



Handbook: How to organise Public Consultations for local and regional authorities



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What is a public consultation?



The partners

Kallithea: Public consultation is the essence of local democracy, ensuring citizens have a voice in shaping decisions. It gathers diverse perspectives through meetings, surveys, or workshops, fostering informed and inclusive policy-making.

ZMOS: Public consultation is mainly a reflection of democratic culture, it means giving the opportunity to all stakeholders to effectively influence the substance of policies and regulations.

TOOSZ: Public consultation is the active communication between the elected municipal members and other actors on a local public issue. This can be done by informing the actors or by organising meetings where they express their views or seek solutions together on issues that concern them.

UNCJR: Determinate democratic institutions to transform them in ways that give citizens a more direct role in setting agendas and shaping the public decisions that affect them. To ensure that citizens are enshrined in the political decision-making process without discrimination, an enabling environment is required.

Xativa: Public consultation is a powerful tool that public entities have to channel all the opinions of the citizenry into public policies that can truly influence the improvement of life and opportunities for the entire population.

The European Commission

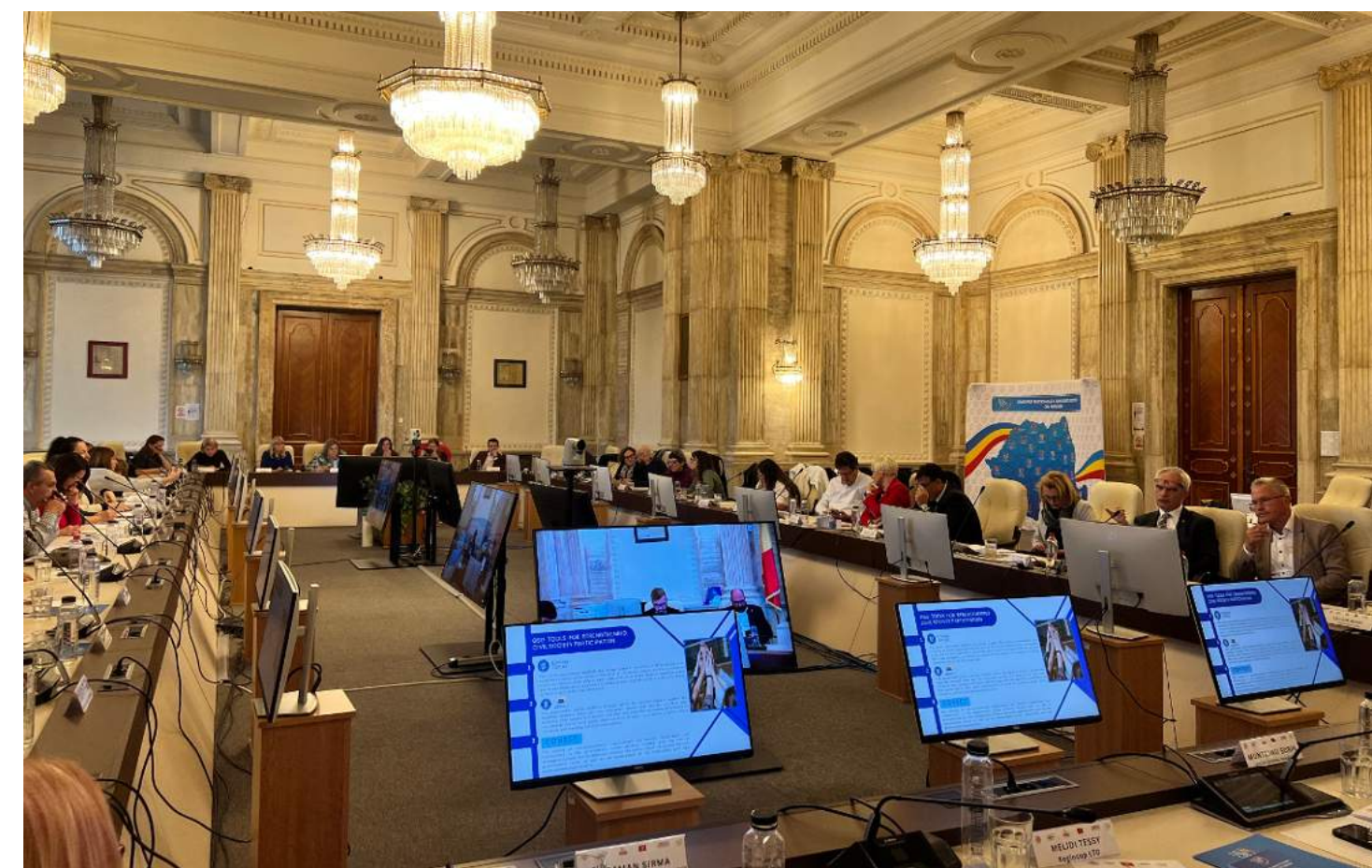
Consultation is intended to provide opportunities for input from representatives of regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, undertakings and associations of undertakings, the individual citizens concerned, academics and technical experts, and interested parties in third countries. *European Commission, Communication: Towards a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue - General principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties by the Commission*

