Participatory plan for local communities focused on citizens participation

Introduction

This document aims to provide a useful picture on participatory democracy, as well as successful cases of participatory processes as inspiring experiences.
Starting from the definition and principles of participatory democracy, the key actors of these processes are identified, followed by the description of the level and tools of participation.
Afterwards, the third chapter aims to present qualitative features of relevant experiences of our community for sharing good experiences and practices within these cases of some of our members.

Key concepts and background information

1. Definition and principles of participatory democracy

Participatory processes give citizens the possibility to take part in decision-making and to give impulse for change. A participatory democracy aims to ensure civil participation in the decision-making processes.

The principles of participatory democracy are:

1. Mutual respect between all actors as the basis for honest interaction and mutual trust
2. Respect for the independence of NGOs whether their opinions are consistent with those of the public authorities or not;
3. Respect for the position of public authorities with whom responsibility and accountability for decision making lies;
4. Openness, transparency and accountability;
5. Responsiveness, with all actors providing appropriate feedback
6. Non-discrimination and inclusiveness so that all voices, including those of the less privileged and most vulnerable, can be heard and taken into account;
7. Gender equality and equal participation of all groups including those with particular interests and needs, such as young people, the elderly, people with disabilities or minorities;
8. Accessibility through the use of clear language and appropriate means of participation, offline or online, and on any device.

2. The actors of a participatory process

One of the crucial elements of the participatory approach is the identification of the participants in the action. The actors of the process are:

- Local authorities (elected officials and civil servants):

  - Elected officials have a political and strategic role and are directly accountable towards the citizens who elected them.
  - Civil servants are the linchpin of public policy. In any case, the attention of a participatory democracy program must take into account the actual skills of either the elected officials or the civil servants.

- Citizens and / or their associations:

  - The term citizen is still rather vague and can represent many things. The citizen can be considered either as an individual or as a civil society organisation. A dialogue with individuals can be established through openings of the offices to the population, open meetings, citizen consultations online, door-to-door direct inquiries, identification of specific meeting places.
  - The civil sector is often a privileged interlocutor for consultation since it represents a group and collective interests which are thus "organised" by topic or by place. The freedom of expression and association are fundamental pillars of citizen participation. They accompany the development of participatory democracy. The key element of the civil society sector's life is often an opportunity but can also have its limitations, especially when verifying the representativeness expressed by the Association (who, how much, what is the transmission mechanism of representativeness, the number of represented members).

Main target groups and actors usually include:

Citizens	Local groups and individuals, society at large. They can be directly or indirectly impacted by the decision.
Interest and advocacy groups	CSOs, activist groups, and associations representing various causes or interests related to subject of the participatory process.
Businesses and Industry Representatives	Stakeholders from different sectors or industries affected by proposed changes or policies.
Public sector and social service providers	Government, local government and other public institutions and bodies. Those responsible for decision-making or policy implementation.
Academia and Research Organisations	Expert practitioners and academia representatives with relevant knowledge or insights on the subject.
Youth	Encouraging the involvement of the younger population will ensure a future-facing perspective.
Minority, marginalized groups	Making voices of those who might traditionally not participate heard and accounted for in decision-making processes.
Media and communication outlets and networks	Engaging with media can help in disseminating information and encouraging broader participation.
Other stakeholders	Such as religious groups, cultural organisations, or any group that could be affected by or have insights into the topic at hand, for example, a related ministry of public officials, who are not formally part of the process.

In the context of participatory democracy, citizens establish dialogue and collaboration at various levels with local institutions. Indeed, the process of participatory democracy opens up new horizons in terms of relations between local authorities and citizens, in addition to elections and the financing of association projects. The process must be able to give the possibility to intervene in the choices of the community and local policies.

Stakeholders of the participatory democracy and basic features:
1. The retailers
2. The bars and restaurants
3. The inhabitants of the neighbourhood
4. The employers
5. The owners of the houses / offices
6. Neighbourhood associations (cultural, social)
7. The municipal administration

3. Level and tools of participation

There are four different levels of participation: information, consultation, dialogue, partnership.

3.1 The first level: information

Most of the time, the information is not effective. It is possible to see a relatively low level of participation, which usually consists of a one-way provision of information by public authorities and no interaction or involvement with associations or citizens is required or expected.

