



**Cities as Arenas of Political Innovation
in the Strengthening of Deliberative
and Participatory Democracy**

Inclusiveness, Accessibility and Horizontal Deliberation

Results from the first Knowledge Exchange Workshop

September 2022

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:

euarenas.eu

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Contact	Professor James Scott (james.scott@uef.fi)

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Authors: Hayley Trowbridge | People's Voice Media
Matti Fritsch, Trang Nguyen | University of Eastern Finland
Wojciech Ufel | SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities

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About the EUARENAS Community of Practice

The EUARENAS Community of Practice (CoP) has been set up in order to provide a horizontal learning platform on participative and deliberative democracy in urban settings. With a long-term vision to nurture active citizenship, social agendas and political life through citizen participation and democratic innovations in European cities, we seek to bring together people from different professional backgrounds through the co-creation and exchange of expertise, stories and resources on participative and deliberative democracy in Europe.

We hope that the CoP will provide a space for people to connect and engage with like-minded people from a variety of sectors and arenas with a shared interest on deliberation and participation in democracy.

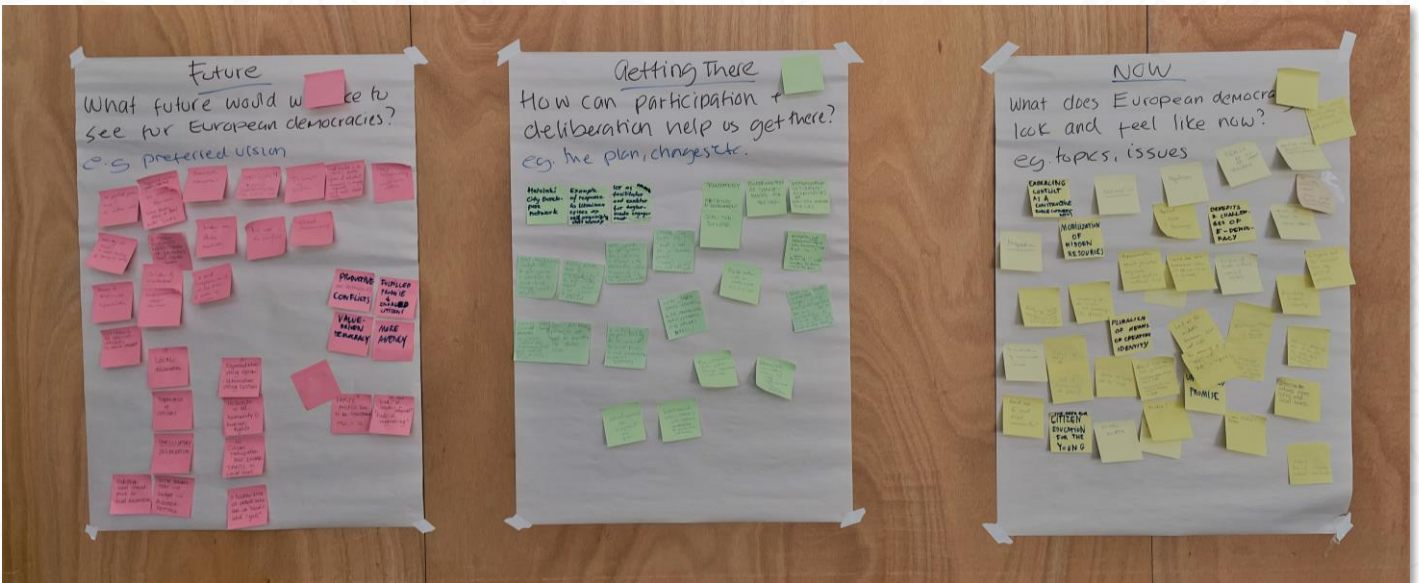
Knowledge exchange workshop 1

In May 2022, we held our first Knowledge Exchange in-person meeting in Reggio Emilia (Italy) with the aim to pool the collective knowledge of the CoP's members and start the dialogue. The event was jointly attended by both CoP members and the EUARENAS consortium. The document at hand outlines some of the findings and results from that first Knowledge Exchange Workshop.



Democracy Now, Democracy in The Future

The first session of the workshop was dedicated to a future thinking activity lead by our partner People’s Voice Media who is running the foresight research in EUARENAS. Below are some of the ideas from this session.



