



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Incubator for Participatory Democracy

World Forum for Democracy

Participation Index for Cities

Bolton, Greater Manchester

July 2017

Introduction

The Council of Europe's participatory democracy incubator grew out of the World Forum for Democracy, an annual event, organised by the Council of Europe in collaboration with the French government, the Alsace Region and the city of Strasbourg, to debate key challenges for democracy worldwide and to highlight and encourage democratic innovation.

Through an open call, interested cities have been invited to apply for the first hackathon:

Amsterdam (Netherlands); Arnsberg (Germany); Bolton (United Kingdom); Bonn, (Germany); Bucharest (Romania); Falun (Sweden); Ghent (Belgium); Katowice, (Poland); Lisbon (Portugal); Madrid (Spain); Neapoli-Sykies (Greece); Nis (Serbia); Palermo (Italy).

These are the founding cities of the incubator for participatory democracy.

In 2017 other interested cities are joining, and to date we have received application from: *Bolton, Greater Manchester (United Kingdom.); Genk (Belgium); Mira (Italy), and Reykjavik (Iceland).*

The Incubator

The Participatory Democracy Incubator was conceived as a physical space, linked to a community, where project leaders can have access to support expertise, resources and services to prototype and grow their idea. The challenge was to adapt this concept to democracy, to find out what kind of ecosystem and support should be built around democratic innovations for a greater impact, while using the immense expertise and knowledge accumulated at the World Forum for Democracy. It brings together local decision-makers and democracy innovators from across the world to help transfer knowledge and create new ideas about increasing citizen participation and impact in cities' democratic decision-making.

The incubator participants debate in the context of interactive brainstorming sessions, solution and formation methods strategies for solving expanding participatory, deliberative and direct democracy – locally and in a nation scale; tools to provide to agencies to invest in citizen participation; ways to encourage successful participation of the diversity in the city in order to prevent democracy from becoming a privilege of some.

The Participatory Democracy Index is one of the tools used by the Incubator to help cities assess their achievements, identify challenges, and monitor progress over time.

Participatory city definition

The optimal strategy for participatory democracy on a city level would involve a demonstrated commitment to public participation. When public officials and other

leaders make strong, clear claims about the value of participation, they can help inspire citizens to get involved. Cities with a coherent regulatory and policy framework for participation are more likely to succeed.

Boards and commissions can be a powerful tool for public participation, especially if the members of these bodies believe that bringing other citizens to the table – not just representing their voices – is a key part of their role. When communities support regular, interactive, and meaningful participation on a broad range of issues, they are better able to meet the diverse needs and goals of citizens.

There are many different methods, tools, apps, and meeting formats for public participation. Because different tactics fit different goals and scenarios, and because citizens have diverse needs and goals, cities are more likely to succeed if they employ a wide variety of methods. While efforts to increase transparency and open government may not be sufficient to increase public participation, they are essential complements to participation initiatives. Transparency can increase government accountability, decrease corruption, and enable citizen problem-solving efforts by giving civic technologists access to government data.

Public participation is more likely to improve over time if it is being evaluated in regular, transparent, and interactive ways. If citizens themselves are involved in measuring and assessing engagement initiatives and structures, they will have a greater stake in the success of those efforts, and more ways to ensure that participation is equitable, accountable, and productive.

Methodology

The Participatory City Index analysis is based on a questionnaire involving 69 questions grouped in ten indicators. Including a set of sub-questions for some of the 69 questions, the cities can gain a maximum of 94 points. The points are converted into a percentage measure to ensure the comparability of results. The ten indicators include commitment, regulatory and policy framework, advisory boards and commissions, civic associations, range of issues, range of tactics, grassroots problem-solving, young people, transparency, and monitoring and evaluation. The index serves as a tool of self-assessment for the cities to critically evaluate and improve their structures for citizen participation.

Taking into account that a growing number of new cities are willing to join the Participatory Index, it might be decided to compare the cities not only within the entire sample, but also according to specific criteria to be developed (e.g. size of the city, number of inhabitants). It is believed that this approach would allow for more valid and useful comparison, visual presentation and filtering of the results.

Bolton – an overview¹

Bolton is a large town situated in Greater Manchester, in the north west of England, with a population of about 285,000. The current Metropolitan Borough of Bolton was created in 1974 and encompasses the townships of Bolton, Farnworth, Kearsley, Horwich, Westhoughton, Little Lever, Blackrod and South Turton, all of which retain their own unique characters, identity and history.

Bolton itself vaunts a magnificent Town Hall, pedestrian-friendly shopping streets, an acclaimed theatre and a new University.

Bolton has always been an active town. Known as work-town, in its heyday as an industrial manufacturing town the skyline was indeed a forest of chimneys, most of which served the textile industry, of which Bolton was a world-famous centre. Heavy engineering, foundries, bleaching, tanning and coal mining were also major employers. Very few of the chimneys - or old industries - now remain today.

The number of citizens eligible to vote in the city is circa 200,000 residents, according to the latest census.

¹ The overview of the city is inspired by the city's official webpage: [http:// www.bolton.gov.uk](http://www.bolton.gov.uk)



Commitment

The optimal strategy for participatory democracy on a city level would involve a demonstrated commitment to public participation. Citizens are often doubtful about their ability to help solve public problems, and sceptical about the willingness of public officials to respond to their concerns. When public officials and other leaders make strong, clear claims about the value of participation, they can help inspire citizens to get involved.

It is highly commendable that the city of Bolton, in order to systematize its participation strategy, is developing a **participation plan, an official long-term strategy** guiding the participation efforts of different departments in a coordinated manner. Currently, the local administration does not produce an annual report in order to keep informed its citizens about participation progresses of the city on the state of public participation. However, a **newsletter** and some other regular bulletin inform citizens about what city government is doing, and how they can participate. The city maintains also active social media accounts to keep in touch with its citizens.

Council meetings in Bolton **are open** to the public; however the city **has not** established a participation commission (an official body, broadly representative of the city's population, which is charged with overseeing public participation). We encourage the city to establish such a commission since a participation council could provide opportunities for Bolton's community development, enhance a genuine engagement of its citizens, and offer people the capabilities needed to participate and deliberate well. This is important, especially if citizens are disengaged and certain groups within the population are marginalized.

Furthermore, effective engagement by the citizens requires a political support for the genuine devolution of the decision-making process. Therefore, we encourage the city of Bolton to formally adopt a public statement declaring the importance of public engagement and explaining how citizens can participate.

In Bolton there exist opportunities for citizens to give input on how participation should be structured and supported and to vote for particular policy options. Last but not least, the city of Bolton **supports** citizen engagement by recognizing

citizens, public officials, or other leaders for their efforts to support public participation in different ways, although it does not have an annual awards programme.