That is the reason why it is key to take into consideration:
- the objective of the communication
- the targets of communication (youth, experts, foreigners, women, …)
- the most appropriate channels for informing the target group

It is possible to choose between different information tools:
- Publishing agendas, reports and other relevant materials online, on public authority website or on social media (i.e. mid – term reports);
- Providing relevant information (i.e. convocation of public events) via whatsapp or SMS
- Paper material: posters, brochures (to be disseminated at community meeting areas, so to ensure reaching also citizens with limited or no internet access, or no digital competences)
- Municipal office dedicated to the information and services for the citizens
- Public meetings

The language used shall take into account who are the users!

3.2 The second level: consultation

It allows public authorities to collect the views of individuals, CSOs and civil society at large on a specific policy or topic as part of an official procedure. The initiative and topics originate from the public authorities, not from the associations. Public authorities might take into account the inputs collected, but this is not compulsory or expected

Some of the key rules are:

1. Elaboration of a message clear and precise, to be submitted to consultation
   a. - Preliminary analysis of the context, before the meeting
   b. - For which aspect of the public policy am I opening a consultation
2. The format
   a. - The venue of the public meeting (a venue which is open and accessible to all)
      i. - The format of the meeting (avoid an excessively official format): on-line, in presence, hybrid)
      ii. - The agenda of the meeting shall allow an exchange with the public and not end up with a long presentation of the subject
      iii. - A facilitator who can animate the debate, coordinate the dialogue and manage potential conflicts
3. Follow-up
   a. The consultation must ensure feedback about the following process of decision–making, to avoid frustration and loss of trust from the citizens

As the information, also the consultation provides its tools:

- Public meetings

- Consultative committees: permanent or regularly requested by the municipality, divided by theme. They address key elements of the political programme of the municipality.

- Surveys:
  - filled by hand. In this case, it will be sent by post or distributed in public places. It is key to identify the modality and the venue of the distribution
  - Digital. In this case, it is key to take into consideration the capacity if the users to interact with ICT tools

- Consultative Referendum. This tool is often authorised and provided for in several European countries on specific themes, in particular on themes of urbanisation or medium and long-term commitment of public resources (investment and others). It requires considerable organisation and its regulation varies according to the number of inhabitants in the municipality.

- Petitions. It is often a collection of signatures to attract the attention of public institutions and to try to influence the decision-making process. The minimum number of signatures required may vary from case to case
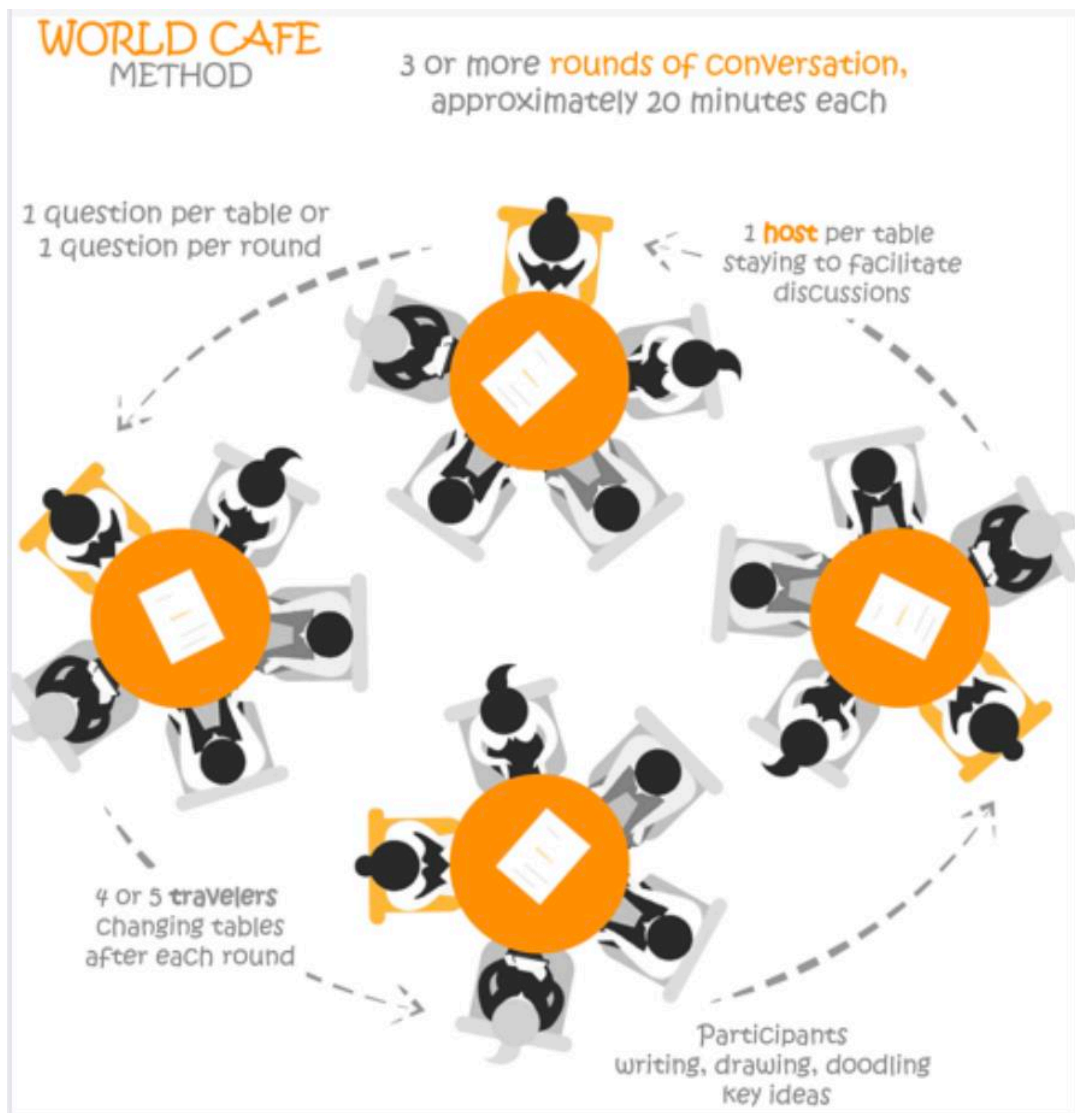
and from Country to Country.

