



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Incubator for Participatory Democracy
World Forum for Democracy
Participation Index for Cities

Genk

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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); Reykjavik (Iceland).

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); 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 about strategies for solving expanding participatory, deliberative and direct democracy – locally and in a national 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.

Genk – an overview¹

Genk is a city and municipality located in the Belgian province of Limburg near Hasselt. It is one of the most important industrial cities in Flanders, located on the Albert Canal, between Antwerp and Liège.

The city has a population of 65.667 and it is a young city that cleverly developed on the foundations of its rich mining past: an agricultural village that grew into a true city due to its dynamics and versatility.

The city's main feature is diversity that went hand-in-hand with its mining history. Starting off with the cultural melting pot – no less than 80 nationalities, each with their own cultural values and background, live together in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The cultural symbols that came to Genk from all corners of Europe still determine its streetscape. Additionally, the historical landmarks of the city such as the monumental mining architecture and the beautiful garden suburbs blend in harmony with the new, modern architecture.

Another feature is that of a working-class town which focuses on a knowledge-based economy and wants to inspire its old economy towards innovation. The city has a great variety of residential areas, ranging from characteristic mining suburbs to monumental villas. Yet another contrast is the industrial image combined with the title of green city.

Action is the key in Genk, since this city is always working on new possibilities; it is always on the move. Genk wants to stimulate everyone's enthusiasm for life and challenge people to bring out their best.

The number of citizens eligible to vote in the city is about 46.551 residents, according to the latest census.

¹ The overview of the city is inspired by the city's official webpage: <http://www.genk.be/>



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.

The rate of achievement of the city's commitment is of 50%, slightly higher than the City sample's rate of 49%.

It is highly commendable that the city of Genk, in order to systematise its participation strategy, has developed a **participation plan, an official long-term strategy** guiding the participation efforts of different departments in a coordinated manner. In order to keep informed its citizens about participation progresses of the city, the local administration produces **an annual report** on the state of public participation; as well as a **newsletter** and some other regular bulletin that informs citizens about what city government is doing, and how they can participate.

Positively, the city of Genk values the power of networking in all communication media, while reinforcing its image in its own institutional communication using social media tools. **Council meetings** in Genk 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 it could provide energy and ideas to realise opportunities for Genk's community development, enhance a genuine engagement of its citizens, and offer people the capabilities needed to participate and deliberate well. These are challenging orders, especially if citizens are disengaged and certain groups within the population are marginalised, so it is important that a specific body is charged with driving and overseeing developments.

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 Genk to formally adopt a public statement declaring the importance of public engagement and explaining how citizens can participate.

There should ideally exist opportunities for citizens to give input on how participation should be structured and supported and to vote for particular policy options. Lastly, **annual awards programmes** would be beneficial to support citizen engagement, supported by the city or by a non-governmental organisation, which recognise citizens, public officials, or other leaders for their efforts to support public participation.

Best Practice

*Dialogue with the City*²

Dialogue with the City's aim was to engage the citizens of greater Perth in developing a planning strategy to make the capital of the state of Western Australia the "world's most liveable city by 2030." The process included disseminating information to the public over several months, holding a deliberative forum on September 13, 2003 with 1,100 citizens, and then implementing the suggestions and decisions made at the forum. The final result was "Network City: A Community Planning Strategy for Perth and Peel." At the time is completed, it was the largest deliberative forum to be held in southern hemisphere. Dialogue with the City was modelled after the "Listening to the City" initiative organized in New York City to gather public input about how to rebuild the site of the World Trade Centre that was destroyed in the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001.

The main potential problems Dialogue with the city focused on were: economy and employment, sustainable environment, integrating transport and land use, residential land balance, costs of urban form, and infrastructure coordination. The government also wanted to come up with more creative ways to address those issues. The ultimate purpose was to come up with a plan to make Perth a sustainable city by coming up with a plan for the urban development of the city.

*Uniontown Cares*³

"Uniontown 2020" was a strategic planning process designed to set goals for the community's future. One of the major observations arising from the strategic planning process was the need for a community entity to take responsibility for implementation of initiatives related to economic development or enhancing quality of life.

