



An event organised in connection with the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

200

participants
present including
50% inhabitants of pri-
ority neighbourhoods

70

remote
participants

10

European cities

11

workshops

1

group
game session

11

project pitches

6

plenary sessions

THE CORNERSTONE OF A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT IN PRIORITY NEIGHBOURHOODS AND BEYOND: **A STATE OF MIND AND A METHOD!**

The *Conseil National des Villes* (CNV – French National Advisory Council for Urban Policy) in partnership with the French National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ANCT) and the European Active Citizens network sponsored by URBACT, organised the European Meeting on Participatory Democracy at the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 23 and 24 June 2022. The event took place under the auspices of the Conference on the Future of Europe and the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union (PFUE).

Knowledge and the sharing of European practices are sources of inspiration that can help promote ideas, initiatives and new methods **on the ground in priority neighbourhoods and beyond**. The CNV promotes citizen participation with conviction and steadfastness, as it is convinced that **recognising involvement and citizen participation** – in all its forms – in the making of **urban and social policy is now an unavoidable necessity**.

At a time when France and other European democracies are seeing rising rates of abstention in their elections, when national consultation processes, such as the climate conference, generate frustration because their messages are not heard, these two days of meetings showed how citizen participation - whatever form it takes - is the cornerstone of success in the urban and social transformation of cities. At a time when many are wondering if it is not time for a change in method, there is a need to highlight the examples being set by working class neighbourhoods driven by a desire, perhaps stronger than elsewhere, to "do things together".



WORDS OF WELCOME



At a time when European democracies are wondering how to implement public policies that meet the needs of the population, especially the most fragile and vulnerable; at a time when the French President is talking about changing methods, we can only rejoice when we see that the most fragile neighbourhoods can be the most inspiring.

Fabienne KELLER

Vice-President of the CNV since 2018

Member of the European Parliament, Quaestor



This meeting comes at a very particular time, when abstention reached 52.49% in the last parliamentary elections and 28.01% in the 2022 Presidential election in France. Participatory democracy is an area of reflection that must be revisited and about which it is important that we think collectively. The challenge of this meeting is to highlight that it is – once again – people at grass-roots level that will inspire the democracy of tomorrow.

H  l  ne GEOFFROY

Vice-President of the CNV since 2021

Mayor of Vaulx-en-Velin



The aim of the Conference on the Future of Europe is to create a sense of belonging to Europe and to foster open, inclusive, transparent and structured debate. Europe's citizens have spoken, by submitting 49 proposals containing 326 measures to the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. It is now time for the institutions to follow through and transform this vision into concrete, tangible outcomes. The first series of new proposals will be announced in Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's State of the Union Address in September, and in particular the integration of citizen participation and deliberative democracy into the work of the European Commission.

Colin SCICLUNA

Head of Cabinet for European Commission

Vice-President, Dubravka   UICA, and co-head of the Common Secretariat of the Conference on the Future of Europe



It is necessary for European, national and local leaders to work together to support European democracy and freedoms. It is also up to them to respond to the challenges facing us today with climate change, the digital transformation and the consequences of a global pandemic which hit our economies hard. The European project is anchored in every region, in every city in Europe, and the participation of citizens is essential to the well-being and strength of the Europe of the future.

Roberta METSOLA

President of the European Parliament



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION: WHY?

The voice of a philosopher-researcher

A first essential question for decision-makers if they are interested in participatory democracy is: **WHY** do we want to introduce citizen participation? It is indispensable to answer this question before you get started and to share the answer.

Adapting to a constantly changing society where we are seeing phenomena like citizens becoming disaffected with politics and a growing feeling of distrust means that we have to constantly question the way citizens see things. Often the population do not perceive an impact on their daily lives or the connection between participation, voting and local impacts. When the connection with the decision is too weak, it becomes complicated to mobilise inhabitants, to maintain participation over the long term and to **make it possible to create a genuine culture of engagement**.

Bernard Reber insists on the **importance of conversation** and the need to take risks. He emphasises that consideration includes the way we address each other; it means having to suspend our judgment and weigh things up properly before judging.