Democracy Now

When reflecting on what democracy feels like where they live and work, the CoP members noted points such as:

- Citizens feel removed from the political process - they perhaps don’t care or feel powerless to affect change
- There was a sense that ‘European identity’ is being diminished
- Growing complexity administration and bureaucracy causing blockages and disconnect
- Truth and trust doesn’t feel valued

A key question being posed was: **is democracy really working?** Is it supporting the practice or principles of social equality - or unwittingly helping maintain inequalities?

The future we’d like to see

Given that some of the points above point to a ‘crisis in democracy’, CoP members had some interesting ideas about how this could look very different. These ideas included:

- Citizens having more agency and involvement in democracy - moving to ‘deep democracy’, going beyond just voting and being involved in deliberation and decision-making
- Having a ‘value-driven’ democracy
- Local government with the competencies to support new ways of working with citizens and involving them in local democracy



Ideas for getting there

So, given that the CoP members would like to changes from the current situation, we spent some time thinking about how we might get there. Thinking and suggestions in this area were:

- Scaling-up and mainstreaming of existing practices such as participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies, crowdsourced law - so that these become the new 'status quo'
- Adopting test and learn approaches as a way that experimentation can be done and actively learned from
- Find ways of celebrating and connecting up the small changes that are taking place - this will help people see that progress is being made, even when it feels like things are changing too slow

The full results of this workshop will be combined with more detailed work done with citizens from Voru, Reggio Emilia and Gdansk to produce an insight briefing focusing on how people across Europe are currently experiencing democracy and their ideas for the future. This will be released in Autumn 2022 - watch this space!

World Cafe – Small Group Discussions

In the second session of the Knowledge Exchange workshop, we adopted the World Café approach discuss four questions on participatory and deliberative practices. The Community of Practice and EUARENAS consortium members joined each table for 20 minutes. At the end, short feedbacks from each topic area were given by the table hosts. The following sections of this report briefly presents the results. The four questions/topic areas were:

Systemic Issues: How do structural/social inequalities impact on how our democracies work and who is included in participatory and deliberative processes?)

Power and Hierarchy: Is it possible to achieve horizontal and equal deliberation – why and how?

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?

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?

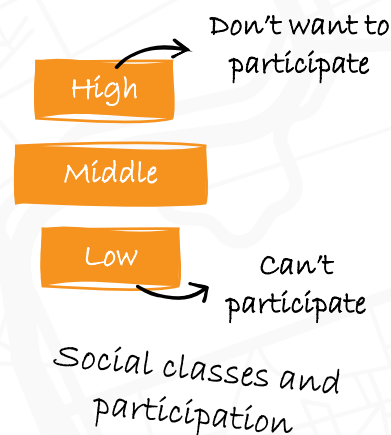
Systemic Issues

How do structural/social inequalities impact on how our democracies work and who is included in participatory and deliberative processes?

The participants at the table identified a number of systemic and structural inequalities that affect participatory and deliberative processes ranging from broader societal issues to aspects that are more connected to individual experiences and life conditions, which, however, are obviously influenced and conditioned by the former. Being aware of such systemic issues, and applying participatory strategies to remedy them, is valuable for the quality of participatory practices in a variety of ways. Overall, a better understanding of why people won't participate is thus needed, which might result in strategies such as better recruitment techniques, more varied and mixed participatory methods or better leadership.

During the workshop, attention was drawn to white and western biases that exist in many of the process, approaches and tools used to promote participation and deliberation in cities around the world. Power and hierarchical structures in society(ies) also control and condition much of what is possible and likely in terms of such practices. Interestingly, some of the table participants connected the level of participation to social classes existing in society arguing that people from lower social can't participate whereas people from higher social classes do not necessarily want to participate.

Quite a bit of attention was drawn to the issue of lacking resources to participate in (urban) participatory practices and the resulting imbalances in terms of the included population in such processes. These include human resources as well as financial ones. Some residents might find it for example difficult to participate as a result of lacking time (boom years with young children and busy careers). Others might feel that giving their time to participatory activities in times of



economic hardship or lack of money, particularly when participatory contributions (time) are expected to be carried out free of charge, is not a sensible approach. Participation might also be hampered by a lack of health, education or necessary digital skills, and language skills. It should be borne in mind that particular strata of the population, particularly in more marginalised areas, might also have a lack of basic motivation to participate simply as a result of a feeling that their contribution will in the end lead to nothing.