3.3 The third level: dialogue

It is a structured, long-lasting and results-oriented process which implies a two-ways communication. The initiative can start from one side or another.
It consists of joint, often frequent and regular, meetings between LA's and the civil society to develop specific policy strategies. It is the public authority that feels the need to include the stakeholders' capacities into the decision-making process, creating incentives and occasions for a mutual exchange with the stakeholders.

The dialogue level can be applied concretely through the following tools:

- WORLD CAFÉ: The core design philosophy of a World Café session is that people possess an intrinsic ability and insights to address issues of decision-making or planning effectively, and that natural conversation is one of the best options for eliciting such dialogue. Participants rotate between tables over the course of a session, individual conversations build off one and other, and ideas and issues "cross-pollinate". In doing so, the collective intelligence, focus, and experiences of the group are brought to bear on a particular issue or issues with a collective sense of purpose and direction.

WORLD CAFE METHOD

3 or more rounds of conversation, approximately 20 minutes each

1 question per table or 1 question per round

1 host per table staying to facilitate discussions

4 or 5 travelers changing tables after each round

Participants writing, drawing, doodling key ideas

- OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY: it is participant-driven and less organiser-convener-driven. The scheduling of which talk, on which topic in which room is created by people attending, once they arrive. This methodology reposes total trust on the capacities of the group. This method best works when some conditions are met:
    - A real and serious issue at stake (not too broad or undefined topic)
    - A high level of complexity
    - Multiple points of view
    - Widespread conflictuality
    - Necessity to find a solution quickly

- FOCUS GROUPS: The focus group is a participatory methodology that allows for in-depth data gathering and debate on a specific issue. It is not advisable for preliminary phases of a decision-making process, such a priority setting (better served by the implementation of a World café methodology), but might be very useful to revise the drafting of the policy or to work on the policy tuning after monitoring opportunities. Focus group meetings work very well for groups up to 10-15 participants, so as to allow for an in-depth analysis of the topic at hand.

  The participants are experts in the topic debated and it is advised that also the facilitator possesses a certain degree of competence. During a focus group, stakeholders act based on their role and actual knowledge, as the information they share needs to be checked against actual resources and feasible.

3.4 The fourth level: partnership

This is the highest level of participation where associations and the public authorities cooperate closely together while ensuring that the associations continue to be independent and have the right to campaign and act

irrespective of a partnership situation. Partnership can include activities such as provision of services, participatory forums and the establishment of co-decision-making bodies.

