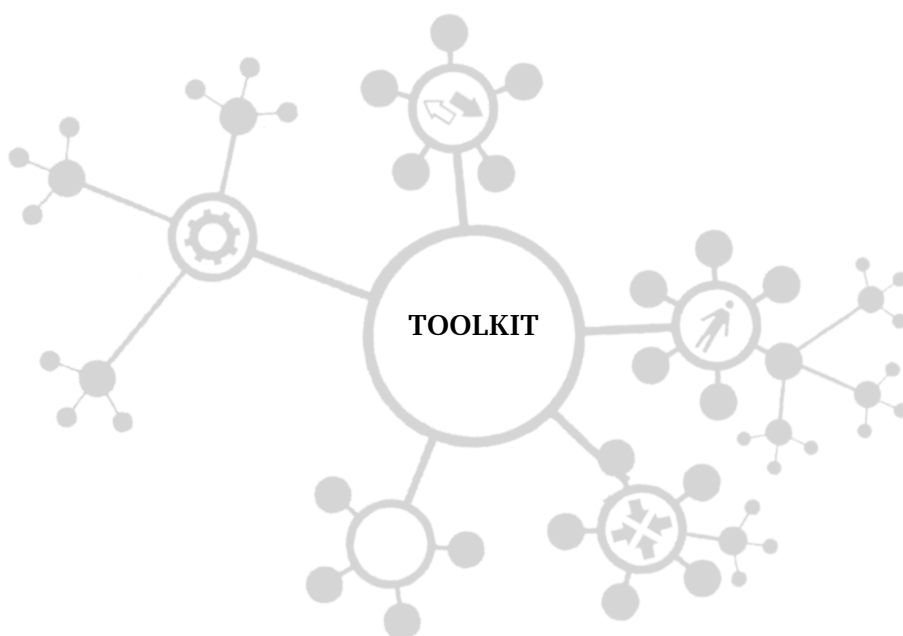# IMPLEMENTING CITIZENS PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING AT LOCAL LEVEL

TOOLKIT

Foreword

The aim of this guide is to give an overview of the legal background, theoretical models and practical examples of citizens' participation in decision making at local level from the country and abroad. It makes a clear distinction between involvement of citizens in the functioning of the municipality and their involvement into the process of decision making as such. The guide goes beyond the methods offered in the legislation of the country and aims at bringing common domestic and international practices close to the municipal administration in the country.

The toolkit was produced based on conducted desk and field research in the period 2012 – 2013. The following municipalities in the country were subject to the field research: Arachinovo, Bitola, Bogovinje, Valandovo, Vinica, Gevgelija, Gostivar, Dolneni, Ilinden, Kicevo, Kratovo, Lipkovo and Lozovo. Good practices and examples of citizens' participation are presented at the end of the toolkit.

$$\boxed{\text{OSCE}}$$ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe **Mission to Skopje**

Contents:

Citizens' participation in local decision making – a cornerstone of building a democratic decentralized society

The participation of citizens in decision-making processes is a key element of the local democracy. It increases the transparency and makes local government officials more accountable for their decisions. It is an ongoing process that covers the period between two elections, where dissemination of information about local policies and decisions occurs in both directions: citizens express concerns towards local government and local government informs citizens on the implementation of the local policies.

One of the most effective ways to increase participation and involve citizens in governance, as well as to improve the stability and security of the communities, is decentralization. Being based in the principle of subsidiarity, decentralization implies bringing power closer to citizens. This requires a sustainable and organised effort of the institutions involved at both local and central levels. It also entails a continuous re-adjustment of the relations between different stakeholders, through permanent dialogue and communication.

The main prerequisite for pursuing a sustainable democratic reform processes is the ability to make the citizens trust the elected leadership. The stronger the bond between the two parties (citizens from one side and elected officials from another), the more successful and more democratic society will be developed. Undoubtedly, this relation strengthens proportionally with the readiness of the elected officials to respond to the real needs of the citizens, represent their best interest and improve their quality of life. This is increasingly important at a local level of governance, where the relation between the two is more evident, tangible and sensitive.

Individuals and groups that are involved in the process of decision making are called stakeholders. They have interest in the adoption and the implementation of the local policies, since they influence citizens' wellbeing and every day lives.

Legal background for citizens' participation in the country

Local elections are the first step in the involvement of the citizens in the decision making process. Nevertheless, the inclusion of citizens in this process does not end with the election day. Continuous engagement by the citizens in the functioning of the municipality is further regulated with the laws and municipal statutes and internal acts.

Direct participation of the citizens in the decision making process in the municipalities is regulated by the Law on Local Self Government. The article 25 lists the following legally recognized direct forms of citizens' participation:

- Civil Initiative
- Citizens' Gatherings
- Referendum

Further on, articles 29 and 30 recognize 1) Appeals and Proposals and 2) Public Hearings, Surveys and Proposals as additional forms of inclusion of the citizens in the local decision making process. Article 25, paragraph 2 also prescribes that "The expenses for execution of the direct participation of the citizens in the decision-making process shall be covered from the municipal budget".