Good policymaking involves those affected by the decisions. To sustain trust in the European Union, EU policies need to take into account and reflect the values and concerns of citizens. The active participation of stakeholders, including citizens, is essential – especially in times of uncertainty. At the same time, consultations should not impose unnecessary burdens. Therefore, we want to make it easier for interested parties to provide input through our consultations. *European Commission, Better regulation, joining forces to make better laws*

The OECD and the UNPD

Public consultation may be defined as a structured public engagement which involves seeking, receiving, analysing and responding to feedback from stakeholders. It involves defining the purpose and subject of the consultation (policy initiative, regulatory change, legislative proposal) *OECD, Workshop on "Consultation Practices within the Process of Public Policies - Challenges and Opportunities"*

Public consultations are important tools which help elected bodies gather sufficient evidence and information to decide policies or laws and to oversee the implementation of these measures. Public consultations enable people to express their opinions, which are then taken into account and considered by local governments. *UNPD, Manual on public consultations for the provincial people's councils.*



Why public consultations are important?

Public consultations are essential for democracy, as they allow citizens to participate in decision-making and government to be more transparent and accountable. They also lead to better decisions, as policymakers can gather input from a wide range of stakeholders.

Inclusivity and Democracy: Providing a platform for diverse voices and perspectives to be heard. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of an issue and can contribute to more equitable decision-making.

Transparency: Promoting transparency by allowing the public to understand the issues at hand, the options being considered, and the rationale behind decisions. This openness fosters trust and accountability.

Informed Decision-Making: Leading to better decision-making by gathering input from a wide range of stakeholders and experts. This allows for a more informed approach to policy development.



Legitimacy: Increasing the sentiment of legitimacy due to public input. This can lead to greater public acceptance and compliance with resulting policies.

Conflict Resolution: Providing a forum for different groups to express their concerns and potentially find common ground on complex issues. This can contribute to a more collaborative decision-making process.

Public Education and Awareness: Serving as a means of educating the public about complex issues. They provide an opportunity for experts to explain the nuances of a problem and the potential consequences of different decisions.

Identifying Unintended Consequences: Involving the public in decision-making can help identify and mitigate unintended consequences of policies. Stakeholders may be able to point out potential issues that policymakers may not have considered.

Building Trust: Helping build trust between organizations and the public. They demonstrate a willingness to listen and take public opinions into account.

Empowering Stakeholders: Empowering stakeholders by giving them a voice in decision-making processes. This can lead to increased civic participation and a stronger civil society.



When should we have public consultations?

Public consultations can be used at any stage of policy development, but they are most effective when used early on in the process. This allows policymakers to gather feedback from a wide range of stakeholders before they have become too invested in a particular policy proposal.

Problem identification

Public consultations can be used to identify the problems that a new policy is intended to address. This can help to ensure that the policy is focused on the real needs of the people it is meant to serve.

For example, when developing a new policy to address homelessness, policymakers could hold public consultations with people who are homeless, homeless service providers, and other stakeholders to learn about the root causes of homelessness and the most effective ways to address them.

Policy development

Public consultations can be used to gather feedback on different policy options. This can help policymakers to identify the most effective and feasible approach to addressing the problem.

For example, when developing a new policy to address climate change, policymakers could hold public consultations to gather feedback on different options for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, such as carbon pricing, renewable energy incentives, and energy efficiency standards.

Policy implementation

Public consultations can be used to gather input on how to best implement a new policy. This can help to minimize disruption and ensure that the policy is implemented smoothly and effectively.

