



## Scoping Paper: Participation in Intercultural Cities

The Intercultural Cities (ICC) network has expressed an interest in prioritising actions on democratic and inclusive participation<sup>1</sup>. During 2018 and beyond, the network aims to advance actions to build on the guidelines and strategies already in place around civil participation<sup>i</sup> within diverse cities.

All individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society at large<sup>ii</sup> should be able to participate in civil life and political decision making at the local level. People can elect their representatives (representative democracy); vote in a referendum on an important issue (direct democracy); or seek to influence or determine the actions of a public authority through participation in another way which extends to actions beyond voting (participatory democracy).

There are multiple meanings of 'participation' and it can take place in different ways. The Council of Europe defines participation as being:

*"... about individuals and groups of individuals having the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to freely express their views, to be heard and to contribute to decision making on matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity"<sup>2</sup>*

Other common forms of participation, such as those involving community arts or volunteering, might directly include that focus, or might be important development opportunities to enhance people's skills and confidence to engage in wider civil and democratic processes. It's further recognised that formal and non-formal learning opportunities play an important function in democratic citizenship and participation.

Intercultural Cities are interested in exploring how people bound by community - whether that be defined by geography, identity, experience or something else - participate in making, shaping or influencing, and evaluating the decisions and actions that affect their lives.

This focus of this thematic area will be civil participation and participatory democracy<sup>iii</sup>.

### Intercultural Cities and Participation

Through the adoption of conventions, recommendations and protocols in recent years, the Council of Europe has taken steps to encourage environments where civil participation can flourish<sup>iv</sup>. In September 2017, the Committee of Ministers adopted 'guidelines for civil participation in political decision making' which encourage members States to:

*"... draw on the views, information and expertise provided through participation and to develop a culture of effective participation based on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law"*

Intercultural Cities can start at the local level, where people play out their everyday lives, to develop inclusive participatory practices. Restrictive residency requirements that often prevent people taking part in more traditional forms of democratic decision making, such as voting in elections, can be navigated to create new and meaningful opportunities to be involved that are not reliant on

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<sup>1</sup> See the main conclusions of the ICC Milestone Event, Lisbon, 28-29 November 2017:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/icc-milestone-event-main-conclusions>

<sup>2</sup> [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cb0ca](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cb0ca) [Appendix Section I]

domestic citizenship. The goal is to create cities where a diverse range of people have the skills, knowledge, confidence and opportunities to participate; but also where public authorities are open and welcoming of diverse participation.

Equal participation, non-discrimination and inclusiveness are principles of great importance to ICC. Participation can cultivate a sense of ownership and belonging to the community, and it can extend to people that are more transient or face systematic barriers, including migrant, refugee, and Roma communities<sup>v</sup>. Strategies for participation can also encourage greater mixing and interaction between diverse groups in the public space.

Examples of interesting initiatives and good practice can already be observed in some ICC member cities.

## Examples from the ICC network

Across the world we are witnessing some common forms of participatory methods emerge: citizens' juries, citizens' panels, participatory budgeting, idea generation, youth assemblies, community action groups and consensus circles to name just a few. Although people are being involved in decision making and actions in different ways, with varying degrees of power, the umbrella of 'participation' activities is broad. The ICC network has multiple past and current examples to share.

In Reykjavik (Iceland)<sup>3</sup>, Mexico City (Mexico) and Cascais (Portugal)<sup>4</sup> participatory budgeting (PB) has taken place on an annual cycle across the City since 2011, and in Paris (France) since 2014. At it's simplest, PB is a process whereby local people decide how a budget is allocated. This can involve sizeable sums of money – the budget in Paris, for example, was €100M in 2016. Examples and rich learning can be drawn upon from across the world.

In Swansea (UK) the City Council has developed a number of tools to involve and consult all citizens in the council's decision making process. Priorities, plans, budget, social services, and civil life are all processes subject to consultation processes. Any new policy and initiative is built on equality assessment carried out by the equality office which challenges the specific department, checking to see if they have consultation and engagement plans.

In Lisbon (Portugal)<sup>5</sup> the '*Somos*' was a municipality initiative which aimed to develop a 'universal culture of democratic citizenship and human rights'. Engaging thousands of participants, the programme included a 'multipliers exchange' and provided a pool of trainers to facilitate activities on intercultural themes including human rights, gender violence, and democratic citizenship. This took place alongside communication campaigns informing residents of their rights. It was free for all of the city to access, but was recently suspended after the October 2017 elections. In Vinnytsia (Ukraine) the city has recently launched the "Intercultural Hub" project, whose main objective is to create a space for enhancing synergies between representatives of different cultures, and to introduce conditions for creating a common creative / artistic economy based on their interaction.