What this means in particular is that it is not participation or representation or a 'democracy of experts' that counts, but the desire to be able to put forward an argument and decide together.

« *Cities are like nodes in a deliberative system in which it is necessary to accept that we cannot be right about everything and that sometimes we will not be heard.*

Bernard REBER
Philosopher and
research director at the
CNRS



WORKSHOPS



EMPOWERMENT: WE ARE ALL LEGITIMATE

Everyone has the right to speak out and what everyone has to say is legitimate. It is necessary to create a feeling of inclusion to get active participation underway; it is this feeling of inclusion, of being part of a group, a neighbourhood, something shared, that makes a person feel they can legitimately have their say, take action to influence their daily life, take their place in society and their environment - in short, participate! You have to go and get people to speak, listen to them where they are and hear them.

- Invite **all the inhabitants of a city, rather than just one neighbourhood.** You have to work on the tools of cooperation in order to include as many people as possible;
- **Get inhabitants involved in a discussion group on a given subject** and keep the conditions of access as loose as possible;
- Enshrining citizen participation in law **should not lead to it being seen as an obligation or burden, but as an opportunity and a strength.**

PARTICIPATION IS LEARNED: DEVELOPING TRAINING AND SUPPORT

Participating in the public policy-making process and public action is not something that comes naturally. Learning to participate and to get others to participate requires more than just the right mindset - it calls for training and new tools and it concerns not only citizens, but also elected representatives, professional stakeholders and public employees. Existing training is not widely available enough and the public is largely ill-informed or unaware of it. Communication must be expanded. "It's not because we are not interested, but sometimes we do not feel capable or concerned."

- Identify inhabitants' needs at the very outset, even before considering what path to take to get them involved and before looking into what training can be offered to allow effective participation;
- Train elected representatives and technical staff at the same time as the inhabitants, in a process built on pathways, whilst ensuring that everyone remains focused on their role;
- Reinforce the education of children and young people to raise their awareness of the importance of citizen participation.