People who are seen as not "participating" may have their own ways to deliberate

Different opportunities to participate - mixed methods

Better understandings of why people won't participate

Invest time in recruitment methodology

Power and Hierarchy

Is it possible to achieve horizontal and equal deliberation - why and how?

At this table, the prospects for horizontal and equal deliberation free from power relations and hierarchies were discussed.

Deliberation was seen as an alternative to the traditional power political processes and as an escape from private “citizenship” and plutocracy. It is a potentially more equal form of decision-making that changes the status of its participants from having certain rights and (untapped) capacities to being responsible and having the power of agency. Moreover, greater equality can be achieved through deliberation, even if the process itself lacks in inclusivity. However, it does have certain limitations. First, a broad 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. A lengthy process of building trust and accountability of the authorities – especially through respecting decisions of participatory bodies – was pointed here as one of the crucial elements for broadening inclusion. The other problem that has been pointed out is the reluctance of engaging in deliberative practices of these stakeholders who have the most to lose – e.g., large developers in cities – as it is against their ‘rational’ interest to share power.

In its most consequential and meaningful form, deliberation would also lead to direct implementation of the results (decisions, solutions, recommendations) of the results, without the involvement of politicians. In turn, this would provide the process (and its participants) with motivation and legitimacy. Direct implementation would obviously require the willingness and readiness of public authorities, who need to initiate the process anyway. Therefore, different tools of decision-making need to be designed and implemented on different levels of the political process, and deliberation should be designed in a way that provides safe and robust framework for political engagement of citizens. Certain ideas for this framework that emerged in the discussion included:

- 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 the ‘silent’ majority of citizens to engage in community

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 ‘siloed practice/pilots’ to more mainstream, embedded activities?

The table working on this question developed an ‘urban participation cycle’ based on the experiences of the City of Gdansk. The depiction of the participation cycle indicates that in order to mainstream such activities and institutionalisation of such a cyclical process has to occur.

The starting point of that cycle was a potentially existing tension between the community/residents and the political decision-making process/structures, or pressure from the former on the latter to bring about change. If political will exists, participatory practices will enter the ‘black box’ between the two spheres and result in setting the rules of the game, experimentation, storytelling practices. In the best case scenario, these practices lead to a joint learning process, results of which will feed into city strategies if the political and administrative will exist. Further institutionalisation, and thus mainstreaming, of these experiments and practices might then be achieved by integrating them into local administrative law. An important aspect of the cycle is the communication and reporting back to the residents and the community about results and outcomes of their involvement. A clear presentation of the outcomes and benefits of the participatory and deliberative practices increases the legitimacy among both the residents and the decision-makers. Obviously significant resources are necessary to ‘feed’ this cyclical process are needed, including human resources providing their time and effort, financial resources and the availability and ability to use appropriate tools and methods.

Obviously, the participation cycle does not take place in isolation ‘from the rest of the world’ but is influenced by a host of variables within the multi-level system of governance/government in the EU and beyond. The OECD, EU and a variety of other institutions set norms and standards and provide a giant knowledge exchange platform with regard to participatory practices (the H2020 EUARENAS project being just one example). National governments also set parameters for participation through their national legislation and soft power instruments.

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. From there, organisers of participatory and deliberative processes can apply targeted outreach to engage with communities that are hard to reach. Participants may not be able to join due to language barriers and/ or being occupied by childcare and work. These obstacles must be addressed and mitigated through offering financial or practical support, such as having on-site translators and employing inclusive language. Here, technology offers great assistance, such as creation of an online platform where people can participate anonymously, and those with busy schedules can still voice their ideas when they can.

Existing tools and methods for accessibility and inclusion have already been tested in various countries in Europe. For instance, childcare, transportation, and translation are being provided as incentives to participate in the UK. In Switzerland, assistance to the elderly is being offered through the “Time Bank” programme. In Estonia, the Helpific event mapping and communication tools exist to assist communication with the disabled.

The participatory and deliberative discussions themselves should be value-based and reciprocal – aiming for mutual gain and respect. Systemic attention should be paid to the topics of debate between citizens and decision-makers. Here, to ensure diversity in participants, demographic quotas can be set. The facilitators of these discussions should be aware about the diversity of their audiences, and also receive proper training to be able to handle diverse groups. Different roles during the facilitation process should be covered.

The entry barriers can be:



Participation incentives can be:

