principles of good governance. These principles are evaluated in accordance with the Council of Europe's standards for good governance.

The award was officially adopted on May 18, 2016, and subsequently revised on March 24, 2020, and October 21, 2021. It is granted for a period of one year to eligible local authorities (6).

Principle 1: Representation, Participation, and Proper Conduct of Elections

- Local elections must be free and fair, aligning with international standards and national laws.
- Citizens participate clearly in public life at the local level.
- All citizens, male and female, have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediary bodies that represent their interests, which typically include rights to assembly, freedom of expression, and the formation of civil society organizations such as associations.
- Mechanisms are created to ensure effective participation of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, incorporating their needs into the decision-making process, including allocating financial resources for them.
- Efforts should be made to achieve broad consensus on issues of collective community interest, with mechanisms established to facilitate this.
- All decisions must be made by the majority while respecting the rights of the minority.

Principle 2: Responsiveness

- All objectives, rules, structures, and procedures must be tailored to meet citizens' needs.
- Required services, as well as responses to requests and complaints, must be provided by the relevant authorities within a reasonable timeframe.

Principle 3: Efficiency and Effectiveness

- Achieved results must align with set objectives.
- Optimal use of available resources is required.
- Mechanisms must be created to evaluate performance and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of provided services.
- Audits should be conducted regularly to assess and improve performance.

Principle 4: Transparency

- Decisions must be made and implemented according to legal rules.
- All citizens should have access to information as stipulated by law.
- Relevant information about decision-making, implementation, and outcomes should be made available to citizens to enable them to monitor and contribute effectively to the work of local authorities (7).

Principle 5: Rule of Law

- Local authorities must adhere to laws and judicial rulings.
- Rules and regulations should be adopted in accordance with legally prescribed procedures and implemented impartially.

Principle 6: Ethical Conduct

- The public interest must take precedence over individual interests.
- Mechanisms should be created to prevent and combat all forms of corruption.
- Individuals must abstain from participating in decisions related to conflicts of interest.

Principle 7: Competence and Capacity

- The professional skills of those involved in governance should be continuously maintained and enhanced to improve outcomes and impact.
- Public employees should be motivated to continuously improve their performance.
- Practical methods and procedures are established and utilized to transform skills into capabilities and achieve better results.

Principle 8: Innovation and Openness to Change

- New and effective solutions to problems are sought, utilizing modern methods in service delivery.
- There is a willingness to explore, test, and learn from new programs and the experiences of others.
- A conducive environment for change is created to achieve better outcomes.

Principle 9: Sustainability and Long-Term Orientation

- The needs of future generations are considered in current policies.
- The sustainability of the community is consistently taken into account.
- Decisions aim to encompass all costs and avoid transferring problems and tensions—whether environmental, structural, financial, economic, or social—to future generations.
- There is a broad and long-term perspective on the future of the local community, along with an understanding of what is required for sustainable development.
- A clear appreciation of the historical, cultural, and social complexities underpinning this perspective is maintained (8).

Principle 10: Sound Financial Management

- Fees should not exceed the cost of services provided, nor should they excessively reduce demand, particularly for essential public services.
- Financial management exercises caution, including in contracting, loan usage, resource and revenue estimation, reserves, and the use of extraordinary revenues.
- Multi-year budget plans are prepared in consultation with the public.
- Risks are properly assessed and managed, including through the publication of consolidated accounts, and in public-private partnerships, through realistic risk-sharing mechanisms.
- Local authorities participate in solidarity arrangements among municipalities, ensuring fair burden-sharing, benefits, and risk mitigation (equality systems, inter-municipal cooperation, and risk-sharing).

Principle 11: Human Rights, Cultural Diversity, and Social Cohesion

- Within the local authority's jurisdiction, human rights are respected, protected, and implemented, and discrimination of any kind is actively combated.
- Cultural diversity is treated as an asset, with ongoing efforts to ensure everyone has a stake in the local community, identifies with it, and does not feel excluded.

- Social cohesion and the inclusion of disadvantaged areas are promoted.
- Access to basic services is ensured, particularly for the most underprivileged populations.

Principle 12: Accountability

- All decision-makers, collectively and individually, are accountable for their decisions.
- Decisions are reported, explained, and can be subject to sanctions.
- Effective mechanisms are in place to address mismanagement and actions by local authorities that violate civil rights (9).