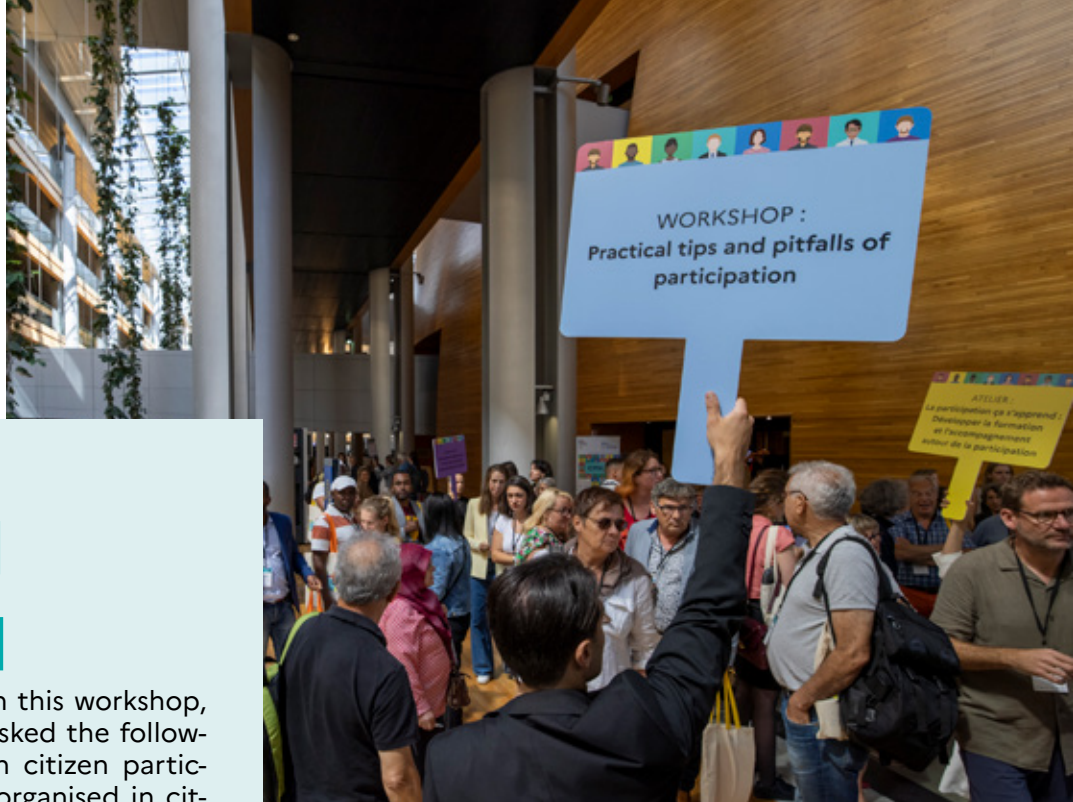




DIFFICULTIES AND TIPS FOR DAY-TO-DAY PARTICIPATION

To get the ball rolling in this workshop, the participants were asked the following questions: How can citizen participation be set up and organised in cities? How can the right conditions for participation be created at neighbourhood level? Everyone was agreed on the obstacles: the time needed to go out and meet inhabitants in public spaces, the need to get them involved and give them a real place alongside the professionals whilst bearing in mind that this kind of active participation can sometimes be exhausting. The organisation of meetings must be adapted to the audience that it is hoped will attend, an inter-generational public in particular, and it must provide inhabitants with the chance to speak out in front of elected representatives. The local authority must organise itself internally, include participation in all of its own bodies and build it into the design of its local policies.

- Develop venues for public consultation in every part of the city so that everyone can participate;
- Map out all the initiatives taking place in the area and strengthen the coordination mechanisms between the different participatory bodies to ensure that there is complementarity between stakeholders involved;
- Ensure there is diversity in the social milieux and profiles involved in governance bodies;
- Take account in all citizen participation initiatives, including the digital tools used, of the obstacle that the language barrier can represent, to ensure fair practice.



PARTICIPATION? YES! BUT BE SURE TO SUPPORT THE PARTICIPANTS

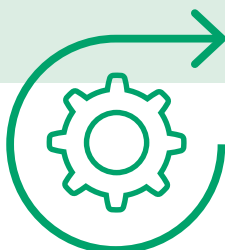
There are various obstacles to citizens' involvement, but an important one is fatigue and burn-out on the part of citizen councillors: the "caring" aspect, being open to others and knowing how to receive them, the forms of compensation, the recognition of the value of involvement and **being aware of and able to take good practices on board** are all aspects of the work that require constant vigilance and questioning. During the workshop, everyone agreed that this represents a blind spot in citizen participation and that in the coming years it will be necessary to ensure that resources are available to deal with it.

- Within local authorities, **set up a dedicated department, with appropriate human, financial and material resources to handle citizen participation issues or ensure that every department is involved and sets aside part of its budget for citizen participation issues;**
- Draw up a set of specifications at national level and provide funding at local level to cover the expenses of inhabitants involved in citizen participation initiatives (allowances, payment of travel expenses and meals);
- Choose venues and times for consultation meetings that take account of participants' availability.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY: CHANGES TO ELECTED ROLES

One of the impediments to the setting up of participatory processes is that elected representatives fear losing their power and legitimacy. Many of them see such participation as competing with their own legitimacy. The elected representative has to relinquish their place as a designer of public policies and become a sort of guarantor and facilitator of the democratic process, engaged in a method of co-construction expected by the population. The place that inhabitants occupy in projects will often depend on the local situation and the elected representatives in place. The participants were convinced that elected representatives have a decisive role to play, both the French ones and our European friends, for whom the grass-roots consultation process seems to be better integrated. **It is important to get across the idea that the time spent on setting up the participatory process is not time wasted on the project itself, but that on the contrary it saves time on setting up and moving the project forward afterwards, as well as contributing to its success.**

- Make citizen participation a cross-cutting theme that applies to all the local authority's spheres of competence;
- Encourage experimentation and new initiatives, even on a small scale, to create a culture of participation;
- Train elected representatives in participation, to work in a process of co-construction with citizens, to report regularly on the developments in the projects that have been the subject of consultation, especially urban projects, and always in a spirit of total transparency;
- Organise surveys every year to measure the level of satisfaction of the population and evaluate the quality of the public policies.



