



CITIES AS ARENAS OF POLITICAL INNOVATION  
IN THE STRENGTHENING OF DELIBERATIVE AND  
PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

# POLICY BRIEF 1

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Access and inclusion in democracy

APRIL 2023

### 1. SUMMARY

The purpose of EUARENAS WP7 activities is to openly extract, discuss, and share the most significant lessons regarding deliberative democracy. The development of activities and deliverables are intended to offer clear and practical information for a variety of end-users, including local actors, the European Commission, the general public, civil society, social entrepreneurial players, and the policy research community. In keeping with the overall approach of the project, the policy considerations and change-making tools attempt to respect the uniqueness of local contexts while offering clear instructions on how to design better policies that encourage citizen democratic involvement and social justice. Therefore, the pilot city experimental phase and communication are critical. Thus, from research institutions to municipalities, the project may map and address the many needs and obstacles that may occur while building and executing a deliberative democracy initiative.

In this context, the key results emanating from the project's early research and activities center several specific factors recognized as critical for the effective implementation of deliberative democratic initiatives at the local level. The EC Preliminary Policy Brief (D7.2) pointed out that diversity, inclusion, and involvement are among these dimensions. Although these characteristics appear to be identical, they express various conditions that deliberative processes must meet in order to be acknowledged as reasonable and efficient.

Diversity refers to the necessity to incorporate stakeholders from varied backgrounds, especially minorities and traditionally underrepresented constituencies, as well as to remove obstacles that may prohibit various participants from contributing.

The concept of inclusivity encapsulates the idea that participants should not just be involved in the process as a count check, but their wants and views should also be heard throughout the process.

While diversity focuses on the "physical" component of participation, inclusion focuses on the participatory power that stakeholders acknowledge.

Engagement emphasizes the significance of keeping people active in the deliberative process across all the phases that an endeavor anticipates. Relations with actors should be established not just during deliberation but also during the numerous processes that govern the initiative's execution and monitoring.

Following the identification of these categories, it was possible to investigate what insights can be drawn from the EUARENAS project's reference to the experimental approach: case studies, Pilot, media discourse analysis activities, citizen storytelling, and multi-stakeholder workshops. EUARENAS is thus an observer of phenomena related to democratic processes as well as a test of methods and practices. As a result, the intention to create an easy-to-read and public EC Policy Brief (D. 7.3) that may generate debate among cities, even those outside the project, and give ideas for new policies capable of supporting "accessibility and inclusion in democracy" at the local-urban and European levels.

As a result, this document is the outcome of a collaborative process of observation, interpretation, and synthesis. Key-contributions have come and will come from all the partners of the consortium, and in particular: WP 1 and WP2 have been framing the topic of the EC Policy Brief focused on access and inclusion in democracy, WP3-4-5 are providing concrete example from case studies, events and pilots, while WP6 is supporting the dissemination of messages and the engagement of the Community of Practice to validate messages and testing the transferability of findings, WP10 (and 2) is favoring the correct implementation of ethical requirements and issues in line with the Responsible Research and Innovation approach.



## 2. INTRODUCTION

The following policy brief deepens the preliminary insights traced in D7.2 expressing a more mature vision on the challenges of deliberative democracy. As the EUARENAS project starts exploring experimental perspectives within cities through both case studies and Pilots and applying dedicated tools developed across WP4 Piloting, WP5 Foresight and WP7 Policy and Change-making, it became clear how the creation of initiatives open to a deliberative approach first collides with the question of democratic access and inclusion.

Spatial obstacles, exposure to hazards and vulnerabilities, social and environmental injustice, time limits, personal impairment, lack of trust, financial impediments, infrastructure inefficiencies, and institutional hurdles are all examples of accessibility-related causes of social exclusion (Wixey et al., 2005; Parthemore and Rogers, 2010; Foster, 2021)<sup>1</sup>.

A social exclusion analysis could be envisioned prior to the starting point of any deliberative democracy initiative as part of the preliminary discovery activity focused on who is being excluded, who is doing the excluding, and why.

With these premises the consortium decided to dedicate D7.3 EC Policy Brief to the topic “Access and inclusion in democracy” and received contributions coming from all the partners and Community of Practices (CoP) members thanks to the distribution of a template that has been filled-in by the partners prior to Gdansk consortium meeting and the organization on two dedicated workshops: 26th October 2022 – CoP workshop; 30th November 2022 – WP7 workshop in Gdansk. The whole debate on the topic has been fed by the policy debates held in Reggio Emilia on May 13th, 2022, specifically during the Project conference that consisted of a session dedicated to providing an overview of the relationships between climate challenges, democracy, collaborative governance and City and Citizen Science. It has seen the participation of international Professors and European Commission Officers who interpreted policies and concrete democratic and deliberative practices undertaken to counteract the effects of climate change as lenses through which it is possible to read today’s urban challenges (results are also visible online).

Therefore, this document summarizes the challenges identified during the initial stages of the Project by reflecting on the criticalities in terms of access and inclusion in democracy, and it serves as a preliminary outcome to develop further and more detailed policy recommendations that can be disseminated to favor cities’ inclusive decision-making. The brief outlines areas of interest, criticalities, stakeholders, actors affected by them, and policy levels where solutions may begin.

The questions guiding the analysis of the topics on which the recommendations were produced descend from confrontations between SWPS and Luiss and are as follows:

- *A deliberative dilemma: Inclusion of people or inclusion of discourses?*

Since deliberative democracy is not representative, but always takes only a small sample of citizens, for its outcome to be inclusive it need not only to include people from underrepresented groups but also make sure that their voice is heard and considered. Therefore, a mere invitation of underrepresented people to deliberative processes is not enough, unless they have proper “tools” and support to make an actual impact. It also raises the question of whether a single individual can be a representation of a larger group or many groups. Therefore, we suggest that the focus on inclusion should refer not only to the ‘input’ of deliberation but also to its ‘output’.