In Dublin (Ireland)<sup>6</sup> a Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in 2015 to bring together local, voluntary and 'not-for-profit' groups for involvement in policy making and oversight committees. Representatives are elected and directed by 'linkage groups', which bring together members with related interests.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.citizens.is/portfolio\\_page/my-neighbourhood/](https://www.citizens.is/portfolio_page/my-neighbourhood/)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.casi2020.eu/casipedia/cases/participatory-budgeting/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.programasomos.pt/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dublincity.ie/housing-and-community-improving-my-community-section/dublin-city-public-participation-network-ppn>

In London-Lewisham (UK) Local Assemblies are operational since 2008 as a network of citizen forums which empowers local decision making and action through a direct dialogue with the City Council and a budget to spend on projects which benefit the area. Lewisham is also sustaining the so-called "Young Mayor" scheme, which puts power and responsibility in the hands of young people. The Young Mayor is elected by direct ballot every year and – along with a cabinet of young advisors – is given a budget to initiate a programme of work, as well as to scrutinise the work of Lewisham Mayor and of its Council.

In Ballarat (Australia) the city is implementing its Multicultural Ambassadors' Program (MAP) since November 2009. This programme was developed in order to provide leadership within the migrant community, encouraging minorities to participate in the political life of the City.

In Botkyrka (Sweden), politicians meet residents in person at dialogue forums. In Erlangen (Germany), neighbourhood conferences have brought together stakeholders, including private companies, in dialogue. In Strasbourg (France), migrants were involved in museum design.

In Hamamatsu (Japan), foreign residents are encouraged to join neighbourhood associations. The city council also coordinates a council for foreign students which ties into the Intercultural city vision. In Bilbao (Spain) the Local Council of Immigration is a collegial body that has consultative and informative natures, and the vocation of guaranteeing the democratic participation of immigrant associations and their interaction with other agents in the different areas of political, cultural, economic and social life. In Stavanger (Norway), the Immigrants' Council (IC) is an advisory body that was set up already in 1986 and whose main objective is to ensure a more active involvement of the immigrant population in local public life, on an equal footing. The IC is also due to co-operate very closely with the local politicians (town councillors) and with the regional authorities responsible for addressing issues related to inclusion and participation.

In Pavlograd (Ukraine) city authorities supported a local Roma initiative to create a public organization, "*Amaro Kher*", which allows Roma representatives to participate directly in the life of the city through their community organization. The City Council also provided free premises for the work of the organization since 2012.

Members of ICC see a wide range of opportunities for developing participatory initiatives in their cities and across the network. Actions arising from recent discussions are outlined in the 'Future Actions' section at the end of this paper.

It should also be noted that Intercultural Cities published a policy brief on 'participatory and deliberative democracy strategies for the Intercultural City' in late 2017. This provides a reference for different engagement strategies for migrants, refugees and newcomers<sup>7</sup>.

## Gaps & Challenges

Participation is an opportunity to build and reconfigure relationships between communities and public authorities, especially where no or little connection currently exists.

There's a range of different challenges for cities to overcome as they develop participation, many of which overlap with wider systematic issues around power, discrimination, and exclusion. The existence of a process alone does not guarantee that everyone feels welcome or able to participate, or that the process is a genuine opportunity to engage with the issues that are important to them.

That said, a well-designed process which considers multiple community needs and takes action to address them can foster strong, relevant and transformative participation. It's strongest when

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<sup>7</sup> See the Policy Brief here: <https://rm.coe.int/icc-policy-brief-participatory-and-deliberative-democracy-strategies-f/168073f6b8>

people are clear why they're being asked to participate, can see how their participation determined an outcome (even if it's not the one they wanted), and can see the impact of the process overall.

Trust can be compromised by misusing participation (e.g. when outcomes have already been decided), by discussing issues that communities don't feel are relevant, by dismissing community input, or by designing complicated processes.

If processes are instigated by public authorities, it's important to think about the stage at which the public are involved. This could be as early as developing the concept, starting from a place of community-led issues; or it could be in the design of the process itself, when the public can help to design something they believe could work for them. The importance of the wide ranging skills and preparedness required by public authority staff and others to coordinate participatory activities should not be underestimated.