As a result, a Community Development Corporation (CDC) was created, with the mayor serving as president and appointing all CDC members. Citizens who attended strategic planning or CDC meetings often took a passive role and appeared reluctant to express their viewpoints in front of others. They tended to look to the mayor or outside experts for answers to community problems. Communication was primarily one-way and little attention was paid to things that community members

² <http://www.participedia.net/en/cases/dialogue-city>

³ <http://www.participedia.net/en/cases/building-community-uniontown-story>

could actually do something about. Although the CDC met regularly, it was mostly unsuccessful in its efforts to broaden public engagement, develop leadership capacity, or improve the community's quality of life.

The "problem" and "needs" oriented mind set, as well as the institutional domination were identified as the main results for the failure.

Then a new process began with the forming of a representative focus group of Uniontown citizens as a framework for deliberation about community issues. The group discussed questions like: "What do you like about your town?" and "What would you like to change?" The most interesting result of these early meetings was how much consensus there was. Blacks and whites agreed on what was good about Uniontown and about the challenges it faced. Uniontown was about a group that began to deliberate about particular areas of concern; citizens began to identify things that Uniontown Cares might do to address those concerns. More importantly, they began to act together in order to find and implement solutions.

The success of the process illustrates both the power of public deliberation and the ability of ordinary citizens to address complex policy issues. The research carried out on the process revealed that citizens are very knowledgeable about community problems and have a greater capacity for solving problems than government officials realise.

The new mayor started working with the group on many community improvement projects and the efforts of elected officials in the community are being influenced by citizen opinion and their decisions are getting closer scrutiny by citizens, who see themselves as active participants – not passive recipients of services. Because of increased citizen awareness of local issues and increased citizen determination to influence decisions of local government, recent city elections saw the replacement of several long-time council-members with new candidates perceived to be willing to represent the voice of the people.



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 rate of achievement of the city's regulatory and policy framework is of 57%, slightly higher than the City sample's rate of 53%.

The city of Genk has concrete regulations and policies that govern public participation. These regulations are reviewed on a regular basis. However, public officials, staff, and citizens **do not** understand how the laws governing public participation are being interpreted and applied. Moreover, 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.

Furthermore, the city has a small budget (0, 5% of the annual city budget) for public participation and employs a small team to support public participation activities (1%).

Positively, Genk'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 Planning⁴

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

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

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.

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 Training⁵

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 rate of achievement of the city's advisory boards and commissions is of 67%, higher than the City sample's rate of 56%.

The city motivates citizens' participation through **10 advisory boards** (organised as a public body that have an official advisory role to government) on which citizens can serve. The members of these 10 boards are chosen through an **open application process** where anybody can apply. The members of these 10 boards are **broadly representative** of the larger population, in terms of age, race/ethnicity, income level, and immigrant/native-born. Positively, its members **regularly** lead public participation efforts that bring other citizens to the table. Likewise, public officials are obliged to **give information** to boards and commissions, and consider their recommendations.

Unfortunately meetings of the boards **are not** structured and facilitated in ways that encourage productive dialogue, deliberation, and participation. We remind the city of Genk 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 Genk'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

⁶ <http://www.participationcompass.org/article/show/32>;
<http://www.participedia.net/en/methods/citizen-advisory-board>

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:

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.

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

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 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 organising 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.

The rate of achievement of the city's civic associations is of 52%, lower than the City sample's rate of 60%.

Positively, in Genk there is an **active online network of citizens** in most neighbourhoods, and active **neighbourhood associations** are operational in the majority of all neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood meetings, events, and online forums regularly attract large, diverse numbers of people. Unfortunately, the city does not have a neighbourhood council system or some other network that gives neighbourhood groups an official role in public decisions.

It is worth noticing that in Genk there is a system of tracking who participates in neighbourhood groups and neighbourhood meetings. Additionally, the city **supports** training programs that help build the engagement capacity of neighbourhood groups and there are city employees who are tasked with maintaining communication between neighbourhood groups and local government.

It is commendable that there are **active parent groups at the majority of the schools** in Genk. However, these parents' meetings are not structured and facilitated in ways that encourage productive dialogue, deliberation, and participation. Likewise, there are not active online networks of some kind – either official or informal – in the majority of all schools. The situation would be even better if the school system supported training programs that helped build the engagement capacity of parent groups. 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. Communities and schools are important partners in promoting citizens engagement. Schools can also play an important role in a broader city strategy by creating supportive social networks for children, young people and families; providing a facility for community sport programmes and events; and building awareness and knowledge about physical activity. Secondary

school students can serve as role models and coaches for younger children, and universities can assist the community by developing and evaluating special programmes in collaboration with the community.