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<sup>1</sup> Wixey, S., Jones, P., Lucas, K. & Aldridge, M. (2005). ‘User Needs Literature Review’, Measuring Accessibility as Experienced by Different Socially Disadvantaged Groups. Social Research in Transport (SORT).  
Parthemore, C., Rogers, W. (2010). Sustaining Security: How Natural Resources Influence National Security, Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security.  
Foster, S. (2021) in Walls M. Exposure: Environmental Justice Research, Policy, and Advocacy, Resources, ([online](#)).

- *How far can/should positive discrimination be used?*

This connects to the previous point. It is impossible to give specific yet universal rules on how we should use positive discrimination in order to facilitate inclusion in the participatory or deliberative processes. However, we all agree that some people and their needs need to be considered, e.g., some people need more time to speak, or the deliberative process should be adjusted in length to the cognitive capabilities of the older people so that they have equal chances to discuss. But what about extreme positions? Some empirical findings from WP3 indicate that some parties may be less interested in participating in deliberative processes, so should we be ‘making up’ for their absence and ‘discriminate’ progressives engaged in deliberation?

- *Inclusion and/or empowerment?*

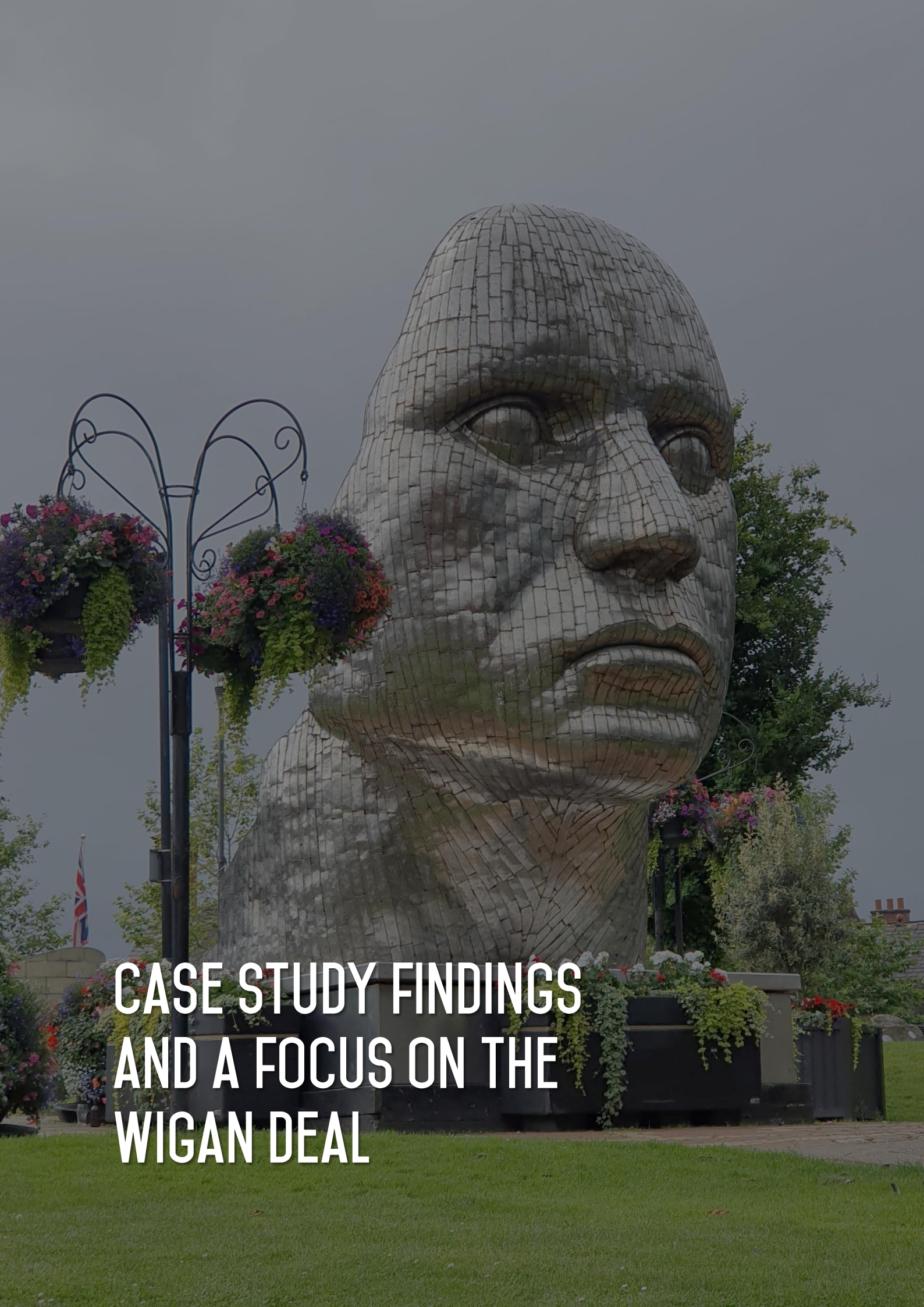
During SWPS conceptual research on the project itself, researchers have noticed a strong commitment to ‘inclusion’, but ‘empowerment’ was invoked very rarely. However, it seems that for building a just, fair, and equal democratic society we should look beyond inclusion and search for long-term empowerment. These are not the same – we consider inclusion as somewhat patronizing, i.e., including disadvantaged groups into the game played according to the rules of these more advantaged. Meanwhile, empowerment would imply the capability of changing these rules (at least a little bit) in a way that adjusts them to the needs and expectations of those previously excluded or powerless. However, this by no means exhausts this distinction, as there are many further questions to be answered: should we empower through inclusion, or ensure inclusion through empowerment? How can short-term inclusion ensure long-term empowerment? How do these differ in participatory and deliberative democracy? While it’s impossible to have a definite theoretical answer to these questions, we think it is important to recognize this difference in the practice of participatory and deliberative democracy.