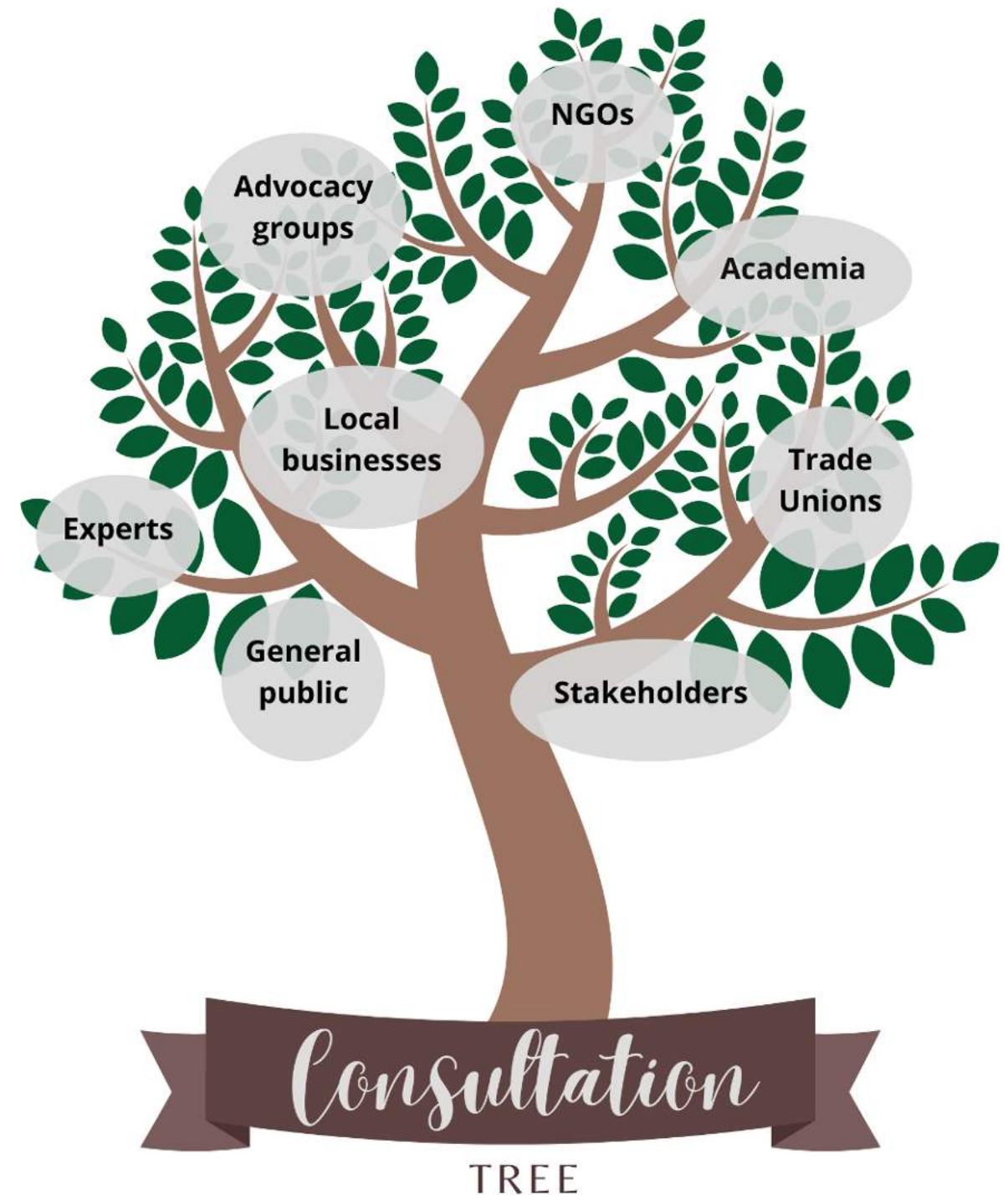
For example, when implementing a new policy to reform the education system, policymakers could hold public consultations with teachers, parents, students, and education experts to gather input on the best way to implement the reforms in a way that is least disruptive to students' learning.

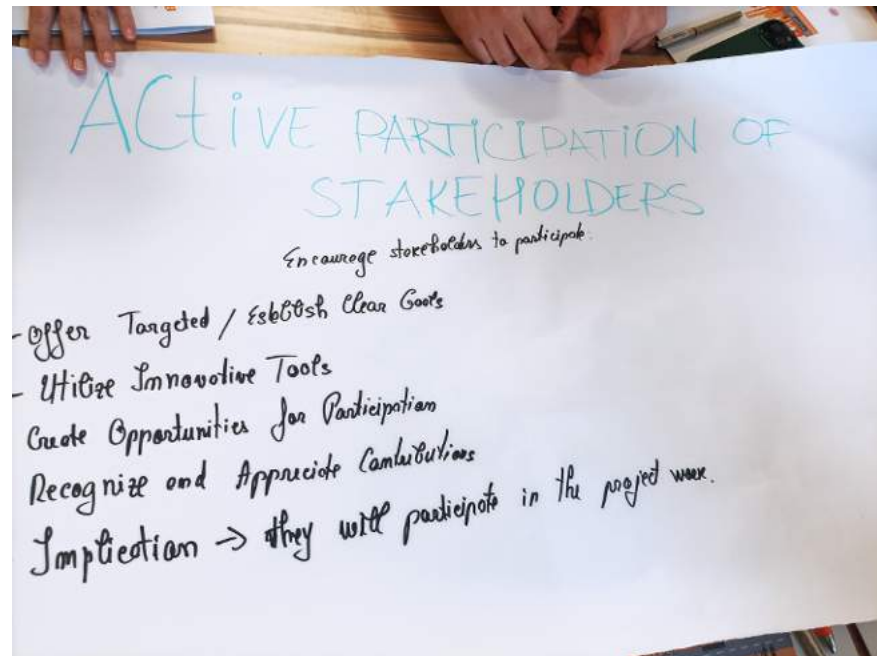
Policy evaluation

Public consultations can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of an existing policy. This can help policymakers to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments.

For example, when evaluating the effectiveness of a policy to reduce poverty, policymakers could hold public consultations with people living in poverty, anti-poverty advocates, and other stakeholders to gather feedback on the impact of the policy and how it can be improved.

Who should be consulted?





How should we organise public consultations?

Public consultations can only be successful if they are designed properly taking into account the local community demographics, target audience and scope of the consultation. The tools and methods used to implement the consultation are equally crucial.

Define goals and objectives:

Start by clearly defining what you hope to achieve with the consultation. Are you aiming to gather resident input on a park redesign, a new city infrastructure or a new social program? Clearly defined goals will guide the entire process.

Identify the target audience:

Determine who is mostly impacted by the discussed intervention.

Select the consultation method:

Choose the method that best suits your target audience and ensures equal participation of various groups. Based on your needs this can be in person meetings, online consultations, questionnaires, etc.

Develop communication materials:

Prepare informative materials that explain the local issue, the consultation process, and how feedback will be used. Use plain language, visuals, and translate materials into relevant local languages.

Promote the consultation:

Utilize various channels to reach your target audience at the local level. This could include social media platforms, banners and flyers in public spaces, announcements in local newspapers, etc.

Create an inclusive environment:

Create an atmosphere that makes citizens feel free and safe to voice their opinions during the consultation. Address any accessibility concerns, and ensure everyone feels comfortable participating.

Report on the Feedback:

Carefully analyze the feedback received and identify key themes and trends. Prepare a report summarizing the findings and how they will be considered in the final decision-making process and share it with the participants and local citizens.

Online public consultations

Online public consultations offer a chance for increased citizen engagement at the local level, but they also have limitations.

Advantages:

- **Increased accessibility:** allow participation from geographically dispersed residents or those with mobility limitations to participate at their own pace and convenience.
- **Reduced costs:** can be more cost-effective compared to traditional in-person meetings, avoiding venue rental, printing, and staffing costs.
- **Greater anonymity:** encourage participation from individuals who might be less comfortable speaking up in a face-to-face setting at the local level.
- **Multilingual options:** can be offered in multiple languages to ensure wider participation within the local community.
- **Better data analysis:** Offer easier data collection and analysis of public feedback, allowing for a more quantitative assessment of local public opinion.

Disadvantages:

- **Accessibility issues:** exclude those without access to technology or the internet, leading to under-representation of certain demographics.
- **Limited deliberation:** limit opportunities for rich discussions and capture of non-verbal cues.
- **Bias and manipulation:** spam or manipulation of responses through online bots can insert biases, pollute the results and destroy trust on public consultations.

Offline public consultations

Offline public consultations, often held in person, have been a traditional method for citizen engagement.

Advantages:

- **Richer deliberation:** allow for face-to-face discussions, fostering a deeper understanding of public sentiment through body language and interaction.
- **Enforced community cohesion:** help build relationships between residents and local authorities, fostering a stronger sense of community cohesion.
- **Increased accessibility:** become more accessible for those with limited or no internet access and difficulties in using online services.
- **Immediate feedback and interactions:** allow for immediate feedback and question-and-answer sessions and more interactive exchanges between residents and local authorities.

Disadvantages:

- **Limited accessibility:** can be less accessible for geographically dispersed residents or those with mobility limitations.
- **Higher costs:** can be more expensive to hold compared to online versions due to venue rental, printing materials, and staffing costs.
- **Domination issues** can be susceptible to domination by vocal individuals or groups, limiting participation of shy residents.

Best practices from Europe

Ireland - Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change

Ireland held a [Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change](#) in 2016-2018. The assembly brought together 99 citizens chosen through a stratified random selection process. The Assembly members reflected the Irish population in terms of age, gender, geography, social class, and disability. Over six weekends, they heard from experts on climate science, economics, and policy, and deliberated on various climate action proposals.

United Kingdom - Citizens' Assemblies on Climate Change

The UK has held [Citizens' Assemblies on climate change](#) in several regions, including one nationally in 2020. Each assembly involved a representative group of citizens deliberating on climate action after receiving information from experts and stakeholders. The national assembly, for instance, consisted of 100 randomly selected citizens who met over six weekends. Their recommendations focused on areas like clean energy, transport, and household consumption.

Germany - Online Public Consultation on Digital Policy (Zukunftsdialog)

Germany's [Zukunftsdialog](#) (Future Dialogue) was an online consultation process that took place from November 2018 to January 2019 organised by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy. The consultation used a combination of online surveys, forums, and workshops to gather input from over 50,000 participants. Citizens could engage in various topics like artificial intelligence, data protection, and the digital divide.

France - Grand National Debate (Grand Débat National)

France's [Grand National Debate](#) was a series of public meetings held across the country from January to April 2019 organised by the French Ministry of the Interior. The debate emerged in response to the yellow vests protests and aimed to address citizen concerns on various issues, including taxes, pensions, and democratic representation. Over 10,000 meetings were held, with an estimated 2.2 million people participating.

Best practices from the world

United States: utilizing social media and citizen science for public input in Seattle

Seattle [leveraged social media platforms and citizen science](#) to gather public input on park planning. Residents could share ideas, participate in online surveys, and contribute data on park usage through smartphone apps. This approach increased accessibility and engagement, particularly among younger demographics.

Uganda: Conserving Forest Resources

Uganda's [public consultation on forest policy](#) balanced conservation with community needs. Storytelling sessions and focus groups ensured diverse voices were heard, particularly women and marginalized groups. Local input on resource dependence and deforestation shaped the final policy, showcasing successful public engagement in Africa for sustainable forest management.

Australia: public consultation to revitalize Melbourne's urban forest

Melbourne's [public consultation revitalised](#) its Urban Forest Strategy. Online surveys, workshops, and multilingual materials ensured broad participation. Resident input on native trees, canopy cover, and green space access shaped the final plan, showcasing successful public engagement in Australia.

India: budgeting and community driven development in Karnataka

In Karnataka, [public consultations](#) empowered rural women in water management. Using women's self-help groups and accessible workshops, the project ensured their voices were heard. Insights from these consultations directly influenced water management plans, demonstrating successful public participation in Asia.

Kallithea - Urban Regeneration

Municipality of Kallithea // designing the future of the city

Kallithea’s urban regeneration plan involves a number of projects that aim to upgrade the city’s infrastructure and -as part of it- the circulation within the city. Two of the main projects of this plan -the open mall that will transform the local market and the connection with the Stavros Niarchos Foundation- have a significant impact on circulation and transportation in the city and as such public consultation prior to the implementation of the studies is mandatory by law.

For this reason, the municipality of Kallithea posted the traffic studies on the municipal website together with an invitation for public consultation at a specific place and date. At the same time and to ensure the elderly will notice it, invitations for public consultation were distributed on every door of the properties in the area of interest. Then the traffic studies were

Learn more



presented to the residents of the area so that they can submit their comments and make their suggestions for the traffic regulations. Comments could be submitted online, by post or during meetings and they were all passed to the competent service of the municipality to be considered in the finalization of the project.

The Municipal Committee for public consultations also gathered for each of the projects and consulted stakeholders, NGOs, associations and citizens willing to express their views and proposals.

For the preparation of the Open Mall study several solutions such as green routes, car-pooling, public transport routes were discussed and tested with various local agencies during individual interviews to allow them to provide comments and suggestions based on their expertise.

At the same time an online public consultation was also conducted through a platform where people could also submit their comments and suggestions. The online public consultation was mainly attended by young people, probably because they use the internet much more than the elderly.

For the traffic study around the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, three public consultations were held during which residents submitted their comments, some of which were accepted and incorporated into the study.



Why is it good practice?

The municipality of Kallithea exceeded what was the legal requirement for the implementation of the urban regeneration of the city and involved citizens, stakeholders and experts in the process of designing the urban regeneration of the city. Using multiple channels of communication and interaction gave the opportunity to any citizen interested to participate and be heard.

Innovations introduced.

The most innovative part of the consultation is the combination of platforms and tools that allowed citizens participation and the fact that the

municipality did not limit each effort to communicate the consultation online but also posted personalized notices to the citizens in the area of interest.

sustainability

The urban regeneration plan is part of the municipality’s new strategy to transition to a new era of sustainable development that will also reduce its environmental footprint, while it will boost local economy and improve citizens quality of life.

The Municipality of Kallithea aims to submit all main decisions that have a direct impact on its citizens to public consultation, whether technical projects or decisions concerning vulnerable groups and the Municipality’s social policy.

TOOSZ - Participatory Budgeting

Budapest Capital District XIII // Implementing with the citizens

The municipality of Budapest Capital District XIII introduced the participatory budgeting method, a new decision-making mechanism, aiming to:

- improve involvement of the residents in the thinking about the district,
- strengthening community attitudes,
- raise community participation and foster a sense of community involvement and community ownership.

Community participatory budgeting is about a new approach, a new way of urban development, based on shared responsibility and the opportunity for citizens to plan and implement.

How is it conducted?

The Council of Representatives decided to introduce a community/participatory budget in 2020 based on the recommendations of a working group under the guidance of the deputy mayor in charge of the area, taking into account the guidelines of academic experts and communication specialists,. The following structure was used:

Watch the video



I. Preparation of the process:

Taking stock of needs and opportunities. Based on the partnership strategy, elaboration of the system of cooperation, the communication strategy (media campaign), the necessary online and offline platforms, the schedule of organised meetings, the territorial logistics etc.

II. Implementation of the process - sub-processes

A.) Publicising the Community budget, holding public meetings and workshops, ensuring the participation of the stakeholders according to the planned territorial distribution, running forums to receive proposals, collecting the proposals received on the various platforms.

B.) Collating the suggestions from the public, grouping them, if necessary, without thematic criteria, possibly into a larger thematic group of similar themes, and developing projects.

C.) Voting, selecting and supporting the projects proposed for implementation.

D.) Announcing the results of the voting process (decision on the fate of the initiatives supported but not ultimately won).

III. Closing of the process, implementation

Implementation of the winning initiatives with the involvement of the citizens and residents who proposed them. Ongoing information on the improvements made and the results achieved (follow-up of a monitoring nature, satisfaction measurement.)



When the municipality decided to introduce the Community budget, they knew that it would be more time-consuming than the general decision-making process, but the results show that it has now clearly lived up to their expectations (while the preparation took half a year, the Community budget took 4 months from the start of the proposal to the announcement of the results).

In 2021, 2022 and also in 2023 the programme was annually implemented.

Why is it a good example?

60 million HUF (155000€) was spent in each year to this program in the District. In 2022: thousands of enquiries, 507 proposals received, 97 initiatives put to the vote, 2,541 votes received: 44 winners and developments implemented.

Innovations introduced

Online system was developed for communication of the program. It is full transparent and all applicants receive an answer. Employees of the local governments consider how fit the relevant idea to the strategy of the district. It happens often that an idea will be included into the action plan and will be created a bigger project based on that idea.

Sustainability

The participatory budget - with its successes, results and experiences - can be seen as a learning process, where both the municipality and the population get used to and learn a new method of urban development, of ensuring and enabling participation in decision-making processes. It is important for the municipality to incorporate its experience in a cyclical way into the planning of its programmes for the coming years, so that they become more effective each year and, in the process, more responsive to the needs of the population.

Urban municipality of Ljubljana// Digital development strategy

The city of Ljubljana carried out consultations in 2023 to identify the views and needs of the citizens in order to prepare a strategy of digital development that aims to improve the quality of life for all citizens. The intent was to enable a number of stakeholders in co-designing the strategy and propose objectives and solutions to be included in the strategy. This approach offers more legitimacy and ensures a more successful implementation of public policies in the field of digital development.

How is it conducted?

The process of preparation of the strategy lasted for 18 months. The city of Ljubljana put substantial effort to conduct effective consultations with many stakeholder in various ways.

Consultations were conducted with:

- Citizens,
- City administration departments,
- Professional public,
- Political decision-makers.

Learn more



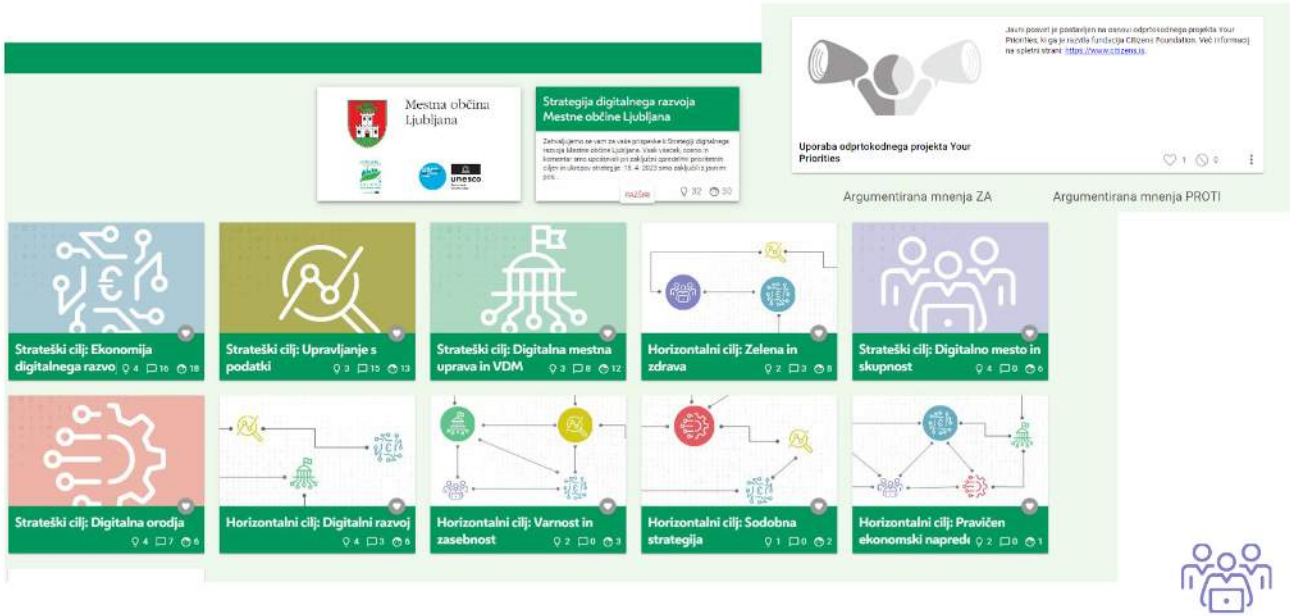
Consultations included an online survey for citizens to identify main fields of interest, fears and needs. The survey was open for 6 weeks and provided the basis for identifying the principles and values, strategic objectives and actions of the strategy.

After the draft of the strategy was prepared, another follow-up online public consultation with citizens was carried out. Citizens had the opportunity to comment, react, like and rank proposed objectives and actions via a web platform. The website had 3,346 views, and 128 individuals actively participated.

Online surveys were also prepared for the city administration and its management. In addition, interviews with heads of departments were conducted.

The city organized a number of focus group meetings with the professional public from business, academia, NGOs, state administration and various associations that co-designed the strategy's principles, values, objectives, actions and indicators. Due to covid measures, four meetings took place online, a final meeting was organized at the city hall.

In the final stage, political actors (city councillors, mayors committees) were consulted, before the strategy was submitted for approval to the City Council.



Why is it a good example?

The implemented participatory process considered a wide array of stakeholders and, more importantly, gave the stakeholders the opportunity to effectively influence the content of the strategy. Ljubljana's digital development strategy has therefore more legitimacy, it focuses on the citizen and on the improvement of the quality of life.

The participatory process was not rushed but instead provided enough time to process and incorporate all the feedback. Consultations were done online and offline.

The city is also reporting on the implementation of the strategy and will continue to use the participatory process of consultations.

Innovations introduced

The online public consultation, conducted after the draft of the strategy was prepared, used the open source

solution from the project "Your Priorities". This tool facilitated giving and gathering feedback on the draft content of the strategy. Individuals could rate, like, react and comment the content with pro et contra arguments, the city administration responded to received comments.

Sustainability

The strategy is conceived as a living document. Its implementation will be monitored through a website, where a KPI monitor and presentations of the projects will be presented.

Every two years, through surveys, interviews and consultations, the strategy will be updated and adapted to current expectations and needs. Therefore the participatory process did not conclude with the adoption of the strategy, but instead continues throughout its implementation as well.

Sector no 6 Bucharest// Ideas from citizens to citizens

In 2023, Sector no 6/Bucharest allocated 1 200 000 lei (approximately € 240 000) for citizen-proposed projects. Consultations were held to identify resident needs and determine projects to be financed from the public budget and six categories have been proposed for project entries (1. Development of green spaces, playgrounds, urban furniture, 2. Digitization, 3. Educational, cultural, sporting, 4. Street infrastructure, mobility and traffic safety, 5. Environmental protection, 6. Social and/or health). This initiative aims for direct citizen involvement in allocating funds, allowing them to register projects, vote for favorites, or support implementation of winning ideas.

How is it conducted?

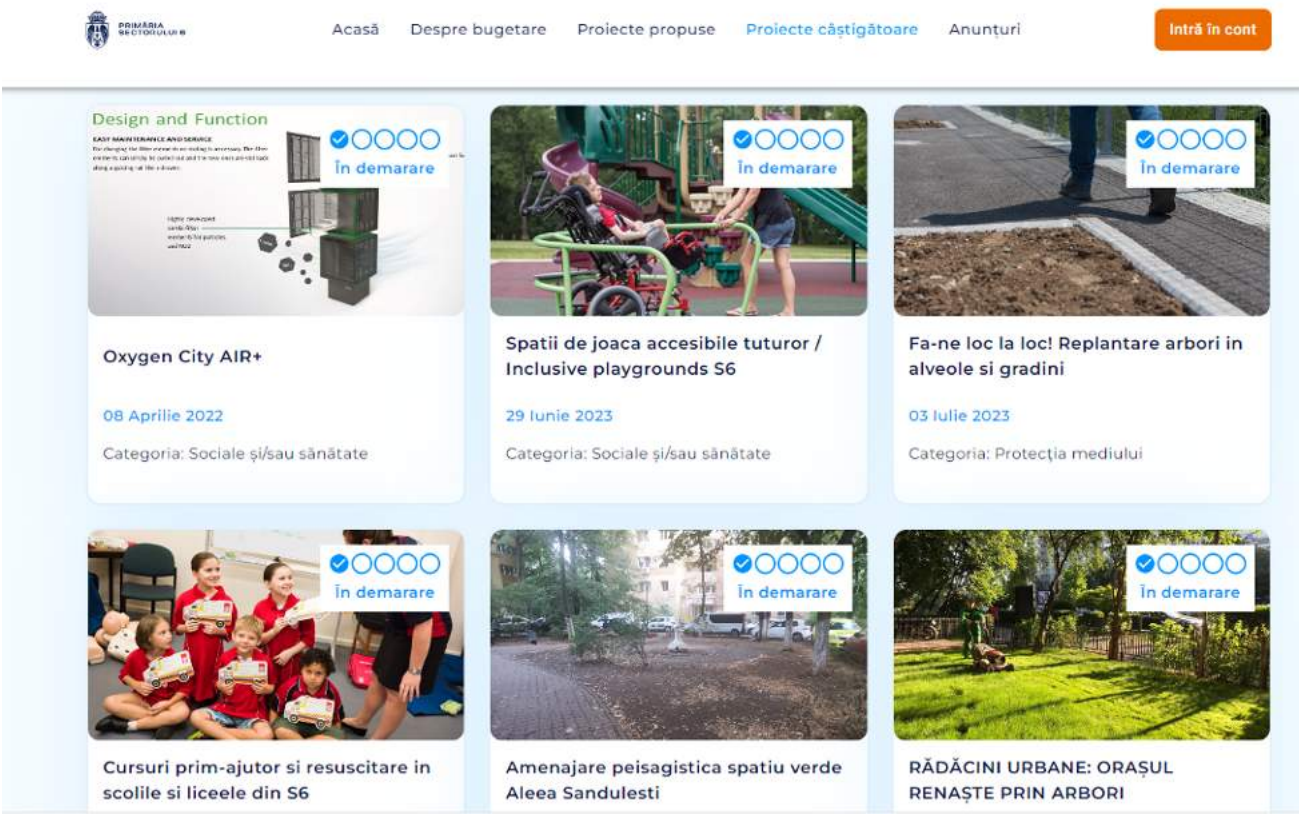
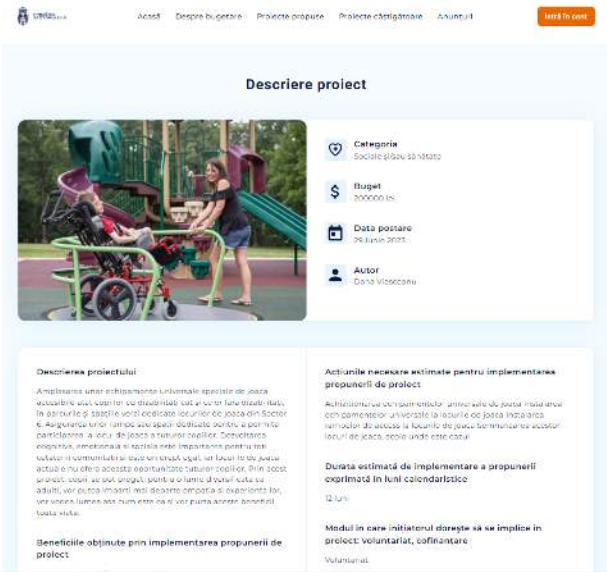
The process allowed one month for the submission of the projects. The participatory budgeting process is open to citizens, individuals who live, work or study in Sector 6 and are at least 18 years old.