3. Mechanisms for Measuring the Principles of the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE)

For those expressing interest in evaluating their performance and progress according to the principles of good governance in local governments (which vary from one country to another), the following are the main performance standards:

- Evaluation should be conducted by local residents, local government employees, and local government politicians. It is suggested that the local government form a group of staff and advisors to assess its performance.
- Separate surveys are provided for residents and local government employees to express their opinions on the implementation of the 12 principles and to identify the causes of problems in their application.
- It is proposed that the level achieved by the local government in its activities be evaluated on a scoring scale ranging from 0 to 4.
- The score for each of the 12 principles is calculated by summing the scores of the local authority's performance evaluation criteria and dividing by the number of criteria specific to that principle (10).

If the local authority's level of achievement in applying the 12 principles to local government operations is rated as "very good," the local authority's governance level aligns with the *Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at the Local Level*. If the score falls between 0 and 1.99, it indicates that the principle of good governance is not applied within the local authority.

After identifying the causes of problems in applying the principles of good governance, the local authority must focus on implementing the unfulfilled principle of good governance.

The overall score for evaluating the performance of the local authority is calculated by taking the average of the scores for all principles of good governance and dividing it by 12.

Following a thorough analysis of the collected data, the accreditation body awards the *European Label of Governance Excellence* to local governments that successfully complete the entire program.

This award, valid for one year, is granted to local authorities that achieve a high level of good governance according to the standards of the Council of Europe. The award contributes to enhancing competitiveness among local governments, which, in the long term, evolves into long-term cooperation (11).

4. Provisions of the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE):

- As previously mentioned, the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE) is awarded to municipalities that can demonstrate compliance with the 12 principles

outlined in Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)5 issued by the Committee of Ministers to member states on the principles of democratic good governance. The current regulations govern the implementation procedures of ELoGE, as adopted by the ELoGE Accreditation Platform during its most recent meeting on October 20, 2023.

- The ELoGE award may be granted to municipalities and other relevant public authorities in Council of Europe member states that demonstrate compliance with these principles.
- The ELoGE award is valid for up to three years, subject to approval by the accrediting body.
- The implementation procedure for ELoGE consists of two phases: accreditation by the ELoGE Accreditation Platform of the Council of Europe and national (or regional) implementation, which results in the awarding of the label.
- When submitting an accreditation request, the applicant must provide a national (or regional) standard for evaluating the performance of municipalities with respect to the 12 principles, along with an explanation of this standard (12).
- The ELoGE Accreditation Platform, as part of the Council of Europe, will review the application and grant accreditation if the following conditions are met:
 - The member state or region has no objections to the accreditation.
 - The national or regional standard for evaluating municipal performance aligns with the Council of Europe's principles, i.e., the 12 principles of good governance (13).
 - Any changes deemed necessary by the applicant must be approved by the Accreditation Platform.
 - The accredited entity has the capacity to manage the ELoGE award process.
 - Equality and diversity are considered during the implementation of ELoGE.
 - ELoGE is implemented and awarded following transparent procedures that can be subject to review (14).
- Accreditation may be granted for a maximum of three years and can be renewed upon request for a duration determined by the Accreditation Platform. Renewal of accreditation will be granted if the Accreditation Platform is satisfied that there have been no changes to the conditions that justified the initial approval of the accreditation.
- Decisions made by the Accreditation Platform are final and cannot be appealed. Applicants will be informed of the decision without delay (15).
- The ELoGE Accreditation Platform reserves the right to suspend the authority of the entity authorized to grant the label at any time in case of suspected violations of the applicable regulations, pending the submission of clarifications and justifications.
- If, upon conclusion of inquiries, the Accreditation Platform finds serious violations of the regulations, it must revoke the accreditation and may take any additional actions deemed necessary to protect the reputation of the label.
- A decision not to grant accreditation does not preclude the right to submit further applications.

- The accredited entity is responsible for managing the process of awarding the label and is also obligated to implement ELoGE in a significant number of municipalities during its accreditation period.
- Accredited entities must keep the Accreditation Platform informed of their activities related to ELoGE and respond to requests from the platform in a spirit of cooperation. On a regular basis, and at the latest before the end of their accreditation period, they must submit a detailed report describing their activities related to ELoGE.
- Accredited entities bear the costs associated with the implementation of ELoGE (16).
- These provisions may be amended or supplemented at any time by the ELoGE Accreditation Platform based on experience (17).

So far, ELoGE has been implemented or is in the process of being implemented in Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Slovak Republic, and Spain (Basque region) (18).