<u>Civil Initiative</u>

As explained in the law, the civil initiative refers to the citizens' rights to "propose to the council to enact a certain act or to decide upon a certain issue within its authority". The act can be the statute, programmes, plans, decisions and other regulations adopted at local level.

Civil initiative can not be raised for personnel and financial issues. For any other issue, the council is obliged to discuss "if it is supported by

at least 10per centper cent of the voters in the municipality that is of the neighbourhood self-government to which a certain issue refers".

At latest 90 days after the raising of the initiative, the Municipal Council is obliged to discuss the issue and to inform the citizens on its decision.

Citizens' gatherings

According to Article 27, citizens' gathering may be convened for the territory of the entire municipality or for the territory of the neighbourhood self-government.

Citizens' gathering can be convened:
- At the initiative of the Mayor of the municipality,
- At the request of the Municipal Council or
- At the request of at least 10per cent of the voters in the municipality that is in the neighbourhood self-government that a certain issue relates to.

Regardless of the source of initiating citizens' gathering, the municipal administration is entirely responsible for the facilitation and the logistical organization of the process, including the flow of information between the citizens and the municipal bodies (Mayor and Municipal Council members).

Within 90 days the municipal organs are obliged to review the conclusions made at the citizens' gathering and to take them into account when making decisions and determining measures on issues they relate to, and to inform the citizens on their decisions.

Referendum

Referendum is the most legitimate direct involvement of citizens into decision making at local level. It covers issues under the local self-government competence, except issues pertaining to:
1. The budget
2. The annual account and

3. The organization of the municipal administration.

Article 28 regulating Referendum at local level, prescribes that:
- The council shall be obliged to issue a notice of a referendum at the request of at least 20per cent of the voters of the municipality.
- The council may issue a notice of a referendum on issues within its authority, at its own initiative.
- The decision adopted on the referendum shall be binding for the council.

Appeals and Proposals

Every citizen of a municipality has the right, individually or together with others, to submit appeals and proposals regarding the work of the organs of the municipality and the municipal administration.

The Mayor is obliged:
- To create conditions for submission of appeals and proposals;
- To provide detailed reply for the appealer at the latest within 60 days after the receipt of the appeal, i.e. proposal;
- To submit the appeals and proposals which do not refer to the authority of the municipal organs to the responsible organ and to inform the appealer about it.

Appeals and proposals normally address the quality of the service delivery by the municipality to the citizens, their organization, procedure, forms, accessibility to municipal civil servants, accessibility to information, knowledge and attitude of municipal civil servants, etc.

Public Hearings, Surveys and Proposals

In the course of preparation of the regulations of the municipality and bringing decisions of local importance, the council and the Mayor may previously organize public hearings or surveys or ask for citizens' proposals. The purpose is to adopt a good regulation and give the ownership to citizens, thus positively affecting the implementation.

Public Hearing

<u>General aspects</u>

Public hearings are informal meetings between citizens and local self-government officials in order to collect public opinion and exchange information on civic issues before action is taken.

Public hearing serves as a tool for the local self-government to legitimize their decisions and to build a bridge of trust between them and their electorate, which is a necessary element for ensuring a stable local democracy. Citizens should see public hearings as an opportunity to have their voice heard by elected officials, while political leaders should see it as an opportunity to stay in touch with the electorate in the period between two consecutive elections.

<u>Practical implementation of the public hearing method</u>

An effective public hearing follows only after a successful informative campaign aimed at attracting enough interested citizens to take participation in the process. The success of the campaign is guaranteed if:

- It begins early enough (at least one month prior to the day of the public hearing) so the citizens will have sufficient time to discuss the issues with families and friend and to come up with their own opinion about it.
- The image developed on the issue is clear and well promoted by the media. Where necessary not only words, but images and pictures can be used to convey the message in a more effective manner. The promotional method must be in line with the culture of the targeted community.
- There are well in advance secured financial and human resources to implement the promotional campaign and to facilitate the public hearing process. Public hearings involve a lot of planning and work, which requires a fixed group of people to be engaged in its preparation and implementation.

- The venue and time of the public hearing is well identified, accessible to all citizens and timely communicated to them in the frame of the promotional campaign.
- All the necessary information and documents are disseminated to citizens beforehand, including agenda of the event, important background information, eventual report, public studies etc.
- There is a precise definition of ground rules, such as: the roles of the involved stakeholders, timeframe for discussing each issue, how many times each individual can speak and for how long, etc.
- Impartial external professional facilitator is employed to run the public hearing meeting in order to ensure that the ground rules are effectively implemented, while also acting as a fair and neutral manager of the debate.
- The room set up is arranged properly, there is audio or visual equipment available for the participants to be able to see and be heard, table is set for printed materials, the names and telephone numbers of participants are registered for future follow up.
- The public hearing outcomes are summarized in an objectively written report submitted to the public through the media.
- Local government officials make all promised actions at the public hearing known to the public and make sure that the input from the public hearing is seriously considered in the official decision making.

Citizens' participation techniques commonly used in the country and abroad

This paper gives an overview of the main citizens' participation techniques and methods together with practical examples and explanations on their implementation, with an aim to further the theoretical knowledge and practice on citizens' participation and to serve as a ready to be used model in the framework of the h/country local self government units. The examples mainly stem from the municipalities within the country, strengthened with additional ones that proved to be successful abroad and are applicable in the h/

country local context. Both types of sources are used to contribute to facilitating the dialogue between local governments and citizens with an ultimate goal of improving citizens' quality of life through effective and efficient public service delivery.