Best Practice

Pittsburgh's Citizen Participation Plan (CPP) for the 2010-2014²

A five year consolidated plan used a combination of civic and community engagement methods to include citizens and civic society in the planning process. The overall goal of the housing, homeless and anti-poverty, community and economic development, and planning programs covered by the Five Year Consolidated Plan is to strengthen cooperation with other jurisdictions and to develop partnerships among all levels of government and the private sector. Profit and non-profit organisations would provide decent housing, establish and maintain a suitable living environment, and extend economic opportunities for every resident in Pittsburgh. The goals and objectives are assigned a priority that the City will address in a ranking system of high, medium, low, and no such need. Different components of the planning process for the plan included round table discussions, surveys with local housing providers, social service agencies, and community and economic development organizations. Also there were citizen surveys, two public hearings, and multiple advertisements in Pittsburgh newspapers.

The Citizen Participation Plan is included as part of the consolidated plan in order to ensure that citizens have a voice in the city's development. The CPP also serves as the funding applications for various programs under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), including Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Home Investment Partnership (HOME), Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG), and Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA); HOME and HOPWA are administered by community groups.

The CPP is included in the Annual Action Plan which has many components to gather citizen participation. Requests for proposals for funding (RFP's) from organisations, citizen participation process, consultation Process, and the development of the annual action plan are all categorized as different components. Each component of this plan principally serves the needs of the low-and moderate-

The Mayor of Pittsburgh had to ultimately approve of the plan. Finally, the Five Year Plan was officially developed to improve the quality of life for all residents of the city of Pittsburgh. The city also circulated a Citizen Questionnaire through email, the City's website, and manually passed out at roundtable meetings.

Many of the comments from citizens and civic society were incorporated into the Five Year Plan. If the final plan did not incorporate the input provided by citizens and civic society during the draft's comment period and the second public hearing, the text of the final plan included an explanation of the decision to reject the suggestion. Ultimate impacts of the Five Year Plan were assessed in 2014. Survey

² <http://participedia.net/en/cases/pittsburghs-citizen-participation-plan>

of participants and the public helped determine whether or not the plan and the CPP successfully improved the city, especially regarding housing needs.

The Tuscany Regional Participation Policy, Italy³

The Tuscany Regional Participation Policy - TRPP is an innovative and important tool for the institutionalisation of participation and deliberation permanently within the state (through the Tuscan regional laws No 69/2007 and No 46/2013). The TRPP is a pioneer initiative in the Italian and European context and it can be considered one of the first examples of participatory politics inspired by the concept of deliberative system. In certain cases or projects, municipal governments and private companies can share a minor part of the funding. The Tuscan system acts to promote participation as a regular form of government at multiple scales and involving various bodies and sectors of the public administration and civil society, in both regional and local level.

The main purposes of Law 46/2013 - which enriches the previous legal tool - are contained in Article 1, which declares that the Law aims at "contributing to renew democracy and its institutions by integrating them with practices, processes and tools of participatory democracy", and, thus, seeks to contribute to the creation of "greater social cohesion, through the diffusion of a culture of participation, and valuing all forms of civic engagement, knowledge and skills disseminated in society".

Between the other main purposes of the Law the following are also worth to mention:

- strengthening, through participation, the capacity of building, defining and implementing public policies;
- promoting participation as a regular form of administration and government;
- creating and promoting new forms of communication and exchange between institutions and society;
- valuing the skills, spread knowledge and competences existing in society, also by making low represented interest more visible;
- developing and disseminating new technologies of information and communication as tools for democratic participation of citizens.

The cross-cutting nature of participatory experiments in different sectors of the regional action increased recently, thanks to the creation of a Regional Ministry of Participation (which is in the hand of a powerful minister, also in charge of budget, financial issues and human resources) which collaborates in several events with the APP. It also funds "Open Toscana", a web-platform that hosts free websites for all the participatory processes in the region, realizing open data on them.

³ <http://participedia.net/en/cases/tuscany-regional-participation-policy-italy>
<http://open.toscana.it/web/participa>



Regulatory and policy framework

In many places, the regulations governing public participation are outdated and unclear. In other places, public officials and staff do not have the participation skills and resources they need. Cities with a coherent regulatory and policy framework for participation are more likely to succeed.

The city of Bolton has **concrete regulations and policies** that govern public participation. These regulations are reviewed on a regular basis. Moreover, public officials, staff, and citizens do **understand** how the laws governing public participation are being interpreted and applied. However, the city **does not** have a well-used, widely known document – a policy, protocol, or set of procedures – that helps public officials, staff, and citizens understand when and why to use specific participation approaches and how a specific approach can impact policy decisions.

In Bolton, it is difficult to quantify the city budgets for public participation as well as the staff the city employs to support public participation activities.

Positively, Bolton's public administration provides **training opportunities for public officials and city staff** who want to learn more about how to support effective participation; and it facilitates, encourage, and supporting public participation included as a category in the job expectations of people serving in management-level positions for the city.

Best Practices

*Action Planning*⁴

Action Planning is an approach, rather than a specific method, which helps focus ideas and decide what steps you need to take to achieve particular goals. It is a statement of what you want to achieve over a given period of time. Preparing an action plan is a good way to help reach objectives (this can apply to organisations and individuals). An effective action plan should give a definite timetable and set of clearly defined steps; for each objective there should be a separate action plan.

⁴ <http://participationcompass.org/article/show/152>

Action Planning is commonly used for town planning purposes on issues such as development, regeneration and identifying existing problems in an area. It is often local interest groups that come together to address the issues. These groups can consist of experts from different professions such as town planning and architecture, but can also include local citizens.

Action Plan events are generally structured in 5 phases:

1. A meeting of stakeholders, professionals and citizens where the issues are raised and investigated.
2. A series of topic and design workshops which are open to everyone.
3. A brainstorming of the ideas raised in the workshops.
4. An analysis of the ideas that have been put forward in the form of proposals.
5. The agreed proposals will be published in a report along with an outline of actions to be taken.

*Participatory Training*⁵

Participatory Training provides training and support for people who want to use participatory methods in their work to involve and engage others. This includes community consultation and research by involving community members in identifying priorities, developing solutions and action planning. They help people with community consultations by providing training for local residents and professionals.

⁵ <http://www.participedia.net/en/organizations/participatory-training>



Advisory boards and commissions

Boards and commissions can be a powerful tool for public participation, especially if the members of these bodies believe that bringing other citizens to the table – not just representing their voices – is a key part of their role.

The city does not motivate citizens' participation through **advisory boards and commissions** on which citizens can serve.

Moreover, the city **does not** hold meetings of such boards structured and facilitated in ways that encourage productive dialogue, deliberation, and participation. We remind the city of Bolton that citizens' dialogues are critical for developing responsive, effective, sustainable, evidence-informed policy. Perhaps a roundtable process using online tools would be much more effective for acquiring broad input from the Bolton's population, refining policy directions and forming the necessary consensus among its citizens.

Best Practice

Citizen Advisory Groups⁶

Citizen advisory committees involve citizens who sit as a group to inform and advise decision making over an extended period of time. Advisory committees can create effective and on-going dialogue that allow issues and citizen's concerns to be explored in depth, and ideally addressed, while the participants are still involved. Such committees can take many different forms depending on the exact purpose of the group. The group may meet on a regular basis and it can either be a representative sample of the local population, representatives of particular groups (for example, minorities) or specific individuals, such as community leaders.