5. Tools Supporting the Implementation of the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE):

These tools are inspired by best European practices and are designed to enhance and evaluate the capacities of local authorities in various areas. The tools are regularly reviewed and updated.

All interested parties are encouraged to use these tools, provided they respect copyright regulations, notify the center, and utilize experts certified by the center. The center can assist in adapting and implementing the tools and training national experts. Among these tools are:

- **Training Needs Analysis (TNA):**
The TNA toolkit outlines steps for analyzing training and capacity needs and provides guidance on developing a training strategy and building national capacities for local governments.
- **Human Resources Management (HRM):**
The HRM toolkit is a practical guide for developing and managing human resource capacities. It includes guidelines on job descriptions, recruitment, evaluations, performance management, and a gender perspective for modern HR management.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation Methodology (URSO):**
The URSO toolkit enhances human resource management and other tools by providing the means and procedures for monitoring and evaluating training programs.
- **Leadership Academy Program (LAP):**
A hands-on, interactive training program for officials aimed at developing leadership skills for institutions, strategies, and capacity building.
- **Performance Management Program (PMP):**
This toolkit assists in developing performance indicators to improve the delivery of public services.
- **Best Practices in Local Governance Program (BPP):**
The BPP toolkit offers municipalities ideas and guidance to promote successful, transparent, adequate, replicable, and sustainable practices.

- **Enhancing the Capacities of Local Government Associations (LGA):**
The LGA toolkit provides tools for analyzing and transforming the performance of Local Government Associations, enabling them to become more effective organizations.
- **Public Ethics Benchmark (PEB):**
This toolkit supports public authorities committed to assessing corruption risks, improving public ethics standards, and developing an ethical infrastructure.
- **Local Government Finance Benchmark for Local Authorities (LFB):**
The LFB toolkit aids local officials in evidence-based decision-making to optimize the use of available resources.
- **Local Government Finance Benchmark for Central Authorities (LFB):**
This analytical tool helps policymakers develop accountable and effective local finance systems.
- **Inter-Municipal Cooperation (IMC):**
The IMC toolkit provides templates and frameworks for taking action through each step of the process of establishing, implementing, and evaluating inter-municipal cooperation.
- **Territorial Amalgamation Tool (TAT):**
The TAT toolkit aims to support decision-makers considering amalgamation by addressing challenges caused by regional fragmentation.
- **Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC):**
This toolkit serves as a step-by-step guide for designing and implementing cross-border projects.
- **City-to-City Cooperation (C2C):**
The C2C toolkit identifies practical solutions to support cooperation between municipalities from different countries (19).

5. General Conclusions:

To assist local authorities in understanding and implementing the principles, the Center of Expertise has established standards and indicators for each principle to ensure that “what gets measured, gets done!” Each municipality can now measure and rank these indicators against the 12 principles, enabling them to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Municipalities can also conduct surveys for citizens and municipal staff to determine whether their self-assessment aligns with public opinion.

Finally, municipalities can develop an action plan to address any identified weaknesses—for instance, creating a code of conduct to raise awareness of ethical behavior and prevent corruption. Municipalities that can demonstrate adherence to the 12 principles may be recognized by receiving the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELOGE).

National authorities, associations, or other relevant entities can award the label if they have accreditation from the Council of Europe.

As of today, ELOGE has been awarded or is being awarded in Bulgaria, Norway, Malta, Spain, Greece, and Poland. Several other countries, such as Ireland, France, Portugal, Ukraine, and Italy, along with various institutions, have piloted the project and submitted accreditation applications. Feedback from local authorities that have used the ELOGE framework thus far has

been highly positive and inspiring, encouraging colleagues across Europe to adopt the 12 principles and promote local governance excellence. The European Center of Expertise is available to provide any relevant support and training (20).

Significant activities have been undertaken to support this strategy across European Union countries, including:

- The *Program for Strengthening Local Democracy in Albania (2015–2017)*, supported by the Swiss government;
- The *Program for Strengthening Local Democracy in Armenia (2014–2016)*, supported by the Danish government;
- The *Program for Strengthening Local Democracy in Ukraine (2015–2017)*, supported by the Swiss government;
- The *Program for Strengthening Local Democracy in the Eastern Partnership Countries (2015–2017)*, implemented within the framework of cooperation between the European Union and the Council of Europe;
- Various bilateral cooperation programs and activities with approximately 20 member states (21).

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