There's also a challenge to develop the readiness and skills of communities to participate. Some processes, for example, require participants to formulate arguments or to take part in debates. Others ask participants to write or compare chunks of information, sometimes in a language they are not fluent in. Many involve the use of online tools, which require internet access and basic computing skills. Most processes will require people from different backgrounds and lived experiences to interact and share their views. Cities should aim to support people to refine and amplify their own voices, alongside ensuring that there is space for those voices to be heard and considered.

The process design and structured support can determine who's able to take part, and who's able to really express what they want to say. Targeted outreach and support to enable and encourage different people and groups to participate can help. It takes some experience to find the processes that fit best for any given group of participants.

Intercultural Cities may also need to consider varied issues concerning perceptions; language barriers; use of terminology; managing conflicts; involving tight knit and insular communities; vested interests and group hierarchies; barriers of time and place; 'post-fact' and 'fake news' discussions; and, importantly, resources.

## Future Actions

The ideas to develop participation in Intercultural Cities can so far be clustered into three key categories: information and review; peer learning and exchange; network support and development.

### a) Information and review

A number of Intercultural cities are already involved in participatory projects and could share their experiences with the network. There are additional tools, methods and processes that exist elsewhere which could be communicated.

The development of an information base could start with gathering experiences and celebrating successes, building on those noted in this paper, to develop a depository of case studies and news stories. The Council of Europe is currently scoping options for developing an online participation portal which could hold this information.

New cities joining the network in future should receive details about all thematic areas, with an introduction to the information, support and opportunities available. They could be paired or clustered with cities in action learning groups to explore the topic, which could deepen their knowledge of existing models of participation and what could work (or not work) in their city.

A particular area that needs further investigation is how we assess the quality of participation. This could be done in several ways, but members suggest that it could be useful for members to see

feedback from participants. One recommendation is an online '*booking.com*' of participation which invites feedback from participants in several key areas and includes a star rating.

#### b) Peer learning and exchange

A team of "participation champions" from member cities could be established and trained to conduct investigations in cities undertaking participatory initiatives. Their role would be to gather learning about the process to share with the wider network, but also to act as a critical friend for the city itself so they can develop.

Exchange trips to share learning and experiences are another suggestion. This approach to peer learning could involve city officials, or it could be organised in a more bottom-up way and involve residents. In both examples, information would be brought back to share with their home city and used to develop participation.

Cities should be able to submit information to an online portal about live initiatives or those recently concluded. An online space could also include a space for discussion and reflection, adopting a self-help model.

#### c) Network support and development

Cities have expressed an interest in training and support for process design and facilitation, alongside mentoring and support to identify local networks and connectors. This support could be aimed at developing local participation practitioners, communities, public authority staff or other stakeholders.

### Next steps

Member cities of the ICC network need to consider whether existing political, legal and practical frameworks enable or hinder participation. The responsibility and accountability for local decision-making ultimately rests with a public authority with democratic legitimacy; public authorities and their elected representatives that hold the agenda for participation, and define how and when it can be invited. The degree to which power can be transferred from public authorities to communities is a matter of discussion, but there are multiple different ways that the public can meaningfully and - with impact - influence, make and shape the decisions that affect their lives.

A thematic seminar on building inclusive democracy through participation will take place 26-27 April 2018 in Tenerife. This seminar will result in an action plan, which will guide the work of the ICC network to develop participation.

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### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> "civil participation" is defined by CoE as the engagement of individuals, NGOs and civil society at large in decision-making processes by public authorities. Civil participation in political decision-making is distinct from political activities in terms of direct engagement with political parties and from lobbying in relation to business interests.

<sup>ii</sup> According to the '*Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making*' (CoE, 2017) the right to participate should be inclusive of individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society at large. They operate and engage in different ways, but each is important. Whereas an individual may share their personal views, an NGO participates on behalf of a collective interest (which itself may have been determined by a participative process).

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<sup>iii</sup> It is however recognised that different forms of democracy work hand in hand – we elect our representatives through free and fair elections, but we can shape and direct their work between elections through direct and participatory democracy.

<sup>iv</sup> A list of relevant documents can be viewed in the reference section. A summary of the of 'standards for meaningful civil participation' for the international level, Council of Europe, European Union, and OSCE ODIHR can be viewed in '*Civil participation in decision making processes – an overview of standards and practices in Council of Europe member States*' (CoE, 2016, pp8-17).

<sup>v</sup> Additionally, a summary of 'values and principles of civil participation' from difference sources is provided in '*Civil participation in decision making processes – an overview of standards and practices in Council of Europe member States*' (CoE, 2016, pp6-7).