Registration on the participatory budgeting platform was mandatory to submit a project and citizens could submit multiple proposals. Common project requests included public money allocation (contracts, investments, expenses), road infrastructure, cultural events, public transport, mobile centers/ and community centers for lifelong learning.

The submitted proposals were evaluated by the Project Evaluation Committee based on their potential impact, feasibility and eligibility. The Committee also checked the financial and legal aspects and proposed merges for similar or overlapping ideas.

The final selection of the projects is made by voting on the online platform -the process remained open for 21 working days. After the official declaration of the winning projects those are included in the draft budget of Sector 6 up to the amount of 1,200,000 lei.

Learn more



For 2023, projects selected included:

- 1.Seismic Education and First Aid in high schools – 53 votes, Budget – 200 000 lei
- 2.Improving education in kindergarten by installing cameras – 38 votes – 20.000 lei
- 3.Cat houses for the proper feeding and care of community cats – 691 votes – 20.000 lei
- 4.Urban roots: the city is reborn through trees – 88 votes – 20.000 lei.
- 5.Landscaping green space Sandulesti Alley – 875 votes – 20.000 lei
- 6.Playgrounds accessible to all/inclusive playgrounds – 60 votes – 20.000 lei

Why is it a good example?

Thanks to this initiative 6 projects were declared as winners and were included in the investment list of the Sector no 6 and now they are in implementation (all the projects)

Innovations introduced

The submission of the projects was done in a fully automated wat via the official municipal platform for public budgeting ensuring transparency and security via the user accounts citizens had to create to participate.

Sustainability

UNCJR aims to develop a website where anyone can view what has been funded via participatory budgeting in every county the past 5 years and what was the outcome -whether the projects were finally implemented. Follow-up and recommendation will be made to all members for better implementation of participatory budgeting at county level

Xàtiva - youth employment

Municipality of Xàtiva// planning together with young people

Young people need support from local authorities for their insertion and stability in the labour market, boosting incentives to include young people from a public collaboration-where young people are more likely to consolidate.

In addition, policies must be implemented to retain, return and absorb young talent, and to articulate new opportunities that diversify the productive fabric and increase labor supply and diversity. The traditional economy must also be strengthened from a young people’s perspective and support the labour inclusion of inexperienced youth. On the other hand, the promotion of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial culture has to be addressed, supporting economic and accompaniment.

Education must also be targeted as the strongest tool for equal employment

Learn more



opportunities and access to higher quality jobs. Likewise, constant training, guidance and information must be worked to increase the employability of young people.

This is why the municipality of Xàtiva developed the Millennial Plan. The planning, management and strategic direction tool for all policies related to the promotion of youth employment and its orientation and information, as well as the increase of employment options and employability for the period of years from 2021 to 2025.

How is it conducted?

The preparation of the diagnosis was based mainly on documentary sources.

Firstly, we used different studies and reports on youth and the labour market, provided by SEPE, LABORA, INJUVE, Ayuntamiento de Xàtiva, EPA de la Comunidad Valenciana, Consejo de la Juventud de España, Valencian Youth Council and Youth Council of Xàtiva, LABORA and other public sources.

In addition, a participatory process, called «We create Youth Employment», involved more than 100 young people from different groups with common characteristics. Business associations from the city and social agents and platforms from the territory have also participated. Due to the pandemic at the time of the implementation, some groups had to participate via Zoom. That created a mixed process of onsite and online implementation.



The information collected helped Xàtiva to clearly define the different interventions that need to be taken to promote youth employment and training to increase employability, and to increase employment opportunities for young people, strengthening the local economy from a young perspective and improving information and guidance.

Why is it a good example?

Youth people felt like their voice was heard and counted. Focus groups made it more comfortable for them to express themselves about their own wills.

innovations introduced

Millennial Square is the first local occupation plan aimed at the youth of

Xàtiva, pioneer in the wake of the territory. This is the result of, also first, Pla Joven 2019-2022 of the Xàtiva City Council, which strategically decides on the policies aimed at the youth of the city.

Sustainability

The plan ends in two years and we hope to develop the second Millennial Plan and continues supporting young people and increase their opportunities to work.

“Active cities, active citizens”

The project

Active Cities for EU promotes local decision making through public consultations, to strengthen citizens' active involvement in European political life. The project focuses on women as tackling gender inequality in the EU will contribute to the protection and further promotion of the EU citizenship.

Municipality of Kallithea, situated in the south surroundings of Athens (Attica Region) with a population of 100.000 citizens.



Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities (TOOSZ) a national association of local authorities with more than 1600 members from small remote villages to capital districts.



Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS), that exclusively represents the interests of 12 urban municipalities of Slovenia.



National Union of County Councils of Romania (UNCJ) that brings together all the County Councils of Romania, to support international cooperation and regional development.



Municipality of Xàtiva, a Spanish city located south of the province of Valencia (Valencian Community, Spain) with a population of about 30,000.



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