

Problems without solutions?



A brief report on the nature of problems
faced by Kosovo municipalities

May 2019

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The original version of this report was written in Albanian.

Introduction

Often, the biggest problems faced by residents of Kosovo municipalities do not match electoral offers of candidates for mayors. The reason behind it is that political parties and mayoral candidates do not conduct relevant research to measure the main concerns of citizens they aim to govern.

In order to fulfill this gap between the main problems of the citizens on one hand and the electoral offer of mayoral candidates on the other, GAP Institute identified the main problems in 30 Kosovo municipalities prior to the electoral campaigns for local elections in 2017, as it did in 2013.

Problems identified, alongside mid-term municipal budget capacities (2019-2021), were published in 30 reports and disseminated to mayoral candidates, media and local civil society organizations.¹

GAP Institute identified 181 different problems in 30 municipalities. In order to identify the said problems, prior to 2017 local elections, GAP Institute interviewed representatives of non-governmental organizations in municipalities, media representatives, municipal assembly members coming from different political parties represented in municipal legislatures, as well as representatives of village and neighborhood councils. Also, one part of data referred to minutes of municipal assembly meetings.

Problems identified fall under the area of infrastructure, education, healthcare, public services, cultural heritage, urban development, etc. Issues like unemployment, poverty, safety and lack of electricity, although noted as major problems by Kosovo citizens, were not included among the problems reported by municipalities, as they are considered responsibilities that fall under the powers of central-level institutions.

This brief report provides insight as to the number of problems - out of 181 problems identified by GAP Institute prior to 2017 electoral campaign - that were included in the electoral programs of current mayors, or how many were promised to be addressed, during the electoral debates. In addition, the report indicates the status of the identified problems, one and a half years after their identification. Finally, the identified problems will be assessed compared to the municipal budget capacities and powers held by central and local level authorities.

¹ GAP Institute. Reports. 2017. Source: <https://bit.ly/2zwCYIr>

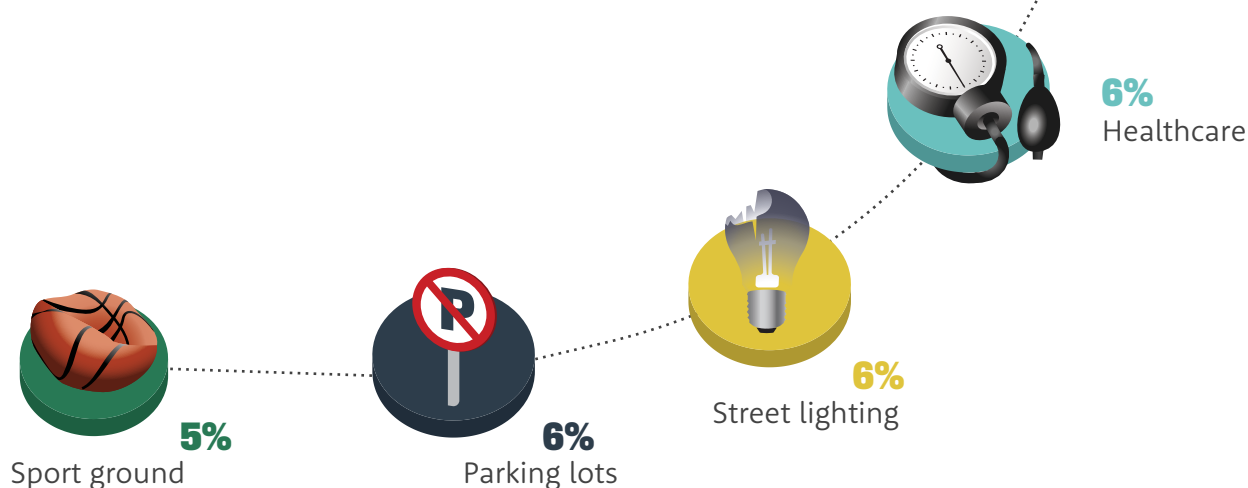
Types of problems identified throughout municipalities

After grouping the 181 identified problems by thematic areas, it can be concluded that the greatest problems faced by the citizens pertain to education, water supply, street lighting and environmental concerns. Almost all municipalities have identified at least one problem related to environmental pollution. If environmental pollution also includes acoustic pollution (noise), environmental problems caused by quarries, air pollution, waste, wastewater, riverbed pollution and problems caused by hydro power plants, then environmental problems are the most frequent problems faced by municipalities.

Another problem faced by the municipalities is drinking water supply. Half of the municipalities covered by the research, list concerns of citizens related to different aspects of drinking water supply, including lack of water sources, water quality, obsolete or asbestos-based pipelines, lack of water supply grids in villages, etc.