The toolkit elaborates on the following techniques and methods of citizens' participation initiated by the municipal leadership which are not covered by the current h/country legislation:

- Citizens Advisory Groups (CAGs)
- Municipal Strategic Planning
- Participatory budgeting
- Social monitoring
- Public-private partnerships

Citizens Advisory Groups

<u>General aspects</u>

In democratic societies, Citizens Advisory Groups (CAGs) are often used tools for providing on-going advice to Municipal Councils and administrations on variety of issues of common interest for the local citizens. This tool is particularly important for maintaining a continued dialogue and communication among the elected officials and the citizens between two elections, thus providing continuous information flow for solid-based decision making in line with the real needs at stake.
The advantages and positive aspects in using CAGs as a local decision making tool, include:

1. Increased transparency in the work of the local elected officials
2. Created positive circumstances for developing links of trust and confidence between the two parties
3. Put forward various technical expertise of the citizens to support the work of the local officials
4. Smoothed relations between the local government and the representatives of different communities – particularly applicable for ethnically and politically mixed municipalities

<u>Practical implementation of the CAGs method</u>

Theoretically, the initiation for establishment of CAGs should come from the citizens in their attempt to influence local officials in making decisions that have direct impact on their every-day life. Nevertheless, the practice has demonstrated the opposite: the local government (LG) very often, willing to promote their work as transparent, create CAGs and involve citizens in the local decision making for solving specific, practical issues of common interest for the local population.

CAGs are established whenever LG has a task to do that would benefit from involvement of citizens in the decision- making process. The LG clearly specifies the task and defines the most important parameters: 1) the number of citizens to be involved, 2) the model of selection of the CAG members, 3) the period of serving (normally from one to four years), 4) the frequency of meetings among the CAG members, in a document produced for the specific purpose.

The LG provides all the necessary logistical support to the CAGs: 1) venue for meetings, 2) human resources for assisting in the work of the CAGs, 3) provision of office supplies and 4) access to information. Important for noting is the fact the CAG members are volunteers. According to the normal practise, interested citizens apply upon the advertised announcement by the LG and are officially confirmed as CAG members by the LG officials.

After the official establishment, the LG prepares written documents for the CAGs, explaining their mandate, goals and objectives, with clear instructions on the following major points:

1. The name and the goal of the CAG
2. Process of selection of the CAG members
3. Terms of reference of the CAG members
4. The expected outputs of the work of the CAG
5. The authority of the group, specifying the level of the influence the CAG members can expect to possess in the ultimate decision making regarding the specific task of the LG
6. Timeframe – expected duration of the mandate and frequency of expected meetings among CAG members

7. Type and level of support from the LG
8. Relations with media, issues of confidentiality and conflict of interest.

All this information should be made public through the local media, municipal web-sites or public bulletins. The meetings of the CAGs must be made available for public presence, unless there is a specific reason for keeping a CAG meeting closed.

Issues like: 1) time and duration of meetings, 2) election of a chairman, 3) modality of making decisions, and) record keeping and report writing are normally regulated in the CAG's Rulebook.

Municipal Strategic Planning

General aspects

Municipal Strategic Planning is a complex process that involves community members (citizens, business men, NGOs), municipal administration and management in the development of a common vision, mission and goals. Furthermore, it is a process that identifies the major actions (Action Plan) to produce change and to achieve the set goals. The Action Plan is one of the key aspects of the strategic planning, but still it is different from the operational planning which addresses the details of how something is achieved. Strategic planning limits in the framework of the general major actions to be undertaken and their timeframe and resources for implementation.

Involving stakeholders with direct interest in the issue provides broad support to the strategic plan and serves as a guarantee for its successful implementation, as the ownership over the produced strategic plan is adopted by all the community members involved in the planning process.

Practical implementation of the Municipal Strategic Planning

This methodology can be applied in any municipality at any time in which people want to plan for their future. Regularly, the process is

done by Strategic Planning Forums, comprised of citizens, business community members, civic organization members, members of different municipal communities – stakeholders and concerned parties in the planning process. Strategic Planning can be performed in many different ways. The seven-step process is given as an example.

1. **Making the Commitment to Plan.** The municipal leadership needs to make sure that all involved stakeholders agree on the planning process, the timeline, the required resources and other relevant details of common interest. The commitment can be best exercised by delivering of certificates of participation to the strategic planning body or other written forms that ensure the ownership transfer on the team members.
2. **Identifying the responsibility of the municipality.** The municipal leadership must create a clear list of own responsibilities and tasks aimed at facilitating the strategic planning process.
3. **Developing Mission and Vision Statements.** The Vision statement describes where you want your municipality to be in a long run. The Mission statement gives information on what, how and why your municipality is doing, what it wants to do, for whom, where and when. Both statements cover a long term period of five to ten years. The objective of this step is to describe the work you do and what you want your municipality to like at a defined period of time in the future.
4. **SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis.** This is an effective tool for screening the environment in which your municipality operates. This gives valuable information for decision making. Strengths and Weaknesses are focused on the internal aspects of the municipality. The idea is to honestly examine your municipality and bring up facts. Opportunities and Threats are focused on external factors that influence the municipal work.
5. **Prioritizing the Issues.** Once the environment is known, you know where you want to go (Vision / Mission), then you need to identify how you are going to get there. Brainstorming is one effective way, where every participant contributes his idea / objective. In the next step, the objectives get prioritized, based on the impact for minimum effort they will have on the final goal you want to achieve.

6. **Creating an Action Plan.** After prioritizing the objectives, you need to develop Action Plan in order to determine the specific actions for achieving them. The period covered by the Action Plan is one to three years. For each objective, identify what will be done, by when, by whom, and using what resources. Action Plan needs to be very specific and everyone should know their specific task in contributing towards the progress.

7. **Monitoring and Evaluation.** Reviewing the plan and monitoring the progress is the crucial step for successful implementation. If unforeseen circumstances arise, changes to the Strategic Plan need to be made.

COMMITMENT

↑

MONITORING/
EVALUATION

↑

ACTION PLAN

↑

PRIORITIZING

RESPONSIBILITY

↓

MISSION / VISION

↓

← SWOT

Participatory Budgeting

General aspects

The participatory budgeting is a citizens' participation method in the financial planning process. It adds fundamental value to designing an efficient and practical municipal budget and enables involvement of citizens in bringing the most important decisions at local level – planning the municipal expenditures versus the municipal revenues. This decision has a far reaching impact on all the subsequent decisions made by the local authorities, hence entails major interest and a feeling of ownership among the local population. It ultimately helps lay the foundation for a more sustainable dialogue among the local government and the citizens, providing realistic recommendations for the local financial planning process.

The domestic legislation gives a potential for implementing this technique in the article 19 of the Law on Budgets. The article states that "The Mayor of the local self-government units is responsible for submitting the budget to the Municipal Council for adoption". It is up to the mMayor to develop a process in which his budget proposal will be produced by using the opinion of its citizens. This method is normally implemented in combination with other citizens' participation methods, such as public hearings, advisory groups, and public meetings.

Practical implementation of participatory budgeting

In participatory budgeting, all interested groups work together with the local government officials towards producing an inclusive, relevant and realistic financial plan. The process is initiated by the Mayor and organized by the municipal administration. It includes the following stakeholders:

- Citizens' organizations (NGOs, Trade Unions, Religious Organizations, etc).
- Business community and entrepreneurs.
- Interested individuals.
- Representatives from different political parties.
- Representatives from different ethnic groups.
- Community representatives with different professional background.
- Media representatives.

The framework for planning the Municipal Budget is regulated with the Budget Calendar adopted by the Municipal Council. According to
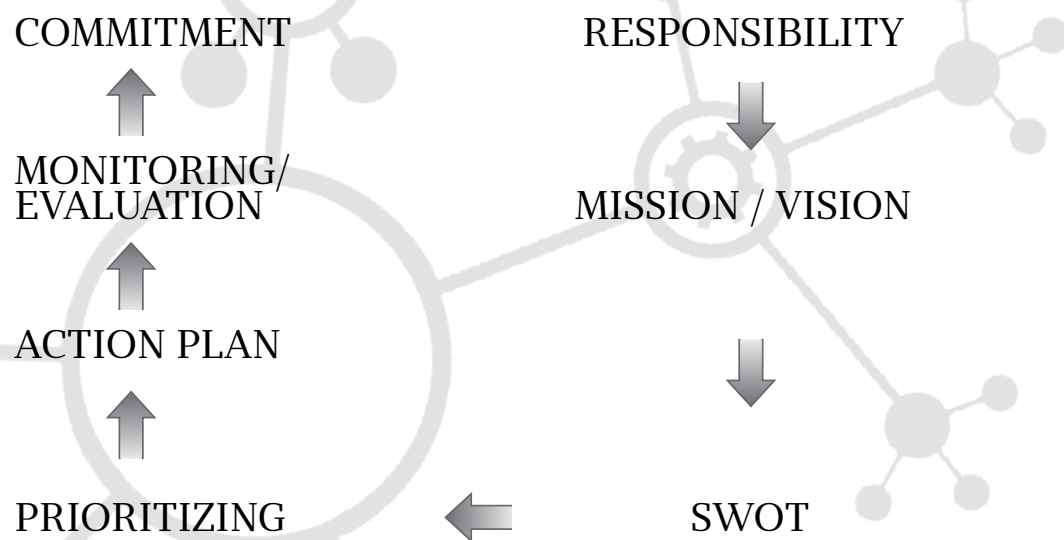
the article 27of the Law on financing the local self-government units, "The budget calendar shall determine the time-frames within which:
- the Mayor shall submit the main directions for preparation of financial plans to the municipal budget users
- the municipal budget users shall submit their financial plans to the Mayor
- the Mayor shall submit the Proposed - Budget to the municipal council."

The Budget for the following year shall be adopted by the council of the municipality by December 31 of the current year at the latest. Its form and content are pre-determined by the budget circular issued by the Ministry of Finance.

Once the budget calendar is produced and areas for citizens' intervention are known, the municipality can start the participatory budgeting process preparation. The necessary steps are as follows:
- Inviting the identified municipal stakeholders at least one month prior to the public meeting or hearing on the budget preparation. Details of the exact time, place and purpose of the meeting should be provided well in advance.
- Distribution of the current year budget calendar and the last year's budget together with detailed information on how local budgets work, what it is consisted of and how it affects citizens. In addition, all supporting written material with relevant information for the budgeting process should be delivered to places available for the citizens in an understandable format free of technical jargon.
- Provide adequate education to the stakeholders on the participatory budgeting process, involving knowledge on their role in the whole process. This step requires engagement of experts / educators from different fields of study with adequate experience in strategic planning and budgeting, able to relate their knowledge to citizens during community meetings.
- Begin the process involving the public well in advance to ensure successful implementation
- Establish intermediary groups (facilitators) between the citizens and the local government in order to facilitate the process of information flow and brainstorming. The group

should review the suggestions provided by the stakeholders and lobby for their final incorporation in the municipal budget.
- Undertake performance measures, by organizing public surveys to measure the effectiveness and the correct implementation of the participatory budgeting method.

Social Monitoring

General aspects

The social monitoring is a process in which the public monitors the implementation of the government decisions at local level and measures their efficiency. In most cases, it requires engagement of an external agency either contracted by the local government or community self-engaged. In both cases, there has to be a mutual agreement between the local government and the civic sector on the implementation of the social monitoring, including the time-frame, modalities (both technical and financial) and the targets/ objectives of the process.

Social monitoring requires good communication flow among the involved stakeholders but its main drawback is closely related to its time-consuming nature and the involvement of professionals which is costly. As the costs are covered by a specific party, the problem of the objectivity of the process appears.

Practical implementation of social monitoring

Successful social monitoring includes the following steps:

- Identification and agreement on the monitoring goals and objectives
- Selection of an implementing agency in a transparent manner
- Implementation of the social monitoring process
- Analysis of the results and recommendations
- Development of final report
- Dissemination of the report to the local government and the public

- Follow up actions, including possible adoption of the report recommendations by the Municipal Council.

Public–private partnership (**PPP**) is a process in which local self governments join their efforts with business sector and civil society members in order to implement specific activity of mutual benefit and interest. The joint activities normally refer to municipal service funded and operated by the business sector, where the factor of involvement of citizens in the partnership creates an opportunity for participation in decision making at local level.

PPP involves a contract between the municipal authorities, the non-governmental sector and the business sector representatives in which the private party provides a public service or project and assumes substantial financial, technical and operational risk in the project.

<u>Why the involvement of citizens is important in PPPs?</u>

Citizens are the final beneficiaries of the services provided by the business sector and facilitated by the municipal authorities and administration. Ultimately, citizens are the final payers of the costs the service delivery entails. Hence, their opinion on the key components of the PPP process is of crucial importance. It is up to the municipalities to construct their own model of incorporating citizens' opinions into the PPP arrangements. Highly recommended are combinations of all previously described methods.

Necessary elements for effective citizens' participation

1. The successful implementation of citizens' participation requires well motivated and aware citizens.
2. The driving force of the process needs to derive from the citizens.
3. The municipal administration needs to create a favorable environment for citizens' participation, including well established channels of information dissemination, provision of logistical support, guidance through the process and even provision of financial and human resources.

4. All the stakeholders need to be familiar with the citizens' participation methods and to be able to make a distinction between participating in decision making and actual decision making authority.-the Municipal Council.
5. Citizens need to be aware and educated on their rights and responsibilities in relation to the local self-government and the decision making process.
6. The benefit of the process must serve both the citizens and the municipal administration.
7. Both parties need to be transparent about their actions, particularly the local self-government
8. Both parties need to be flexible and able to negotiate and cooperate.
9. When necessary, assistance of external experts needs to be employed, including specialists in: public education, local economic development, budget, public hearing, etc.

Obstacles to citizens' participation

<u>Most common obstacles:</u>

- Lack of mutual trust between the citizens and the local government
- Limited access to information for the citizens
- Lack of motivation and commitment for cooperation (from both sides)
- Limited knowledge and awareness among citizens on their rights and responsibilities
- Lack of skills, culture of participation and experience
- Unrealistic levels of expectations
- Confusion between participation and actual decision making authority
- Lack of resources
- Limited LG skills and capacities to facilitate participation

Ways to overcome obstacles:

- Public education and training
- Public awareness campaigns
- Implementation of communication strategies
- Development of partnerships
- Fundraising
- Adequate information sharing
- Share of experience and practices among LGs
- Initiation of actual implementation of participating tools

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES FROM COUNTRY AND ABROAD DEPENDING ON THE AREAS OFFERED BY MUNICIPALITIES

Vinica municipality:

Adoption of an Urban Plan for the economic zone "ILA" and its inclusion into the General Urban Plan (GUP) of the municipality (civil initiative)

This was a citizens' initiative raised by a group of 24 owners of cadastre parcels, which represents 42 per cent of the total number of parcel owners of the zone "ILA". The zone is planned for economic purpose: production facilities and storage rooms.

Based on the initiative, in 2009, the Municipal Council adopted a decision to initiate a procedure for a production of urban documentation for "ILA" zone. Ten out of the 24 owner of parcels are women.

The costs for the implementation of the procedure were covered by the parcel owners, equally distributed per square meter. Among the owners of the parcel, there are employees in the cadastre, municipal administration and private businessmen from the country and abroad. The citizens' initiative was initially sent to the Mayor, who proceeded it to the Municipal Council for adoption. Later on, external expert company paid by the parcel owners produced a technical

documentation, further on submitted for a discussion at the Municipal Council and for a public debate among the interested citizens of Vinica municipality. The information reached the citizens through advertisements on public area spots and in two national newspapers. Each interested citizen got the right to submit a proposal to an independent commission composed of municipal administration representatives and external experts. The role of the commission was to ensure transparency of the process and inclusion of the interested citizens in the decision making. The commission was obliged to respond in written to each of the submitted remark / proposal and to make sure all the remarks are incorporated into the final documentation.

The role of the municipal administration further on was to obtain approval from relevant ministries and central government institutions in the process of finalizing the urbanization of "ILA" zone. In addition, the Mayor provided for human resources to perform digging of the terrain for the purpose of examination and production of a study requested by the Ministry of Culture. The aim of this study was to confirm that no national impact of cultural character after converting the terrain into economic zone will be realized.

By the end of 2012, the municipality obtained an official approval from the Ministry of Transport and Communications for including "ILA" zone into the General Urban Plan of Vinica municipality. The procedure has been run entirely by the municipal urban department.

In late 2012, Vinica municipality became twin-city with the Turkish municipality Orhangaзi, where "ILA" will be used as a basis for attracting foreign investments and boosting the local economic development.
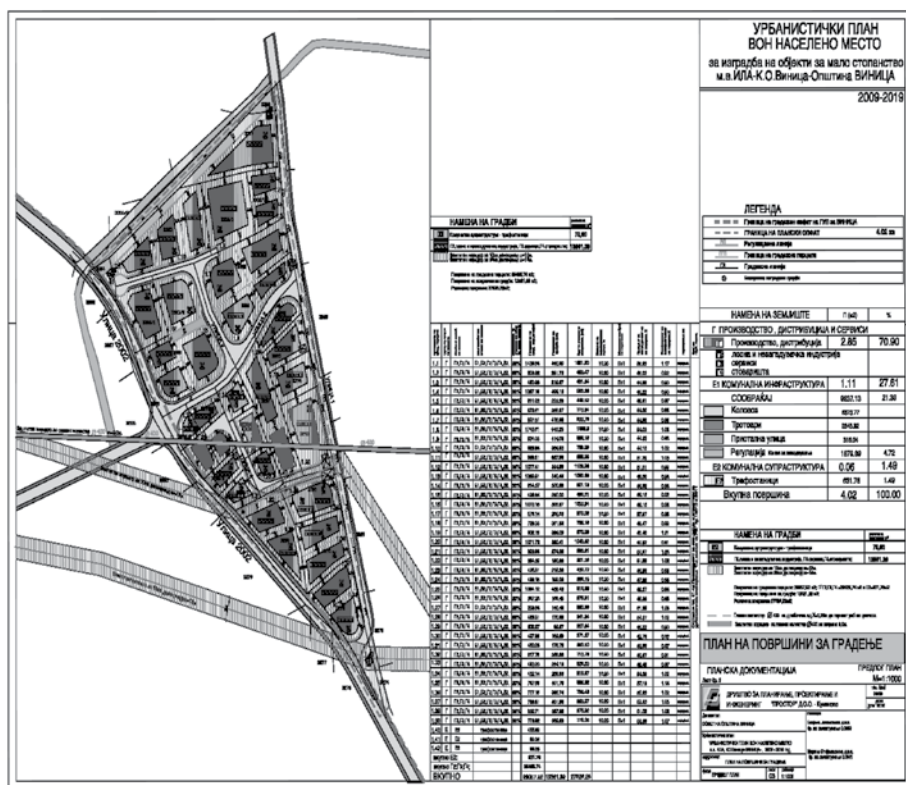
Kratovo municipality:

Renovation of a cinema (civil initiative)

In 2009 there was a citizen's petition submitted to the municipality, in which 200 citizens asked for a renovation of the cinema venue. Based on this citizens' initiative, the municipality in cooperation with the regional center for NGO support in Kratovo and a consultant company developed a project proposal. In April 2011, the municipality applied for a grant at the "Citizens' Forum Programme" for infrastructure project in the area of culture, financially supported by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC).

The project proposal was discussed at five consecutive Citizens' Forum Sessions in the period September – December 2011. Each citizen that participated in at least three forum sessions had the right to vote in the final procedure of adoption of the decision to submit this project proposal for financing.

In the beginning of 2012 the tender procedure for the approved project proposal was finalized and by the end of 2012 all the construction work was also brought to an end.

The financial construction for the project is jointly shared by the municipality, central government and the SDC Citizens' Forum Programme.

Gostivar municipality:

Adoption and implementation of local action plans for Roma inclusion (participatory planning)

Gostivar municipality has established an Advisory Committee on Roma issues composed of Roma members of Municipal Council, municipal administration representatives and interested Roma and other citizens. As per the decision of the Municipal Council, the Committee has a status of a permanent municipal body financed by both municipal budget and external donations. In cooperation with the local NGO community and the Roma Advisory Committee, Gostivar municipality has pursued and extensive process of adoption and implementation of local action plans for improvement of the living conditions of the local Roma population. The action plans include the following three pillars:

1. Education
2. Health
3. Housing

They cover the period 2012 – 2017. The housing plan has been adopted by the Municipal Council in March – April 2012, whereas the other two are yet to be adopted. Their implementation will be financed by both municipality and the NGO community. These local action plans would further serve as an application for funds basis at EU, OSCE/ODIHR (Best Practices on Roma Inclusion), Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and other relevant domestic and international institutions.

Furthermore, Gostivar municipality has adopted Citizens Forums as a regular instrument for local decision making and included it into the municipal statute.

Lipkovo municipality:

Social inclusion and poverty reduction in Lipkovo municipality (strategic planning)

Supported by Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, Lipkovo municipality developed a Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in Lipkovo municipality. The process started when Lipkovo, along with eight other municipalities in the country was granted financial resources for project in the area of social inclusion.

The strategic document was developed in cooperation with all interested NGOs, citizens and businessmen from the municipality, 35 to 50 in total. They attended five working sessions in the period March – July 2011, and leaded by the external consultant company and the municipal administration developed the Strategy, which includes action plans for

three vulnerable groups: 1) children, 2) unemployed and 3) elderly.

The focus is put on unemployed citizens, non-holders of citizenship documents, people that live in remote settlements and people with low level of education, and elderly that do not have access to healthcare.

The implementation of the Strategy will be financially supported by the municipal budget, central government and donations. It is available in Macedonian, Albanian and English language.

STRATEGY FOR
SOCIAL INCLUSION, SOCIAL PROTECTION
AND ALLEVIATING POVERTY IN THE
MUNICIPALITY OF LIPKOVO
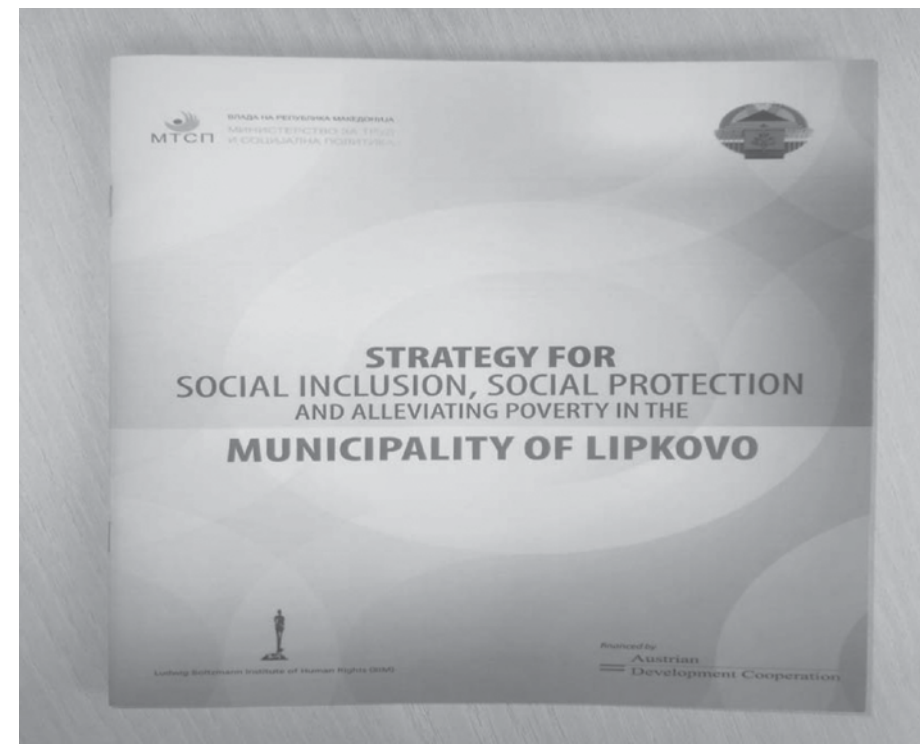
Bitola municipality:

Inclusion of neighborhood self-governments in the budget process (participatory budgeting)

Citizens' participation technique most evident in Bitola municipality is the participatory budgeting process, where all 84 neighborhood self-government units (NSGU) are included into the budget development process. In October 2013, Presidents of the NSGUs are requested by the municipality to submit official budget plans for their respective neighborhood. The prioritizing is done internally into the NSGUs and further summarized in writing, stamped and submitted to the municipality. All proposed activities must cover the interests of all citizens per NSGU. Once officially endorsed and submitted, the documents become integral part of the budget proposal, adopted by the Municipal Council by the end of the year.

