

Report

Workshop on Active citizenship and participation

Strasbourg, June 5th 2024

Introduction

The workshop on **active citizenship and participation** took place at the European Youth Center in Strasbourg, France, on June 5th 2024 and involved 26 participants from 13 countries; it primarily aimed at fostering an **exchange of needs, practices and solutions** among invited cities on **active citizenship and participation** with a specific focus on the lessons learned during the **Divercities Project**. The workshop was conducted making use of **non formal education methodologies** and divided into three main phases: first, a series of frontal presentations in plenary; second, a long activity of exchange and elaboration in facilitated working groups; finally, a stage of sharing and reflection in plenary. The workshop's goals and conduction were **well received** by the participants both in the **qualitative** (most shared word in the final round of comments: "inspired") and **quantitative** (general rating scored: 4,6/5) **evaluations**.

Methodology

Participants were divided into six groups to define the biggest challenges (45') that city administrations encounter when building and running participated assemblies, focusing in particular on three dimensions:

- how to select the target groups and ensure their participation;
- how to ensure a smooth relationship between local authorities and citizens;
- how to ensure a long term impact to the project.

Subsequently, groups were asked to draft a series of **recommendations** (60') to overcome the outlined challenges using an **intercultural perspective** (focusing on ensuring diversity, equal opportunities and positive interaction).

Each group received a canva to support its members to fulfill the task.

Workshop on Active citizenship and participation - CANVA

*You are asked to individuate the most relevant challenges (1-2max) in building and conducting participated assemblies in three fields. Once the challenges are set, you shall draft recommendations to the municipalities to overcome those challenges by ensuring **diversity, equal opportunities** and **positive interaction**.*

Challenges - What is the problem we are trying to solve? Frame the design challenge as a “**HOW** can we...?” question

Recommendation - **WHAT** are the actions needed to address the challenge? And **WHO** should act?

Target selection and participation

- 1.
- 2.

Relationship between municipality and citizenship management and facilitation

- 1.
- 2.

Process sustainability and long-term impact

- 1.
- 2.

The generated outcomes were presented and discussed in plenary (60'); the following paragraphs elaborate and resume the main findings of the day.

Outcomes

1. Target group selection and continuous participation

The first step of setting up a participative process is to provide for adequate **preparation**. Administrations should invest time and energies in actions **before** starting the assemblies by

- establishing and strengthening bilateral relationships with the single stake- and needholders to prepare the ground for their active participation;
- offering training on inclusive behaviors and intercultural communication (for example, empowering members of minorities to speak up and training groups with privileges to leave space);
- surveying the citizens' needs to find the best time, days, venues, and other preferences for the forthcoming meetings;
- mapping CSOs, communities and informal groups and involve them to reach out to new target groups (with a particular focus on youth, workers' and migrants' associations);
- making use of pre-existing partnerships and communication channels to reach citizens and CSOs.

Once the process has started, Administrations should put **effort and care in the meeting organization**:

- providing food, beverages and other amenities to create a welcoming and safe space;
- making sure that the meeting is accessible for people with children and with disabilities;
- providing compensations, reimbursements and/or gifts to participants to keep them involved. Potential tools to explore further: gamification; tax reduction for private employers to allow their employees to participate in local assemblies during working hours.

2. Establishing a strong relationship between Local Authorities and citizens

A **transparent and regular communication** is a cornerstone of participative processes. This can be achieved and maintained by

- clarifying from the very beginning the width and scope of the whole process, what will be achievable and what is outside the city's commitment or possibilities, in order to help citizens create adequate expectations;

- investing energies into transparent, regular, accessible communication, which includes producing written reports that all participants can comment on and contribute to after each meeting; providing regular information in different languages; and building an “information point” for newcomers to the process or to the city;
- providing intercultural training to city’s communication officers.

It is important to make the Administration’s **commitment tangible** by

- ensuring the presence of public officers and policy makers to the meetings in order to show the city administration’s commitment;
- organizing the events throughout the city’s territory and not always/only in the city center or in the city hall.

Professional and political efforts should be put **within** the meetings...

- by training technicians and politicians with intercultural competences and participative methodologies;
- by building activities to let participants “walk a mile” in other stakeholders’ shoes to understand each other’s POV;
- by organizing meetings on specific topics (in the form of committees, subgroups, or others) to maximize interest and/or in smaller groups to help participants feel safer and more comfortable.

...and **outside** the meetings:

- by creating a space of networking and trust-building among CSOs and with public officers to help citizens understand who/which office is responsible for which policy;

A **cultural change** should be achieved in the way citizens and officers relate to each other; this can be done by

- investing time and energies to illustrate citizens to the difference between other forms of engagement and the methodology and approach of participative assemblies.

3. Ensuring a long term impact to the project

Maintaining the format and the approach after the end of a single experience or project can be difficult. To achieve this goal, Administrations should

- assess its strength and resources: better scarcer but regular meetings than an intense period followed by long times of silence;
- ensure continuous and regular communication with citizens involved in the process;
- think strategically in terms of programmes, synergies, projects, funds, ...

Citizens are more likely to stay involved if they see the **outcomes** of the process be **enforced** by the administration. This can be achieved by

- producing a concrete list of actions to be implemented;
- ensuring the formal adoption of the actions by the municipality through city laws, ordinances, resolutions or any other form;
- disseminating the outputs of the process in a dedicated website, in order to ensure transparency and accountability.

The Administration should work to **empower** other stakeholders by

- training assemblies' participants in order to let (some of the) assemblies self-organized and self-managed;
- creating and empowering relationships between groups and train their members;
- implement a mentoring programme to save and pass the skills acquired by participants who have to leave (for example, young people leaving town for university);
- advocating to create a national framework to help cities set up their own processes.