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

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

Best Practice

Community Action Networks⁸

In order to connect citizens voices to city policymaking processes, since the mid-1970s neighbourhoods council systems emerged to create meaningful chances to participate and coexist within the local administration's system.

In Canada, Community Action Networks (CANs) bring people together to build a healthy, strong and vibrant community. They emerge from the collaborative efforts of thousands of citizens who care about where they live and want to make their neighbourhoods the best they can possibly be.

The City of Greater Sudbury recognises the value of on-going participation from residents toward the provision of programs and services to the community. Neighbourhood Associations and Community Action Networks are excellent vehicles through which people can contribute to their community and become involved in community decision-making. These organisations help to maintain the uniqueness of each individual community/neighbourhood which, together, comprise the City of Greater Sudbury.

The City of Greater Sudbury recognizes the following benefits in establishing and supporting Community Action Networks:

- CANs enhance the overall quality of life in Greater Sudbury's social, environmental and economic sectors.
- CANs enable citizens to participate, appreciate, and fully understand the services offered by community organizations and groups.
- CANs help to identify community needs and establish co-operative working relationships.
- CANs promote democracy and inclusiveness by giving participants (community members, City Council, and City staff), a unique vehicle to work in harmony toward common goals.
- CANs provide a mechanism for planning at the community level by identifying the different projects with which individual Community Action Networks will be involved.
- CANS take action and implement projects and initiatives which have a positive impact on the quality of life in Greater Sudbury.

⁸ <https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/get-involved/community-action-networks/>

*Makers Point*⁹

Hunts Point Habla! is a community-centered planning project led by Makers Point in Hunts Point, Bronx (USA). The Hunts Point Habla! Team is reaching out to residents to hear what they think about their community and how they wish to improve the quality of life in Hunts Point. At the end of this project, Makers Point will identify projects that have community support and work with residents to make their great ideas happen.

Hunts Point Habla! is a capacity building program model, supported in part by the Hunts Point Alliance. Makers Point is empowering a team of young, local leaders to lead the initiative. This team is attending community events and engaging with residents at local events and gathering places. Their goal is to reach as broad, inclusive, and representative group of residents as possible and start building a network of residents that can support projects with their social, political, and intellectual capital in the years to come.

*Peninsula Interfaith Action*¹⁰

An affiliate of the PICO national faith-based community organizing network, the Peninsula Interfaith Action works with diverse congregations and youth organizations to train community leaders in USA¹¹. Peninsula Interfaith Action creates justice by forging a common sense of purpose among diverse communities, addressing local problems, putting faith into action, building hope and finding solutions.

Using the values of democracy and diverse religious traditions, PIA helps people improve many aspects of their local quality of life, including more housing that is affordable, better neighbourhood schools, access to health care in local counties, improved economic opportunities and safer communities with more support for youth.

Peninsula Interfaith Action is affiliated with the PICO National Network. PICO equips faith-based organizations with community organising skills and links members across the nation for common purposes.

⁹ <http://www.makerspoint.org/projects/>

¹⁰ <http://www.piapico.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.piconetwork.org/about>



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 rate of achievement of the city's range of issues is of 36%, lower than the City sample's rate of 44%.

The city of Genk has experimented with a range of different issue 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 education, racism and cultural difference. On the other hand, the people who participate are broadly representative of the larger population; however the participation should be more interactive, i.e. it should facilitate two-way communication between citizens and government, and among different kinds of citizens. In Genk there are not opportunities to participate at least once a month (currently only racism-related issues foster adequate participation), and the participation experience should provide people with the information they need. The participation experiences should 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 have 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).

Positively, in Genk participation activities in different fields (racism and cultural difference, policing and public safety, education, public health, planning and land use) are enjoyable for people. Moreover, in Genk there are meaningful opportunities to participate on other key public issues such as culture, sports, elderly, disabled, day-care, environment, development & cooperation. However, we would like to stress the need of improving the participation also for other issue of citizens' concern, notably transportation and budgeting.

