

A CITIZENS PARTICIPATION JOURNEY  
BETWEEN LOCAL AND EUROPEAN LEVELS

A JOURNEY  
BETWEEN  
**LOCAL AND  
EUROPEAN**  
LEVELS FOR  
MEANINGFUL  
PARTICIPATION



ecos  
Cooperativa de Educação, Cooperação e  
Desenvolvimento, CIL



## DATASHEET:

**Author and Coordinator:** Ana Morgado | Cooperativa Ecos –  
Cooperação, Desenvolvimento e Educação, CRL.

**Proofreading :** Joana Sousa Pinto

**Graphic design, layout and illustrations :** Charrão Studio®

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Kaja Cunk  
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Anna Pomykol  
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## EDITORIAL

As we are getting closer to the end of our cooperation project, I would like to thank all the partners but also all the people and organisations around Europe that have the perseverance to continue working or to start working on the topic of Democracy. Working on how we can contribute to the improvement and the quality of our democratic systems, as well as the processes and mechanisms that our institutions have developed, even if we find more and more citizens looking at democracy in an alarming rhythm of disbelieving.

Since these organisations and all the people involved are working based on their passion and with a strong belief that we can still significantly improve our current systems, I must consider all these people heroines and heroes. Knowing that something urgently needs to be done, we continue working with so little support, with so little social and political recognition of our work.

I definitely dedicate these words and this publication to all the people that does not resign, believing that we can have a more participatory society, where citizens are engaged and feel part of the decisions that affect their lives. Where citizens believe that our structures, institutions and processes contribute to the accomplishment of the human potential which contributes to build "trust bonds and fruitful alliances among social actors, entrepreneurs and institutions (through dialogue and cooperation) and articulating agendas of action".

These days, by observing the trends and statistics on every election and studies on citizens engagement, we can easily say that there is a strong detachment and disbelief in our political system and in our democratic institutions, and this is reflected from local, regional, national to European level. Nowadays, abstention is the major political party in Europe. And this sends a clear and loud sign. Despite that fact, we still face lack of investment in this field. I would say that there isn't real political willingness to make a change on this reality.

Unless we are referring to the period just before elections where we can see a lot of focus on the topic, but mainly on a rhetorical level.

Changing this reality is not such a complex task as taking humans to planet Mars, something quite trendy and mediatic at the moment. Probably, the financial investment would be significantly lower, but the impact on the credibility and sustainability of our democracies would be tremendous.

We need to invest in a transgenerational approach working with all age groups. We need to make the information accessible and in a format that is understandable both for a person who lives in the city as for the ones living in the country side. We need to make people understand that their participation has an impact. We need to improve the mechanisms of accountability and transparency and to develop new forms of engaging the citizens in the decision-making processes.

The major potential for change relies on citizens and people only engage themselves if they feel that their participation is meaningful!

My most sincere thank you to all of you who continue believing and working for a more democratic and participatory society.

**Bruno Antonio**

ECOS President

In the sky to Nairobi, 6th of November 2015



**WELCOME!**

**ROUND  
TRIP**  
A CITIZENS PARTICIPATION JOURNEY  
BETWEEN LOCAL AND EUROPEAN LEVELS

Thought and created primarily for citizens, **this magazine on Citizens Democratic Participation has a clear purpose:** to be a practical tool with useful and clear information on the existing mechanisms for participation at local, national and European level, including examples, references and case studies of implemented mechanisms in the five municipalities and countries involved in this project (Germany, Portugal, Slovenia, Poland & Lithuania). This magazine was also elaborated having in mind the importance of bringing together different understandings, approaches and projects that are enriching and questioning the debate on Participatory Democracy in Europe today.

In the 1st Section of the magazine there will be a **general description of 16 mechanisms of participation** used to involve citizens in public life and applied by the European Union, 5 European countries and 5 municipalities. These descriptions intend to provide the reader with a general understanding of the mechanisms, their functioning, strengths and weaknesses, as well as with practical information on forms, conditions and requisites for participation in each of the mechanisms presented.

The participatory practices that we present were identified by the Consortium of the Round-Trip project as good practices. They create opportunities for citizens to engage in political life on a regular basis, and not only during the elections. They support democratization of public life decisions and foster accountability and transparency in the work of public authorities.

By sharing different examples of existing participatory mechanisms that strength the voice and will of citizens around Europe, this magazine will contribute to foster the understanding of citizens about different forms, formats, ways and mechanisms that allow them to be involved in public life. At the same time, it will contribute to initiate or/and strengthen participatory practices in our own communities.. In this regard, the magazine should also be seen as a tool which can be used by municipalities, policy makers, civil society organisa-

tions and information centres at local, national and European level to provide their citizens with information in what concerns to their civil and political rights.

In the 2nd Section of the magazine “Unwrap Democratic Participation: meanings, models, obstacles and conditions” we aim at **setting a conceptual framework on Citizen Participation and at bringing citizens perspectives** about their participation, they face obstacles and opportunities they face when engaging decision-making processes in public life.

In this section it was unavoidable to bring some reflections on the role of information and education as essential elements to put forward conscious and critical participation.

The 3rd Section of this magazine “Trends & Perspectives on Public Participation” puts together different opinion articles that raise some of the contemporary challenges that democracy and citizen participation are facing in Europe in nowadays society – the emergence of subversive movements to claim more democracy and more voice for citizens, the raise of extreme right movements, corruption and clientelistic relationships, elitization of the participation structures, the need to work on social inclusion, etc. are some of the reflections that Academia Cidadã, Nuno da Silva and the executive directors of the partner organisations of this project brought to feed our reflections.

Finally, this magazine recognizes the great diversity of contexts, objectives and measures in strengthen the involvement of citizens in the decision-making processes. It offers no prescriptions or ready-made solutions, but rather seeks to clarify key issues to ensure access to information and opportunities.



# IN ACTION – MECHANISMS & PRACTICES OF CITIZENS PARTICIPATION

- Citizens Participation at Local Level
- Citizens Participation at National Level
- Citizens Participation at European Level

## CITIZENS PARTICIPATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

### LOCAL ASSEMBLY OF CITIZENS



Country: Slovenia  
Several municipalities are implementing this mechanism

#### What are we talking about?

Assembly of citizens is a form of direct citizen participation in decision-making in the municipality through which citizens discuss issues of local self-government, the work of the municipal authorities and local community authorities, the changes in the area of the municipality or the changes in the area of the local community, the integration of municipalities in the wider local government community local issues and / or offer opinions and suggestions on matters within the competence of the local community.

#### Who convenes the local assemblies of citizens?

Voters (at least 5% of the voters in the municipality), the mayor, the municipal council or the narrower section of the municipality.

#### Who can participate in the local assemblies of citizens?

Any citizen from the municipality

#### How does it work?

At the Assembly, citizens form position, give proposals, suggestions and opinions or make decisions. The mayor must convene the Assembly if 5% of the voters in the municipality demands it, but it can also convene it on its own initiative, at the initiative of the municipal council or by the narrower section of the municipality.

and...

The Mayor shall convene the Assembly of citizens by publishing the decision to convene the Assembly in the Official Gazette and in the local manner at the premises of the municipal administration or at the premises of the local community.

If the Assembly is convened by the voters, political party or other association of citizens, the request for it must be supported by signatures of at least 5% of the voters in a municipality area or in the area of the specific local community. The list shall contain the personal information of the signatories: name and surname, date of birth, address, municipality of residence and signature of the signatory.

The mayor must convene the request for the Assembly of citizens within three days. All the deadlines are subject to the general provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The legal provision in Slovenia for this mechanism of participation is The Local Government Act (ZLS) and the Law on the provinces (ZPok), which is currently only in the form of a proposal.

#### IN WHICH LEVEL OF THE LADDER OF PARTICIPATION ARE WE?

5th rung: citizens are able to create plans together with authorities.

# MOBILE APPLICATION FOR MONITORING THE CITY – EXAMPLE OF IZOLA

## What are we talking about?

Mobile app is an application that can be installed in a smart phone and that allows citizens to easily notify the municipality about problems in the public space.

## Who can notify the municipality?

Any citizen that has a smart phone and the application installed.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

1.

The citizen detects a problem

2.

The citizen reports a problem with the mobile app

3.

The service automatically submit the problem to a competent public administration

4.

The public administration assign the problem to a contractor within the web application

5.

The problem is solved

6.

The notification of the problem solved is provided in the mobile app

7.

The app notifies the citizen about the resolved problem

8.

The relevant public administration is praised by the user

## In which level of the ladder of participation are we?

4th rung - not real participation, but a necessary step in participation since citizens inform and monitor about existing problems in the city and afterwards citizens can also ask for relevant information about what was done and was not done

## Perspectives and challenges

This mobile application can be seen as a tool for citizens to constantly interact with local authorities without going directly to their services.

It is also seen by municipalities around Europe as a possibility to optimize their management of resources and means (saving fuel, manpower and working hours) and, at the same time, as a possibility to give faster answers to issues reported by citizens.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Since January, the parish of Estrela in Lisbon (Portugal), is using a very similar app. It is called GeoEstrela.

Check here: [www.geoestrela.pt](http://www.geoestrela.pt)



Country: Slovenia  
Several municipalities are implementing this mechanism

# PARTICIPATORY BUDGET



Country: Portugal  
Region: Algarve  
Municipality: Loulé

## What are we talking about?

The Participatory Budgeting 2015 in the municipality of Loulé is a deliberative process that involves citizens in the decision-making process about public investments. Citizens can decide where to invest part of the budget of the municipality.

## Who can make a proposal for the Participatory Budgeting?

Anyone related to the municipality of Loulé can submit a proposal for any locality, by taking part in one – or more - of the 11 decentralized participatory meetings.

## What is needed for a proposal to be eligible?

The proposal must:

- Be within the mandate of the Municipality of Loulé;
- Support plans or municipal projects;
- To be considered as a public investment;
- Do not exceed the maximum amount set for each parish;
- Do not exceed 24 months of execution;
- Be sufficiently specific and delimited the territory.

## Who can vote in a proposal of the Participatory Budgeting?

Each voter of the municipality (registered on the electoral roll) has two opportunities to vote: through free text message and in person on an itinerant ballot box or in a permanent ballot box. Any other citizen can vote through free text message using their mobile phones.

## Who initiates the Participatory Budget process?

The City Council of Loulé and is the city council who decides on the amount that will be allocated for the Participatory Budget.

## How the City Council decides on the budget invested in this mechanism?

It is based on an application of an equitable and proportionate form of investments in all parishes of the county, so that all locations are addressed with investment from the participatory budgeting.

## When are most voted proposals implemented?

The most voted proposals (total of 11) are implemented in the following biennium.

## Where to get more information?

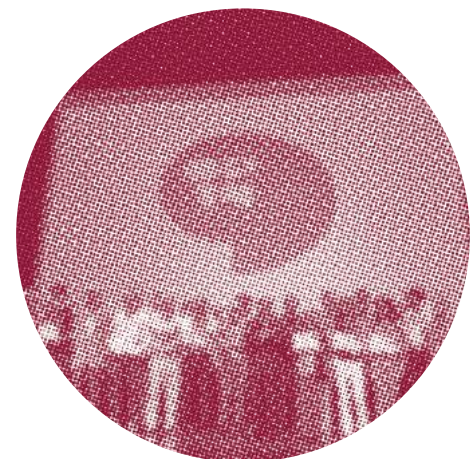
- Online page of the Municipality of Loulé dedicated to the Participatory budget: <http://www.cm-loule.pt/pt/menu/828/perguntas-frequentes.aspx#9e-obrigatorio-que-as-propostas-apresentadas-sejam-tecnicamente-elaboradas-e-orcamentadas>

## More about the Participatory Budget of the city of Loulé

The Participatory Budgeting 2015 in the municipality of Loulé is a deliberative process that involves citizens in the decision-making process about public investments. The main purpose is to deepen the exercise of democracy through a more participatory governance and greater proximity between local political power and citizens, enabling them to be not just mere observers, but protagonists in the decision-making process. This project increases the discussion about investment priorities between citizens, which can help avoiding planning errors and increases transparency in the acts of municipal management.

The annual cycle of decision-making in the Participatory Budgeting Loulé 2015:

- a. Preparation and Disclosure (January to May);
- b. Collecting Proposals - participatory meetings (May to June)
- c. Technical Analysis (June to August)
- d. Voting Process (September)
- e. Public Presentation of the Outcomes (October)
- f. Budget Approval (November to December)





# PARTICIPATORY BUDGET



Country: Portugal  
Region: Algarve  
Municipality: Loulé

## In which level of the ladder of participation are we?

6th rung - Partnership: citizens are able to choose between different suggestions from authorities and to influence legislation.

## Perspectives and Challenges about this Mechanism:

Like in other participatory budget processes the main challenge in Loulé is to find the necessary ingredients to engage citizens to fully participate and to continue participating every year. Although the process is very simple and was broadly publicized by the municipality, the number of people participating in 2015 edition was lower than the number that participated in 2014.

The low and decreasing number of participants, very common in other municipalities as well, is mainly connected with two factors: first an individualistic perception of the process that leads many people to stop participating once "their" project is already approved or if some part of the process or the result did not meet their expectations; and second a poor or late project implementation by the municipality without proper information to the citizens, leading to frustration with the process.

Addressing the latest factor, by providing better information on project situation, would be a relatively easy way to improve the process in Loulé, but dealing with the first factor, by really engaging citizens to participate in the process for the sake of communal interest, is the real challenge and the key to a more meaningful exercise of participatory democracy.

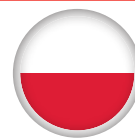


## DID YOU KNOW?

In two years, the overall budget invested (or soon to be invested) by the Participatory Budgeting is 1.200.000€ (500.000€ in 2014 and 600.000€ in 2015).



# LOCAL INITIATIVES



Country: Poland  
Several municipalities are implementing this mechanism

## What are we talking about?

The local initiative is a form of cooperation of local government units with their inhabitants, in order to jointly carry out public tasks for the local community. A Local Initiative has the form of a public task assignment. The application is submitted to the local government unit.

The exercise of this right is free and free of charge.

## Who can initiate a Local Initiative?

Any citizen who have the support of other inhabitants of a specific administrative area, a group of citizens or a non-governmental organisation acting in the name of citizens.

The local initiative can be submitted just by citizens who have full legal capacity (Poland's case, both being 18 years old and having no deprivation of voting rights).

## To whom should the Initiative be addressed?

Local authorities in general.

## Where to get more information?

Please read Act on Public Benefit Organization and Volunteerism (chapter 2) and specific legislation in each local authority.

## WHO CAN INITIATE A LOCAL INITIATIVE?

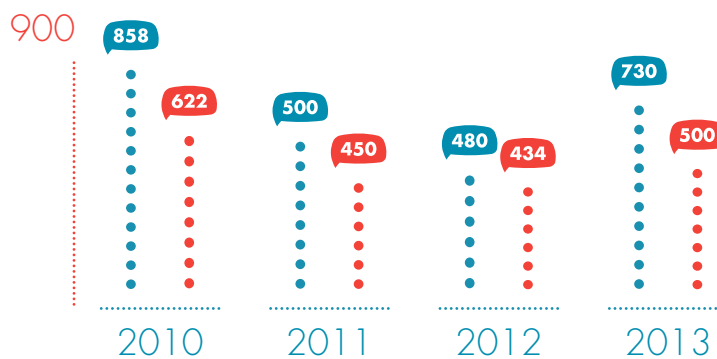
Any citizen living in a municipality that has this mechanism implemented.

## IN WHICH LEVEL OF THE LADDER OF PARTICIPATION ARE WE?

5th rung: citizens are able to create plans together with authorities.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Mechanisms of Local Initiatives are popular in Poland. The statistics below show data collected about the submitted and implemented local initiatives over the years 2010-2013.



● Number of applications submitted

● Number of approved applications

# GUIDELINES FOR CITIZENS PARTICIPATION – EXAMPLE OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF HEIDELBERG

## What are we talking about?

Guidelines for participation is mechanisms developed by municipalities to inform citizens about participation processes. They describe and explain a complex multi-level process involving several partners including the 6th rung of the ladder of participation.

This mechanism was a door for a more collaborative relation between Citizens, administration and political bodies because citizens actively participate in the municipal decision-making process and enter into a direct communication process with the administration and political bodies.



## DID YOU KNOW?

In some municipalities the guidelines are included in the local law. Heidelberg is one of the “pioneers”. The guideline content has been adopted by a decision of the municipal council. There is an administrative regulation for staff handling with participation procedures.

## MORE ABOUT THE GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION

### Goals:

Creating reliability and transparency by rules  
Building trust between citizens, administration and local representatives  
Strengthening of Council decisions and the legitimacy of local councils

### Process steps:

#### 1. Early information about plans and projects of the municipality

Project list is on the Internet, in the Official Journal and local press

#### 2. Stimulating civic participation

Committees, city council and administration can start the process

#### 3. Participation Concept

The participation concept behind embraces co-operative designing, planning, implementation, feedback and evaluation of the participation

#### 4. Evaluation Participation Process, drawing up a recommendation

The administration is responsible for the implementation of process and the committee controls the major projects

#### 5. Decision

The consultation results are used in the decision-making process by local representatives.



Country: Germany  
Several municipalities are implementing this mechanism



## PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES



Country: Germany  
Several municipalities are implementing this mechanism

## THE LOCAL GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION

### Advantages

#### STRENGTHS

The guidelines guarantee that citizens participation is desired by politicians and administration based on generally accepted quality standards.

Citizens are recognized as experts in their own living environment.

Due to the guidelines, citizens have access to important municipal decision-making.

### Disadvantages

#### WEAKNESSES

It is uncertain whether a city government establishes the guidelines as part of the municipal statutes or as recommendations to the administration.

Municipalities can choose different paths of developing local guidelines. Sometimes not participatory.

Experiences from the first pilot municipalities show that the participation of children and young people is not taken into account.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

The decision-making process of the politically legitimized powers are supported by professionally organized and moderated participation processes.

The dialogue among the three stakeholders politicians, administration and civil society is established very early.

Politicians and administration are interested in ensuring citizens participation and cover informal participation practices into regulated processes

#### THREATS

The specialized administrations offices have to give up part of their power and may feel that their professional competence is being questioned.

There is the formal voting mechanism to fall back on when consensus cannot be reached. In the end politicians are the ones who take the final decisions. Their political powers remain exactly the same.

It needs more than guidelines for practicing a comprehensive culture of participation in civil society, politics and public administration. People will need additional resources and staying in power for implementation.

# CITIZENS PARTICIPATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

## REFERENDUM

### What are we talking about?

A referendum is a mechanism of direct democracy. It is a formal ballot on a policy issue in which all citizens eligible for voting have the right to participate. It may be required to do amendments to the Constitution or to amend or approve new laws, , be called by the government or be held on request of a certain number of citizens. It can be consultative or even binding if, for example, a sufficient number of citizens have participated.

The exercise of this right is free and free of charge.

### Who can initiate a referendum?

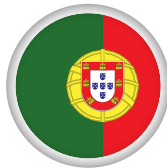
Members of parliamentary groups (parliamentary initiative), the government (government initiative) or groups of voters (citizens initiative)

### In which countries of the Round-Trip project does this mechanism exist?



### Who can make use of this mechanism?

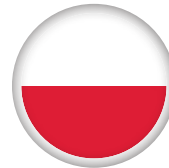
The right to participate in a referendum, as an instrument for democratic participation in politics, shall belong to all citizens entitled to vote, living in their national countries or abroad.



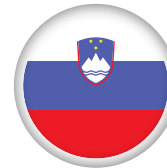
PORTUGAL



GERMANY



POLAND



SLOVENIA



LITHUANIA

## DID YOU KNOW?

Concerning the consultative referendum, a media savvy poll has taken place around three years ago when the Lithuanian people was called to decide upon the opportunity of renewing their nuclear power capacity. Rather unexpectedly, the referendum satisfied the quorum and showed a negative answer despite the much advertised "need" for energy independence. Ever since, the country has embraced a more balanced and European energy mix.

As for the obligatory referendum, last year the Lithuanians were called to decide on the land purchase liberalization as negotiated with the European Union prior of the enlargement in 2004. It was a moment of tension, however released, as the poll did not reach the legal threshold.

### IN WHICH LEVEL OF THE LADDER OF PARTICIPATION ARE WE?

6th rung - Partnership: citizens are able to choose between different suggestions from authorities and to influence legislation.



# NATIONAL CITIZENS INITIATIVE

## WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

In this mechanism of participation citizens suggest a new statute or constitutional amendment by gathering signatures to demand a vote on their proposal. Can be operated directly

(citizens proposals are placed directly onto the ballot and decided by voters) or indirectly/agenda initiative (citizens proposals are first considered by the legislature. They may receive a popular vote later in some systems).

The number of signatures that need to be collected depends on the country.

The exercise of this right is free and free of charge.

### Who can make use of this mechanism?

Any citizen entitled to vote can start, submit and sign, together with a group of citizens, a process of a National Citizens Initiative.

### Who can initiate a National Citizens Initiative?

Citizens are the ones who initiate this mechanism and the ones who should collect all the signatures.

## IN WHICH COUNTRIES OF THE PROJECT ROUND-TRIP DOES THIS MECHANISM EXIST?



PORTUGAL



GERMANY



POLAND



SLOVENIA



LITHUANIA

## IN WHICH LEVEL OF THE LADDER OF PARTICIPATION ARE WE?

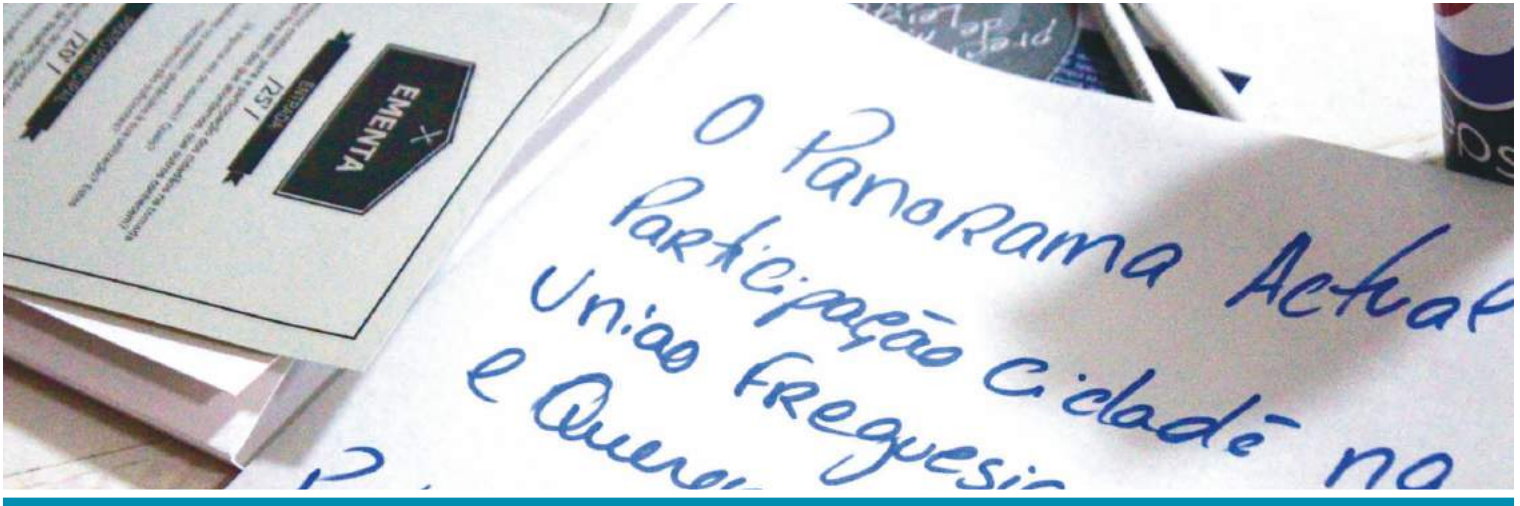
6th rung - Partnership: citizens are able to choose between different suggestions from authorities and able to influence legislation.

## PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES ABOUT THIS MECHANISM:

The instrument is, as a principle, an excellent measure to provide citizens with an opportunity to take part in the political life. No endorsement by political parties or authorities is needed to create an initiative. Nevertheless, gaining the support of the required number of citizens is difficult for most initiatives carried out in the different countries and just few have impact on the laws.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In Portugal the number of signatures that must be collected is 35.000.



## CITIZENS PARTICIPATION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

### EUROPEAN CITIZENS INITIATIVE

#### What are we talking about?

European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is a mechanism of participation which allows citizens to participate directly in the development of EU policies, by calling on the European Commission to make a legislative proposal.

The exercise of this right is free and free of charge.

#### What proposals can citizens make?

This mechanism is an invitation to the European Commission to propose legislation on matters where the EU has competence to legislate.

#### Who can organize a European Citizens' Initiative?

In order to launch a citizens' initiative, citizens must form a "citizens' committee" composed of at least 7 EU citizens being resident in at least 7 different member states. The members of the citizens' committee must be EU citizens old enough to vote in the European Parliament elections (18, except in Austria, where the voting age is 16). Citizens' initiatives cannot be run by organisations. However, organisations can promote or support initiatives provided that they do so with full transparency.

#### Who can subscribe a European Citizen Initiative?

All EU citizens (nationals of a member state) old enough to vote in the European Parliament elections can sign a citizens' initiative.

#### Where to get more information?

- Site of the European Citizens Initiative: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome?lg=en>
- Guide to the European Citizens Initiative

#### In which level of the ladder of participation are we?

6th rung - Partnership: citizens are able to choose between different suggestions from authorities and to influence legislation.

#### Perspectives and Challenges about this Mechanism:

The main challenge of this initiative is the creation of a network that can go beyond borders, a scope of action more easily achieved by civil society organisations than by the individual citizen.

It is also being discussed the need to feedback citizens when initiatives are rejected by explaining them detailed, transparent and objectively the reasons for the rejection. The required number of signatures, one million, has proved to be difficult for most citizens' committees i.e. the organising groups of initiatives to reach. Each initiative should have enough supporters in at least seven countries to ensure that the proposal is not merely in the interest of a comparatively small geographic area. The requirements have proven to be an obstacle for civil movements.

#### Did you know?

2015 is the year for ECI' review. EU bodies, such as European Parliament, Council of the European Union, European Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions, Ombudsman, are currently preparing to present their views and proposals to improve ECI.

#### Some numbers about ECI:

- 3 Initiatives answered by the Commission
- 1 Initiative with collection closed
- 3 Open initiatives
- 10 Withdrawn initiatives
- 15 Initiatives with insufficient support
- 20 Refused requests for registration





## What are we talking about?

Public consultations allow citizens to express their views on the key aspects of the impact assessments for Commission proposals under preparation, as well as on key elements of evaluations and 'fitness checks' of existing policies.

The exercise of this right is free and free of charge.

## What type of Public Consultations are made?

Depending on the initiative, different types of consultations may be carried out – e.g. targeted or public consultations. Public consultations are open for a period of minimum 12 weeks by default.

## Who can participate in Public Consultations?

All EU citizens or representatives of associations related to the domain of the consultation.

## Where can I participate in European Public Consultations?

Through the 'single access point' website 'Your Voice in Europe', European Commission enables citizens to express their views on EU policies at different stages throughout the policy lifecycle.

## Where to get more information?

Please check the website "Your Voice in Europe"  
[http://ec.europa.eu/your-voice/consultations/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/your-voice/consultations/index_en.htm)

## DID YOU KNOW?

That the Protocol No. 2 of the Treaty on European Union states "Before proposing legislative acts, the Commission shall consult widely. Such consultations shall, where appropriate, take into account the regional and local dimension of the action envisaged. In cases of exceptional urgency, the Commission shall not conduct such consultations. It shall give reasons for its decision in its proposal."

## In which level of the ladder of participation are we?

4th rung - not real participation, but necessary precondition for a participation process since citizens are able to give their opinions and be informed about the authorities plans.

## Perspectives and Challenges about this Mechanism:

Since it is a mechanism that must be started by the European Commission, Public Consultations are limited to the themes and time frame established by the Commission.

Such consultations are expected to have several positive benefits (improving the quality of public policy, strengthening political responsiveness to citizens concerns, and more generally increasing trust in government and democracy). At the same time, little is known about whether the different instruments will end up achieving these goals in practice.

# UNWRAP DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION: MEANINGS, MODELS, OBSTACLES AND CONDITIONS

- What is Democratic Participation? Why is it important?
- Main obstacles & challenges to citizens participation
- Necessary conditions for a meaningful Citizens' participation
- What does participation mean for citizens?
- Where are Citizens Participating today's political life?

## WHAT IS DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Since the 70's, the decade in which participation first hit the mainstream, the term "participation" has been constantly evoked, used and claimed by politicians, civil society organisations, public institutions, communities, activists, etc. The term "participation" became a trend, a much-used word which often has its significance wounded and emptied in our democracies.