Good practices of citizens' participation. Experiences of ALDA members

Status: December 2023

Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, Türkiye

İzmir City Council, composed of the Women's Council, Children's Council, Youth Council, Disabled Council, and 36 Working Groups, with a total of approximately 879 representatives, conducts activities providing financial and logistical support within the scope of its functions. Ensuring the participation of youth and children in municipal governance, the **Youth Municipality** and the **Children's Municipality**, under the Directorate of Youth Studies and Social Projects and Directorate of Children's Municipality, have been established. **Youth Centers** support young people's engagement in social and cultural activities, and international collaborations with different municipalities are fostered. The **Directorate of Vocational Factory** collaborates to provide employment-focused training, contributing to İzmir's economic development and diversifying qualified human resources. Additionally. The **Directorate of Women's Studies** supports women's participation in local mechanisms through the Local Equality Action Plan and related activities such as courses and workshops, which strengthens women's participation in social and cultural life.

Group of the European Youth for Change (GEYC), Romania

GEYC has a dedicated **Youth Center** which informs young people about various opportunities leading to their personal and professional development. They involved youth in strategic initiatives related to: digital citizenship, youth participation and activism, human rights, youth radicalization, intercultural learning and so on.

GEYC launched a project called "**emPOWER YOUth: Empowering Youth and facilitating Dialogue between Youth and Local Authorities**". Here, the GEYC team decided to raise the local involvement of youth from Câmpina, a municipality that consists of Campina city and multiple surrounding villages. With the support of Câmpina town hall, the young people selected to participate will be directly involved in the decision-making process related to the city, their direct contribution being the development of a youth strategy for the city.

Another project emblematic of GEYC's activity is "***Constanța pentru TINEri!***" (Constanta for YOUth!), a joint initiative between GEYC and the Youth Federation of Constanta, where the main goal is to raise the participation of youth in the democratic process, both locally and at the county level. We decided to do this through the creation of Youth Centres that were going to act as agents that guide and represent youth in relation with the local authorities. Youth Centres are institutions that legally (law 33312006) have the right to inform and counsel young people, they have permanent activities, they promote volunteering and civic engagement and can act as a connection line between young people and decision makers. At the time of the writing of this project, there were no such youth centres in the entire county, as there was no legal obligation to create one, only provisions about how to open and manage it. Therefore, GEYC and their partner decided to answer this need in the community and create the first one.

University of Customs and Finance of Dnipro, Ukraine

In order to concentrate and present the scientific achievements of the WCO European Region in the field of customs, the decision on starting publishing the "**Customs Scientific Journal**" on the basis of the Regional Training Center of the University was made by the management of WCO regional structures. The "Customs Scientific Journal" is now one of the platforms for the study and dissemination of modern customs technologies and standards for further use in the European region. Employees of customs administrations, educational customs institutions, as well as research institutions of European countries, in particular Austria, Macedonia, Germany, Poland and Hungary, publish their materials in the scientific journal.

Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, Albania

Among the good practices of the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, there are the **publication and dissemination of juridical literature** for the professionals of justice system and students of private and public Law Faculty; **training** of a number of lawyers from Tirana and other cities of Albania **in the law "On measures Against Violence in Family Relations"** and other gender laws making them more responsible on women's issues; training a pro bono team with students of Tirana Law Faculty on the law "On measures against violence in family relations" and our attempts to attach these students near our Centre and near the Legal Clinic in Tirana University, Law Faculty to provide free legal assistance for violated women and girls have been part of our activity, too. Since November 2017, The Center for Legal Civic Initiatives has been coordinating the **Monitoring Network Against Gender Based Violence** in Albania.

Karpos Municipality, North Macedonia

The municipality of Karpos has established a practice to involve its citizens in the decision-making processes of the municipality. All meetings of the municipal council are open for the public and citizens are invited to participate in them. The meetings are also streamed or published online. Apart from the Municipal council, Karpos has established a **Youth Council** in order to involve youngsters in the decision making processes and in 2023 voted for the Youth strategy and action plan of the municipality that was created in 2022 after a consultative process that consisted of focus groups, working groups, online surveys and regular consultations. The yearly budget is created via **budgeting forums** where citizens are invited to contribute and get informed where the budget of the municipality will be spent. The budget as well as the final accounts are published on the website and can be accessed all. In 2021 The Municipality of Karpos is ranked first on the national level in terms of financial transparency of local governments. This is confirmed by the Report - Assessment of the good governance of the local self-government units in the Republic of Northern Macedonia through the openness index, prepared by the Foundation for Internet and Society "Metamorphosis", within the USAID Citizen Participation Project.
The municipality is also part of the **"Community forums" project** where in 5 public sessions in 2023 the citizens of Karpos will gave proposals that should be implemented in the form of projects, for which they themselves will decide what are the priorities for the development of their local self-government are and what activities can be implemented in that area.
With the aim of better detection of issues in the Municipality, Karpos created a **mobile application** through which the citizens can declare issues in their community especially on the topic of pollution.

Association of Ukrainian Civic Initiatives, Ukraine

The most important good practices of participatory democracy implemented by the Association of Ukrainian Civic Initiatives are tested **programs for the dissemination of participatory methods** in local communities; own developments and rights to use **educational programs** (educational game "Democracy cake," training for young, etc.); developed and tested **training and methodology** for supporting public organisations at the local level; holding regional and national forums for NGO activists and local government leaders; organisation and conduct **educational visits and internships** for representatives of NGOs and local self-government; administration of grant competitions for representatives of NGOs, as well as joint teams of NGOs + local self-government; implementation of moderated dialogue practices as a participative approach to solving complex problems in the community; **adaptation and integration of IDPs** into the life of the new community; activities of **social enterprises**.

Labin Municipality, Croatia

Participatory practices are included in the **Statute of the City of Labin**:
- Citizens can directly participate in deciding on local affairs through a local referendum and citizens' assembly, in accordance with the law and the Statute
- Citizens have the right to propose to the City Council the adoption of a specific act or the resolution of a specific issue within its scope
- Spatial plans and other spatial planning documents and other significant acts, which regulate issues in which a large number of citizens are interested, are submitted to a public discussion before decision-making
- Local committees

Other good practices related to citizens' participation are promoted and implemented by the Municipality of Labin. The **"Open City" platform** is a unique IT solution that provides citizens with a number of electronic services related to information or communication with city services, as well as insight into the functioning of the city. Open and easy to access via the Internet, this platform is accessible via computers, tablets and smartphones, and provides citizens with all services in one place. The specific goals of the project is to provide citizens, entrepreneurs and other users insight into the operational and financial functioning of the City, which enables interaction and fast constant communication between city services and all interested stakeholders. Target groups of the project: 1) citizens of the city of Labin and the area of gravitating surrounding municipalities; 2) potential immigrants to Labin - domestic and foreign; 3) entrepreneurs and craftsmen - business entities in the city of Labin; 3) potential investors - domestic and foreign; 4) visitors and tourists.

The **participatory budgeting application** of the City of Labin allows all fellow citizens to participate in the creation of the Budget of the City of Labin for the next year. Namely, after the proposal of the City of Labin Budget for the next year was consulted with the public for 30 days, an application is active on the website of the City of Labin through which anyone who wants to can participate in the creation of the Budget in a simple way. Link: https://labin-mojproracun.curiouscat.hr/

A **participatory approach to the planning of public spaces** (e.g. discussion regarding the future use of mining baths) is promoted.

The City of Labin supports the holding of **round tables** to connect different stakeholders (e.g. Career guidance of young people from Labin - connecting the labor market and the education sector) and **focus groups** (e.g. when creating city development strategies).

Citizens' public engagement is guaranteed through their participation in **various committees** (Committee for cooperation with municipalities, cities, regions and international cooperation, Committee for Culture, Committee for Sports, Committee for Labor, Health and Social Affairs, Committee for Preschool and School Education, Committee for Economy, Committee for Finance, Committee for Environmental Protection, Committee for Urban Planning, Construction and Communal Affairs, Committee for Local Self-Government). The Economic Council as an advisory body to the Mayor and the Youth Council of the City of Labina as a permanent advisory body of the City Council.

Stand Up for Europe, Belgium

Stand Up for Europe has been implementing and supporting good practices in citizens' engagement both on social media and through online and on-site formats.

StandUp News is posted either daily or every other day on Twitter describing current events and important topics surrounding both Europe and the world. It is a quick and unbiased way to disseminate information that people should know about. This is an especially easy way to keep up on what is happening for those who would like to be aware of current events but do not have the time to read about them in detail (2020 - Present Day).

Interactive short videos get the perspectives of the average European (all from different countries throughout the continent) on various topics, such as what Europe means to them, why they feel European, and why voting in the 2024 European Elections is important. This activity is posted on multiple social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter) and allows the young people of Europe to be heard and engage with politics (2020 - Present Day).

Quiz Time are short and easily digestible interactive quizzes on multiple social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook) in which viewers (both followers and non-followers) are able to test their knowledge of European history and

fun facts. An educational and informative yet engaging way for people to learn more about Europe (11/2020 - Present Day).

Wake Up Europe, Podcast brings in guests from all walks of life to talk about current pressing issues in the European Union. This easily digestible format allows users to stay up-to-date on events and to hear other opinions and perspectives that they might not have been able to have access to, allowing for an exchange of ideas and a broadening of the listeners' worldviews (04/2023 - Present Day).

World Cafe/Make Your Vote is an international online event to raise awareness of the opinions and views of young people when participating in the democratic life of their communities. People are given the opportunity to speak their minds in a safe environment (01/2023 - Present Day).

Citizens Take Over Europe is a call for the creation of permanent European citizens' assemblies to have spaces where citizens can come together and share their views with others on how to make Europe fit for the future (11/2021 - Present Day).

Stand Up Talk Series is a monthly conversation with a special guest from civil society, a civil servant from the EU institutions, or any expert on European affairs such as an academic, or an international actor who is willing to share his/her views on a specific European matter is shared. The conversations last for approximately one hour and conclude with an end round of Q&A (11/2020 - 02/2022).

Volyn Regional Council, Ukraine

The **Coordination Council for Local Self-Govemment** was established within the regional council, comprising representatives from all 54 territorial communities of Volyn Oblast. During its sessions, there are regular discussions on current issues and challenges faced by the communities, and ways to resolve them are proposed.

The regional council boasts several successful projects carried out in collaboration with communities. Noteworthy is the joint work with the Olytska community of Lutsk district on the **restoration of the unique architectural castle complex of the Radziwills and the tourist promotion project of the Shatsk Lakes**, implemented within the framework of the European Neighborhood Instrument Transborder Cooperation Program.

Poltava City Council, Ukraine

In Poltava, **Participatory Budgeting** was implemented in 2016 in order to develop a democratic society and public education, improve the dialogue between the authorities and the community, create and maintain a full-fledged public space, solve socially important issues, and activate Poltava residents to participate in the budget process. In addition, our city held training

seminars to teach city residents how to write and submit projects for the city's Participatory Budget competition.

The web-platform **"Single Platform for Local Electronic Democracy" (e-DEM)** https://e-dem.ua/has aims to provide citizens with easy and convenient access to several e-democracy tools. These tools are designed to establish a better relationship between citizens and the government in addressing various socially important issues. In particular, the platform combines the following services:

- «Local Electronic Petitions» service, where city residents can influence their community development by filing petitions to the authorities;
- «Public Budget» service, which allows residents to propose their own local development projects and/or influence the distribution of local budget funds by voting for certain projects;
- «Open City» service is an online crowdsourcing platform for residents to inform local authorities about pressing issues of public facilities, housing and communal services, infrastructure, etc;
- «Electronic public consultation» service provides local authorities with the opportunity to involve residents' proposals on city and community development, discuss draft documents, and study opinion of the active part of city residents. Poltava territorial community is currently in the process of renaming streets. «Electronic Public Consultation» service allows citizens to vote electronically for new names, expressing their opinions and influencing decisions.

In total, 6296 citizens took part in the electronic voting, and 40518 votes were cast.

Kryvyi Rih Municipality, Ukraine

Since 2016, Kryvyi Rih has held an annual **"Participatory Budget" project competition**, which gives residents the opportunity to directly choose what part of the community budget is spent on. Everyone can submit their own initiatives of social projects, and the winning projects are chosen by public voting, which are financed from the city budget.

Since 2011, the **"Local Development of Ukrainian Cities" project** has been implemented in Kryvyi Rih in cooperation with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. As part of the project, the Marketing strategy of Kryvyi Rih, city brand and tools for forming a positive image of Kryvyi Rih were developed.

In Kryvyi Rih, particular attention is directed to social, cultural and educational projects, which also ensure the involvement of residents in community life.

ANTS - National Interests Advocacy Network, Ukraine

Members of the ANTS team started working to support Ukraine's democratic development, support decentralisation reform, protect human rights and

promote best practices of governance long before the NGO "ANTS" was established. They were former members of parliament (Hanna Hopko, Ostap Yednak, Oksana Yurynets), representatives of local self-government (Yulia Vusenko, Kateryna Musienko, Petro Shot, Anna Valevska), and representatives of civic initiatives and international technical assistance projects (Vasyl Sehin, Oleh Radiychuk, Natalia Forsiuk, Roman Makuhin, Olena Sas).

For almost 4 years of existing, NGO "ANTS" has implemented dozens of projects. Among them, the most preeminent are **"Community advocates"** was launched in 2020 and finished in 2022. The project allowed us to form a network of partners all over Ukraine (local leaders, NGOs, local deputies, and mayors). We also supported 80 leaders that became local deputies in elections in 2020. Once a year we organise a forum for partners with about 100 participants.

HALLI (Hackathon for Leadership in Local Innovations) serves as an incubator for identifying, supporting, and implementing local innovations. First phase was implemented in 2022 and currently is implemented second phase of the project.

Through **"Strengthening Communities for Ukraine's Victory and Revival"** 30 territorial communities have received institutional support in the elaboration of recovery plans. In addition, within the project we financed 45 feasibility studies for municipal infrastructure facilities.

YOUTH Parliament Assembly NATO promotes education and practical experience for youth on NATO issues.

EUROSCOPE analyses the progress of Ukraine towards EU membership and involvement of the experts to common discussions of implementation of EU legislation.

GSI Italia, Italy

In 1999, the Regional Parliament of Umbria passed **Law 26**, a law that was conceived, built, and drafted in 4 months by GSI. It was created in collaboration with the presidents of the two provinces of Perugia and Terni, the University of Perugia, and the Technical University of Civil Engineering of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although it was proposed by the Rifondazione party, its approval led to a crisis and a change in the regional government, eventually resulting in its approval and allocation of resources.

During the same years, GSI Italia played a key role in founding the **European Civic Forum** in Paris, representing Italy on its board for seven years and still remaining an associated member of the network.

In 2016, GSI Italia realised the project "**Young Decision-Makers Grow**" culminating in the approval of Law 1/2016, specifically targeted at youth. This law, following the one on international cooperation, marked the second regional law created by GSI Italia, showcasing a complete expression of participative democracy—an ongoing commitment of the NGO in Italy and across Europe.

Les Têtes de l'Art, France

At the core of our initiatives lies the flagship project "*Tous à la Barre*", launched in 2020. This project aims to guide young people in reflecting on current societal issues. Through the creation of theatrical mock trials, this initiative encourages young individuals to explore complex questions using advocacy and debate. It compellingly illustrates how art can act as a catalyst for the civic engagement of youth, aiding them in dissecting contemporary issues.

Situated in the heart of the Belle de Mai and Saint-Mauront neighbourhoods, we foster rich and creative close relationships with local structures and residents. In addition to our artistic workshops held throughout the year, we play an active role in coordinating "*La Belle Fête de Mai*," a participative and festive event that strengthens community ties. This involvement demonstrates art's capacity to foster social connections and reinforce local cohesion.

Our international projects address environmental, civic, and participatory artistic issues. The **INPACT** project we coordinate aims to support transitions in the artistic and cultural sector across Europe. Working in collaboration with six European partners, Les Têtes de l'Art have developed a multilingual website offering tools for artists and cultural entities to enhance their autonomy and expand their local activities.

Moreover, the **Edu-City project** aims to recognize, valorize, and map the local knowledge and skills of vulnerable adults, utilising them to activate participatory practices in four European countries. By fostering relationships among residents, local actors, administration, and nonprofit organisations, "Edu-City" trains professionals capable of facilitating citizen engagement and participatory processes at the neighbourhood level, thereby strengthening local democracy.

As the **coordinator of the Mediterranean Youth Council**, a body of 40 young individuals with whom we conduct advocacy and local engagement actions, we firmly believe that citizen participation, particularly that of youth, is a fundamental element in building a prosperous democratic future.

Finally, as co-leader alongside ALDA in the **Anna Lindh France network**, we actively engage in promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in France, reinforcing cooperation between civil society actors and local authorities.

Associazione per la Sussidiarietà e la Modernizzazione degli Enti Locali - ASMEL, Italy

Among the concrete examples of the push towards streamlining bureaucracy and digitising Municipalities, ASMEL is a proponent and promoter of the **AsmeL@b platform** for competitive procedures. More recently, ASMEL has

advocated for the aggregated procedure for lists of eligible candidates for hiring in associated Municipalities under Article 3-bis of the Recruitment Decree.

ASMEL has also led a **campaign against forced associations of Municipalities**. Thanks to the battle that ASMEL has championed, the Constitutional Court, with Ruling 33/2019, overturned the obligation to merge fundamental functions imposed on Municipalities with fewer than 5000 inhabitants (3000 if in mountainous areas). Municipalities are primarily tasked with delivering services to citizens, ideally in an effective and efficient manner. Those that succeed best and at lower costs are precisely the small and medium-sized Municipalities, akin to small and medium-sized businesses. Their autonomy should be safeguarded through networking, promoting their modernization through digitization, cooperation, and training. Thus, thanks to the class action initiated by ASMEL, rules on mandatory association of functions, blatantly unworkable, economically unsound, and detrimental to the constitutional autonomy of Italian Municipalities, have been halted.