Best Practice

*Citizens' Jury*¹²

A Citizens' Jury is composed of a group often of around 18-24 randomly selected citizens, representative of the demographics in the area, that come together to deliberate on an issue. Over the period of 4-7 days the jury hears from expert witnesses that are knowledgeable on the topic and deliberate to provide a solution or recommendation to the public and official decision makers.

Citizens' Juries are comparable to Citizen Conferences and Consensus Conferences.

The process of deliberation allows all members of the jury to have his or her voice and opinion heard and considered. After the jury has come to a decision they present the recommendation in the form of a public forum. There is also a written report of the recommendation available to the public and the media. These juries allow decision makers to hear from informed citizens that help them make the best choice regarding the issue at hand.

The first step to creating a Citizens' Jury is to select the people that will compose the jury. The jury must be a random sample that is representative of the public. There is careful planning and certain steps that must be taken in order to gather this group. After the jury has been selected the key witnesses must be chosen. These witnesses must be experts in the field of the issue and are generally made up of neutral resource people, stakeholders and advocates that take a certain side to the issue. The neutral resource people provide the jury with background information about the issue and their main job is to inform the jury and make them familiar with the issue. Stakeholders and advocates normally have taken a side on the issue. His or her job is to inform the jury about his or her side and explain why they have chosen or believe in that particular side to the issue. The witness selection is key because they must represent all sides so the jury can receive a balanced and complete picture of the issue.

After selecting the jury and the key witnesses, the jury gathers and the charge is issued. The charge is a question or group of questions that must be answered by the jury at the end of the process. The charge acts as a guideline for the jury and witnesses. The jury may choose to answer questions about the issue that are not in the charge but the Advisory Committee must approve them first. The charge is the structure the jury follows when planning the recommendation.

¹² <https://www.participedia.net/en/methods/citizens-jury>

The first day the jury meets is dedicated to understanding the process that they are about to embark upon, receive a brief overview of the issue, and mostly to get comfortable with each other so they feel at ease and relaxed. The next 3 or 4 days is dedicated to hearings that include the expert witnesses. There is time allotted for the jurors to ask questions of the witnesses and also time for them to deliberate. After all the hearings have been completed the rest of the time is set aside for the jurors to have final deliberations about the issue as well as answer the crucial charge question or questions.

On the final day there is a public forum held where the jurors present their findings and recommendation. There is also an initial report that is issued that is written by the jurors themselves in a language that they created. About two to three weeks later there is a final report issued that is available to the public.

The final stage to this process includes an evaluation that is filled out by the jurors. The jurors are asked to evaluate the process itself, the staff, and if they believed the process was biased or not. There is a portion for the jurors to add a personal statement, which is another way they can express their opinions. This evaluation is added into the final report that is made available to the public.

In recent years, with early help from the Jefferson Center, the Citizens Jury method has been successfully used by a pair of independent organizations - Healthy Democracy Oregon and the Healthy Democracy Fund - to evaluate statewide ballot initiatives; this adaptation of the method is called a Citizens' Initiative Review.

The Jefferson Center and Promoting Healthy Democracy also ran a Citizens' Jury on Election Recounts in Minnesota in 2009 that was credited with helping build bipartisan support for reforms to that state's recount procedures.

Participatory Transportation Planning "Buona Mobilità" (Emilia-Romagna, Italy)¹³

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;

¹³ <http://participedia.net/en/cases/participatory-transportation-planning-buona-mobilit-emilia-romagna-italy>

- 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.



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 rate of achievement of the city's range of tactics is of 53%, higher than the City sample's rate of 44%.

The city of Genk 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 Genk 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 Genk to enter data about particular problems and conditions, such as potholes, graffiti, and environmental hazards.

Via crowdsourcing on online platforms and through face-to-face exercises the city allows people to suggest ideas and then rank, refine, and comment on the ideas generated by the crowd.

Positively, in Genk online and face-to-face opportunities give citizens a chance to test their knowledge, strengthen their relationships, or come up with their own solutions to public problems.

It is remarkable that in Genk collaborative Planning Processes bring people together to make design or architectural decisions. Unfortunately, the city of Genk does not organise Participatory Budgeting activities through which large, diverse numbers of people deliberate, plan, and vote on how to spend a proportion of public money. 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.

Furthermore, online initiatives that enable people to ask for or donate money, and small-grant programs run by institutions to support volunteer projects should be developed as well.

Best Practice

Pop-up Public Policy Collage (Canada)¹⁴

Public Policy Collage brings together participatory art and pop-up democracy methods to offer participants creative and spontaneous ways to engage with public policy issues. Participants are provided with collaging materials (a 4X6 piece of durable cardstock, scissors, glue, markers) and pages of thematic icons representing the different federal public policy areas (e.g.: democratic reform, education, health care, human rights, national security). The method was invented and used by the Creative Publics Lab in the fall 2015 to engage voters in policy issues leading up to the Canadian federal election. It is designed to spark dialogue among participants, encourage them to vote, demonstrate that political engagement can be fun and create space for individuals to reflect on the connection between important issues in their everyday life (food, shelter, health, education, etc.) and public policies.

This method draws on participatory art and pop-up democracy - it facilitates the creation of artwork through temporary, site-specific practices that provide opportunities for increased local political participation. The act of art-making is used as a way to spark reflexive political dialogue among participants and public exhibit functions as a collective expression of creative political engagement.

The project created conditions for dialogue amongst random members of the public through a relaxed and friendly environment where expression took place through art making instead of verbal discourse. Because the project was set up in public spaces and only required that people know how to cut and glue paper, it was accessible to a broad community who did not need to have extensive knowledge of either art-making or politics. We observed that this approach allowed for quiet one-on-one conversations about issues that mattered to the participants.

21st Century Town Meeting¹⁵

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

¹⁴ <http://participedia.net/en/methods/pop-public-policy-collage>

¹⁵ <http://participedia.net/en/methods/21st-century-town-meeting>

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 organisations, 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 trade-off between the quality of discussion and the size of the group. The participants are split 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.



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 their public statements about the value of participation, **public officials and staff support the idea that citizens can help contribute to solving public problems.**

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.

The rate of achievement of the city's grassroots and problem-solving is of 33%, slightly lower than the City sample's rate of 35%.

Unfortunately, most participation opportunities are not organised in so to allow citizens to discuss and plan ways they can take action. 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 Genk 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 Appraisal¹⁶

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.

Better Neighbourhoods- Better Reykjavik¹⁷

Better Neighbourhoods won the Nordic Best Practice Challenge in category 1 "Public Communications". Over 70.000 people have participated to this project out of 120.000 inhabitants. And 15 top ideas are processed by the city of Reykjavik every month; so far 476 ideas have been approved.

The aim of the project is to improve the quality of the inhabitants' surroundings. Through this inventive project, the residents are offered influence beyond what is normally seen in a representative democracy. The city of Reykjavik has found a successful strategy to enhance public participation in the municipality.

Specifically, Better Reykjavik is an all year idea gathering and prioritisation by citizens for the City of Reykjavik. Every month 10-15 top ideas in 10 categories are moved into city administration for processing. Citizens are informed on website and in email with reasons for decisions.

About the process:

1. Citizens submit their ideas;
2. the city of Reykjavik evaluates their cost;
3. citizens vote on the ideas;
4. the city of Reykjavik executes them;
5. citizens use the results.

¹⁶ <http://participationcompass.org/article/show/137>

¹⁷ <http://www.citizens.is/portfolio/better-neighborhoods-helps-citizens-understand-the-realities-of-budgeting/>
<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/12RZZG2M3sCYP7uBhpyI7MytzwLsumXgWcgfpxPewrY/edit?usp=sharing>

What kind of ideas citizens submit?

Issues vary from improving environment, facilitate playing, improve pedestrian and cycling transport within scope of the city, fit planning.

Citizens can vote for the ideas: the vote is electronic, binding and secure. 107 ideas were voted in by citizens in 2015. One vote per person is ensured by strict authentication.

The city executes the ideas: some ideas are realized in a few weeks, other ideas take over a year. It depends on many factors, for instance the number of departments and people to be involved and planning regulations.

Citizens use the results: from benches to footpaths to dog parks to better lighting to playgrounds. More trees, trashcans, repair pavements, food gardens, add speed bumps or pedestrian lights. Improvements from Better Neighbourhoods are easily found in all areas of the city of Reykjavik.



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.

The rate of achievement of the city's commitment to young people is of 100%, considerably higher than the City sample's rate of 79%.

Positively, in Genk young people have meaningful opportunities to address key issues facing students within the school system. Moreover, outside the school system, there are meaningful opportunities for young people to take part in public decision-making and problem-solving. Additionally, Genk'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

Youth Participatory District Councils¹⁸

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 – Argentina). 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 systematise and re-elaborate the demands made by their peers, by additionally identifying the responsibilities

¹⁸ <http://participedia.net/en/cases/participatory-budget-joven-de-rosario>

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

Democracy applied to class priorities in Australian school - Girraween Public School (Class controls class)¹⁹

How can we improve democracy in a primary school?

Rathy Srikanthan, teacher at Girraween Public School in Australia, started to use Your Priorities tool in her class to teach her students about democracy and to give them an opportunity to participate in the decision-making.

They use it as a platform to learn about transparency and the prioritization of ideas. Essentially, students are posting what they would like to see happen in the classroom and the ideas with many up votes is discussed and implemented. It has encouraged teachers to accommodate students' interests and passions.

Your Priorities is an e-Democracy web application designed by the non-profit Citizens Foundation to help groups speak with one voice. It is a very effective way for classroom to run democratically. It is interesting to see what other members of the class want and see how students can down vote and up vote new ideas. Doing

¹⁹ <http://www.citizens.is/portfolio/girraween-public-school/>
<https://girraween.yrpri.org/>

so makes it easy for young students to express their opinions. Your Priorities is an awesome site that has helped classrooms.

Finally, the story of using Your Priorities at school is a good example which shows that this software is available for every kind of community to share ideas and to increase civic participation. Such tools have a strong maximizing effect when it comes to participation since they can be used at all ages.



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.

The rate of achievement of the city's transparency and accountability is of 75%, higher than the City sample's rate of 63%.

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

On the other hand, the city releases data on public services and public meetings as but it does not on financial data.

It is commendable that the city of Genk supports Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and makes efforts to help the local civic tech community use public data and help citizens understand and use public data.

Best Practice

OpenGov.gr - The Greek Open Government Initiative²⁰

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).

²⁰ <http://www.opengov.gr/en/>

- 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).

Open Data, Open Dialogue and Open Doors (Canada)²¹

Greater Sudbury Council has unanimously adopted a model of Open Government based on the principles of open information, open data, open dialogue and open doors. In Canada, Open Government is endorsed by international, federal and provincial governments to move accountability and transparency to a higher and more comprehensive level.

The themes of Open Government are:

- Open Dialogue: Working with and communicating to the public and involving citizens in decision-making.
- Open Information: Opening up and proactively releasing government information.
- Open Data: Making data a publically available tool or asset.
- Open Doors: Implementing measures or plans for accountability and oversight of government actions.

Open data:

Last year, the City hosted a public event at Tom Davies Square in order to share with citizens information about of open data and to gather feedback on what they would like to see in the City of Greater Sudbury's Open Data Program. The event was attended by software developers, researchers, professors, students and City staff. The City's leadership in this regard is evidenced by the fact that the IT staff lead on the open data project has been invited to speak at a number of open data events and participates in the Public Sector Open Data Working Group (PSOD) which is led by the Ontario government and includes a number of municipalities.

The City has also been working on an Open Data Pilot Project with Transit app developers in the community. The developers have been provided with access to real-time/ actual bus arrival times and they are currently integrating this functionality into their existing mobile apps using the API open data format.

²¹ <https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/open-government/>

Moreover, specific page of the CGS website is dedicated to e-services, with links to a number of initiatives currently underway. A key partner in the provision of public access to and information about technology are the Greater Sudbury Public Libraries which provide support for everything from family literacy, to digital collections, public access computers and the maker space.

Open information:

the City of Greater Sudbury has a strategic communication plan, City with a Voice, which states that:

“The City of Greater Sudbury maintains open and honest communication with its residents and its employees. We engage citizens with a voice of passion and conviction. We are committed to providing relevant and accurate information in ways that are accessible, creative, coherent and timely.”

The City of Greater Sudbury has an extensive website which contains very detailed information about the services, policies and financial status of the City of Greater Sudbury. This includes links to current and prior year budgets, to Council and Committee meeting Agenda Packages and Minutes and the Newsroom where the most current information about CGS activities can be found. Recently, the City’s w Council and budget meetings are open to the public and have been broadcast on Eastlink Television for many years. Since December 2014, all Council and Committee website search engine was replaced for enhanced and easier access to information. Meetings held in Council Chambers have been live streamed to the public. Between February 27th and March 6th, 2015 538 unique viewers watched a combined 380 hours of those meetings. During meetings, members of the media actively make use of social media channels to update the public and traditional media coverage continues to be extensive.

The Municipal Act requires each municipality to adopt and maintain policies on how and when notice will be provided to the public. In 2012, Council adopted a new Notice By-Law, which is based on a series of principles, all of which “support the democratic rights of citizens to be advised of where, when and what business of the municipality is being discussed”.

Open dialogue:

Over the summer of 2014, CGS staff conducted a review of the City’s community engagement processes, which included a review of the Public Participation Policy, a public survey to which nearly 1,000 citizens provided a response, and public meetings. Outcomes of that process were reported publically in August 2014 and work is on-going in the implementation of outcomes of that review. For example a toolkit is planned for citizens and employees alike on effective citizen engagement. These tools and systems complement engagement processes already in place, such as public input to the budget each year, feedback and opinion surveys, a rigorous social media presence, open houses, charettes, public information centres, local boards, Community Action Networks, and more. Also new in recent months and there is a page with information pertaining to different ways residents can engage with City Hall.

Open doors:

The City has a number of systems designed to create, maintain and enhance public accountability and more open access to decision making.

The most obvious form of public accountability for Council comes by way of the Municipal Election, where the citizens of Greater Sudbury vote for their elected officials. An important step in strengthening accountability was taken by this Council when all members endorsed the Greater Sudbury Charter and committed themselves to the very principles of Open Government. Members of Council are also bound by the Code of Ethics which is contained in the Procedure By-Law, while Employees of the City of Greater Sudbury must all review and adhere to the Employee Handbook. The Employee Handbook addresses topics as varied as conflict of interest, duty of fidelity and business conduct and includes a large number of employment-related policies, as for example related to recruitment. The Handbook is supplemented by additional workplace policies, which guide conduct and frame accountability systems for employees.

The success of this Open Government model and related initiatives rests largely on education and understanding of new expectations. A strategy for both internal and external stakeholders will be developed so to educate and promote understanding for staff and residents of the principles associated with Open Government and its implementation in the City.



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.

The rate of achievement in this field is of 13%, slightly higher than the City sample's rate of 20%.

Unfortunately, the city of Genk **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**. The results of evaluations should be made publicly available and broadly disseminated. Lastly, there are not regular opportunities for public officials, staff, and citizens to analyse participation evaluations and make recommendations.

Positively, the city Of Genk provides citizens with opportunities to give feedback on how official public meetings are structured and facilitated.

Best Practice

*Delphi Survey*²²

A Delphi Survey is a series of questionnaires that allow experts to develop ideas about potential future developments around an issue. The questionnaires are

²² <http://participedia.net/en/cases/use-delphi-method-develop-horse-control-strategy>

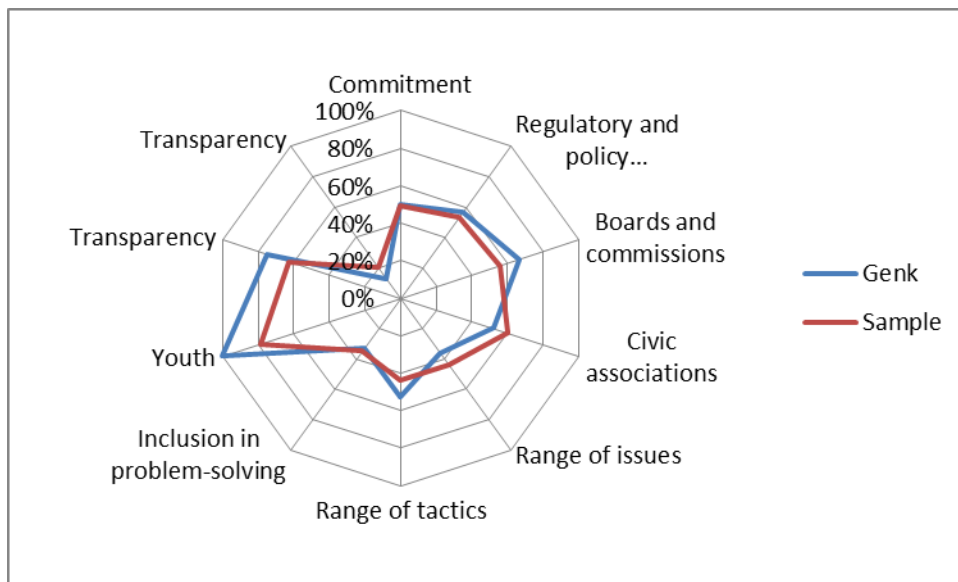
developed throughout the process in relation to the responses given by participants.

