



World Forum for Democracy

Participatory Democracy Incubator

Index Report – June 2016

Neapolis-Sykies, Greece

Background

Neapolis-Sykies is a municipality of the Thessaloniki Urban Area in the regional unit of Thessaloniki, Central Macedonia, in Greece. The city has 84.741 inhabitants according to a 2011 census.

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 164 points. The points are converted into a percentage measure to improve the comparability of the 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.

Results

1. 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 skeptical 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 council meetings in Neapolis-Sykyies are open to the public and that the city has established a participation commission (an official body, broadly representative of the city's population, which is charged with overseeing public participation). The city issues a regular bulletin that informs citizens about what city government is doing, and how they can participate. Moreover, the city maintains active social media accounts.

In order to demonstrate its commitment to citizen participation, the city could adopt a public statement declaring the importance of public engagement. To systematize its participation strategy, the city should develop a participation plan, an official long-term plan or strategy guiding the participation efforts of different departments or agencies in a coordinated manner. It could also facilitate collaboration with non-governmental organizations to support participation. For a better overview, the city might consider producing an annual report on the state of public participation. Moreover, there should ideally be 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 organization, which recognize citizens, public officials, or other leaders for their efforts to support public participation.

Recommendations

- ✓ Adopt a public statement declaring the importance of public engagement.
- ✓ Develop a participation plan.
- ✓ Produce an annual report on the state of public participation.

- ✓ Provide official opportunities for citizens to give input on how participation should be structured and supported.
- ✓ Give citizens the opportunity to vote for policy options (rather than voting for elected representatives).
- ✓ Create an annual awards program – supported by the city or perhaps by a non-governmental organization – which recognizes citizens, public officials, or other leaders for their efforts to support public participation.

Best Practice¹

Community Appraisal

Community Appraisals are surveys of local need and opinion about issues such as local housing, schooling, training, employment, culture, health, social welfare and community facilities. Community Appraisal is a method that includes gauging the viewpoints of members of a community on particular issues. Appraisals may be conducted to form a plan of action to resolve an issue or improve existing services. Traditionally, they are citizen driven initiatives although they can also be organised by local authorities. Whilst all Community Appraisals will vary in their application, many will include the following steps:

1. Form a steering committee to take an oversight role.
2. Write up a questionnaire which is to be distributed to households and later collected. As an alternative, software such as ‘Village Appraisals for Windows’ can be used instead of the paper option.
3. Sort the responses and compile a report of the findings.
4. Distribute the report throughout the community to citizens and to decision-makers in local authorities. Attempts can also be made to convince the local media to discuss the issues raised by the report.
5. Agree on actions to be taken that address the concerns raised by the report with the relevant bodies.
6. Monitor developments and report back to the community with information about the progress of the initiatives.

2. 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.

¹ All Best Practice examples in this report are available at www.participationcompass.org or www.participedia.net.

The city of Neapolis-Sykies has concrete regulations and policies that govern public participation. These regulations are reviewed on a regular basis. The public officials, staff, and citizens understand how the laws governing public participation are being interpreted and applied. The city has a small budget for public participation and employs a small team to support public participation activities? It provides training opportunities for public officials and city staff who want to learn more about how to support effective participation.

In order to foster its engagement the city could issue 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 and how a specific approach will affect policy decisions. It could also integrate the support of public participation as a category in the job expectations of people serving in management-level positions for the city.

Recommendations

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Include facilitating, encouraging, or supporting public participation as a category in the job expectations of people serving in management-level positions for the city.

3. 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 of Neapolis-Sykies has six advisory boards and commissions for citizens. The members of boards and commissions are either appointed by public officials or chosen by lot. It is positive that they are broadly representative of the larger population, in terms of age, race/ethnicity, income level, and immigrant/native-born. The members of the boards and commissions regularly lead public participation efforts that bring other citizens to the table. The meetings are structured and facilitated in ways that encourage productive dialogue, deliberation, and participation and public officials are obliged to give information to boards and commissions, and consider their recommendations.

To inform more people about its activities, the boards and commissions could use online tools to interactively engage the public.