In setting up an advisory group the city council should consider key principles:

⁶ <http://www.participationcompass.org/article/show/169>
<http://www.participedia.net/en/methods/citizen-advisory-board>

1. The selection of participants is crucial. Those who are most affected should be considered first and there should be an attempt to benefit from a spread of expertise amongst the participants.

2. Participants should be provided with all the necessary information to reach informed decisions on issues.

3. Participants should understand that there is a goal to be sought and the different values, problems and benefits of each decision should be weighed accordingly when attempting to reach it.

4. The participants' decisions and/or recommendations should be respected. Whereas this ought to apply for every instance, it is of particular importance for those groups that meet over a long period of time and cover a spread of issues. If the participants feel their time is being wasted they will not attend or contribute.

As for the strength of such groups, it is important to understand that they can provide an early warning of potential problems and be a useful sounding board to test plans and ideas. Regular meetings over extended periods of time give participants a chance to get to know each other, which can help discussions. Citizens can introduce a fresh perspective to discussions, encouraging innovation. Citizen involvement increases accountability in governance through due to the more transparent process.

Citizen Councils of Grenoble (France)⁷

France has expressed its desire for the enhancement of participative democracy with the implementation of the "law on local democracy". Aiming at strengthening citizens' power within towns that have at least 3,500 inhabitants, this law encouraged a lot of cities, like Grenoble, to develop participative processes. In 2002, Grenoble founded six participatory citizen councils for the six areas that composed the city. These "*conseils consultatifs de secteurs*" (CCS) have allowed citizens residing within the six different districts to give their opinions about municipal projects and to express their concerns about the development of Grenoble.

Since 2002, residents of the city of Grenoble have been able to express their opinions and make recommendations on city planning, education, cultural life, and other municipal issues.

Any citizen interested in participating in an event can do so. Participants are self-selected and can participate on a volunteer basis. Information about how to join is disseminated via pamphlets, posters, and online websites. Each CCS involves a structure in which citizens and public officials share power, with an elected representative and a citizen serving as co-presidents. CCSs additionally involve three separate groups, each composed of about 50 people (the first one composed of motivated citizens, the second of associations, and the third of specific

⁷ <http://participedia.net/en/cases/citizen-councils-grenoble-france>
<http://www.grenoble.fr/461-conseils-citoyens-independants.htm>

associations of the district). In addition, specific task groups are open to any citizen and are often organized to broaden the points of view on the different projects. Most of the plenary committees are held publicly so that the population can contribute its opinion. Recently, the city council has encouraged CCSs to make a special effort to involve young people, the elderly, and non-national residents in the process.

Grenoble's mayor and city council are responsible for organizing and overseeing the CCS program. Special liaisons exist in order to facilitate communication between the city's central government and the citizen councils. Every CCS is allocated a sum of €11,000 per year. This amount, however, is directed toward the functioning of the committees themselves, rather than the implementation of their proposals. The city government ultimately decides whether or not to pursue the recommendations of the CCSs and is thus responsible for financing the projects. Every CCS has to meet at least once every three months in a plenary committee in order to discuss the main projects of Grenoble.

The majority of people involved in the CCSs claim that they are satisfied and would like to get even more involved in future projects of their city. At the end of the day, citizen participation, even if limited, was one of the main objectives behind the creation of the CCSs. Considering that the CCSs' organization and their role have evolved considerably between 2002 and 2011, becoming increasingly involved in every decision taken by the city Council, one may assume that their power and weight will grow within the next few years.



Civic associations

Many cities have civic associations, operating in neighbourhoods, schools, and other settings, which help to engage people in public life. These associations are better able to contribute to public participation when they are inclusive, broadly supported, and well-connected to government.

Positively, in Bolton citizens are involved and engaged through Area Forums and Neighbourhood groups which have an official role in public decisions. Moreover, in the majority of neighbourhoods there are active neighbourhood associations. The meetings of neighbourhood groups are structured and facilitated in ways that encourage productive dialogue, deliberation, and participation. Furthermore, it is worth noticing that in Bolton there is a system of tracking who participates in neighbourhood groups and neighbourhood meetings. However, the city of Bolton does not support training programs or other supports that help build the engagement capacity of neighbourhood groups.

Positively, **the leadership of most neighbourhood groups is broadly representative**, in terms of age, race/ethnicity, income level, and immigrant/native-born.

City employees are **also tasked with maintaining communication** between neighbourhood groups and local government.

In Bolton there is an **active online network** in the majority of all schools which is structured and facilitated in ways that encourage productive dialogue, deliberation, and participation. As from the local government's side, the employees are tasked with maintaining communication with the schools. Unfortunately, the school system does not support training programs or other supports that help build the engagement capacity of parent groups. Moreover, the leadership of parent groups should be broadly representative of the school population, in terms of age, race/ethnicity, income level, and immigrant/native-born.

Faith communities, clubs and social groups along with ethnic associations –help engage large numbers of people in public decision-making and problem-solving in Bolton, widely using spaces for public participation events and activities.

On the other hand, community organizing or issue advocacy groups do not help engage large numbers of people in public decision-making and problem-solving.

Best Practice

Les Rendez-vous de quartier – Neighbourhood Meetings in Angers⁸

The City of Angers is committed to giving every inhabitant the opportunity to participate in local life, its neighbourhood, its citizens' dialogue and its associative dynamics. "Neighbourhood meetings" are part of this approach.

Once per week, in each neighbourhood of the city, the municipal team meets the inhabitants to listen to them, gather information about citizens' expectations, their requests, and their projects, and simply talk about their daily lives.

San Jose's Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative empowers residents⁹

The City of San Jose's Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative has received much praise since its inception in 2000. With the local redevelopment agency as a partner, the city developed a program that empowered residents from 19 low-income and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods to propose and prioritize improvement projects in their neighbourhoods. San Jose invested \$104 million to implement more than 75% of the resident-proposed projects. Even with the economic downturn and the loss of redevelopment dollars, the city has been able to sustain a level of community engagement through a Neighbourhood Council. The city council has now made the Neighbourhood Council a permanent part of its decision-making process.

The program highlights:

- In its 10-year span, the Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative opened up the decision-making process to a new group of residents and let them set the agenda and priorities for projects in their neighbourhood, rather than voting on proposals that originated at the city level.
- The program's design empowered residents and created an expectation that community members will be actively involved in decisions that affect their lives and neighbourhoods.
- The initiative produced a new generation of neighbourhood and community leaders. Some residents went on to join the planning commission and lead citywide task forces. Others were elected to the Neighbourhood Council and continue to work with neighbourhood associations to strengthen city-resident partnerships.
- Despite the economic downturn in 2010 and the state government's dissolution of redevelopment agencies in 2012, the spirit of the Strong

⁸1) www.angers.fr/projets-et-politiques/democratie-participative/rendez-vous-de-quartier

2) http://www.angers.fr/fileadmin/plugin/tx_dcdownloads/DP_journees_participation_01.pdf

3) http://www.angers.fr/actualites/videos/index.html?tx_angersvideos_pi1%5Bpointer%5D=17&tx_angersvideos_pi1%5Bvideo_id%5D=662

⁹ <http://www.sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?NID=1745>

<http://www.sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?NID=2105>

Neighbourhoods Initiative remains intact. The San Jose City Council voted in 2013 to make an extension of the program, the Neighbourhoods Commission, a permanent means of involving the community in local decision making.