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.



The city of Genk has an aggregate participatory city index of 51%, slightly higher compared with the city sample of 50%.



Overall, Genk has a good strategy for participatory democracy and a demonstrated commitment to public participation. Indeed, the city has developed a participation plan, an official long-term strategy guiding the participation efforts of different departments in a coordinated manner. Although Genk has not a coherent regulatory and policy framework for participation yet, 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. Positively, Genk has established ten advisory boards on which citizens can serve. The city has also 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.

Genk 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. However, the city would still need to improve in terms of inclusiveness and regular support. Nonetheless, the city of Genk uses different methods and tactics to support public participation and involve citizens in policy-making.


Definitely, Genk 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 Genk young people have meaningful opportunities to address key issues related to participation. Whereas, Genk'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, regulatory and policy framework, advisory boards and commissions, civic associations, range of issues, range of tactics, grassroots problem-solving, young people, 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 Genk could enhance the all fields below, with the only exception for young people, 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.

 **Regulatory and policy framework:** it is advisable to publish a document – a policy, protocol, or set of procedures – that helps public officials, staff, and citizens understand when and why to use specific participation approaches. The city should also facilitate, encourage, or support public participation as a category in the job expectations of people serving in management-level positions for the city.

 **Boards and commissions:** Genk's meetings of boards and commissions should be structured and facilitated in ways that encourage productive dialogue, deliberation, and participation. Likewise, they 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 Genk 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 attention.

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 Genk may find interesting some best practices suggested throughout this document.



Civic associations: civic associations, operating in neighbourhoods, schools, and other settings, help to engage people in public life. Therefore, the city of Genk may wish to consider setting up a neighbourhood council system or some other network that gives neighbourhood groups an official role in public decisions. The city should also come up with a strategy to structure and facilitate neighbourhood groups in ways that encourage productive dialogue, deliberation, and participation. It is advisable for the leadership of most neighbourhood groups to be broadly representative of the neighbourhood, in terms of age, race/ethnicity, income level, and immigrant/native-born. Social media tools are powerful for citizens' participation also through the school system. Genk should also make sure that the school system supports training programs that help build the engagement capacity of parent groups



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 public health, education, and policing and public safety. Above all, create meaningful opportunities to participate on issues of budgeting and public finance and transportation.



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.

Grassroots problem-solving: Genk 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.



Transparency: Public meetings should be televised or live streamed, with opportunities for remote interaction by citizens. Release financial data in machine-readable formats. Transparency is a key element of public trust and confidence. A commitment to transparency demonstrates to the community that the city and its officials have nothing to hide and that the local administration is accountable.

There are a variety of ways to show this commitment: 1) conscientious observance of transparency laws; 2) concerted efforts to share information with the public about local agency operations and decision-making process; 3) commitment to engaging the public.

Above all, it should be stressed that transparency of public authorities is a key feature of good governance and a gauge of a pluralistic and democratic society. The right of access to official documents is also essential to the self-development of people and to the exercise of their rights. It also strengthens public authorities' legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens, and its confidence in them. To this aim, it is worth recalling the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents and the Open Government Partnership's subnational government initiative; the latter a multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. In this view, cities and subnational governments are where considerable action and innovation takes place on open government. It showcases how local transparent governments can have a major impact on citizen's everyday lives than national level governments²³.

²³ 1) CoE Convention on access to official document: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/>

2) Subnational Governments and the Open Government Partnership:
<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/subnational-governments-and-open-government-partnership>



Monitoring and evaluation: The city should have a protocol for evaluating public participation processes. Moreover, Genk'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 Genk 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.