### 3. EXAMPLES FROM REAL CASES

The EUARENAS initiative approaches access and inclusion reasoning from an empirical and experimental standpoint. In the first year of activity, activities related to the conceptual and methodological framework (WP1 and WP2) established the basis for observing instances of cities that have questioned or are challenging the role of communities in the democratic and public policy co-production scenario. As a result, the development of policy recommendations is based on responsible participant observation activity focused at researching Processes, identifying and developing techniques and instruments capable of serving the access and inclusion of communities themselves.

In this section, we enter the problem-based approach to give actual examples from the Case Studies, Piloting and Foresight work packages and draw out the evidence to support the suggestions.





**CASE STUDY FINDINGS  
AND A FOCUS ON THE  
WIGAN DEAL**

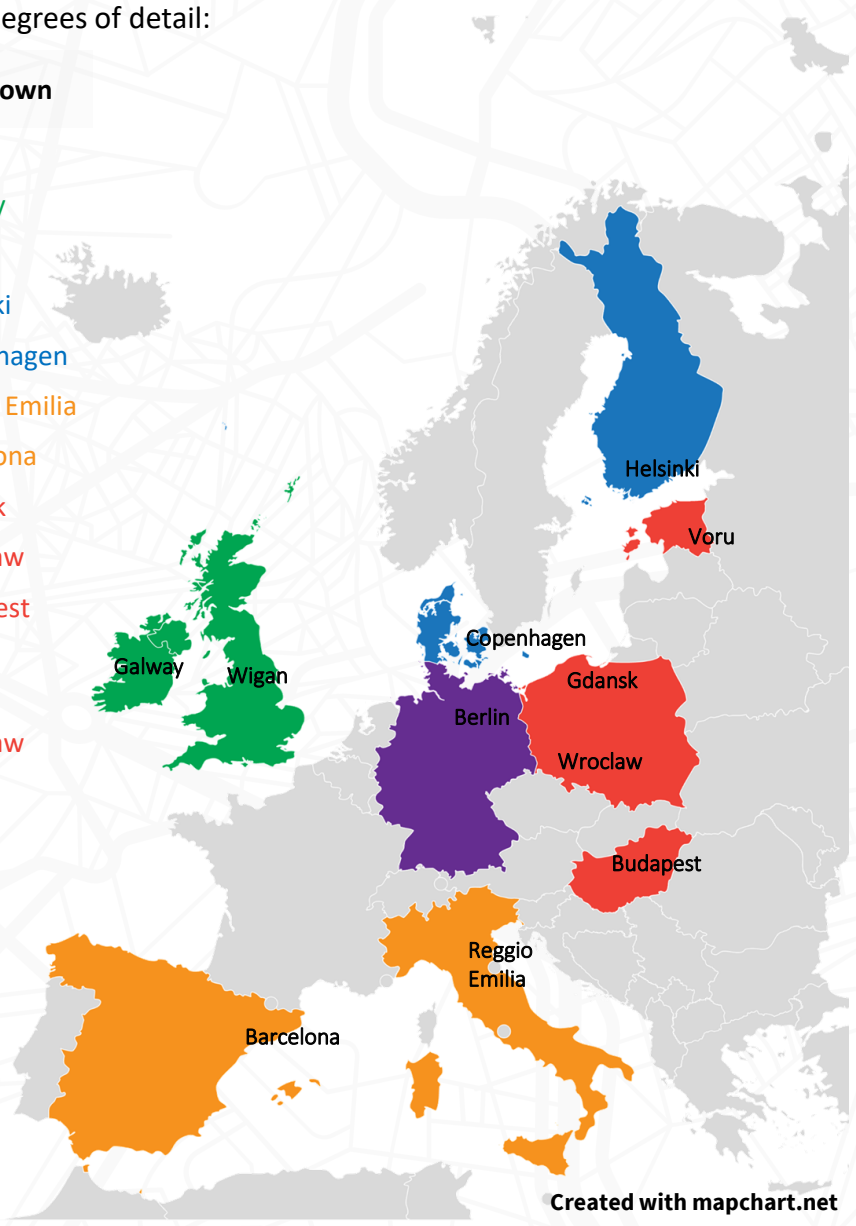


### 3.1 THEORETICAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION BASED ON CASE STUDY ANALYSIS AND A FOCUS ON WIGAN DEAL CASE

WP3 research has allowed us to examine existing cases using a variety of methods, including desk-based research, fieldwork research, and on-going individual case study analysis. The following experiences have been gathered and compared in various degrees of detail:

**Participatory/ Deliberative process      City/ Town**

The Deal for Communities	Wigan
Citizen Jury	Galway
Quartiersmanagement Pankstraße	Berlin
Borough Liaison Officers	Helsinki
Citizens' Assembly	Copenhagen
Quartiere Bene Comune	Reggio Emilia
Community Balance	Barcelona
Participatory Budgeting	Gdańsk
Citizens' Assembly	Wrocław
The Oficce for Community Participation	Budapest
Social Hackathon	Voru
Increasing social participation in cultural policy	Wrocław



This activity allowed us to provide some theoretical conclusions and discussions based on case studies analysis:

- crisis is a permanent state of politics;
- democracy offers ways to respond to the crisis – an example is civil society response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis;
- the crisis generates opportunities to observe the rise, life, and decline (state of dormancy) of civil society – the pulsating nature of the civil society;
- observations shift the center of gravity in defining the nature of civil society from subjective categorization to the relational nature of the phenomenon;
- the findings stand in an opposition to structurally fossilized definitions of West-centered perspectives defining the civil society by structured, institutional categories;

- the pulsating nature of civil society as an element of governance, the heterogeneity of its constellation and ways of operating confirms the constantly incomplete structure of every form of governance, and consequently an inevitable governance failure

Therefore, the critical factors that seemed to have a crucial impact on the success or failure of participatory and deliberative innovations were:

- power relations. Define the ability and/or capacity of individuals or groups of interest to establish dialogic relationships with public institutions in order to impact the interests of those with genuine expectations.
- adaptation potential. Flexibility of efforts, particularly the ability to offer space to new voices and themes through process openness, even changing previously established choices and strategic lines without causing harmful confrontations.
- effectiveness. Capability to achieve common goals with a prominent level of acceptance and consistency.
- general performance. Interpretation of achieved qualitative-quantitative targets.