Generally, citizens participation **can occur in processes that are facilitated by, or depend on the decision-makers / government, civil society organisations or in "popular" processes. Nevertheless Democratic Participation means much more than going to the polls every four years**, more than having citizens scant informed about what is going on in the country and totally excludes processes where citizens are manipulated and used as a decorative part of the participatory process. A participatory process that lives and feeds the current model of power relations where citizens are voiceless and used to legitimate decisions, new forms of power and privileges, without being truly included in the whole process of decision-making.

The most important question to be raised is the level of participation of citizens in decision-making processes, built on the insight that citizens can truly make a valuable contribution to policy-making in their local,

national and European governments. In an effort to describe the way citizens interacted with decision-makers, Arnstein (1969) established the idea of a Ladder of Participation which functioned as a continuum ranging from the most exploitive and disempowered to the most controlling and empowered 'levels' of participation. Arnstein's ladder retains considerable contemporary relevance and in this model she proposed eight levels' of participation, starting at the bottom with levels which she described as being "non-participatory" to the top of the ladder where "citizen control" the whole process. "She draws a distinction between 'citizen power', which includes citizen control, delegated power and partnership, and 'tokenism', in which she includes consultation, informing and placation." (Cornwall, A., 2008, p.270).

Too often citizens do not reach higher than the middle of Arnstein's ladder. In fact, this kind of participation is still very limited and mostly happening at local level, however citizens have been claiming for more involvement, voice and power in decisions, and the examples of reaching the highest rung of this ladder around Europe started to multiply in the past 5 years.

Actually, having this in mind, when we talk about citizens participation as Democratic Participation we should be talking about **inclusive processes where decision-makers, citizens and civil society share the decision-making under values and principles as justice, freedom and political equality**; processes where the structures and processes of citizens participation are able to be appropriated by citizens and, at the same time, are **promoting a culture of emancipation and empowerment** that contributes to

the development of competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) that allow citizens to be more capable of influencing political decisions in their communities.

This understanding of Democratic Participation reinforces democracy, clarifying that not all forms of participation are democratic and put forward **Participatory Democracy experiences** like popular assemblies, citizens initiatives, etc. (without excluding the importance and, to some extent, the social need of having representative democracy). The concept of "democratic participatory experiences" is used in this magazine as it was used in the several round-tables, local seminars and world cafes ran within the framework of this project where we could conclude that **"political actions/initiatives/mechanisms initiated by citizens - 'bottom-up' that are inclusive, free of discrimination, representative of citizens voice and have a real impact on the decisions taken in relation to our communities."**

The great importance of having Democratic Participation along with participatory democracy is that it avoids that 'the ones that are participating and having the power are always the same', **it gives the chance to give voice to the invisible communities**, that often comprises individuals living in a situation of unemployment, immigration, refuge and asylum seeking and poverty, as well as women, young people or any other workers undervalued or unrecognised by dominant standards of living and thinking, **it closes the link between citizens and decision-makers and increases the sense of community, shared responsibility, transparency, inclusion and dialogue.**



# WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION MEAN FOR CITIZENS? WHERE ARE CITIZENS PARTICIPATING IN TODAY'S POLITICAL LIFE?

Democratic Participation in public life, in a structured way and with real impact in decisions is clearly not the strength of our democracies. Citizens are called to participate in many initiatives that, as previously mentioned, sometimes perpetuate the same forms of dominance and power and do not develop the sense of belonging and the hope of contributing to social transformation.

In this project citizens reveal an explicit difficulty to identify themselves as political active members in their communities. Much of the forms of political participation recognised by them are processes that are initiated and led by decision-makers and where they cannot fully make use of their voice and experience to add something to the process itself. Only few citizens engaged in political participation processes that they considered "democratic participatory experiences".

## WHAT DO CITIZENS UNDERSTAND AS DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE?

- To act for a meaningful change
- To learn from different stakeholders
- To listen to each other
- To share ways of acting, solving problems and changing their communities for better
- To have real access to mechanisms of participation that make their involvement effective and not decorative
- To have real space and real opportunities to embrace and shape public policies
- To have space and real opportunities to share their needs, concerns, views with regard to the different communities and contexts where they live
- To see their demands really integrated into the decisions taken
- To raise their voice in respect to all matters that affect their life (urbanism, environment, housing, employment, education, culture, sport, health, welfare, etc.)
- To work on the consolidation of citizens freedoms (freedom of speech, association and free access to information)

## WHERE ARE CITIZENS PARTICIPATING IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THEIR COMMUNITIES?

- Initiating and/or signing petitions
- Conducting public hearings
- Voting in local, national, and european elections
- Voting and elaborating proposals for local participatory budgets
- Organising and participating in popular/ citizens assemblies
- Notifying problems in the public spaces using mobile applications
- Notifying problems in the public spaces going directly to local decision-makers
- Being members of a political party
- Participating in parish and municipal assemblies
- Voting in referendums
- Elaborating national and European citizens initiatives
- Being members of a civil society organisation
- Looking for information in newspapers, magazines and reference materials and judging its accuracy
- Participating in political discussions
- Writing letters to elected representatives
- Being union members
- Taking part in demonstrations, boycotts, sit-ins or other forms of protest
- Organising and taking part in strikes
- Contributing with money to a party
- Attending meetings to gain information, discuss issues or lend support
- Campaigning for a candidate
- Lobbying for laws that are of special interest
- Disobeying laws and taking the consequences to demonstrate that a law or policy is unjust
- Monitoring public accounts
- Attending social audits

## WHICH MECHANISMS CITIZENS USE TO TAKE PART AND INFLUENCE THE DECISIONS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES?

- Voting in local, national, and european elections
- Being members of a civil society organisation
- Notifying problems in the public spaces going directly to local decision-makers (specially in small communities)
- Being members of a political party
- Being union members

The main reasons **pointed out for the "popularity" of these mechanisms** of participation by the citizens involved in the project were:

**a)** these forms of participations are the most visible and accessible ones;

**b)** some of the citizens didn't even know how some of the other forms of participation work and how they can be involved in them;

**c)** participants considered that political parties and unions are still 'actors' who have some power to negotiate and influence political decisions.



After being informed about the different features of the forms of participation and having the chance to read some legislation and analyse some examples and results of the different mechanisms listed before, citizens considered as being “democratic participatory experiences” the following mechanisms:

- **Initiating and/or signing petitions**
- **Elaborating national and European citizens initiatives**
- **Being members of a civil society organisation**
- **Voting and elaborating proposals for local participatory budgets**
- **Participating in parish and municipal assemblies**
- **Taking part in demonstrations, boycotts, sit-ins, or other forms of protest**

## WHY IS PARTICIPATION IMPORTANT?

All the mentioned mechanisms of participation and others result on many concrete, visible and positive implications in citizens life and in our communities. Participants have identified the following reasons why participation is important.

- a) Increases regular participation of citizens in the political life of their communities
- b) Fosters citizens sense of ownership and shared responsibility in decision-making
- c) Recognises citizens as capable and important sources of knowledge and experience
- d) Brings new ideas and approaches in solving public problems
- e) Aligns policies with real needs of citizens
- d) Contributes to the quality of adopted public policy and its implementation
- e) Works on proximity, transparency and accountability



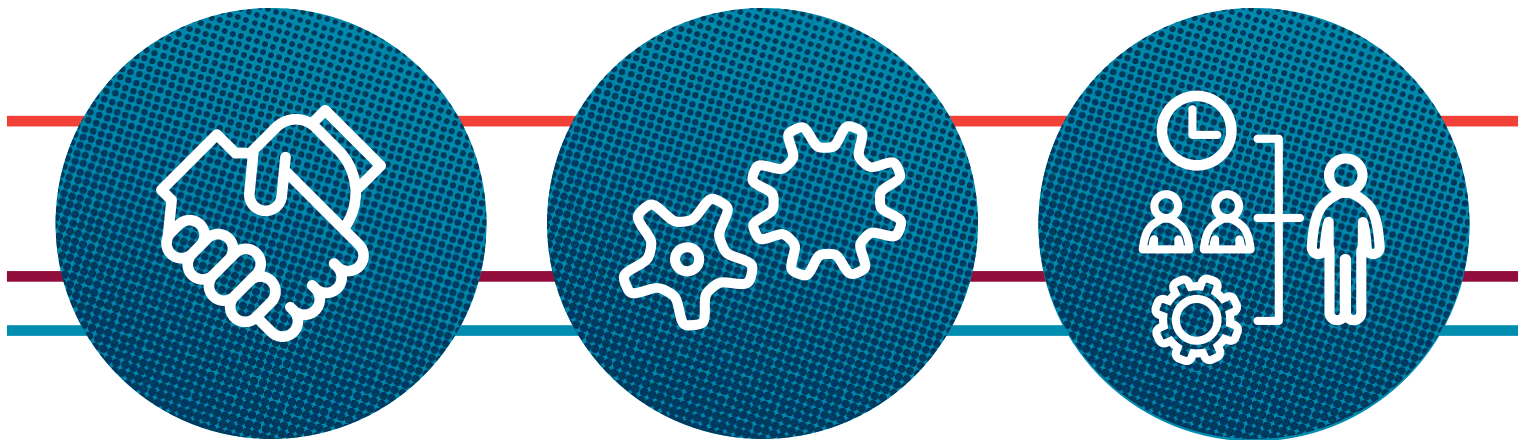
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# MAIN OBSTACLES & CHALLENGES TO CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION

## What are they?

In general, citizens identified as the main barriers to participation in their local, national and European contexts the following aspects<sup>1</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> The identification of these obstacles and challenges was made based on the existing literature on the topic but it mainly resulted from the different world cafes, seminars, round-tables and personal chats we had close to the population we involved in the Round-Trip.



### A. **TRUST** - LACK OF TRUST IN THE PARTICIPATION PROCESSES

- Widespread belief that the impact of citizen participation is very low and it is not taken into account in the decisions taken nor in public policies
- Mistrust in public institutions, their work and leaders
- Lack of recognition of the views and perspectives of citizens as a valuable resource for solving, acting and changing
- The belief that is someone else's job to work on citizen participation
- Low turnover of representatives
- Risk of backfire (consequences that might reflect on their personal and professional life for taking a position, specially when working for public institutions)

### B. **MECHANISMS** - INADEQUACY OF MECHANISMS AND FORMS OF PARTICIPATION

- Excess of bureaucracy in the procedures and policies hindering the access to the structures of participation
- Lack of citizens friendly mechanisms and structures for participation (less formal, more open, more regular, with more aggregative spaces)
- Lack of information about structures, mechanisms of participation and their functioning
- Misalignment between citizens competences and political demands (large amounts of materials to read, huge quantity of information circulating, too formal and technical information to be understood)

### C. **CONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION** - LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES ADAPTED TO CITIZENS SKILLS AND AVAILABILITY

- Lack of time to participate (people referred that it overwhelming to work and do the family tasks and be available to participate with quality in the existing structures and mechanisms)
- Lack of real opportunities to participate and bring their points to the tables where decisions are taken
- Lack of skills and attitudes to participate (fear of having their contributions not taken into account, timidity, difficulties in using technical terms)
- Insufficient support provided to citizens



# NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR A MEANINGFUL CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION

People to participate in a structured and meaningful way need to have guaranteed some conditions:

- Knowledge of Citizen Participation Methods & Mechanisms
- Rights
- Means
- Space
- Support
- Involvement of different stakeholders
- Valorisation of their involvement
- Responsiveness
- Transparency
- Accountability



## Citizens' Participation implies

**1. Rights\*** – to have an implicit right to participate. There should be legislation protecting and promoting citizens' participation. It is a fundamental right that all citizens have and should demand.

**2. Information** – Access to clear, updated and complete information by the citizens. Here it is also about having the support to understand some of the existing legislation on the mechanisms for citizens' participation

**3. Action** – Citizens drawing on this information to take action, communicate and or provide feedback to governments

**4. Responsiveness** – The existence of transparent and effective mechanisms by governments for responding to citizens' voice. This

essentially means that citizens' views, recommendations and conclusions should have a real impact on decisions that are made. This is also a way to valorise the involvement of citizens.

**5. Means\*** – Authorities should work to ensure that basic needs of citizens are met decreasing the difficulties that citizens face to participative. These include sufficient social security, education, housing, health care, transportation, know-how and access to technology

**6. Space\*** – Citizens need physical space to meet, to discuss ideas, to spend time to organise their own activities and to reflect about their communities and their role. But space can be also seen as space to participate within the institutional framework of policy making.

**7. Support\*** – This includes, for example, financial, moral and institutional support at a number of different levels – personal, organisational or at local community level. Ideally, local authorities should provide adequate financial support to cover expenses and structural costs of citizens participation

**8. Accountability** – is the acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility for actions, decisions, and policies and to explain and be answerable for resulting consequences. Accountability is a constitutional duty

**9. Involvement of different stakeholders** – All social actors should be implied in promoting citizens' participation and should share and find space to discuss priorities, concerns and actions.

\* Adaptation from the Manual "Have Your Say! MANUAL on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life" of the Council of Europe





**Audrone Margenyte**  
President of the Board  
ANNONA  
Vilnius, Lithuania

## COLLECTIVE ACTION - GENERALIZED DISBELIEF

According to a study “Map of Lithuanian Civil Society”, conducted by the NGO “Civil Society Institute”, Lithuanian society is suffering from civil disability that hinders the development of civic initiatives in Lithuania. According to the study, the civil disability is based on the society’s prevailing disbelief that citizens’ collective action can make a difference or help achieve meaningful outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

As it is concluded in the above-mentioned study, this attitude of civil disability often has realistic grounds: in many instances, influencing decisions of authorities (even local) is indeed complicated because of insufficient mechanisms for citizens to influence the government or to implement their initiatives.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the attitude of civil disability is usually not based on the actual experience of involvement in civic action and is a somewhat a “self-fulfilling” myth.<sup>3</sup> The creators of the “Map of Lithuanian Civil Society” conclude that this leads to a “vicious circle” when, in disbelief in their force, people do not take civic action and therefore have no opportunities to experience their citizens’ power.<sup>4</sup>

Currently, one of the main barriers to the empowerment and strengthening of civil society in Lithuania is the existing divide between government and society – the inaccessibility of government and popular distrust of government institutions. Several studies have found hostility toward the state remaining from Soviet times and a lack of popular trust in democratic political institutions.

Naturally, the first impulse is to require quality information in order to decrease the divide between public power and their constituencies. Nevertheless, the third pillar of sustainable development, that is the social pillar, is the essential element that can bridge the gap. Sustainability of a society or of a community starts with the actual exercise of democracy.

1 “Map of Lithuanian Civil Society”, NGO “Civil Society Institute”, 2015. [http://www.civitas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Project\\_MapOfCivilSociety\\_Conclusions.pdf](http://www.civitas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Project_MapOfCivilSociety_Conclusions.pdf)

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.



**Anna Pomykoł**  
President of the Board  
Civil Initiative Development  
Centre CRIS  
Rybnik, Poland

## ENGAGING GRASSROOTS IN PARTICIPATION

In my opinion we can observe a very strong trend in terms of public participation which is putting more focus on engagement of citizens at the grassroots level. Moreover the active citizenship starts to mean much more than only participation in decision-making processes (usually understood as participation in elections), it seems that participation in implementation phase is becoming more crucial then never before.

European societies are becoming more developed, educated, aware of own need but what it might mean in terms of their public participation? Answer can be made after analyzing the society’s structure and taking under consideration demography issues (aging population), increasing level of education, socio-economic and cultural diversity of European societies. It’s almost sure that in coming future we can expect that participants of public processes will become more individualistic, less deferential, more diverse and increasingly demanding in the future. In this same time citizens seems to be ready and determined to take responsibility for making the change. The passive participation limited to ceding the power of act on governance in many cases were disappointing for them and seen as not enough effective mechanism in providing a real, expected change. It means that it’s a right time to improve the participation mechanisms and transform people frustration into motivation to act.

But how to improve those mechanisms? I’m sure that there is more then one good answer but in my opinion there is a crucial principle that should be implemented using participatory tools adjusted to citizens needs, preferences and abilities.

Nowadays digital technologies are present in almost all sphere of people’s life so there have to be space for them also in public participation mechanism. Moreover we should not forget about the value of animation work in local communities which provide us the easiest and most effective way to build a strong social relationship between citizens in different age, socio-economical status or cultural background.

In response to these challenges, governments must be smart in their use of participation and rather than relying on its generic application, they must tap in to the different ways through which it is possible. This means going for quality over quantity and designing participation which responds to participants’ motivations to participate.

# THE ROLE OF INFORMATION IN CITIZENS' POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

## The role of European information networks for a successful participation in political life | Europe Direct

Someone said that never like nowadays citizens in Europe are in conditions to participate in political life as they have so much information available, freedom and the means to do actually participate, but still, very often they do not do it in fact. Why?

You do not have the motivation to participate in political life until you have enough knowledge or enough life experience to get involved and to care. Knowledge gives a certain sense of power and this feeling leads to action. We believe this is common sense.

But we also believe that there is too much information to process and too much confusion on people's minds, at some extent due to media manipulation of that information. These factors tend to rise suspicious feelings towards news in general but mainly towards EU related information where some of the topics are frequently strange to common citizens.

European information networks, although being closely related to European institutions and having a particular role to play on disseminating European priorities and common politics have the moral obligation to truly inform and raise awareness so citizens may feel empowered and willing to participate.

The everyday challenge consists on having to inform with independence and no ethic or moral judgement. We somehow face the against and pro dilemma that is at the very end what will lead to political participation.

European Commission networks sessions, either generalistic (as Europe Direct network) or specific (as Enterprise Europe Network for

enterprises or European Consumers Center for consumers rights,...) as well as the most traditional communication channels, always make appeal to participation, as they inform about the "European issue". Nevertheless, this is pure politics and either you are against or "pro": against or pro Europe, against or pro representative democracy, against or pro ... even if frequently people in general are not familiarized with the concept behind words like "european citizenship" or "participative democracy"...

Public attendance is a main concern for all European Commission networks as increasing participation is their main goal. The immediate public reaction is usually indifferent when it comes to general matters (it is not the same when talking about particular/specific interests). However if we succeed to bring an audience to an event and really call their attention, the attitude after a period of reflection is normally of engagement. Indifference or lack of interest for political participation in general is related, in our opinion, to what we could be called "lost information" – meaning too much information that often does not reach the expected audience and does not use appropriate language.

Public campaigns are not despicable due to the fact that the various forms of political participation, apart from the vote, are not really known or used. Maybe some public campaign is needed concerning the meaning of the words and values behind democracy, citizenship and politics.

Though, it is true that most people do care about participation mainly when they feel it will have a direct impact in their lives. It is the role for a European Commission networks to instigate reflection and critical spirit so each individual can discover that there are bridges between each other, despite the

plurality and diversity within EU itself. And only that constructive criticism will lead to action and participation in real life, to solve real problems.

European Commission information networks can easily increase political participation through providing information and creating occasions for debate and reflection and doing it with strategic partnerships.

Participation can assume a diversity of forms, from signing a petition to participate in a silent march or contribute to an online community. The so called "good lobby". But this always depends on the information the citizens get and the emotional link that has been created.

European Commission networks mainly through local information centres promote this dialogue and awareness about EU policies and offer information services reachable by phone or internet for general questions, best sources, contact details, rights and opportunities as an EU citizens, other specialized information or even free EU publications anywhere in the EU, at least 9.00-18.00 (weekdays), in any official EU language.

Local information services in every EU country also provide information tailored to local needs.

ACT – REACT- IMPACT was the slogan for the last European Parliamentary elections and we think it really expresses the role to be played by EC networks. We believe Europe will be whatever we do with it. Europe is really US.

27th October 2015  
CIED Algarve



**Kaja Cunk**  
Expert Associate PINA  
Koper, Slovenia

## TRUE DIALOGUE FOR A RIGHTFUL PURPOSE: ENGAGEMENT FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

“Public participation is the deliberative process by which interested or affected citizens, civil society organisations, and government actors are involved in policy-making before a political decision is taken. By deliberation we mean a process of thoughtful discussion based on the giving and taking of reasons for choices”. (European Institute for Public Participation)

There have been several grassroots movements (for example Jugo cikling kampanja, pioneer on Belgrade’s bike activist scene), civil initiatives (for example the world’s platform for change [change.org](http://change.org)), governmental strategies in engaging citizens (for example the establishment of The Ministry of Justice’s Democratic Engagement Branch, which supports all central government departments in United Kingdom) and regional attempts (for example Rheinland-Pfalz engaged in a broad and inclusive process to have citizens participate in public sector reform) to open legislation, practices and actions for all stakeholders. But there is still a general aura of feeling un-represented, un-included, un-heard, miss-understood. This goes for citizens, civil society organizations and also governmental actors. In time of mass communication, true dialogue seems to be what we are all missing, and not being capable of having.

No counting mechanism for participation level will show rightful results but what will count is rightful purpose: engagement for positive changes on local, regional, national, cross-border, international level; dedication of our time and energy and acknowledgement of the arguments of others. In our working roles, in our leisure roles. In our lives.

**Petra Eickhoff**  
Managing Director  
SOCIUS Cologne  
**Andreas Knoth**  
Managing Director  
SOCIUS Organisationsberatung gGmbH  
Cologne, Germany



## COMMON GOOD IS THE KEY

Given the ongoing, profound social change caused by technological networking and globalized economies, we believe that civic participation is a building block that leads people to emancipation and self-organization – in all areas that determine common good: education, healthcare, nature and environmental protection, regional development and urban construction, traffic, water and energy supply.

Civic participation is so valuable because people safeguard their opposing interests and, ideally, negotiate a solution for all.

In an increasingly complex world, civic participation happens in manageable spaces that allow people to enter into contact with each other and build active relationships and affiliations.

In the interplay of a responsible citizenship on one side and politics and administration that they have legitimized by elections on the other, the concept of who represents which interests runs up against its limits. Much too often, complex problems and challenges are solved “for” those affected instead of “with” them.

Which key challenges do we see, and how can taking action be effective?

### Power and counter-power

Resistance and frustrations arise when citizens are intentionally presented with done deals, when they are offered participation without scope for influence or when informal power groups prevail, purporting to pursue the common good. Wind turbines, for instance, are planned on a national level so as to leave behind fossil and nuclear fuels; when the plans reach people’s own backyard, citizen initiatives often form that oppose wind energy. Another example is inclusion in schools, which is decided about on a state level, but actually opening schools where handicapped and non-handicapped children learn together often fails due to parents’ fears that their own child will not receive an adequate education.

Controlled procedures of an early civic participation can help take seriously the worries and troubles of those affected and use their competences for decisions in the interest of the common good.

### Resignation or trust

Many resign because they made negative experiences of not being able to make a difference after all, not being heard as an ordinary citizen or facing covert cooperation in an uncontrollable mesh of relations bordering corruption. This often leads to a refusal to participate in political elections; voter turnout in the 2011 municipal elections in Berlin stood at less than 20% in some districts. In addition, there are language barriers and those caused by social or cultural origins. What builds trust, on the other hand, is early availability of information, transparent decision-making processes and participation on many levels that is perceived as positive. Low-key and open forms of participation in the public space can contribute to including more people. In our opinion, priority should be given to creating the conditions that allow especially children and teenagers to find out what it means to be a participating subject early on.

### Lobbyism and communication

Even though formal processes of public participation are implemented according to the applicable laws and regulations, for instance when airports are expanded or highways and railway lines are built, this does not necessarily lead to more acceptance. Citizen initiatives and mass demonstrations utterly oppose major projects that are wasteful and one-sidedly geared towards economic interests. A broadly based public discourse, long before the first sod is turned, creates clarity about the positions and viewpoints of the interest groups. It keeps down undue influence by ideologically-thinking elites, individual commercial interests and operations by representatives in spaces that are closed to the public. The decisive point for mutual understanding is that the discourse is guided from a multipartial standpoint and that all participants are actively involved.

### Conclusion

Can a balanced coexistence of power and counter-power be successfully established? Can trust grow and mutual understanding expand? Civic participation that is broadly-based and uses diverse methods can make an important contribution to developing democracy in Europe.



## STRUGGLING AGAINST THE LACK OF DEMOCRACY – FIGHTING BACK WITH MORE DEMOCRACY! | ACADEMIA CIDADÃ

We now count five years of austerity to which the Portuguese population had to survive. Therefore, today we live a violent social regression, the largest in the history of our young democracy: 28% of the population lives in poverty and 41% in severe material deprivation (source: INE); poverty risk rate for children under 18 years is 24,4% (UNICEF); 7% of children have permanent hunger (BACF). Rising unemployment contributes to the aggravation of the situation, with a real unemployment rate reaching 29%. Among youngsters this rate is positioned at 35%. And we also have to count with the increase in long-term unemployment (64% of total unemployed) and the huge increase of labour precariousness. The general lack of prospects in the future has dramatically increased emigration, which today corresponds to more than 20% of the resident Portuguese population. In the last years, the amount of new economic exiles has been even bigger than in the dictatorship's escapes from colonial war, political police and poverty.

Nowadays people are struggling to find their family's next meal, looking like they are not able to organise themselves in order to protest, nor to create new solutions for their lives and for the country, even if they wanted to. Today the Portuguese democracy is at risk!

Nevertheless, there are new paths that we can glimpse through the mist, leading us to a real democracy: there are people willing to intervene in society; there are new ways of communication and interaction (including digital), providing new forms of organisation and social participation; there are innovative ways of participation, based on a new social development paradigm based on principles of sustainability, autonomy and self-organisation.

**Carpe Diem Arte e Pesquisa** is a very recent project of contemporary art, based in a palace called Palácio Marquês de Pombal, in an old quarter of Lisbon (Bairro Alto). This cultural project aims to propose new curatorial directions and production of contemporary culture, using a methodology of experimentation. The research processes are always negotiative, taking in consideration the palace, involving its "particular spatial reality", namely "its history and successive layers of materials, that presents challenges to the development and installation of artworks: unstable walls, uneven floors, warped windows, the dialogue between interior and exterior space, the seasonal lighting, the ceiling-height, the angles of the walls that are never regular, the humidity which interferes with electrical equipment and materials of the artworks and ultimately the marks left by previous uses of the past and works on the palace." The current 17 exhibition rooms opened to the public and the 9 rooms for backstage, production and services were reconstructed from what was left of the 1755 earthquake. They ensure the return of the palace to the city and citizens, through a public service strategy. Cultural activities such as exhibitions, artistic residencies, performances, public talks, partnerships with universities and Art Schools, from Portugal and abroad, approach the community, promoting its cultural development.

**GEOTA - Grupo de Estudos de Ordenamento do Território e Ambiente (Environmental and Land Use Planning Study Group)** - is an environmental defence association that exists as a reflection and educational group since 1981. This was the year when this NGO set up a small "think tank, with the goals of promoting environmental education and developing an environmental policy

for Portugal". GEOTA believes that environment should always be a central factor of development, which might look like a common place nowadays, but back in the 80's this was a quite alien idea, especially in the Portuguese context. The association also defends a "global environmental concept that involves not only nature but also humanized landscape, cultural values, people's quality of life and the sustainable management of the natural resources." GEOTA proclaims itself as independent from official institutions, political parties and economic interests. Since the beginning it has been doing intervention with the political powers at the highest level including the President, Parliament, Government and Attorney-General's Office to promote a sustainable development model in Portugal; internationally, it has been working with the European Commission and other international organisations. From all the projects that GEOTA has been developing since its foundation, we would like to highlight Rios Livres. This project aims to preserve the wild rivers in Portugal and to alert for the social, environmental and economical importance of the riparian ecosystems. Rios Livres mission is to stop the National Program of Dams of High Hydroelectric Potential, preventing the construction of seven dams that are projected by this program, namely the huge dam of Foz-Tua. By doing this, GEOTA accomplishes the conviction that big dams do not assure the supply of green energy, due to having heavy social and environment impacts. GEOTA defends there are less aggressive and cheaper ways of getting energy than using dams.

**Chapitô** is a project in which training, creation, animation and intervention promotes daily multiple intersections. It is a school that includes to educate; educates to professionalise; professionalises to activate civil society with arts. Historically, Chapitô emerged from the complex context of the artistic movements that happened during the 70's in Portugal. Since that time, circus has been the central reference of Chapitô's intervention, involving all arts and creative disciplines and enjoying great social acceptance: theatrical expression confounds itself with music, humour and body language. In Chapitô, social, cultural and formative areas are connect in order to promote inclusion and personal development of young people coming from vulnerable contexts. Through the organisation of exhibitions, debates, concerts, cinema cycles, workshops and big cultural events, in the last 33 years Chapitô has been responsible for the social inclusion of thousands of young people at risk. Chapitô has partnerships with several entities, official and private ones, on a national and international level. It has acquired several official statutes such as "public utility", "manifest cultural interest", "institution of social solidarity" and Non-governmental organisations.

In our point of view, these examples represent new paths for participation and citizenship. Using different ways of action, they all face and fight government authoritarianism and the financial totalitarianism that has been growing in Portugal, at least for the last 5 years. They prove that active citizenship not only makes communities stronger, but also offers a critical look at the decisions taken by governments, either through questioning, whether through monitoring, putting the control of people's future back into people's hands.

**Joana Dias**  
Academia Cidadã

## EMERGING CITIZENS PRACTICES FOR A BETTER WORLD WE ALL BELIEVE IN



**Nuno da Silva**  
ECOS da Transição  
LAB Coordinator  
& The Emergence  
Network Curator  
Faro, Portugal

We live in a world running astray. We have built “unnatural” mega-systems that do not work. Now they are starting to crumble and collapse and we are the casualties – stressed-out and depressed, disconnected from our most potential selves, from each other and from nature.

When we observe nature, we see that emergence is a prominent property where change never happens as a result of top-down pre-conceived strategic plans or from the mandate of any single individual or boss. **Change begins as local actions simultaneously spring up in many different areas.** In the end of the day, that is how larger-scale systems come about. In spite of the huge disruptions that are heading our way, there is a realistic promise that in times of crises we will find resilience and return to our communities and eco-systems and to what counts – the nature, including human nature.

A huge number of people throughout the world feel like passive bystanders, disenchanted with the state of representative democracies and the traditional forms of participation through parties and voting. While small powerful elites make the decisions behind closed curtains, a **growing number of citizens are reclaiming their lives, regaining trust in their communities and offering possibilities of a major global shift.**

This article explores emerging ways of participation that are building alternatives to the current exploitative system and ultimately could generate a profound change in terms of consciousness, structures and institutions and maybe even our notions of participation, and with it, the instruments and forms of active participation in the public life. **These times of urgency, invite us to slow down, observe and sense the transformational potential of some initiatives taking place around the world.**

Since Bill Mollison and David Holmgren created the concept of Permaculture back in the 70’s, with its appealing set of principles: care for the Earth, care for the People and Share the surplus, it did not stop spreading all over the world. **Citizens who practice permaculture, are actively participating in building more resilient and efficient communities, producing food locally, enriching the soils, safeguarding the seeds diversity and bringing quality food to the table with a small ecological footprint.** They contribute actively to the eco-systems regeneration. The potential of permaculture practices in terms of reducing the ecological impact of our food production and consumption is incalculable. It is the most promising solution to prevent soils exhaustion, ensure a better balance in nature and feed the population with quality food without resorting to the petrochemical industry that poisons our bodies and landscapes.

Eco-villages and their experiments with more participative and horizontal organisation and decision-making processes, are an example of citizens participation worth taking a closer look. The **Global Eco-villages Network (GEN)** has been growing and integrates many great experiences that offer insights with their experiments of collective horizontal organisation and decision-making processes using new approaches such as sociocracy or holocracy. Some interesting examples are Damanhur in Italy, Auroville in India or the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland.

On the urban side, the Transition Towns movement, which started in Totnes in 2006, has also been steadily growing all over the world in the last years. People who participate in such initiatives are **building more resilient communities, contributing to a greater localization of their economies, by addressing issues such as food sovereignty, collective energy production and consumption decrease, sharing resources, creating time banks and local currencies, and contributing to the growth of a more collective and ethical economic and financial system.**

Part of the Transition Towns work (as of many other initiatives) is to reclaim back the commons. Many citizens, organisations and movements have been participating actively in the defence of the common wealth: the natural wealth (air, water, seeds, eco-systems, other species); the communities' wealth (streets, parks, the internet, money, social insurance); and the cultural wealth (music, art, science, open-source software) that have been increasingly appropriated by private corporations and wealthy individuals for profit, under the capitalism system. All of these are gifts we share and are obliged to preserve for others and for future generations and therefore there is a need to participate in expanding and strengthening both the commons and the institutions that sustain them. **Stewardship, as opposed to ownership, embraces this reality. Whereas ownership suggests a right to do as we please, stewardship emphasizes our responsibility to protect, cultivate, and serve that which nourishes us. Thus, the concept of stewardship forms a solid foundation for conversations about distributive justice and regenerative systems.** A special note must be made to indigenous peoples who are the custodians of some of the most biologically diverse areas on earth and their traditional knowledge, cultural diversity and sustainable ways of life make an invaluable contribution to the world's common heritage.

In terms of community wealth and what concerns to the topic of ethical finances and solidarity economy, the number of citizens initiatives is growing. Groups such as the Mutual Aid Networks that are emerging in many communities around the USA, aiming to create the means for everyone to discover and succeed in the work they want to do, with the support of their community. These initiatives can involve local currencies, time banking, local exchange markets, ethical banks, price-based mutual credit, cooperative savings and lending, and cooperative ownership which provides collective use of resources that are difficult to access individually. Some of these are included in the transition towns movements.

According to International Labour Organization (ILO), there are 1 billion people involved in cooperatives (democratic, value-driven and locally-controlled organisations) that have a key role confronting the growing inequality, unemployment, social exclusion and environmental challenges. Cooperatives such as Copernico in Portugal (which builds sustainable energy alternatives) are changing the ways we deal with resources ownership and contributing to a healthier citizen participation in economical relations.

In terms of Cultural Wealth, festivals like Giftival (a global gathering of celebration, inquiry, sharing, and practices of gifting and gift cultures), Andanças and the Boom Festival in Portugal, Lightning in a Bottle in Southern California (with the motto - Leave it better, Leave it beautiful), are transformational for many artists and participants. Beyond these encounters, there are many citizens participating through arts in shaping the world we live in. Practitioners of Theatre of the

Oppressed are using our capacity to see ourselves and think of alternative possibilities, with rehearsals where people can experiment alternative solutions to their current community challenges. Doing so, they democratize theatre and people have the chance to overcome many of the oppressions inflicted upon them. Through Legislative Theatre, participants in Forum Theatres are even producing laws that create improvements to people's lives.

The entire world of human organisations is being shaken. There are successful developments with the advent of teal organisations (name coined by Frederic Laloux inspired in by the Integral Theory), the framework for organisations that can work meaningfully in complex environments with breakthroughs such as: self-management (driven by peer relationships), wholeness (involving the whole person at work) and an evolutionary purpose (let the organisation adapt and grow, not be driven).

There is also a growing movement of people who participate either individually or collectively to support degrowth as a way of life based on ecological economics, non-consumerist and non-capitalist ideas.

Considering that any effort to bring about systemic change must involve education transformation, there are countless experiences built around creating alternative ways of learning, supporting people's growth and capacity to cope with today's world. An interesting example is the emerging network of Eco-versities where groups of people and communities are reclaiming their local knowledge systems and imaginations to restore and re-envision learning processes that are meaningful and relevant to the call of our times, that cultivate new stories and possibilities, that re-connect and regenerate diverse ecological and cultural ecosystems. It's also worth looking to the work of people at: The Shikshantar Institute in India; Escola da Ponte in Portugal, Projeto Ancora in Brazil and the Proteus Initiative in South Africa or the many indigenous communities in the Chiapas region in Mexico who are autonomously managing their educational work which is traditionally deeply community based.

Still on the learning side, nowadays anyone can create a MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) and make available any kind of knowledge to anyone, anywhere. A great example of the use of a MOOC to produce systemic change is the MIT and Presencing Institute course "ULab: Transforming Business, Society and Self"; led by Otto Scharmer and his team who introduced his Theory U framework to more than 28000 people from 190 countries, in the beginning of 2015. During the course and after it, hundreds of local hubs created to follow the course continued to work together to develop prototype initiatives that can lead to profound change in their local systems. The network is now being enlarged during the 2nd course, which is taking place in the last trimester of 2015. Theory U proposes that the quality of the results that we create in any kind of social system is a function of the quality of awareness, attention or consciousness that the participants in the system operate from. Basically, this means that the impacts of our participation in any kind of social system are dependent on our interior condition and collective practices that bring the best potential out of each person.

When it comes to change it is worth looking to the work of the Berkana Institute where people believe that "whatever the problem, community is the answer".

The Internet revolution has been a great help in creating these seismic changes in society in which the old power structures are break-





ing down in influence and power no longer rests solely in a few hands. Technological innovation is offering a historical opportunity to develop new forms of collaboration and participation. The movements that led to the so-called “Arab Springs”, the occupy movement or the Indignados (M-15), emerged from these new ways of mobilizing and participating in society. Digital natives are participating in civic life in ways where they feel they can have an impact and these points of impact are often outside governmental and the traditional political spheres.

New approaches to civic participation use a broad suite of tools to affect a wide range of targets. Coders write open-source software (for instance, for security purposes, hoping to frustrate NSA surveillance), while community organisers fund neighbourhood gardens through crowdfunding. These emergent civics targets governments, corporations, communities and the media. It harnesses social media, crowdfunding, social entrepreneurship and open-source software as well as law and politics, to bring about change.

The age of internet and global interconnectedness is giving us informed, enabled and empowered citizens precisely because we can learn, talk and act together to solve the critical challenges of a world in which the rich get richer, the poor get poorer, where we are exploiting more than 1,5 planets and democracy is in crisis, simply because traditional politics can't reverse either inequality, business as usual or climate change.

City square by city square, individual meeting by individual meeting, thousands of citizens are coming together in a networked approach to politics that is fresh and engaging because it defies the hierarchical approach favoured by vested interests. They are turning into a reality what Harvard scholar Yochai Benkler presciently called in 2006 the “networked public sphere”.

**Today the world and our ability to shape it is literally in our hands.** It is possible to criticize, disrupt, collaborate and share at the touch of a few keys. **We are all particles in the wave of a future that is ours to make.**

Transparency and accountability rule. We rule; but only if politics changes too. For the new rules of this epochal shift go with the grain of a good society and the “Buen Vivir” precisely because in a flattened world, we talk and participate as equals.

These initiatives and countless others that didn't find their way into this article (organisations, movements, think tanks, researchers, scholars, etc.), are pioneers in what might be called the great transition, the great turning (term coined by Joanna Macy) or the Enlivenment (by Andreas Weber), which are emerging larger umbrella narratives of a global systemic change involving a profound shift in consciousness, huge structural changes embedded with collaboration, cooperation and mutuality, and care for the planet and all living beings.

Are we able to decide meaningfully where, when, how and in which way we participate in shaping the world we live in? Can we decolonize our minds in such ways that we are able to collectively overcome the current and future crisis?

Our lives, the lives of our children and all other living beings around the planet depend on it.

**Monica Mesquita**  
Educator & Researcher  
Lisboa, Portugal

## EDUCATOR AND DEMOCRACY: WHERE IS OUR RELATION?

### The crisis, the reproduction, and the "Land of the Lost"

A collection of thoughts from Etienne Balibar<sup>2</sup> allowed me to reconstruct the idea of a TV series of the 70s: "Land of the Lost", when I think about our current political time. When Balibar reproduced the following Gramsci's discourse (1971) to talk about the current European crisis: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born" (p.256), made me reinforce this previous idea. We cannot be born! We are, while educators, within the dominant ideology. In fact, even though we perceive ourselves as critical educators, we are slaves of our own reality and, at the same time, food to the barren intellectual times – so important to maintain the world order. According to Žižek (2014), "when we think that we escaped into our dreams, at that point we are within ideology. Ideology is not simply imposed on ourselves. Ideology is our spontaneous relationship to our social world." (00'37"; online video)

The reproduction of the urban system, where we are engaged, has as main gear the well-being - the great virtue of the democratic person; it is undeniable that democracy has been worked, in an educational way, as the way of social equality. However, in a certain way, we can question ourselves about our welfare as educators. To bring new conceptions developed from a critical view over this reproduction, even if this position of criticism comes from the boundary, is an exercise embedded of the democratic politics that lives in the educator who lives in towards the crisis. Our great challenge is the

urban boundaries (with the other and not to the other) proposing disturbing choices, i.e., to propose a global historical analysis, a local genealogy, and the collective rethinking of our current fears, to lay bare the gear of this hegemonic system, unravel its complexity and understand the consensus by the way it is engineered.

Inside of our margin of freedom to decide, to make choices, outlined by the neoliberal politics of the urban system, to live the "Land of the Lost" is to assume that we are living the urban land of the lost. This act can be considered as an elevation of our critical education into our current social and political urban life. This position assumes the slave role of the urban system and shakes us inside our symbolic deadlock. How to assume our position of opposition without serving the situation? How to survive if our position disrupts the urban social order? How to assume our role of mediation if we see our position as revolutionary? When has our position made a difference? What do disturbing choices mean to an education that aims the emancipation, the empowerment of the members from oppressed communities, and the active participation of the all citizens in the local political decision-making?

In basic Marxist terms, any social reproduction, inclusive of the knowledge, can be identified by its production, distribution, and consumption. Embedded in the social reproduction of knowledge, to be a critical educator means to exist critically in this cycle (which is the source of the determinism of our social being) i.e., to institute a critical cycle. It is not enough to "think" without "doing". The praxis, in this case, is essential to the critical reasoning. However, this cycle of the social life in our urban hegemonic system is fed by the economic cycle, which imposes a drain on production, a barrier on distribution, and a normalizing frame on the consumption. The junction between "thinking" and "doing", in the education community, presents a body rooted into "school success": mass instruction production, the high-rated schools, and technical and quantitative curricula - what is important is the quantity of knowledge and not the quality of the process of knowledge. In the current edu-

cation cycle there is no space to be in the boundary, to produce from the practical experiences, to produce the new by the natural historic way – an unplanned education that may be disturbing within such world order, shaking the existing comfort of "political correctness in education". Do educators want to change the educational world order that: (1) regulates the hegemonic system and the neoliberal government; (2) self-supports the education comfort - neutrality in the form of democracy; and (3) holds the intellectual infertility?

The present proposal, to a collective discussion may have its end in a cul de sac, by a discourse of impossibility guided by rhetoric: what we can do against the world order?, or even against the (urban) "Land of the lost"? However, the relevant point to this moment is to question our own consensus by the way the "political correctness in education" is engineered. This exercise is emergent to restrain our critical position to take the course that Žižek (2001) identifies as "perfect example of impassivity" (p.02), acting outside of an urban non-space, being located as "an act WITHIN the hegemonic ideological coordinates" (p. 02).

The "Land of the lost" is found, in fact, more commonly than we think; it is indeed the mask of the urban ideology, it is present in what we live, as we feed and we are fed to, we feel comfort and freedom, we exercise our bondage behind our choices and, at the same time, we can realise, as critical educators, the contractions between our thinking and our doing.

Let us be intolerant with ourselves, passing on to another stage (Balibar, 2002, 2011), the stage of the critical active participation!

<sup>1</sup> In his book *Politics and the Other Scene – 2002/2011*, in his interview: *Europe is a dead political project - 2010* or even in his discourses: in Birkbeck Institute, in UK, during a summer course – 2012 or in Bogazici University, in Turkey, during a public lecture called: *In Globalization and the Crisis of Cosmopolitan Idea*.





# ABOUT THE PROJECT



## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Are the Citizens aware of the existence of legal and non-legal mechanisms for political participation at local, national and EU levels? What is their opinion regarding the existing mechanisms? Why aren't they being used? What could be done in order to improve Citizens participation? Can we use social networks and e-platforms? How can authorities support Citizens' participation? And what is the role of civil society organizations?

In order to answer to these and other questions, 5 European organizations came together and created the Round-Trip project, aiming to promote Citizens' participation at local, national and European Union levels, by inspiring citizens to participate active

and effectively in public decision-making processes and by encouraging local authorities to provide more effective opportunities for citizen's participation.

The main objectives of this project are to:

Provide practical information about available mechanisms for Citizens participation;

Gather information regarding the knowledge, opinions about and utilization levels of the existing mechanisms for Citizens participation on the partner's municipalities;

Recommend possible amendments to the existing participation mechanisms or the introduction of innovative mechanisms such as e-democracy tools, among others;

Allow municipalities and active local level Civil Society Organizations, to share practices and develop innovative approaches to increase the active engagement of Citizens on the European debate.

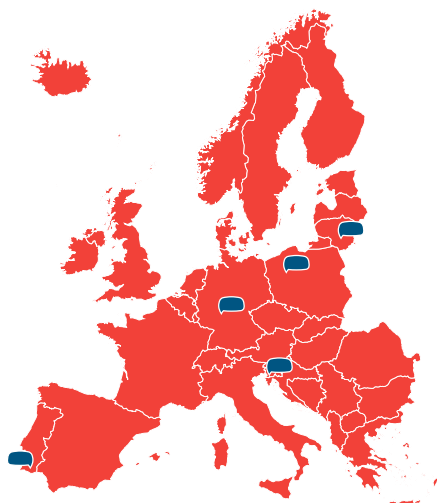
The project is funded with the support of the European Union under the Programme "Europe for Citizens" and coordinated by Cooperativa ECOS – Cooperação, Educação e Desenvolvimento, CRL.

Until the end of 2015 the partners in this project – ECOS, CRIS, PINA, SOCIUS and ANNONA, are embarking together in this Round-Trip, inviting citizens and local public authorities of the 5 countries to:

- share information and experiences
- debate and make recommendations on possible improvements to the existing participation mechanisms or propose innovative approaches to democratic participation
- narrow the relationship between people and political representatives
- encourage more people to have a say in the political decision-making.



## THE PARTNERS



**ecos**

Cooperativa de Educação, Cooperação e Desenvolvimento, CRL

ECOS – Cooperation, Education, and Development, Cooperative (Portugal) main goal is the promotion of non-formal education for social inclusion. Through different activities, ECOS aims to contribute to the development of a more human, sustainable, fair, inclusive, participative, democratic, equitable, solidary, cooperative, dialogical, diverse and integrated society.

ANNONA

ANNONA darnaus vystymosi centras (Vilnius, Lithuania) is a research hub for environmental policies and development, a non-profit organization designed to promote principles of sustainable development into laws and into the education system. ANNONA goes beyond debating problems that affect the environment and channels all energy towards finding and promoting public policy solutions in Lithuania and surrounding region.

**PiNa**

PiNA is Slovenian NGO founded in 1998 on the initiative of the Open Society Institute. Today PiNA works on three priority areas which intertwine and complement each other: strengthening the sector of NGOs, development of a critical and responsible society and international (co) operation. Inside these areas of operation we develop activities, connect with other key players, promote active participation of the civil society, and fill empty spaces with missing content. It became recognised in the local community as one of the reference NGO's in the region. PiNA participates in various networks and initiatives on the national level and have the status of working in the public interest. Its projects and programmes are created with the support of programmes Erasmus+, Europe for Citizens, Creative Europe, European Social Fund, direct European Commission tenders, the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, the American Embassy and the Anne Lindh Foundation.

**socius**  
Organisationsberatung

SOCIUS Organisationsberatung gGmbH (Germany) main goal is to support needs of organizations oriented to common good. To achieve this aim, SOCIUS fosters international understanding, development cooperation, education and occupational training. Particularly the specialist team of the SOCIUS Cologne unit enhances methodologies of participation and facilitates civil participation as well as urban learning action.



Centrum Rozwojnicjatyw Społecznych CRIS (Poland) mission is to build social capital, to inspire and support civic activism. CRIS is a leading Non Governmental Organizations Incubator and supporting centre for local leaders and other active groups. Moreover, the organization is promoting a partnership between Civil Society Organizations, businesses and local government, especially by implementing models of effective cooperation.

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# ROUND TRIP

A CITIZENS PARTICIPATION JOURNEY  
BETWEEN LOCAL AND EUROPEAN LEVELS

Further information: [www.roundtrip.ecos.pt](http://www.roundtrip.ecos.pt)  
Contacts: [roundtrip@ecos.pt](mailto:roundtrip@ecos.pt)