Lessons Learned:

The dedicated staff of 35 people played a critically important role in implementing San Jose's Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative. When staff was reduced to four in 2009, the program began losing momentum.

The residents originally became involved in the program because of the projects, but stayed because they felt a sense of community, success and empowerment.

Having three representatives from each district serve on the Neighbourhood Council made it difficult to reach consensus. The council voted to reduce the number to two.

One element of the program remains: the Neighbourhoods Commission is a 30-member advisory group that contains with three members from each of the city's 10 council districts. Interested residents send applications to the City Clerk's Office, and are designated through a neighbourhood caucus process by their peers, and forwarded to city council for appointment.

Public engagement remains a consistent and important part of the city's culture. Each September since 2009, non-profit groups join the city and San Jose State University to hold a conference designed to highlight community engagement and community leaders. Neighbourhood groups and their leaders from throughout the city are invited to learn how to make their neighbourhoods safe, organized and attractive at a Neighbourhood Development Training Conference. Awards are given to selected residents for their outstanding community engagement efforts. Several hundred people attend the conference each year.

San Francisco Interfaith Council to assist in getting Information out to the Community¹⁰

When local officials in San Francisco need to get information to the community, they often turn to the San Francisco Interfaith Council, a network of 800 congregations. For instance, a city attorney letter assuring immigrant residents that participation in the 2010 census would not put them at risk was e-mailed to Interfaith Council congregations. The Interfaith Council Executive Director reports that such information reaches congregants through worship services and congregational media. Officials have also worked through the Interfaith Council to alert the public to the danger of hate crimes and to inform low-income residents about how to cash checks and file taxes. Established after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, the SF Interfaith Council holds an annual conference to help

¹⁰ <http://www.sfinterfaithcouncil.org/ongoing-programs>
<http://www.ca-ilg.org/case-story/san-francisco-ca-san-francisco-turns-san-francisco-interfaith-council-assist-getting>

congregations partner with local officials and humanitarian organizations to address disaster preparedness and recovery efforts.



Range of issues

Most cities face a range of challenges and opportunities that affect citizens and that deserve productive public participation. When communities support regular, interactive, and meaningful participation on a broad range of issues, they are better able to meet the diverse needs and goals of citizens.

The city of Bolton has experimented with a range of different issues to involve citizens in policy-making.

The issues could include, inter alia, planning and land use, public health, education, budgeting and public finance, transportation, policing and public safety, or racism and cultural difference.

A high quality citizen participation in each of the fields would need to involve large numbers of people (at least 5% of the population), except for budgeting, transportation, policy and public safety, and leisure. On the other hand, the residents who participate are broadly representative of the larger population, with the only exception for transportation, policy and public safety, racism and cultural differences, and leisure; however the participation is interactive and it facilitates two-way communication between citizens and government, and among different kinds of citizens. Overall, in Bolton there are not opportunities to participate at least once a month, although the participation experience provides people with the information they need. Indeed, the participation experiences give people a chance to discuss why the issue matters to them and provide people with a range of choices or policy choices to consider. Besides, the participation activities has a clear impact on policymaking and enable people to take action in a variety of ways (e.g. as volunteers, or in committees or task forces, or through other groups and networks in the community). Most importantly, participation activities in different fields (racism and cultural difference, policing and public safety, education, public health, planning and land use) should be more enjoyable for people. Moreover, in Bolton there are meaningful opportunities to participate on other key public issues such as leisure. However, we would like to stress the need of improving the participation also for other issue of citizens' concern, notably transportation and

budgeting, culture, sports, elderly, disabled, day-care, environment, development & cooperation.

Best Practice

Participatieraad (Participation Council), Netherlands¹¹

The Participatieraad (participation council) is a permanent institution that has been set up by the municipality of Haarlem, in the Netherlands, to give solicited and unsolicited advice to the municipal council. Its aim is to make sure that the opinions and interests of all citizens are heard and taken into account in the formulation of policy, including those from groups which are traditionally less able to find their way through the bureaucracy of local politics. To this end, the council consists of 15 people roughly representative of the population of the city on a number of characteristics, and aims to actively engage additional citizens who are directly affected by the particular policy under discussion at any given time.

The purpose of the Participatieraad is to offer solicited and unsolicited advice to the municipality council and to structurally involve citizens more in municipal policy, especially on three key 'domains':

- Healthcare, housing and wellbeing
- Work and income
- Diversity and the multicultural society.

Some people find it easier to become involved with municipal policy than others, and so a second key purpose of the Participatieraad is to make sure its members represent the general population of Haarlem and to encourage them to reach out to more people where-ever this is appropriate.

The Participatieraad was founded by the municipality of Haarlem and its three older advisory councils. Although the council is supposed to be fully independent, it is financed fully by the municipality of Haarlem.

The budget of the Participatieraad is determined by the municipality in its decision to support its founding with a total budget of €55.410.

In addition, the municipality has reserved €13.000 in its own budget for support of the Participatieraad.

Membership of the Participatieraad needs to fulfil two criteria:

- be representative of the general population of Haarlem regarding: origin, gender, age, illness-status, employment-status, and other relevant characteristics;
- be fairly distributed in primary interest across the aforementioned three focus areas.

¹¹ <http://participedia.net/en/cases/participatieraad-participation-council-netherlands>
<http://participatieraadhaarlem.nl/>

In addition, they need to reside within the municipality of Haarlem, and cannot have any direct business ties with the municipality, be employed by the municipality, or hold any representative position.

The Participatieraad organizes monthly public meetings. These meetings are held on the first Tuesday of every month, and an effort is made to make them known to as many people as possible. To give an indication, in the February 2014 meeting 140 participants joined in. These people are obviously self-selected though.

Furthermore, so far the Participatieraad has succeeded in generating enough public interest to function as a more open and inclusive advisory council.

Participatory Transportation Planning "Buona Mobilità" (Emilia-Romagna, Italy)¹²

In 2010 the Emilia-Romagna Region approved law no. 3/10 regarding citizen participation in decisions of public interest. The Region used this method in the development of a new regional transport plan. The current Regional Integrated Transportation Plan covered the time period 1998-2010. When drafting the new law, the Region decided to use participation as a mean to gather suggestions and solutions concerning transport and mobility issues. The Regional Department of Territorial Planning promoted the event that was supported by an outside firm (*Avventura Urbana*).