Another topic of debate and a big issue that research is addressing in case study papers is the issue of inclusiveness of the space, not necessarily the technique itself. EUARENAS has observed that a lot of attention and energy is put into sortition, for example, extremely proper, meticulous, and mathematically random selection based on demographic data, which is - of course - challenging in a small meeting- or mini-public-based scenario. Nevertheless, this formal approach does not aid in the inclusion of people who are unable to participate for a variety of reasons. There are more factors that must be considered to ensure inclusiveness, both in terms of who may participate and how they can engage. Thus, the preceding and deliberative structuring of space and communication process is critical in these aspects.

The necessity to tackle these crucial concerns or key aspects was related to this sort of consideration in the workshops, case studies, and other discussions:

- a. The inclusion of elderly people must consider that engagement experience must be constructed with care and sustainable choices. In this paradigm, balanced planning, and selection of listening and conversation venues and times is an example. For example, after a given period - 1-2 hours – there could be a decrease in their capacity to focus or actively participate in the conversation and this could imply that they are more inclined to agree on ideas they do not completely accept. This begs the question of whether it is feasible to hold extended and nuanced conversations (e.g., five days of seven-hour sessions) while being inclusive.
- b. Mothers - and less frequently fathers - with children (particularly from big families) or adults who provide care for other members of their families will not even consider offering to participate, especially if the procedure is lengthy and spans many days/weeks. An easy-to-implement approach would be to provide free childcare on-site.
- c. People with visual, mobility, hearing, or speech impairments should be aided by experts or family members who can help them speak up. In this circumstance, neurodivergent persons with ADHD or autism spectrum disorder may be under stimulated in the debate and struggle to focus. As a result, supplying basic fidget toys - similar to how water is provided - to everybody at the table might let them debate on equal footing.

All the above examples, which still provide a partial picture of verifiable circumstances but are based on project practices, demonstrate the need to pay close attention to the establishment of deliberative procedures. Thus, the crux is when empirical research findings must be turned into effective communication of projects and their qualities. These accessibility and inclusivity warnings must be fully disclosed in all promotional materials and invites sent out prior to the discussion, so that people who would ordinarily not wish to attend due to such concerns might reconsider.

While reasoning about EUARENAS case studies, People's Voice Media (PVM) has already shown some

specific worries about the ramifications of access and inclusion to democracy for the case of the Deal for Communities in Wigan in the Greater Manchester area (UK). Initiated a significant transformation process that included transitioning to asset-based working at scale, empowering communities through a 'citizen-led' approach to public health and building a culture that allows employees to redesign how they operate in response to the needs of individuals and communities. The 'Wigan Deal,' an attempt to forge a new partnership between public services and residents, lies at the core of this. The Deal for Communities supports citizen engagement and aggressively encourages local government, council members, and other public servants to collaborate with residents. The Deal is an informal agreement between the council and everyone who lives or works in Wigan to work together to make the borough a better place to live and work.

Within the process the analysis showed that there was and still is disagreement on the power dynamics between the process's stakeholders. Citizens, community groups, and others who have had favorable experiences with the Deal believe they have gained greater power or a more transparent, constructive, and mutually beneficial relationship with the Council. For example, community groups or organizations who received asset transfers or regular financing from the Council had formed strong connections and agreed on the area's needs and future. Citizens and community organizations that had differing perspectives on community issues and critical views on the Deal were feeling marginalized and uninvolved. As a result, the power disparities were heightened for them.

As a result, the Deal is evolving showing the possibility for change and adaptability of the process to new circumstances. It has gone through various iterations, and the Council has undertaken several actions to improve The Deal's vision and include locals in this process. This has been continuing community involvement activities as well as "events" such as a Green Couch activity in which a sofa would appear in various locations and Council's workers would have a conversation with residents in the area about The Deal. Itinerant space setting has been a good option to encompass the difficulties communities may show in familiarizing themselves with locations of open debates and events. The Council considered this was an effective way of reaching out to people, but they also agreed that the agenda for the talk might not be as open as some locals would have wanted. Some locals who participated in the storytelling sessions believed that the activity was more about educating them of the Deal's vision and gaining buy-in than it was about having an open dialogue about what the Deal could be. Perhaps if such engagement initiatives had a more open agenda and citizens were included in the early ideas for redesigning the Deal (something the Council is now considering), the Deal might adapt better to changing situations. A continuous listening program, on the other hand, would improve how it responds to changing situations.

Let us realize that the overall consequence of the process was that the Deal enabled communities to bring about constructive changes in communities, such as improving health and wellness, helping children and young people's education, and so on. The Deal, on the other hand, is not considered as a vehicle for increasing people's involvement in democracy - at least not in the traditional sense. It does, however, teeter on the brink of this, and as a result, some citizens may feel not enough impacted by it; that is, it should go farther, and encourage more equal democracy. While The Deal is about transforming the connection between residents and the Council, there may be disagreements or at least various interpretations of what this implies and how much citizens should govern decision-making domains.