Environmental and water supply problems are followed by those related to education, which mostly have to do with school infrastructure, healthcare and street lighting.

Chart 1. Grouping of major municipal issues by thematic areas



Less frequently mentioned were problems like road infrastructure, lack or illegal usurpation of sidewalks, danger from stray dogs, agricultural land degradation, lack of parks or green areas, etc.

Table 1. Problems by municipality

Municipality	Water supply problems	Education	Hydro Power Plants	Road infrastructure	Parallel structures	Healthcare	Lack of sidewalks	Waste management	Railroads	Forest cutting	Lack of parking	Wastewater	River pollution	Illegal construction	Building maintenance	Noise	Public transport	Stray dogs	Lack of sport grounds	Air pollution	Tourism investments	Bus station	Lack of street lighting	Agricultural land degradation	Quarries	
Deçan	■	■	■	■						■																
Dragash	■	■	■	■	■																					
Drenas		■				■	■																			
Ferizaj	■					■		■	■	■	■	■														
F. Kosovë		■				■							■	■												
Gjakovë								■				■					■	■								
Gjilan		■		■				■				■														
Graçanicë				■	■						■	■	■						■	■						
Hani Elez.	■	■				■					■	■	■							■		■				
Istog								■		■		■	■													
Junik		■						■		■												■	■			
Kaçanik	■	■		■									■						■					■		
Kamenicë	■	■										■		■										■		
Klinë	■	■									■	■	■												■	
Lipjan	■											■			■											
Malishevë												■	■							■				■		■
Mitrovicë		■						■			■		■					■		■			■			
Novobërd	■					■						■	■									■				
Obiliq								■				■	■					■		■	■					
Pejë		■						■			■		■	■		■										
Podujevë	■					■		■				■	■					■								
Prishtinë		■						■							■	■	■				■					
Prizren							■						■													
Rahovec	■	■																					■	■	■	
Shtërpcë		■									■		■							■		■				
Shtime												■											■			■
Skenderaj	■							■				■	■							■				■		
Suharekë	■						■			■			■											■		
Viti	■	■				■						■	■							■				■		
Vushtri	■										■	■	■													

*Fields marked in red indicate problems in the given municipality

The table above shows that municipalities with rich mountainous terrain have problems with forest cutting. This is mostly concerning in Dukagjini region municipalities (Peja, Deçan, Junik, Istog).

However, there are certain interrelated problems. For instance, there is a correlation between the waste, wastewater and river pollution problems. Lack of collectors for wastewater treatment and lack of waste treatment capacities damage mostly the riverbeds, producing odor that further pollutes the air and causes problems to citizens residing in their vicinity.

Problems identified and electoral campaign promises

Although the identification of major problems in each municipality aimed to link them to electoral programs and further ensure they are reflected in the mayoral governance programs, a large portion of identified problems were not included in the electoral promises and governance plans after all. This results from the fact that political parties and their candidates don't take into account research done by non-governmental organizations and don't engage themselves in any problem identification research.²

Of 181 problems identified in 30 municipalities, current mayors have promised in their electoral campaigns to address 52 of the identified problems i.e. 29%. Only the Mayor of Gjakova addressed all identified problems. Mayors of Drenas, Viti, Prizren, Kamenica and Lipjan addressed at least half of the problems identified by GAP Institute.

Mayors of Gracanica, Shterpce, Skenderaj and Novoberde had no electoral programs and did not participate in electoral debates. Table 2 depicts problems identified by GAP Institute before the electoral campaign and promises made to address the said problems.

Out of the 52 problems identified, which mayors promised to resolve during their governing mandate, eight were solved within the first year of the term, while 33 other promises related to identified problems were initiated or are close to completion.³

² During the electoral campaign, numerous candidates from different parties who ran for mayors used findings of GAP Institute during their campaigns, but this analysis focuses solely on the promises made by the candidates that won the elections.

³ All mayoral promises and progress in their completion can be tracked at <https://bit.ly/2kafNOV>

Table 2. Problems and promises of elected mayors

Problems identified before the electoral campaign and promises of elected mayors.

- Number represents the order of problems identified by GAP⁴;
- Problems promised to be resolved are marked in green;
- Problems not addressed by the current mayors during the electoral campaign are marked in red;
- Municipalities with current mayors who have not presented electoral programs and have not taken part in electoral debates are marked with *.