Recommendations

- ✓ Make sure that boards and commissions regularly use online tools to interactively engage the public.

4. 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.

It is positive that there is an active online network in the majority of all *neighborhoods*, as well as a network that gives neighborhood groups an official role in public decisions. The meetings of neighborhood groups are structured and facilitated in ways that encourage productive dialogue, deliberation, and participation and the leadership of most neighborhood groups is broadly representative of the neighborhood, in terms of age, race/ethnicity, income level, and immigrant/native-born. Moreover, Neapolis-Sykies has tasked city employees with maintaining communication between neighborhood groups and local government.

Unfortunately, neighborhood meetings, events, and online forums do not attract large, diverse numbers of people in Neapolis-Sykies. The city has not put a system in place to track who participates in neighborhood groups. Besides, active neighborhood associations do not exist in all neighborhoods. To further improve neighborhood engagement, the city could offer training programs or other supports that help build the engagement capacity of neighborhood groups.

In the majority of Neapolis-Sykies' *schools*, there are active parent groups and online networks. The meetings of parent groups structured and facilitated in ways that encourage productive dialogue, deliberation, and participation. School meetings, events, and online forums regularly attract large, diverse numbers of people and the leadership of most parent groups broadly representative of the school population, in terms of age, race/ethnicity, income level, and immigrant/native-born. The city employs staff to maintain communication between the local government and the schools.

In order to further improve its results, the city could track who participates in school meetings and provide training programs or other supports that help build the engagement capacity of parent groups.

It is positive to note that community organizing or issue advocacy groups, ethnic associations, faith communities, and other social groups in the city help engage large numbers of people in public decision-making and problem-solving. Moreover, there are regular social events that help engage large numbers of people in public decision-making and problem-solving and most neighborhoods have buildings – such as community centers, schools, or churches – that are welcoming, widely used spaces for public participation events and activities.

Recommendations

- ✓ Create active neighbourhood associations in the majority of all neighbourhoods.
- ✓ Install a system of tracking who participates in neighbourhood groups.
- ✓ Support training programs that help build the engagement capacity of neighbourhood groups.
- ✓ Make sure that the school system supports training programs that help build the engagement capacity of parent groups.

Best Practice

Trade School

Teachers propose classes and ask for barter items from students. For example, if you teach a class about making butter, you might ask students to bring heavy cream, jars, bread, music tips, clothes, vegetables, or help with something like finding an apartment. Students sign up for classes by agreeing to bring a barter item for the teacher. Trade School is for people who value hands-on knowledge, mutual respect, and the social nature of exchange.

→ [Trade School Glasgow](#)

5. 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 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 involve large numbers of people (at least 5% of the population). The people who participate would be broadly representative of the larger population and the participation should be interactive, i.e. it should facilitate two-way communication between citizens and government, and among different kinds of citizens. There should be opportunities to participate at least once a month 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 need to 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). Last but not least, the participation activities should be enjoyable for people.

In the city of Neapolis-Sykies, there are participation opportunities for citizens in a broad range of policy fields, including planning and land use, public health, education, budgeting, transportation, policing and public security, as well as racism and cultural difference. In these exercises, the people who participate are broadly representative of the larger population and the participation is interactive. There are last once a month opportunities to participate. Before the meetings, participants receive the necessary information for an informed debate. On this basis, the participants discuss why the respective issue matters to them and consider different policy choices. It is important that the participation activities have a clear impact on policymaking and enable people to take action in a variety of ways. Most citizens think of these participation opportunities as enjoyable. Unfortunately, these opportunities for participation rarely attract large numbers of citizens (usually less than 5%). Therefore, the city should strengthen its efforts to reach out to the people and inform them more often about participation possibilities.

Recommendations

- ✓ Reach out to larger numbers of people and actively invite them to participate in citizen deliberations

Best Practice

21st Century Town Meetings

21st Century Town Meetings bring together between 500 and 5,000 people, to discuss local, regional or national issues. By using technology, this method combines the benefits of small scale face-to-face discussions with those of large group decision making.