Some concerns are directly related to the relationships between access and inclusion in democracy and governance culture and social diversity:

- There is a sense that some individuals feel excluded - that is, they disagree with the Council
- There are also many people in Wigan who aren't involved in the Deal in any way (i.e., don't know what it is or aren't interested)
- The Council is aware of this lack of involvement and is considering how this perhaps quiet majority may be involved, but also whether these people want to be more active or whether they are content with the way things are



Doubts may arise: what if people don't want any more say in decision-making or democracy? Is involvement and debate more necessary for individuals who are dissatisfied with the way things are now and want things to change - i.e., those who face many problems and disadvantages in their lives? Does giving more people a voice just mean that those already marginalized voices be ignored?

To summarize the major results examined by PVM, research activities were carried out with Wigan citizens and persons who had participated in the Wigan Deal as funding applicants and members of community groups, as well as council officials and people in positions of authority. According to the results of the citizens' experience study, while certain components of the arrangement function well – for example, it works well for those who are already actively involved in community efforts and seeking for financing options – there are other downsides. There are significant issues linked to the power dynamic between the council and funding applicants, such as hurdles and excessive levels of bureaucracy restricting the efficacy and accessibility of financial awards. It is crucial to note that, although people' accounts showed a balanced picture of the contract, addressing both the positive and bad elements, interviews with Council leaders appeared more prejudiced and failed to address problems voiced by community members. The disparity in the degree of criticism included in the replies reflects a communication gap between the council and the people they are supposed to serve, emphasizing the importance of open debate and communication between the two.

This specific situation illustrates how, over time, mediation, and appropriate assessment of the success of democratic access and inclusion become critical, even as local officials open up to the use of more deliberative mechanisms.







### 3.2 PILOTS' FINDINGS

The EUARENAS project's pilot cities, Gdansk, Reggio Emilia, and Voru, are in the process of examining their starting position, mapping their requirements, and developing a Theory of Change that will lead to a successful action plan programming. This study is based on identifying barriers and goals in terms of access and inclusion in democratic processes in order to conduct a full rethinking or revision of the working techniques and instruments already in use.

Therefore, this part attempts to continue the extrapolation of policy insights by displaying the concrete courses of action coming from the representatives of EUARENAS Pilot cities' responses to the following question: how do you propose to address the issue of access and inclusion in democracy in your experiment?

#### Gdansk

The guiding principles for the city within EUARENAS are based on recognizing that:

- Improved decision processes among different city institutions levels considering cross-sectoral cooperation based on deliberative democracy tools. Another objective is the creation of the masterplan.
- Access to democracy is connect to a certain sense of belonging to improved areas

The city is aiming at understanding the interconnections between the different stakeholders of the district, being able to map them and understand people's general needs, gaining perspective on their perception of the area, prior to recruiting them for participatory workshops. This sort of activity is meant to be as unbiased as possible and to reach a wide spectrum of individuals.

The perceived requirement stems from the recognition that citizens' wants to remain undefined as a result of a usually limited conversation between players in the functional area, accompanied on the other hand by significant development dynamics. When we include both structures and population, the area has changed dramatically throughout the years.

Trust is regarded as a barrier to participation in the debate. Citizens and residents would have higher faith in institutions if they felt they had a fair impact on choices and could offer their own ideas.

As a consequence of a project, people may connect on a new level with the place in which they reside, making it more than just a location where they sleep but also having certain other deep bonds with it. Building a sense of belonging appears to be a thorny issue that must be handled by an open attitude and activities to promote voluntary displays of interest. As a result, the administration has a struggle to abandon highly secretive processes by guiding them. The attitude that is intended to be promoted toward environmental challenges is an example of this: it will be the inhabitants who define the needs (e.g., related to consumption, the cost of energy), and the city can try to position itself in an attitude of listening and, as a result, update the political and administrative agenda.

As a result, methods for assessing the effectiveness of a new approach to democratic inclusion include raising the number of municipal initiatives in the case of the Citizens Fund and maybe completing the development of a new deliberative planning process that can be utilized effectively in the city. Also, new participatory tools that can come from EUARENAS could be used in the everyday processes, making the experimentation a consolidated approach.

#### Reggio Emilia

Decisive steps need to be put in place for the Municipality of Reggio Emilia:

- Application of the "Regulation on democracy and urban and climate justice in Reggio Emilia" to broaden access and inclusion

- Increase of inclusiveness and participation by citizens in the planning of policies and, in general, in dialogue with the administration, generating an improvement in the quality of life in the territories
- Inclusion of the young generations
- Elections of the Neighborhood Councils as required by the regulation
- Communication campaign that must be organized in different times, on different means and to reach different targets that accompanies all phases such as the information phase, the electoral/post-electoral period, the activity of the Neighborhood Councils once settled.

This awareness of the actions needed to act on access and inclusion was built by the City based on analysis of the impact of previous and established initiatives. Through the listening and accountability activity carried out at the end of the first phase of the "QUA-neighborhood common good" project (2014-2019 studied in this project as a case study), it emerged that one of the major fall points of the project was the difficulty in integrating the needs and requirements of interventions identified in the neighborhood Laboratories with citizens with respect to the planning tools of the interventions of the Municipality. This has caused difficulties with respect to the timing and the possibility of giving concrete and direct answers according to the modalities co-designed with citizens, making the internal dialogue within the policies involved not always fluid.

One year after the establishment of the Neighborhood Councils, which is the main objective, Reggio Emilia expects to see all the Neighborhood Councils in operation and all able to have drawn up their own Pact for the development and innovation of the territorial area of competence. Each pact will contain a strategic section that identifies public policy programming guidelines and an operational section that identifies collaborative projects deriving from civic co-design work. Considering that Neighborhood Councils will be held by January 2023, the first results of the work carried out will be measured at the end of the year.