The main goals of this participatory project were to:

- Convey to the participants the outcomes of the previous Regional Planning Conference, which gathered local authorities and other stakeholders to discuss about strategies and targets of the new Regional Integrated Transportation Plan for the period 2010-2020;
- improve the quality of regional actions and projects, with particular attention to the relationship between administration and citizens;
- involve citizens and institutional stakeholders in a common process of listening useful for the next transport plan;
- gather experiences, points of view and suggestions about issues of regional transport and mobility
- obtain a precise frame of citizens' priorities to pick out the best methods of communication to make the citizens aware about the issues of transport and mobility

The final goal of the project "Buona Mobilità", inspired by the regional law no.3/10 on participation, was the draft of a document of participatory proposals, which represents an innovative mean for the elaboration of the Regional Plan alongside the Preliminary Document and the Regional Planning Conference.

¹² <http://participedia.net/en/cases/participatory-transportation-planning-buona-mobilit-emilia-romagna-italy>

*21st Century Town Meeting*¹³

21st Century Town Meetings are Town Meetings as open fora for citizens to deliberate and decide on political issues employing modern communication technologies.

The participants in 21st Century Town Meetings are usually ordinary citizens who have no particular expertise in the topic under discussions. They are not stakeholders or professional lobbyists. Demographic targets for participants are set, according to census or other relevant data. Outreach and registration is implemented by AmericaSpeaks in partnership with grassroots organizations, service providers and community leaders. Free meals, childcare, transportation, and translation are offered to overcome typical barriers to participation.

This method uses technology to overcome the common tradeoff between the quality of discussion and the size of the group. The participants are spilt up into groups of 10-12 people, where they have facilitated small-group discussions. Each facilitator uses a networked computer to instantly collate ideas and votes from the table. This information is sent to a central point where a team summarizes comments from all tables into themes that can be presented back to the room for comment or votes. Each participant also has a keypad which allows them to vote individually on themes or questions. The results of these votes are presented in real time on large screens for instant feedback from participants. The computers and voting pads generate volumes of useful demographically-sortable data. This information is often quickly edited into a report which is printed and given to participants, decision-makers and journalists at the end of the event.

The whole process can either take place within one room, or groups can gather in many locations around the country or the world. Often, the participants are selected to be demographically representative of the whole population.

The interchange between the small- and large-scale dialogues is powerful as it allows participants to discuss the issues in a small manageable setting, whilst maintaining the legitimacy of a process involving large numbers of people. The immediacy of the vote also creates transparency during the meeting.

At the start of a 21st Century Town Meeting, voting keypads are used to measure the demographics of attendees and publicly compare participants with that of the community.

¹³ <http://participedia.net/en/methods/21st-century-town-meeting>



Range of tactics

There are many different methods, tools, apps, and meeting formats for public participation. Because different tactics fit different goals and scenarios, and because citizens have diverse needs and goals, cities are more likely to succeed if they employ a wide variety of methods.

The city of Bolton has used different methods and tactics to support public participation and involve citizens in policy-making. Starting with Surveys and Polls – both offline and online - the city has collected the citizens' opinions on different subjects. Facilitated, face-to-face small-group discussions – are used by the city of Bolton to delve more deeply into people's views and perspectives, as well as the values, needs, and concerns that lie behind people's beliefs. Genk uses this method also to test how people's opinions change when presented with different options or pieces of information.

Smartphone-based tools allow citizens residing in Bolton to enter data about particular problems and conditions, such as potholes, graffiti, and environmental hazards.

Furthermore, processes that engages large, diverse numbers of people deliberation, planning, and voting on how to spend a pool of public money are just partially put in practice. In such Public Deliberation exercises, citizens, public officials, public employees, and other stakeholders could also interact in small-group sessions where they share experiences, consider a range of policy options, and decide together what should be done.

Best Practice

*CitySwipe*¹⁴

Tinder for urban planning might sound strange but is already a reality in Santa Monica (USA). City authorities are trying to gauge public opinion on everything from street furniture and parking, to murals and market stalls for their forthcoming urban plan, using a digital tool modelled on a dating app.

This app presents local residents with images of potential scenarios and simple yes/no questions, encouraging people to swipe through the options, as if assessing prospective partners. For the time being, it's fairly basic: a photo of some street art appears with a caption asking: "Do you want more of this?" Folding cafe tables and chairs are shown next to pink park benches, asking: "Which do you prefer?"

The questions move on to attitudes towards walking, bike lanes, housing and beyond. It makes the consultation process effortless, compared with the usual feedback mechanisms of filling in mailing-out response forms, or being accosted by a volunteer with a clipboard.

*Collaborative policy making: Consul*¹⁵

Consul is an e-government and e-participation digital platform software originally developed for the Madrid City government.

Since it launched in September 2015, new features have been added and other cities have started to use the software to develop their own participatory digital platforms – including Barcelona.

The main principles on which the platform is based are: open participation, transparency, the combination of online and offline participation, and citizen empowerment. The platform helps to manage the complexity of participation, which is often a challenging task for councils.

The platform brings government closer to the population by opening up direct participatory channels for policy making.

Consul allows citizens to be an active part of the city government by offering them different kinds of participatory mechanisms for direct democracy, deliberation and other collaborative political practices.

Consul allows users to launch collective debates, to propose and support proposals, to organise physical meetings, to run citizen surveys, to organize votes on how investment should be distributed, or to write laws in a collaborative way. In summary, a key value has been to integrate several functionalities into the same digital participatory platform.

¹⁴ <http://www.dtsmcityswipe.com/>

¹⁵ <http://www.decide.madrid.es>
<http://www.decidim.barcelona>

What are the main strengths?

- The platform provides an open space for sharing and discussing the things that matter to citizens;
- it allows citizens to submit proposals related to the kind of city that they want to live in;
- citizens can vote on whether to accept or reject the most supported proposals. If a proposal is accepted by the majority, the City Council accepts it as its own and makes it happen;
- it enables citizens vote to decide how to distribute investment across the city and the districts.

*Collaborative policy making: Your Priorities*¹⁶

Your Priorities is a social network app designed specifically for citizens.

It helps to connect citizens and government in order to give citizens more influence on policy and budgets while building up trust between citizens and government.

Allows citizens to submit and prioritise ideas. Ideas can be debated, with points awarded for and against and debate points prioritised. It includes a Facebook style newsfeeds for ideas, groups, communities and domains. It features activity streams and browser and email notifications. Google Maps and Google Streetview are integrated for ideas. Support for social media login and SAML for electronic IDs.

This tool has been put in action in Reykjavik. The city of Reykjavik has been using Your Priorities since 2010, both for getting citizens' voices heard at city council meetings and to gather and prioritise ideas for participatory budgeting.

But also from Rahvakogu People's Assembly in Estonia; indeed after political scandals in Estonia in 2012, grassroots organisations with official ties led a law reform project. Ideas were gathered through Your Priorities, which was installed and modified locally. Over 50,000 people took part and submitted over 2,000 proposals. The President of Estonia submitted the top 15 ideas to the Parliament, and seven of those have since become Estonian law.

¹⁶ <https://yrpri.org/>



Grassroots problem-solving

Citizens have more ways to contribute to public problem-solving than ever before. Productive public participation strategies encourage and support citizens to take action in a variety of ways.

In Bolton, participation opportunities are organised in so to allow citizens to discuss and plan ways they can take action. The city has also a small-grant program to support the implementation of action ideas. The creation of a small-grant program would support the implementation of citizens' action ideas.