Municipality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Deçan	■	■	■	■	■	■									
Dragash	■	■	■	■	■										
Drenas	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■							
Ferizaj	■	■	■	■	■	■	■								
F.Kosovë	■	■	■	■	■	■	■								
Gjakovë	■	■	■	■											
Gjilan	■	■	■	■	■	■									
Graçanicë*	■	■	■	■	■	■	■								
Hani Elez.	■	■	■	■	■										
Istog	■	■	■	■	■										
Junik	■	■	■	■	■										
Kaçanik	■	■	■	■	■	■									
Kamenicë	■	■	■	■	■	■									
Klinë	■	■	■	■	■										
Lipjan	■	■	■	■											
Malishevë	■	■	■	■	■										
Mitrovicë	■	■	■	■	■	■	■								
Novobërd*	■	■	■	■	■										
Obiliq	■	■	■	■	■										
Pejë	■	■	■	■	■										
Podujevë	■	■	■	■	■	■									
Prishtinë	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Prizren	■	■	■	■	■	■									
Rahovec	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				
Shtërpcë*	■	■	■	■	■										
Shtime	■	■	■												
Skenderaj*	■	■	■	■	■	■									
Suharekë	■	■	■	■	■										
Viti	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■							
Vushtrri	■	■	■	■	■	■									

4 All GAP Institute reports with problems identified in municipalities can be found in the following link <https://bit.ly/2zwCY1r>

Problems identified and municipal budget plans

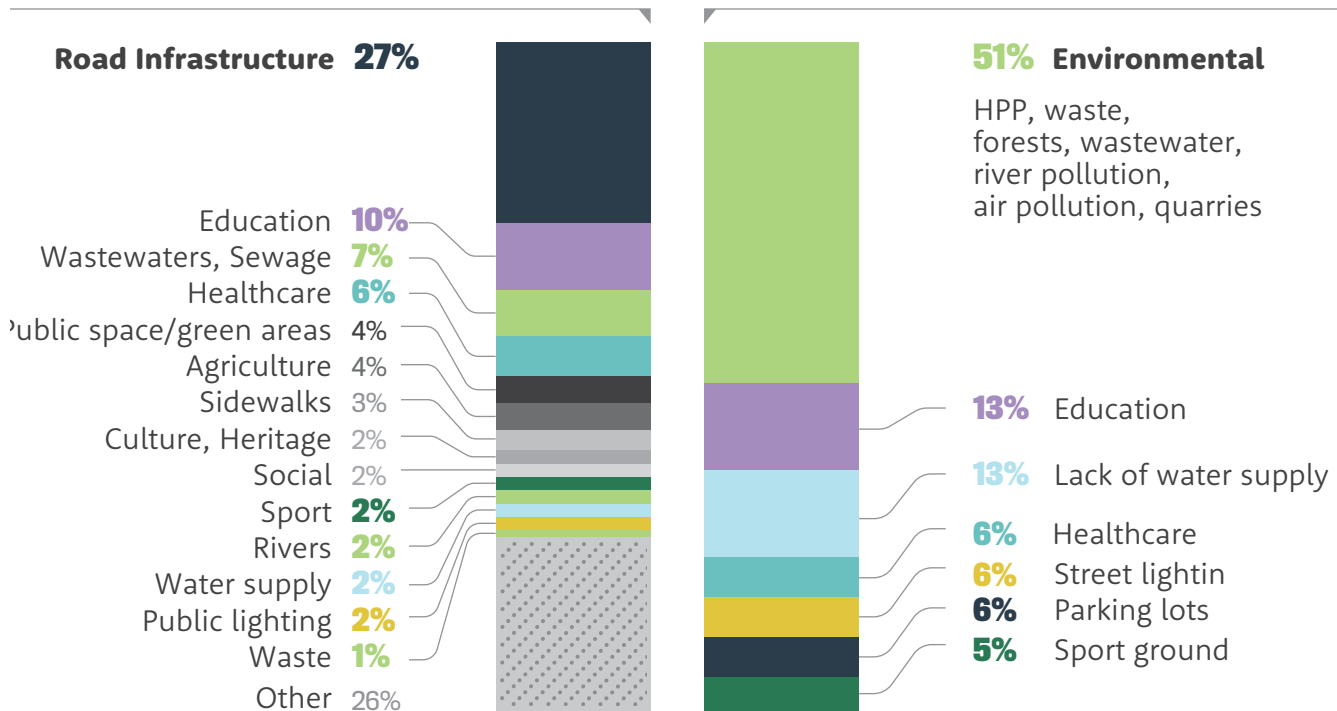
According to the Law on 2019 Budget⁵, capital investments for the current year and the next two years (2019-2021) reach a total of 537.6 million euros. Similar to previous years, the vast majority of the budget is invested in road infrastructure (27%), although road infrastructure is not the main problem identified by citizens. Even though supply of drinking water is a major problem for Kosovo citizens, only 2% of the budget of all municipalities will be invested in the water supply system in the next three years.