The pilot goes in the direction of generating new ways of structured dialogue with the community in order to generate new synergies and new models of public-private collaboration that positively and concretely affect the territories and people's willingness and possibility to access democracy and concretely influence the decisions.

The City Science Office (CSO), as a decentralized unit for research in urban and social innovation with the participation of the university, can be the right widespread and itinerant organism to reach out to communities through the relationships between research and institutional and technological innovation. This includes the reasons for the accessibility of deliberative platforms, which has already been implemented in the process of choosing members of Neighborhood Councils. Technology must support the democratic process rather than exacerbate inequality, therefore it must be available to the City not just to citizens having a digital identity (SPID in Italy), but also to inhabitants, without the citizenship status.

### Voru

Voru has identified a specific target group that is not reached (and may suffer) in terms of access and inclusion in democracy: young people and their organizations. Engaging them would require a joint effort between local governments and their institutions, politicians, officials, citizens and community members. Young generations are yet perceived as crucial for the economic sustainability of the area and demographic change.

Therefore, the expected outcomes of the Pilot are focused on the opportunity to implement two youth policies:

- Municipalities should launch youth councils
- At least one of the ideas of the hackathon, which concerns the target group of young people, has to be implemented (e.g. Setomaa Municipality has prepared and started to carry out the reform in the field of education).



Access and inclusion are seen as the results of a structured itinerary that embed these ingredients:

- Municipalities implement inclusive democracy and open governance
  - Youth involvement and voice are heard in the community through the launched youth councils.
  - School system reform (Setomaa Municipality) - the education system takes into account the expectations of young people and the community. The municipality council policy is inclusive and consciously guides education in the municipality.
- Different interest groups are involved to policy making of local governments
  - young people are involved and their voices are heard
- Transparency of the decision-making of local governments has increased
  - Citizens are involved and more aware of the activities of local governments
  - the work of the municipal government is well thought out and transparent and aimed to solving issues based on needs of citizens and is citizen-centered.
- New generation to be getting back into policy making process
  - young people are taught good governance and democracy at school
  - young people can participate in community life, their initiatives are supported
  - youth participation in local life and politics has increased
- Voices of Young Generation to be heard
  - municipalities include and consider all interest groups of community
  - municipalities support the entrepreneurship and involvement of young people.



# FORESIGHT ACTIVITIES KEY FINDINGS



### 3.3 MEDIA DISCOURSES ACTIVITIES KEY FINDINGS

Still within the sphere of actual situations investigated by EUARENAS, the Foresight WP5 has already allowed the project consortium's researchers to address the conduct of participatory moments involving communities. Media Discourses and Citizen storytelling activities provide the most useful information for this investigation.

The main considerations for Media discourses activities can be summarized as follows:

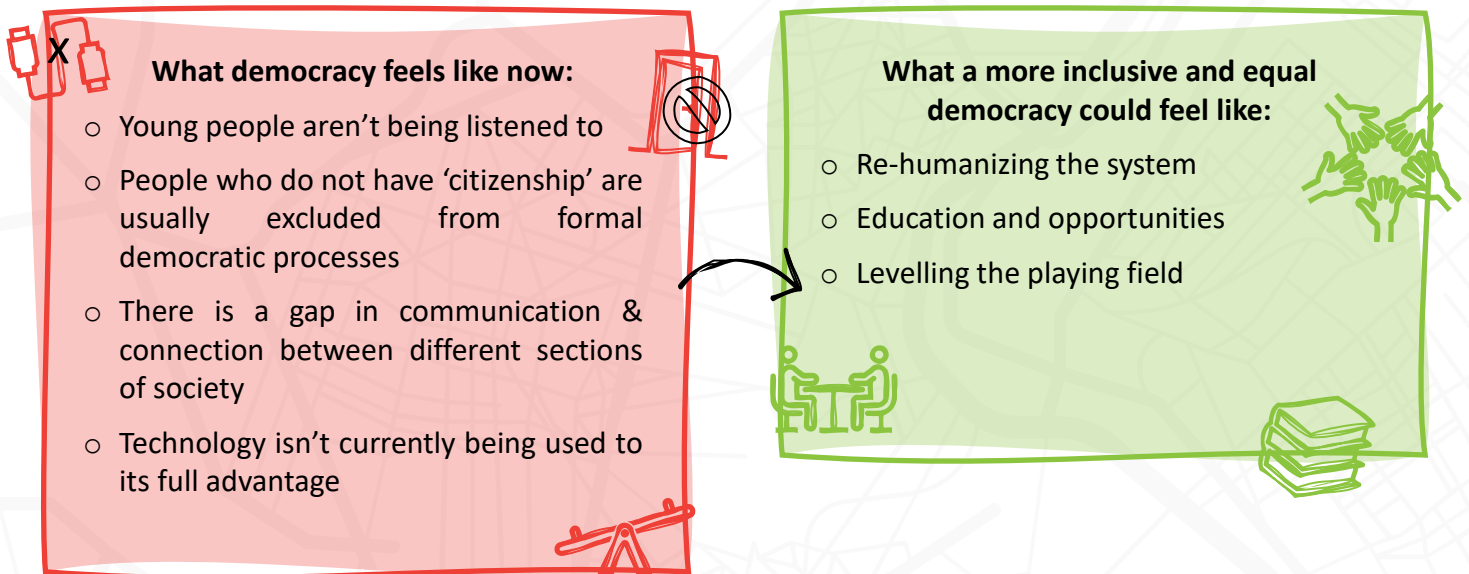
- Digital technologies provide scope for enhancing people's involvement in democracy and social change
- The emergence of - and appetite for - citizen change-making processes can influence and inform traditional decision-making processes

**Digital technology** has the potential to increase people's participation in democracy and social change. The Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the ongoing climate issue, have highlighted the significance of technology in people's lives all around the world. While technology has certain bad implications, society have embraced it in recent years to link people and express ideas, give working and educational possibilities, and more. Improving access to and understanding of technology, as well as giving training on how to utilize it to generate good social change, creates chances for people - particularly underrepresented populations in existing political arenas - to engage in political and civic realms through new ways.