This method uses technology to overcome the common tradeoff 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 summarises 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

→ [Landscape Town Meeting \(Tuscany, Italy\)](#)

6. 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 Neapolis-Sykies has experimented with a range of different tactics to involve citizens in policy-making. Through online surveys and polls, the city has collected the citizens opinions on different subjects. The city has also set up an online problem reporting platform that allows people to enter data

about particular problems and conditions, such as potholes, graffiti, and environmental hazards. Crowdfunding and minigrants have enabled people to ask for and donate money for city or volunteer projects. Through collaborative planning processes, people were brought together to make design, planning or architectural decisions. The city has also organized public deliberation opportunities 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.

Recommendations

The city of Neapolis-Sykies may wish to complement its diverse range of tactics with the following tools or methods to include more citizens in local decision-making:

- ✓ Surveys and Polls – offline: Basic data gathering tactic – can be conducted by phone, by mail, and in person.
- ✓ Keypad polling: A type of polling, using handheld polling devices or smartphones, which is typically conducted as part of a face-to-face meeting.
- ✓ Focus Groups: Facilitated, face-to-face small-group discussions – can be used to delve more deeply into people’s views and perspectives, as well as the values, needs, and concerns that lie behind people’s beliefs. Can also be used to test how people’s opinions change when presented with different options or pieces of information.
- ✓ Crowdsourcing: Online platforms and face-to-face exercises that allow people to suggest ideas – and then rank, refine, and comment on all the ideas generated by the crowd. Some are framed as contests, with the most popular or useful entries winning prizes, badges, or vouchers.
- ✓ Serious Games: Online or face-to-face exercises that give citizens a chance to test their knowledge, strengthen their relationships, or come up with their own solutions to public problems.
- ✓ Wiki-Based Mapping and Writing Platforms: Online technologies that incorporate individual contributions into a central map, database, or document. In some cases, they include processes that help people interact and negotiate in areas where their contributions differ.
- ✓ Online Networks: Temporary or long-term online forums set up to encourage communication and collaboration within groups.
- ✓ Participatory Budgeting: Processes that engage large, diverse numbers of people deliberation, planning, and voting on how to spend a pool of public money.

7. 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 should therefore support the idea that citizens can help contribute to solving public problems.

The existing participation opportunities in Neapolis-Sykies are organized in a way that allows citizens to discuss and plan ways they can take action. However, in order to attract more citizens and show that public officials and staff support the idea that citizens can help contribute to solving public problems, the city may wish to publish a statement about the value of participation and implement a small-grant program to support the implementation of action ideas. It could also support an annual citizens' academy or some other training program for citizens or an annual awards program – supported by the city or perhaps by a non-governmental organization – which recognizes citizens for their efforts to solve public problems.

Recommendations

- ✓ In their public statements about the value of participation, public officials and staff should support the idea that citizens can help contribute to solving public problems.
- ✓ Provide a small-grant program to support the implementation of action ideas.
- ✓ Support an annual citizens' academy or some other training program for citizens.
- ✓ Invite young people to contribute a certain number of volunteer hours before graduation.
- ✓ Implement an annual awards program – supported by the city or by a non-governmental organization – which recognizes citizens for their efforts to solve public problems.

Best Practice

Deliberative Polling

A Deliberative Poll takes a representative sample of the population, provides them with information about an issue and time to deliberate about it before coming up with a considered opinion. These results are then used as a guide to what the whole population would think if they had a similar chance to deliberate.

Process:

- A representative sample of the population is selected, based on gender, race, education and socio-economic background.
- Participants fill out a questionnaire on their opinions on the issue.
- Participants are then invited to gather for a few days to discuss the issues. Participants have access to unbiased background material. They discuss the issues in small groups with trained facilitators. Participants can also ask questions to experts in the area.
- After this deliberation, participants fill out the original questionnaire again.

The resulting changes in opinion are thought to represent the conclusions the public would reach if they had the opportunity to become more informed about the issues. Often, Deliberative Polling creates dramatic, statistically significant changes in views. However, follow up studies tend to show that some

of these changes are reversed over time. Deliberative polls are often run in collaboration with TV companies, which then broadcast parts of the process, allowing the wider public to share the learning of the participants. You should use a Deliberative Poll when you want to engage on a complex issues which the public know little about.