Similarly, despite the fact that waste management is a great concern for the citizens, only 1% of the municipal budget is allocated to improving the infrastructure that facilitates waste collection. In general, only 14% of the budget is allocated to environmental issues (waste, green spaces, wastewater sewer, riverbed improvements), while the environmental problems comprise over 50% of the problems identified by citizens in their respective municipalities.

Chart 2. Budget allocated for capital investments in municipalities, 2019-2021

Budget for capital investments

Major municipal issues



A considerable number of problems in municipalities can be resolved without the need for special budget allocations. Problems, such as operation of illegal taxi drivers, exposure of foods in inappropriate technical/hygiene conditions, prohibition of illegal construction, protection of historic areas, avoiding of noise at night, trailing of investment projects, presence of street vendors on squares, blocked sidewalks by parked vehicles, and placement of various business ads in public areas are just some of the problems the resolution of which requires no additional budget.

⁵ Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo. Law No. 06/L-133 on budget appropriations for the 2019 Budget of the Republic of Kosovo. Source <https://bit.ly/2Pv2IT1>

Problems in municipalities and public services

Waste management and drinking water supply are problems the resolution of which is sought by citizens from the current mayors. However, waste and water supply grid management are not exclusive municipal competencies.

According to the Law on Local Self-Government, water supply is a municipal competence. However, in practice, water supply is performed by regional water supply companies, the shareholder of which is the Ministry of Economic Development, based on the Law on Publicly-Owned Enterprises. There are seven regional water supply companies (RWC) which offer services to different Kosovo municipalities or regions.

Waste management is also an own-municipal competence, as per Article 17 of the Law on Local Self-Government. However, in practice, waste management, more than an own competency, belongs to regional waste companies which operate as joint stock companies. As per the law on publicly-owned enterprises, there are 11 waste management companies, five of which are fully owned by municipalities themselves (Gjakova, Mitrovica North, Zveçan, Leposaviq and Zubin Potoku), while the others are regional companies, the board of which is made of representatives of two or more municipalities.⁶

Therefore, more than specific budget allocations, the resolution of waste management and water supply problems requires greater cooperation between central and local level authorities, and a shift in the manner in which publicly-owned enterprises are managed.

In addition to water supply and waste management, shared competencies between local and central authorities pose obstacles to addressing problems related to air pollution, forest protection, teaching staff, local economic development, etc.

⁶ For additional information on the issue of cooperation between central and local level authorities, please see the GAP Institute report “What are the real competencies of local governments?”. Source: <https://bit.ly/2Dy74hM>

Conclusion

This report, once again, underlines the great discrepancy between the citizens' main concerns, electoral offers of political parties and governance programs and the manner in which capital investment budgets are spent.

This discrepancy between citizens' problems and governing offers of mayors leads to a situation where the biggest problems of municipalities remain unresolved for years, as it was the case in a number of municipalities.

Some of the problems identified by GAP Institute require solutions through capital investments. However, there is an array of problems the solution of which depends solely on the municipality's ability to implement laws, with no need for any additional budget.

In numerous cases, the conjunction between central and local level competencies and lack of communication between governance levels, hindered municipalities in finding solutions to their problems. Some earlier GAP Institute reports raise concerns related to the conflict of competencies and failure of municipalities to properly implement laws. Therefore, legal amendments are required to ensure that municipalities have wider competencies in governance, as well as an asymmetrical division of competencies for municipalities which demonstrate better governance capabilities.

Mayoral candidates and political parties that aim to ensure representation in local governance bodies should enhance their capacities related to identification of real needs of municipalities they aim to govern, and address them in their relevant electoral programs. It is greatly concerning to see that a considerable number of mayoral candidates have no electoral programs, and refuse to take part in public electoral debates. This made our work impossible in identifying the promises and monitoring the work of certain mayors.

It is encouraging to note that there is an increased awareness of citizens on the governance and work of their elected representatives at the local level. This increased awareness and citizen participation in decision-making in the last two local elections was also manifested in sanctioning votes against mayors and parties governing the municipalities, resulting in shifts in governance in most municipalities. Hence, mayoral candidates and incumbent mayors should focus on addressing the main problems citizens face.

GAP Institute is a Think Tank established in October 2007 in Kosovo. GAP's main goal is to attract professionals to create an environment of professional development and research, as seen in similar institutions in Western countries. This also provides Kosovars with opportunities to research, develop and implement projects in order to advance the Kosovo society. Priority for this institute is the mobilization of professionals to address the country's economic, political and social challenges. GAP's main goals are to fill the gaps between government and citizens, and between problems and solutions.

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