Nevertheless, we must not overlook the fact that digital technologies may create various hurdles to access and inclusion, such as access to digital devices and the cost and availability of Internet connectivity. Furthermore, enhancing public media literacy is required to fight the detrimental impact that digital technologies are having on how we access and interact with democracy. Improving media literacy, particularly among marginalized groups, might be accomplished by adopting education and training on how to critically connect with media sources and create a keener sense of information literacy (i.e., analysis, independent research, critical questioning of content etc.).

The growth of, and willingness to engage in, **citizen change-making processes** that can affect and inform traditional decision-making procedures: Effective implementation of, and/or increased knowledge and awareness of, methods such as participatory budgeting and citizen assemblies are increasing both institutional and citizen understanding of how these approaches can improve existing democratic practices and citizen engagement in decision-making spaces. This is something that may be developed upon; however, care must be taken when implementing such initiatives to ensure that they do not just provide a platform or interaction for presently represented groups while perpetuating existing access and inclusion inequities. Such enthusiasm for citizen change-making processes is causing a shift away from old, hierarchical power systems and toward new, more horizontal power structures. Citizens' relationships with institutions are changing, and there are hints of a power struggle between traditional systems of government and grassroots or civic action. This debate revolves on problems such as how changes and choices are made, how power and influence are distributed, and so on. This power conflict has the potential to exacerbate current power disparities.

For what concerns Citizen Storytelling Activities and CoP Workshop Key Findings are listed below.



Specifically, **young people do not appear to be heard**. They may be enthusiastic about democracy and want to be heard, but more needs to be done to ensure they have access to chances to actively contribute and affect change. More effort in schools and within the education system to educate young people about the democratic process as well as means of engagement through grassroots initiatives might be a possibility. Older members of society should recognize the critical role that young people play in the democratic system and be willing to share power and influence in order to achieve fair representation.

**People who do not have 'citizenship' are frequently barred from participating** in official democratic procedures. Municipalities should consider ways to make these individuals more engaged and involved in local decision-making in order to establish communities where people feel they belong and have a stake.

There is a **communication and connection gap** between different segments of society. More should be done to build linkages and promote collaboration between official institutions, grassroots initiatives, and individuals who are not currently involved in democracy in order to share power and responsibility and achieve higher representation.

At the moment, **technology is not being exploited** to its full potential. There was no discussion of how technology is being utilized to increase democratic participation today. People stressed the need of conducting study into how technology may be utilized as a vehicle for good change, which might lead to a more accessible democratic process.

The way to a more inclusive and egalitarian democracy might entail (i) rehumanizing the system, (ii) emphasizing education and opportunity, and (iii) leveling the playing field. To begin, a rehumanizing movement would promote more human connection between those in positions of power within formal democratic institutions and the communities and neighborhoods they serve. Second, education, encouragement, and assistance for persons aged 25 to 45 to become interested in and participating in democracy would be appreciated. Furthermore, chances for young people and migrant populations to have their opinions heard and engage in democracy will assist to mitigate present inequities and exclusions. Third, cities should recognize that participating in democracy is difficult, time-consuming, and energy-intensive. Examining how individuals, particularly those who face current obstacles to inclusion, might join in ways that are accessible to them and overcome practical difficulties such as time/availability and financial status will aid diverse groups in engaging with democracy.





# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



## 4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The empirical analysis of what has already been experienced during the EUARENAS project thus far, in conjunction with the comparison with the CoP comprised of experts, facilitators, city representatives, practitioners, and professors, allows for the development of some public policy recommendations specific to the urban context, as well as the transfer of useful suggestions to the European level. It is stressed that the research and field surveys done demonstrate that the complexities of access and inclusion concerns in democracy require a case-by-case approach. This is especially true for the tool selection process, which seeks to match mapped demands with stakeholder involvement arrangements.

However, several cross-sectoral policy ideas that originated from synergies between consortium researchers, Pilot city representatives, and CoP members may be identified.

At the urban level, we propose addressing the issue of accessibility and inclusion through horizontal deliberation based on four fundamental components: (i) systemic issues, (ii) power and hierarchy, (iii) mainstreaming participatory and deliberative practices, (iv) tools, techniques and methods.

- i. Systemic Issues: How do structural/social inequalities impact on how our democracies work and who is included in participatory and deliberative processes?
  - A better understanding of why individuals do not engage is required, which may lead to initiatives such as improved recruiting approaches, more diverse and mixed participation methods, or improved leadership. Potential participants might simply lack resources (time, money, language skills, etc.) to participate in (urban) participatory practices, which results in imbalances in terms of the included population in such processes. The first step is always to understand and describe the nature of the impediments. Accessibility and inclusion warnings must be explicitly given in all promotional materials and invitations sent out before to the discussion, so that persons who would not normally participate owing to such concerns reconsider.
  - Institutions should provide legal mechanisms that acknowledge the legitimacy of local deliberative processes. These mechanisms should both assist the implementation of such initiatives at the local level and ensure their efficacy by providing them with the legal legitimacy they deserve.
  - Cities should have a long-term goal to ensure a self-sustained participation of those previously excluded. What is crucial here is the uplifting of the whole groups by ensuring economic and social structures do not cause exclusion.
  - When giving resources to improve democratic participation at the local level, institutions should consider directing a portion of these funds to the creation and use of instruments required by local governments to reduce access obstacles. This would solve that attention was drawn to white and western biases that exist in many of the processes, approaches and tools used to promote participation and deliberation in cities around the world.
- ii. Power and Hierarchy: Is it possible to achieve horizontal and equal deliberation – why and how?
  - Power and hierarchical structures in society/ies also control and condition much of what is possible and likely in terms participation and deliberation. Decentralization of power may transcend control in favor of openness, relying on various stakeholders participating in institutional transformation, as is the case with the relationships established between science and public institutions in City Science Offices.
  - "Deliberation by law" or through special regulations is a potentially more equitable alternative to traditional power political procedures, as well as a means of escaping private "citizenship" and plutocracy. As a result, even if the process itself is not inclusive, greater equity can be attained via discourse.