However, in their public statements about the value of participation, public officials and staff do not support the idea that citizens can help contribute to solving public problems. The city does not support an annual citizens' academy or some other training program for citizens. Setting up an academy for citizens would help the city of Bolton to familiarise the public with common local police procedures, activities, opportunities and, most importantly, it would create a roadmap for a community's future. The city shall also consider setting up an annual awards program – supported by the city and/or perhaps by a non-governmental organization – which recognizes citizens for their efforts to solve public problems. Finally, Young people should play an active role for the community development, and perhaps contribute a certain number of volunteer hours before graduation.

Best Practice

Participatory Appraisal¹⁷

Participatory Appraisal (PA) is a broad empowerment approach that seeks to build community knowledge and encourages grassroots action. It uses a lot of visual methods, making it especially useful for participants who find other methods of participation intimidating or complicated. PA uses visual and flexible tools to ensure that everyone can join in regardless of background. It can be carried out in a place where people already meet in their everyday lives. One example of a PA would include mapping where participants draw their local area. They identify key features such as the facilities available, residential areas and the locations of service providers. Since the best applications of PA are long-term, this method can be a good choice for the first meeting as it is not intensive and allows everyone to feel more comfortable. PA can be extremely inclusive, flexible, and empowering if run well.

Participation Days in Angers¹⁸

In 2005 and 2008 this French city also created the 'days of local democracy'. To this day there have been consultation processes experiments with inhabitants, notably for urban planning projects like the redesigning of the canal banks or the tram route. In February 2011 the city of Angers organized the 'Participation Days' in order to review previous work which serves as a basis as a renewed link between local institutions, associations, and citizens. The other objective of the event was to listen to inhabitants' opinions in order to facilitate and promote the public decision concerning the citizens. The slogan of the participation days was 'listen to know, know to act'.

The days of participation took place during two days, 18 and 19 February 2011. They were split in two phases. The first, the 18th, consisted of a meeting between local elected representations and individuals already involved in participatory actions. Workshops were organized in the morning in order to define the respective roles of different representatives in instituting structures and upcoming participatory processes. An assessment of accomplished worked by the neighbourhood advisory councils was executed in the afternoon. This was followed by a debate on possible consequences provided by these measures.

The second phase on the 19th was open to all citizens, including non-inhabitants of Angers regardless of their involvement in this process. Everyone was able to sign up for the workshops through the city website. Those who did not sign up were also able to participate in a series of conferences and were able to visit the 'village of participation', a series of 25 informative stands where the associations were represented.

Four thematic workshops were organized the 19 February in order to offer all citizens the opportunity to discuss important subjects with officials and experts.

¹⁷ <http://participationcompass.org/article/show/137>

¹⁸ http://dailymotion.virgilio.it/video/xh7yra_les-journe-es-de-la-participation-angers_news

These four workshops were named 'call to action in my neighborhood', 'invent the city of the future', 'create a social link', 'from knowledge of usage to the public decision'. In order to create an informed debate and encourage public speaking, the workshops were preceded by 7 roundtables on school, the role of associations, public roads, solidarity (with particular attention paid to senior citizens), the youth, sports, and culture. During these roundtables, experts, association members, and officials presented an assessment on the current situation and proposed various projects.

The workshops took place during the afternoon in small committees of approximately 15 people. The announced projects were debated and participants were considered as 'expert users'.

After the success and popularity of the participation days, the arrangements put into place to promote the days have remained in force (most particularly the neighbourhood advisories) and others have gone on to be created, like for example the youth council. The participation days are to take place every two years, alternating with the Agora forum which concentrations on the promotion of voluntary sector.



As the adult citizens of the future, young people need experiences and education that prepare them for their future roles. But young people can also be dynamic leaders in the present. Productive participation strategies tap into the present and future civic capacity of young people.

Positively, in Bolton young people have meaningful opportunities to address key issues facing students and the schools. Moreover, outside the school system, there are meaningful opportunities for young people to take part in public decision-making and problem-solving. Additionally, Bolton's municipality fully supports a youth council as well; besides, people who take part in the youth council are broadly representative of the larger youth population, in terms of age, race/ethnicity, income level, and immigrant/native-born. This youth council also presents recommendations to local government, and it regularly organises participation opportunities that bring other young people to the table.

Best Practice

Public funds and Chicago youth¹⁹

For the past four years, the 49th Ward's public budgeting committee has been working directly with a group of 15 students from Sullivan High School, a community school in the Rogers Park neighbourhood. To fulfil the school mandate of involving youth in community politics, the students have been developing and proposing projects for PB funding cycles. Through schools involvement young people gain the skills to present in front of a large crowd without getting nervous or feeling like people won't listen.

One Chicago community has been not only democratizing public budgeting, but also getting the 49th Ward, a political district was the first in the city to introduce participatory budgeting. Used around the world, the practice typically involves a city's residents proposing and voting on projects funded by public money.

¹⁹ <http://www.ward49.com/participatory-budgeting/>
<http://www.ward49.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/PB-Presentation-2016-17.pdf>

The structure varies in each city (and within cities), but engaged communities will generally have a leadership committee. In Chicago, such a committee collaborated with the alderman to put a call out for participation. Residents get together to identify community needs and then collaboratively direct local spending toward projects that address those needs. There are no age or documentation restrictions to getting involved, but only youth ages 16 and older can vote. Adults in this district make space for young people in the projects, and youth in the feel part of the community. Black and Latino students from Sullivan High School, represents the diversity of Rogers Park neighbourhood. Last year, the group successfully won the community's votes to add bus stop benches along major bus routes near the school, and to also add street and alley lights around Sullivan and Kilmer elementary school.

Youth Participatory District Councils²⁰

The Youth Participatory District Council is a space of permanent participation made up by councillors elected in the neighbourhood assemblies in the first round of the Participatory Budget (PPJoven). Once the first round is concluded, the totality of the councillors reunites and determines what will be the mode of operation of the youth participatory council which is coordinated by a technical team in the Youth Centre.

The main function of the Participatory Council is to systematize and re-elaborate the demands made by their peers, by additionally identifying the responsibilities which each one of the jurisdictions of the state (municipal, provincial, national) in each given demand. Accordingly, the councillors can develop projects which, in the first place, were presented before the city mayor and the municipal cabinet for its technical and financial evaluation which will be discussed between all of the youth which participates in the second round.

Two principal reasons were at the source of interest in this initiative. The first was low turnout among the youth and the second is the representative political crisis which has affected the country since the end of the 90s. This especially affects the youth population, thereby generating widespread apathy and lack of motivation concerning participation in political matters.

The PPJoven has the followed general objectives:

- Enlarge the capabilities of the youth to achieve social and political inclusion starting with the recognition of their rights as citizens;
- strengthen relations between the local state and youth civil society organizations to generate connections which aim to ameliorate the quality of life among the youth in particular and society in general.