→ [Marousi, Greece - Deliberative Polling](#)

8. Young people

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.

It is highly commendable what Neapolis-Sykyies does to include young people in political decision-making. Within the school system, young people have meaningful opportunities to address key issues facing students and the schools. Outside the school system, there are there meaningful opportunities for young people to take part in public decision-making and problem-solving, such as a youth council. The 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. On a regular basis, they present recommendations to local government. The youth council is also connected to other participation opportunities and regularly organizes participation opportunities that bring other young people to the table.

9. 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. Public meetings are televised or livestreamed, with opportunities for remote interaction by citizens. Moreover, the city releases financial data and data on public services and meetings in machine-readable formats.

In order to further increase transparency, the city could support Application Programming Interfaces, efforts to support the local civic tech community use public data and help citizens understand and use public data.

Recommendations

- ✓ Support efforts to help the local civic tech community use public data.
- ✓ Support efforts to help citizens understand and use public data.
- ✓ Support Application Programming Interfaces

Best Practice

Area Forum

Area Forums are meetings held locally, often hosted by the local council. The meetings are attended by local councillors, together with senior representatives from the local authorities, the Police, Primary Care Trusts and other key local organisations, to debate key topics and answer residents' questions face-to-face.

The Area Forum workshops are normally run in the evenings and are chaired by a local councillor. A Chief Officer also attends each meeting and ensures that the recommendations made are properly fed back into the council's decision-making processes. Area Forums concentrate their conversations on the topics of particular concern to local communities in the area. The outcomes are reported to Area Forum members either on an individual basis or via an Area Forum newsletter, which is distributed to members after each meeting; the minutes from each meeting are normally available online. You do not have to be a member of an Area Forum to attend, but you are encouraged to join so that you can be regularly updated about meetings and developments that have occurred as a result of your input.

→ [King County Community Forums, UK](#)

10. 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.

Therefore, the city of Neapolis-Sykies should publish a plan or protocol for evaluating public participation processes and outcomes. There should be 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 might wish to publish surveys, questionnaires, or other evaluation instruments that are used to evaluate individual participation opportunities and provide citizens with opportunities to give feedback on how official public meetings are structured and facilitated. The results of evaluations should be made publicly available and broadly disseminated. Lastly, there should be regular opportunities for public officials, staff, and citizens to analyze participation evaluations and make recommendations.

Recommendations

- ✓ Publish a plan or protocol for evaluating public participation processes and outcomes.
- ✓ Install a process for tracking the long-term effects of public participation on key social indicators.
- ✓ View participation processes and outcomes through an equity lens.

- ✓ Publish surveys, questionnaires, or other evaluation instruments that are used to evaluate individual participation opportunities.
- ✓ Provide citizens with opportunities to give feedback on how official public meetings are structured and facilitated.
- ✓ Make results of evaluations publicly available and disseminate them broadly.
- ✓ Provide regular opportunities for public officials, staff, and citizens to analyze participation evaluations and make recommendations.

Best Practice

Delphi Survey

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.

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.

→ [District of Okanagan-Similkameen, British Columbia, Canada](#)

Conclusion

The city of Neapolis-Sykies has an aggregate participatory city index of 64%. The city has put in place a diverse set of programmes and structures to involve citizens in political decision-making in many different policy fields, such as for example, Planning and land use, Public health, Education, Budgeting, Transportation, and Policing and Public Safety. The city organizes online surveys and polls, opportunities for public deliberation, collaborative planning processes, crowdfunding and it has set up an online problem-reporting platform.

The quality of the participation opportunities is high, as they are interactive and the people who participate are broadly representative of the larger population. The participation activities have a clear impact on policymaking and the citizens usually think of them as enjoyable.

However, the findings also suggest that there is still room for improvement in participatory policies in the city, especially in terms of reaching out to large numbers of citizens to involve them in participation opportunities. The municipality could identify useful insights and examples from other cities and civil society organisations and remain an active member city of the participatory democracy incubator to improve the city's index results.