ASMEL has also promoted the **campaign against minimum compensation**. The appeal against the "minimum" fees for tender commissioners outlined in the MIT Decree of 12.02.2018 has halted the effectiveness of a rule that caused serious fiscal damage. The TAR Lazio (Regional Administrative Court of Lazio) Order No. 4710/2018 upheld the appeal presented by the Association and suspended the part of the MIT Decree that set the minimum value of compensation for each commissioner at 3000 euros. This excessive amount resulted in additional tender costs of at least 11,000 euros (three commissioners plus travel expenses), leading to the wastage of public funds and the practical risk of halting tenders in the bracket between 40 and 500 thousand euros, which account for 75% of those published by the Municipalities.

In the face of sanctions imposed by the EU, the Italian State involved Regions and Municipalities where illegal landfills were established in the payment process. In January 2018, the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) sent a note attaching a table outlining the distribution of these costs to be borne by the Municipalities, threatening to deduct these amounts from state transfers - a move that could bankrupt the majority of the small involved Municipalities. In this context, ASMEL supported the Municipalities' **campaign against the "landfill sanctions"**. Consequently, ASMEL decided to take on the responsibility of legally assisting the associated Municipalities involved in the appeal, covering all the costs of legal procedures before the Administrative Court and, exceptionally, before the President of the Republic.

Kremenchuk Territorial Community, Ukraine

Kremenchuk Territorial Community implemented and supported many experiences of participatory initiatives in the community. The **Public budget** is a program implemented annually, allowing citizens to submit their projects to be funded from the local budget.

The **Open budget** grants citizens the possibility to have open access to information about the community budget.

Through **electronic petitions** citizens can submit a petition on the official website of the Kremenchuk City Council on a specially created platform for collecting signatures under the text of the petition. After registration, the petition must collect 250 electronic signatures within 90 days from the moment of publication, after which it will be considered by local self-government bodies.

With **electronic appeals**, citizens can submit proposals, statements or complaints on the official website of the Kremenchug City Council and receive an answer to them, according to the deadlines for providing answers.

Public discussions are the involvement of the public and its representatives in discussing issues related to solving problems of local importance. One of these discussions was the involvement of citizens in the renaming of streets in the city of Kremenchuk as part of the decolonization process.

Kremenchuk Municipality promotes **personal receptions of community residents** by the mayor, deputies and deputies.

Projects such as "**School Public Budget**" and "**Environmental Initiatives**" have also been realised.

Human Rights Cities Network, Belgium

Human Rights Cities Network are currently launching a project aimed at co-designing, together with 10 European cities, a **Standardised Monitoring System (SMS)** to measure the achievements of cities in respecting, protecting and promoting human rights at the services-delivery level.

Association of Amalgamated Territorial Communities, Ukraine

One of the key experiences in participatory democratic practices is the emphasis on **open forums and public consultations** held on the basis of the sectoral and thematic platforms of the Association (https://www.en.hromady.org/about/platforms/). These platforms provide territorial communities with the opportunity to voice their opinions, propose initiatives, and engage in constructive dialogues with public authorities. Such interactions not only enhance the transparency and accountability of the governing bodies but also build trust and mutual understanding between the government and the local governance.

Moreover, the Association has been instrumental in promoting **educational programs and workshops** aimed at enhancing civic awareness and participation (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChpGYxE4CzZm2G4ENCOehXg). These initiatives are crucial in equipping citizens with the knowledge and skills

necessary to actively participate in local governance. From understanding the basics of local administration to learning about effective advocacy strategies, these educational efforts have significantly contributed to a more informed and engaged citizenry.

Another remarkable achievement is the Association's role in **facilitating community-led development projects** (https://www.en.hromady.org/work/). By encouraging local entrepreneurship and community initiatives, it has helped spawn a range of projects, from infrastructure improvements to cultural and educational programs. These projects are not only a testament to the power of collective action but also contribute to the economic and social vibrancy of the communities.

Moreover, the Association has been instrumental in **advocating for legislative changes** that support decentralised governance. Its efforts have led to increased financial and administrative autonomy for local governments, enabling them to better address the unique needs of their communities (https://www.en.hromady.org/publications/official-appeals/).

The impact of AAATC extends beyond immediate community benefits. It serves as a model for all regions in Ukraine and beyond, demonstrating the transformative power of participative democracy and citizen engagement in fostering responsive, effective, and resilient local governance (https://www.en.hromady.org/publications/best-practices/).