- Inclusion needs encouragement from the top, not only to invite people to deliberative fora, but also to make them realize the relevancy of their actions, i.e., trust building. It can be counting also on few wise individual and decision-makers that have to be reached and involved by communities to boost the public administration support
  - Inclusion or empowerment always produces a certain level of reliance between those who are and those who become included (not necessarily on their own terms). We must guarantee that the process of inclusion does not perpetuate that reliance and does not result in a protracted state of "learned helplessness," but rather allows it to be broken.
  - Stakeholders with the most to lose, such as major developers in cities, are hesitant to engage in deliberative procedures since it is against their 'rational' interest to share power. (Social) Outcome contracting in the sphere of research and innovation should be promoted in cities to better demonstrate different types of advantages to the private sector pushing for a behavioural shift.
  - Deliberation should be designed in a way that provides safe and robust framework for political engagement of citizens. Key ingredients include:
    - the provision of a safe discussion and deliberation environment, so for example the use of a trusted external facilitator and mediator
    - the provision of enough time to let the deliberative process flourish, for citizens to learn how to use it and for authorities to build organizational competences
    - multi-level cooperation of different governance levels to balance 'plutocracy'
    - the use of random selection of the participants, based on representation, but also encouraging many citizens to engage in community
- iii. Mainstreaming participatory and deliberative practices: How can we engage "decision-makers" effectively in participatory and deliberative practices and how do we move participation and deliberation in democracy from 'siloes practice/pilots' to more mainstream, embedded activities?
- For participation and deliberation to be mainstreamed in cities, a cyclical process has to occur that starts with perceived will and need to engage in such practices, continues with setting the rules of the game, experimentation and continuous listening and dialogue processes (i.e., assemblies and councils, planning for real, focus groups, and storytelling practices).
  - A joint learning process consequently occurs which further institutionalizes such practices by integrating them into local decision-making structures and local administrative law.
  - In this process, communication and reporting back to the residents and the community about results and outcomes of their involvement and clear presentation of the outcomes and benefits of the participatory and deliberative practices increases legitimacy.
- iv. Tools, Techniques and Methods: What tools, techniques and methods can support inclusiveness and accessibility in participatory and deliberative processes, specifically when involving people who are usually marginalised from these processes?
- In order to engage marginalised groups, one must first understand these demographics, specifically the barriers and frictions that are preventing them from participation and avoid methods and instruments that may have exacerbated people's dissatisfaction.
  - From there, organisers of participatory and deliberative processes can apply targeted outreach to engage with communities that are hard to reach.
  - Technology increasingly offers great assistance in this endeavour, for example in form of online platform where people can participate anonymously, and those with busy schedules can still voice their ideas when they can.

- Childcare, transportation, and translation can be provided as incentives to participate (i.e., UK).
- Assistance to the elderly can be offered through “Time Bank” programs (i.e., Switzerland).
- A web-based platform may connect volunteers and paid services with daily life necessities such as transportation, event attendance, and housekeeping responsibilities and assist communication with people with personal impairments (i.e., Helpific event mapping in Estonia)

In light of these issues, it is also critical to shift the focus from tools to policies and regulations that may define different sorts of tools, approaches, and processes. Cities should thus first consider creating strategies and laws based on clear goals, and then choose instruments that fulfill the demands of accessibility and inclusivity, rather than aiming for mindless experimentation with random tools chosen only based on prior situations or current trends.

Simultaneously, in addition to these ideas for the local level, a more consistent strategy at the national and European levels to overcoming these obstacles in the long run should be widely promoted. In adopting key provisions in their financing programs, European and national institutions may support accessibility and inclusive efforts. Specific clauses should evaluate compliance with the standards throughout the whole initiative to avoid “formal” rather than substantive inclusion tactics.

Therefore, a variety of democratic initiatives might benefit the EU, so that it could be the first to test approaches that can be easily replicable at the urban level. Policymakers and European experts in the EU have mostly focused on a type of mini-public dialogue that has gained traction particularly in Western countries. They have historically been resistive to many sorts of developments investigated in other countries. More effective methods involving a big number of individuals are still necessary. Even if permanent EU participation forums are established, only a small number of people will participate. These people will serve as representatives because they were selected rather than elected, as politicians are. This form of representation may be well-founded, but a larger, more engaged populace is also required. The EU must be guided by a broad vision of what a future democratic system should include. This implies that European institutions should facilitate the execution of multi-stakeholder projects that promote collaboration across many sectors of society. Such an approach can deliver greater knowledge, particularly when players close to the reality where initiatives are produced and implemented are involved. At the same time, this aids in identifying and engaging stakeholders who may otherwise be excluded.

To this purpose, more effective CSOs engagement in EU policy making may also be necessary, as experimentation and co-production of change need to connect multiple scales that CSOs already represent: Europe, nations, regions, cities and neighborhoods. For a significant change in democratic reconstruction, a less instrumental approach to EU citizen participation is essential. The emergence of a stronger united European identity may aid in breaking down obstacles to increase accessibility and inclusion in democracy by producing a larger critical mass of groups that will spontaneously claim the desire to participate.



**EUARENAS** investigates the ways in which social movements coupled with local government reform initiatives, manifesting themselves in local-level experiments, create momentum for political change that include more inclusive and participatory forms of governance.



For more information:

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