As specific objectives it states:

- Promote and diffuse the PP of Rosario among the youth;

²⁰ <http://participedia.net/en/cases/participatory-budget-joven-de-rosario>

- create discussion and debate spaces concerning the problems concerning participatory democracy, citizen rights, and management controls on municipal matters.



Transparency

While efforts to increase transparency and open government may not be sufficient to increase public participation, they are essential complements to participation initiatives. Transparency can increase government accountability, decrease corruption, and enable citizen problem-solving efforts by giving civic technologists access to government data.

On this note, it is positive that the city has a website. The website is enriched by live streaming of public meetings with opportunities for remote interaction by citizens.

Likewise, the city releases data on public services and public meetings and it does on financial data too.

Cities worldwide have already started opening up their data. Through application programming interfaces (APIs), they are making government information both readable and writable, thus enabling people not only to view and use information, but also to add it. Unfortunately, the city of Bolton does not support Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) or support efforts to help the local civic tech community use public data and help citizens understand and use public data.

Best Practice

*What Works Cities*²¹

What Works Cities is designed to accelerate cities' use of data and evidence to improve people's lives. Launched by Bloomberg Philanthropies in April 2015, What Works Cities is a US national initiative to help 100 mid-sized American cities enhance their use of data and evidence to improve services, inform local decision-making and engage residents.

²¹ <https://whatworkscities.bloomberg.org/about/>

What Works Cities are located in every region of the United States and in 36 states. They include cities just getting started with data and evidence and other cities that are more advanced and seeking to expand their "what works" practice. All have publicly committed to enhance their use of data and evidence to improve services, inform local decision making and engage residents. By adopting the WWC Standard, they are a part of a national network of local governments committed to using data to improve performance and results that make their residents' lives better.

OpenGov.gr - The Greek Open Government Initiative²²

Opengov.gr has been designed to serve the principles of transparency, deliberation, collaboration and accountability and includes three initiatives:

- Open calls for the recruitment of public administration officials. Top level and mid-level openings in the public sector are available on the Internet. Applications are submitted on-line using a platform available on the opengov.gr website. See the latest Open Calls here (in Greek).
- Electronic deliberation. Almost every piece of draft legislation or even policy initiative by the government, are posted in a blog like platform prior to their submission to parliament. Citizens and organisations can post their comments, suggestions and criticisms article-by-article. See the latest Electronic deliberations here (in Greek).
- Labs OpenGov. An open innovation initiative that brings together ideas and proposals from citizens, the public and the private sectors. Labs.OpenGov.gr attempts to release the power of decentralised knowledge and explore new ways to tackle modern public administration problems. See the latest Labs events here (in Greek).

New Orleans: Using Live Data to Address Abandoned Buildings²³

The city of New Orleans has long faced problems with blighted, abandoned, and derelict properties (problems made worse in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005). Broken windows, caved-in roofs, and abandoned buildings have a negative effect on the way residents think and feel about their city. Blight becomes everyone's problem when it leads to increased crime and lower property values throughout neighbourhoods. This is a problem faced by many cities across the world. After Hurricane Katrina hit, the city of New Orleans had 35,000 abandoned properties and no restoration tracking system to address them. Original estimates made the creation of such a system a 3-year multimillion-dollar project.

To tackle this problem, the City of New Orleans partnered with the non-profit technology organization Code for America to create a public-facing web platform to help residents report on new properties and track those already being processed by the city's enforcement system. By merging live data from across multiple city departments into a simple interface, this newly created web platform, BlightStatus, helped to tell clear stories about individual properties, and what was being done to deal with them, in a way that anybody could understand. The platform kept citizens

²² <http://www.opengov.gr/en/>

²³ <https://blightstatus.nola.gov/>

informed and equipped city officials with the data they needed to tackle the problem in an efficient and data-driven manner, saving the city millions of dollars.

*Citizen notifications*²⁴

Citizen notification is a service that lets citizens sign up to receive information on municipal decisions of interest to them; using the municipal open API on town hall agendas, the platform allow citizens to sign up to be notified about several decisions.

Currently in use in Helsinki, it also offers citizens the opportunity to participate in decisions that involve their municipality, and crowd sources content that can then be used in the decision making process. Its aim is to create more online and offline political engagement.

The tool allows citizens to search for municipal decisions that match their interests. Once a citizen has performed a search, they are given the option of subscribing to future municipal decisions which match their search criteria. Their email address and search criteria are then stored and emails are generated and sent when a new decision is made. On the decision pages, users can share the issues to social media and - importantly - they can open up a discussion related to that tool.

²⁴ <https://fi.okfn.org/paatokset-nakyviin/>
<http://decisions.okf.fi/>



Monitoring and Evaluation

Public participation is more likely to improve over time if it is being evaluated in regular, transparent, and interactive ways. If citizens themselves are involved in measuring and assessing engagement initiatives and structures, they will have a greater stake in the success of those efforts, and more ways to ensure that participation is equitable, accountable, and productive.

Unfortunately, the city of Bolton **does not have** a widely used, well-understood plan or **protocol for evaluating public participation processes**; neither has it published a plan or protocol for evaluating public participation processes and outcomes. **There is not** a process for tracking the long-term effects of public participation on key social indicators. In this context, **participation processes and outcomes need to be viewed through an equity lens**. The city **does not** to publish surveys, questionnaires, or other evaluation instruments that are used to **evaluate individual participation opportunities**. However, the results of evaluations are publicly available and broadly disseminated. Lastly, there are not regular opportunities for public officials, staff, and citizens to analyse participation evaluations and make recommendations.

Lastly, the city of Bolton does not provide citizens with opportunities to give feedback on how official public meetings are structured and facilitated.

Best Practice

*Delphi Survey*²⁵

A Delphi Survey is a series of questionnaires that allow experts to develop ideas about potential future developments around an issue. The questionnaires are developed throughout the process in relation to the responses given by participants.

²⁵ <http://participedia.net/en/cases/use-delphi-method-develop-horse-control-strategy>

Delphi Surveys are used to gather collective forecasts through questionnaires about likely or possible developments in particular areas. Delphi Surveys can be carried out face to face, online or by post. In online versions, participants are given their own login and password to access the site. This is useful when the expert participants are very busy people. The technique aims to derive the benefit of the opinions of a group of experts, while avoiding the disadvantages of 'group-think' and group dynamics where certain individuals dominate the discussion. The process takes place in a number of stages:

- The first questionnaire either asks the participants to individually identify issues and generate as many ideas as possible or to answer more close ended questions such as the likely dates for specific developments.
- The second questionnaire anonymously feeds back all the ideas and forecasts sent in the first round to all participants. This questionnaire also provides space for participants to refine each idea, comment on their strengths or weaknesses and to suggest new ideas.
- An additional questionnaire then summarises the input from the second questionnaire and asks for further clarification, strengths, weaknesses, and new ideas. This stage can be repeated as many times as necessary until consensus on key points is reached.
- The end product is either a consensus amongst the participants on likely and possible future developments, or a wide range of possible developments and their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Pinellas County, Florida²⁶

To evaluate its information activities, the Pinellas County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in Florida examined several indicators; including the number of hits on its website and the number of times relevant documents and maps were visited and viewed. Counting mechanisms were built directly into their website. The MPO also used a pop-up web survey to learn how citizens stayed informed about MPO activities (MPO 2008).