HOW ABOUT IF WE INVENT SOMETHING DIFFERENT TO DISTRICT MEETINGS AND REFERENDUMS?

Citizen participation cannot be confined to a single model, rather it contributes to a spirit of "doing it with" that can take multiple, flexible forms lend themselves to adaptation to the local stakeholders. It must reflect diversity and leave room for the continued invention of new forms. **During the discussion, the point was raised that there are multiple stakeholders wishing to innovate at all costs, whilst mechanisms actually already exist. It was thought that it is necessary to be careful to avoid putting them in competition with or opposition to each other, but rather to foster working together.**

- Be creative in the forms that participation initiatives can take and avoid imposing a framework that they must adopt. Flexibility is needed on the part of the different stakeholders, and national frameworks will not necessarily be required;
- Create spaces where people can express contradictory interests without being afraid of confrontation.





THOSE WHO DON'T PARTICIPATE

Those who do not participate are those who are **indifferent** and **those who, for lack of time or due to a feeling of illegitimacy, will not spontaneously come to meetings of participatory bodies**. In every country this tends to be the same groups: women, single parents, vulnerable people, young people, etc. But it is important to bear in mind that there are **two categories: those who are demotivated, and those who are absent from the participatory process**. For these groups, more than ever, outreach initiatives must be innovative (meeting points, meetings organised in informal settings, at cultural or sporting events, etc.), but they must remain attentive to the fact that aside from the time issue, people may feel that what is on offer is not relevant to them. There is no one solution to the problem, but several, and to know what those solutions are it is necessary to hear what the groups that are most detached have to say.

- Organise **convivial events** aimed at a wide audience so that everyone feels that they can legitimately take part (think about childcare, appropriate times of day, facilitating mobility, informal non-stigmatising venues, language and the need for interpreters).

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO BOOST DEMOCRACY

The digital divide is an issue that is raised regularly, whether linked to a lack of equipment or difficulties in using it. It is an issue that affects a growing number of people given the speed of technological progress and the multiplication of dematerialised methods of accessing public services and citizens' rights. Digital technology as a tool for facilitating participatory processes raises some questions. There are still blind spots, forms of participation that are not necessarily all that 'intuitive' for persons in difficulties. The question resides in whether it is possible to **create a relationship between institution and inhabitants** that is conducive to making public policy through these digital tools. People contribute when they feel that they have an **influence, legitimacy and a stake** thanks to their participation. When there is **distrust and detachment on the part of the citizen with regard to the public institutions**, it is difficult to impose participation via a digital tool if the citizen is not involved in the **process of defining and designing that tool**.

- Train the younger generation in the uses of digital technology in citizen participation, by educating and informing them, from a very young age, in order to reduce the digital divide;
- Continue developing third places to support the use of digital technology and foster greater citizen participation;
- Encourage the development of citizen apps at local level, taking care to keep the tools simple to contribute directly to the reporting and resolution of issues encountered in the city, and organise the follow-up of these reports so that the inhabitant can see the outcome of their action.

WHAT ARE OUR EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURS DOING ABOUT IT?

One of the main beliefs of our European neighbours, even those with young democracies, is in the **responsibility that elected representatives have to make national and local public policies in consultation with all the stakeholders**, whether they are elected representatives, voluntary bodies, economic players or ordinary citizens.

Here are some examples of innovative experiments undertaken under the auspices of the European Active Citizens network and the Fostering Social Justice programme.



GOVERNANCE AND THE ROLE OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

CZECH REPUBLIC

The city of **Hradec Kralove** has set up a strategic development plan and a participatory approach aimed at involving citizens to ensure that the plan is **as representative as possible of the city's inhabitants**. The plan covers 25 neighbourhoods in the city headed by a local committee. Each neighbourhood has a council made up of local residents, whose chair and vice-chair are appointed by the city council.

ESTONIA

The municipality of **Tartu** quickly understood the advantages of mobilising very diverse communities and using citizens' ideas gathered **through a digital platform**. Funds were allocated to support the initiatives and the inhabitants.

PORTUGAL

The city of **Santa Maria da Feira** regularly organises meetings with local authority officials to hear inhabitants' grievances. Since the beginning of the year, these exchanges between the population and the city authority channelled through these local officials have led to the resolution of some 90 social problems.

TAKING CARE AND REACHING OUT

ITALY

The town of **Cento** is divided into neighbourhoods which each have a council with 9 to 11 elected members. In order to overcome the obstacles of Italian bureaucracy, the municipality has changed the consultation processes, ensured that councillors are better trained, and **imposed training days on all town hall staff**.

ROMANIA

The **city of Bistrita** is convinced that cultural events and art in general are truly conducive to supporting and developing the acquisition of skills that are relevant to citizen participation. The municipality has therefore set up a project to revitalise the squares in the old town through cultural events, jazz concerts and the like, and to demonstrate how this can directly promote participatory urban development.

PORTUGAL

To support its citizens, the city of **Santa Maria da Feira** **covers all the costs of young and elderly people so that they can attend meetings**. The municipality runs minibuses to take them to the town hall or to the venues of meetings. The timetables of activities are organised to **take account of young people's schedules** so that they can take part in decision-making, even at the weekend.

ENCOURAGING YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

PORTUGAL

The city of **Santa Maria da Feira** has set up a **Children's Assembly** (for ages 12 to 18), where youngsters present challenges and put forward proposals for projects. The municipality gives them a budget to implement projects, the idea being that this helps to make them aware of the fact that elected councillors are also bound by budgetary restrictions and have to make choices to keep within their budget.

SWEDEN

The city of **Lund** has set up, through the Swedish Federation of Settlements which represents some 150 community and youth centres all over Sweden, a **youth parliament** which holds plenary sessions and organises workshops. The topics covered are diverse, ranging from racism to mental health to housing for young people and the ecological transition.

SWEDEN

The city of **Malmo** has decided to focus on the development of specific schools in identified priority areas, where there is a very high immigrant population. Meetings have been organised to enable **parents and children to take part in joint activities**. The idea is to give young people the democratic tools to become aware that they have a voice.

WHY DO EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES **NEED MORE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION?**

Citizen participation does not come naturally. It is necessary to support its implementation and consideration to encourage emulation and recognition of what is at stake, whilst avoiding imposing legislative frameworks that are too strict. What is needed is **a flexible legal framework that leaves room for innovation to meet citizens' needs and expectations**, and which invites everyone to take part, even if they do not necessarily initially feel concerned, by fostering a desire to be involved.

To do things "together", but **above all "with" citizens** to design the tools and the decisions, by moving on from a culture of managing public money to a culture based on a relationship with citizens and their participation. **People have to be there to make the decision, to implement and build on it, to follow it up and evaluate it**, and for technical staff this means new timeframes and jobs that need to be explained, and the providing of expert advice to accompany citizens' reflections and projects. The challenge is to ensure that everyone involved feels they are in a relationship based on trust, and not competition, with a desire to be involved in the co-construction of a local project. It is also necessary to **target information and communication better for schemes** where citizens do not feel concerned.

The tools currently available to local authorities are not conducive to the practice of participatory democracy. **Citizen participation must work in the public interest.**

The EESC was already taking an interest in these issues around citizen participation in 2016, focusing on the underlying question of "participation: yes, but how?" It aims to support citizens so that they realise that they are capable of participating.

« *It's time for the prism to change on the side of the elected representatives, but also that of citizens themselves.*

Thomas DUDEBOUT

Member of the Active Citizens network, deputy mayor in charge of citizen participation and major projects for the town of Saint-Quentin, Aisne



Jörg MÜLLER

Director of Studies and Research
Researcher at the CREDOC

« *One of the main findings rests on the problem of representativity in democratic systems, with on the one hand citizens who are more and more distrustful of the State and, on the other, the government's wish to get citizens involved in political decision-making and the political process in general.*

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY, A NEW PUBLIC POLICY FACTORY?

Citizen participation does not come naturally. Although the principle of implementing citizen participation is about more than meeting random citizens' desire to participate, it does not profoundly transform practices and mentalities. Citizen participation should set us thinking more widely about the way public policy is made and questioning our ingrained mindset with regard to public action. *Could co-creation and co-decision-making become the new way norm in public action?*

The existence in the population of different daily experiences, visions and aspirations is what is currently reinforcing the difficulties in exchanging, sharing and comparing ideas between people in a calm and serene way. The discussions have revealed a need to adapt the way national and local policy is made, to pay close attention to the population's needs and expectations. An interest in politics should be encouraged from a very young age and the population should be actively involved in drawing up local public policies, whilst developing a culture of empathy. Numerous initiatives have already been taken and are being developed at local level. The fact that citizens are demanding more of their elective representatives is a good thing, which must be promoted and capitalised upon. One thing that emerged as obvious from the discussions was the need for consultation and cooperation in a relationship where everyone has a clear and agreed role.



« Making sure that what citizens have to say is taken into account in what we create with them and for them »

Frédérique MACAREZ
Mayor of Saint Quentin, Aisne
President of the Agglomération du Saint-Quentinoise



« The seeds of the solutions are there, they just need to be fertilised. »

Stéphane VINCENT
General delegate for the 27th region



THE CNV PROPOSES A RECIPE FOR LIVING BETTER TOGETHER

**PREPARATION
TIME:**
as long as it takes

DIFFICULTY:
Suitable for
beginners

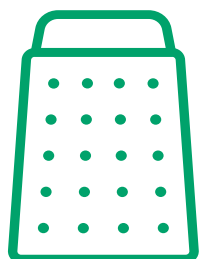


For experienced
cooks



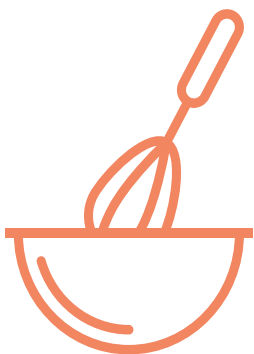
INGREDIENTS

- A question explained in simple terms
- Inhabitants who are interested and feel concerned
- A local authority to drive things
- Councillors who are motivated and supportive
- Technical staff ready to work with local people
- Voluntary body groups and members
- Financial and material resources
- Three pinches of detachment and goodwill
- A large pinch of humour



UTENSILS

- Initial or continued training pathways
- Convivial places to meet
- Rules that are clear and visible to all
- Existing and innovative tools
- A timer to measure the project's cooking time and ensure there is time for all the steps
- A seasoning of innovative European initiatives
- The Lamy Law and the Equality & Citizenship Law

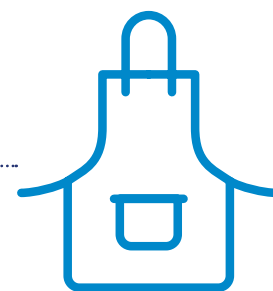




PREPARATION

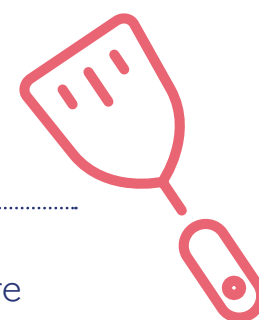
BEFORE

- Step 1:** Ask yourself why inhabitants should get involved
- Step 2:** Take the time to go and meet inhabitants
- Step 3:** Define together what is meant by participation
- Step 4:** Train councillors and technical staff alongside the inhabitants so that they acquire a common language
- Step 5:** Clarify "who does what"?
- Step 6:** Cover the costs of the mobilisation



DURING

- Step 7:** State what the prior assumptions and prerequisites are
- Step 8:** Organise some time for collective reflection and discussion between the different stakeholders, taking account of everyone's constraints
- Step 9:** Organise the listening sessions and debates and accept contradiction
- Step 10:** Taste and season. If necessary, repeat step 7.
- Step 11:** Deliberate, decide, record



AFTER

- Step 12:** Report on the implementation and progress of the scheme
- Step 13:** Give all the stakeholders the chance to take part in regular monitoring (surveys)
- Step 14:** Promote the culture of involvement



CONSUME AS MUCH AS YOU CAN!