The MPO also developed and implemented a tracking system to capture data about its public outreach events (which could be categorized as either consult or involve). This system has a simple user interface in which staff members record data about events, including their titles, topic, date, location, and attendee numbers.

The MPO is currently working to create mechanisms to track how many comments are received and how they are handled.

²⁶ <http://www.pinellascounty.org/mpo/lrtp.htm>



The city of Bolton has an aggregate participatory city index of_.

There is a significant piece of work underway at present in Bolton to enhance participatory democracy which will include an increase in resources. Bolton is also working on this agenda at the Greater Manchester level and with the new Mayor for Greater Manchester in the context of the devolution agenda.

Overall, Bolton is discussing a wider strategy for participatory democracy given its demonstrated commitment to public participation. Indeed, a participation plan is under discussion, as well as an official long-term strategy guiding the participation efforts of different departments in a coordinated manner. To date, Bolton has a coherent regulatory and policy framework for participation, and it is commendable that the city's public administration provides training opportunities for public officials and city staff who want to learn more about how to support effective participation.

Furthermore, it is worth recalling that boards and commissions can be a powerful tool for public participation at local level. Unfortunately, Bolton has established an advisory boards on which citizens can serve. The city has also involved participation through area forums and neighbourhood groups; it has aimed to have online civic associations, specifically operating in neighbourhoods, which help to engage people in public life. It is worth reminding, however, that these associations are better able to contribute to public participation when they are inclusive, broadly supported, and well-connected to the local government.

Bolton is facing a range of challenges and opportunities that affect citizens and that deserve productive public participation. Its community supports participation on a broad range of issues including leisure. However, the city would still need to improve in terms of inclusiveness and regular support. Nonetheless, the city of Bolton uses different methods and tactics to support public participation and involve citizens in policy-making.

Definitely, Bolton would require having more ways to allow its citizens to contribute to public problem-solving than ever before. Indeed, productive public participation strategies encourage and support citizens to take action in a variety of ways.

It is excellent that in Bolton young people have meaningful opportunities to address key issues related to participation. Whereas, Bolton's efforts to increase transparency and open government may not be sufficient to increase public participation, they are essential complements to participation initiatives. Transparency can increase government accountability, enable citizen problem-solving efforts by giving civic technologists access to government data.

The findings suggest that there is space for improvement in light of participatory policies in the city. The municipality could identify useful insights and examples from other cities and civil society organisations in the fields of commitment, advisory boards and commissions, range of issues, range of tactics, grassroots problem-solving, transparency, monitoring and evaluation, and remain an active member city of the participatory democracy incubator to improve the city's index results.



When it comes to participatory policies, with reference to the survey results, the city of Bolton could enhance the all fields below, with the only exception for regulatory and policy framework, civic associations, young people, and transparency by introducing different actions, while taking into account the best practices suggested throughout index report for inspiration:



■ **Commitment:** The city should adopt a public statement declaring the importance of public engagement and explaining how citizens can participate. Establishing a participation commission, broadly representative of the city's population would be also another way to oversee public participation. The city may wish provide official opportunities for citizens to give input on how participation should be structured and supported. Furthermore, when citizens have the opportunity to vote for a particular policy option, their participation and interest to the local administration will be definitely enhanced. Finally, annual awards programs – supported by the city or perhaps by a non-governmental organization – and which recognises citizens, public officials, or other leaders for their efforts to support public participation really make a difference for the city's administration commitment and the way the local administration is perceived by its citizens.



■ **Boards and commissions:** Bolton should aim at creating an advisory board or commission so to enhance participation. Moreover, it should consider structuring and facilitating meetings of boards and commissions in ways that encourage productive dialogue, deliberation, and participation. Likewise, such boards should regularly use online tools to interactively engage the public. The most important function for an advisory board or commission is to serve as a creative source of ideas in the policy making process. A board can collect and respond to the needs of the community. This kind of approach often leads to new ideas, as this advisory body may develop into an innovative group of citizens that will suggest new alternatives to the local

administration. Perhaps, the city of Bolton may start with setting up a local issue forum, where everyone has a greater voice in local decisions and in local public policy making. Indeed, one of the most important features of a local Issues Forum is that it is citizen-driven. Anyone can introduce a topic, concern, or idea for discussion as long as it relates to an issue that impacts the quality of life in the local community. A local Issues Forum empowers individual citizens to bring their ideas, suggestions, and concerns to the forefront of public attention²⁷.

In boards and commissions, city staff members are usually assigned as a liaison to work with a board and commission. City boards should draw upon staff expertise as a resource to adequately perform their assigned functions and to provide a valuable advice. Therefore, the relationship should be mutually beneficial.

Even in communities with alert and accountable news media, information about important proposed policy changes may not get to affected citizens for some time. Advisory boards can offer a feedback link to the governing board members, as well as take information to the citizens. A synergy with local media may help with this process since the advisory board itself is usually newsworthy. As for inspiration, the city of Bolton may find interesting some best practices suggested throughout this document.



Range of issues: Reach out to larger numbers of people and actively invite them to participate in citizen deliberations; Organise citizen meetings and deliberations more frequently and give citizens the opportunity to participate at least once a month. Provide participation opportunities in additional policy areas, such as education, budgeting, transportation, policing and public safety, racism and cultural difference, and eventually leisure. Above all, create meaningful opportunities to participate on issues of budgeting and public finance.



Range of Tactics: Use online aggregation tools to examine through social media networks to find common words and strings of words. Consider using a type of polling, using handheld polling devices or smartphones, which is typically conducted as part of a face-to-face meeting. Online initiatives that enable people to ask for or donate money, and small-grant programs run by institutions to support volunteer projects are influential tactics. Online technologies that incorporate individual contributions into a central map, database, or document, in some cases, are helpful. Last but not least, processes that engages large, diverse numbers of people deliberation, planning, and voting on how to spend a pool of public money are most needed in Genk. And nonetheless, initiatives in which citizens, public officials, public employees, and other stakeholders interact in small-group sessions where they share experiences, consider a range of policy options, and decide together what should be done are also advisable.

²⁷ <http://e-democracy.org/if/guide.pdf>



Grassroots problem-solving: Bolton should support an annual citizens' academy or some other training program for citizens. As well as invite young people to contribute a certain number of volunteer hours before graduation.



Monitoring and evaluation: The city should have a protocol for evaluating public participation processes. Moreover, Bolton's administration should track the long-term effects of public participation on key social indicators. Publish surveys, questionnaires, or other evaluation instruments that are used to evaluate individual participation opportunities. Facilitate regular opportunities for public officials, staff, and citizens to analyse participation evaluations and make recommendations.

In view of the above, we wish to congratulate with the City of Bolton for the efforts taken so far. The Participation Index for Cities has shown that there is room for further improvements, and we are confident that through its participation in the Incubator for participatory democracy, and other opportunities for peer learning, the results will rapidly be visible and tangible.