Ilinden municipality:

**Production of a Local Economic Development Strategy
(strategic planning)**

This is a successful example of an initiative coming from the Mayor and its municipal administration aimed at including its citizens into a strategic planning for production of a Local Economic Development (LED) Strategy. The activity was financially and logistically supported by the OSCE Mission to Skopje, Democratic Governance Unit in cooperation with an external national consultant.
In the period October – December 2011, invited and coordinated by the LED Unit of Ilinden municipality, more than 40 members of the business community, NGO sector and citizens officially established the LED Forum of Ilinden municipality. The Forum members attended five forum sessions and directly contributed to the contents of the LED Strategy for the period 2012- 2016. The process included the following phases:

- Establishing of partners' network and adoption of a plan of activities
- Development of a SWOT analysis
- Adoption of a Vision and a Mission for the period 2012-2016
- Defining strategic goals (infrastructure and urbanism, economy, human capital and quality of life, environment protection)
- Adoption of Action Plans per strategic goal
- Developing of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms
- Defining recommendations for revision of the Strategy

The LED Strategy for Ilinden municipality 2012- 2016 together with the updated Municipal profile are available in Macedonian and English a language. It is planned to be financed by the municipal budget, business community, central government and national and international donations and funds.

STRATEGIC PLAN
for the local economic development
of the Municipality of Ilinden
2012-2016
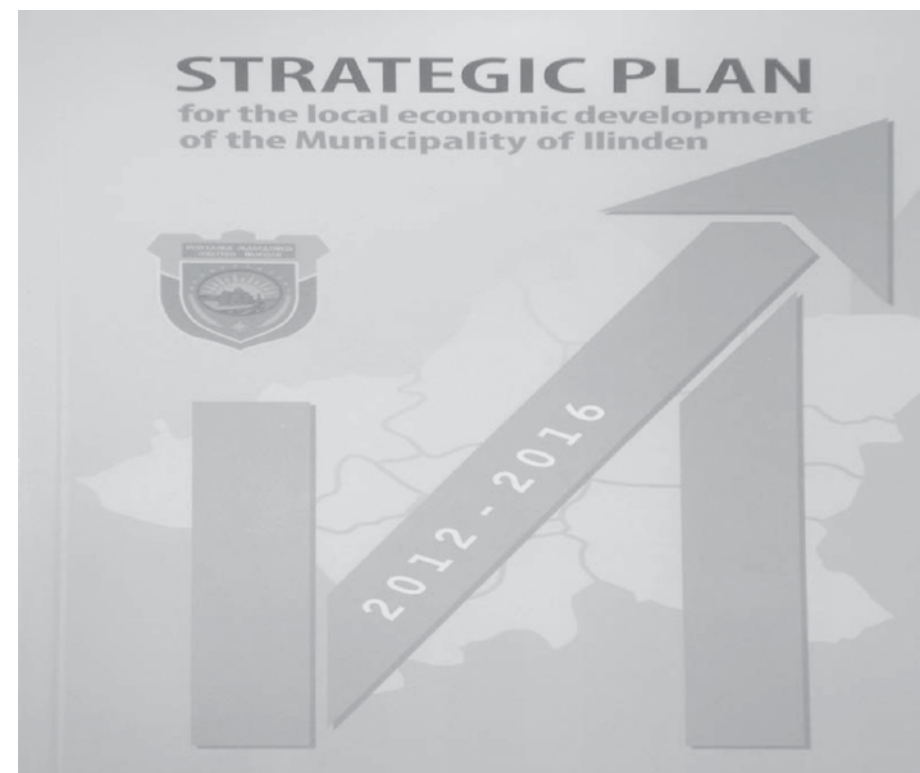
Valandovo municipality:

The municipality of Valandovo has several successful citizens' participation practices, mostly supported by external donors and international organizations.
The citizens' service center was opened in the end of 2008 to serve as a front office for the citizens. In its structures it includes representatives from all municipal administration sectors whose primary objective is to give information to the citizens and to collect their ideas and work related appeals, suggestions and comments.

In the production of its strategic plans for local economic development and environmental protection, the municipality has always included its citizens, NGOs and business community representatives. The budget planning process is also participatory, incorporating inputs from all concerned stakeholders.

Strumica municipality: (**participatory budgeting**)

Strumica municipality includes systematically citizen's participation techniques into the regular municipal work. It has 30 NSGUs - eight

urban and 22 rural. Upon request of the Mayor, the presidents of all NSGUs regularly, in October of the current year, following a public debate call organize workshop for their citizens. In each NSGUcitizens agree on the most important project ideas that later on are presented to the Mayor by the president of the NSGU. Basically the whole budget is constructed in a participatory manner and the techniques are included into the system of the functioning of the municipality.

In addition, the Mayor is available to its citizens both personally or through the local TV where once a month he presents his work and is open for direct questions and proposals from citizens. Very often he gives them feedback on issues and queries through personal contact initiated by the Mayor himself.

Interesting information is that on average, around 15 per cent of the annual budget is allocated for current costs and 85 per cent are dedicated for capital investments. Strumica is pursuing balanced municipal development, spreading investments all over the municipal territory, even though high 80 per cent of its revenues come from the municipal sources.

Public participation in the European Union

This chapter of the toolkit provides a brief overview of European standards, principles and levels of public participation in decision making processes as well as various participatory methods that can be applied in the local context.

A participatory approach advocates for an active involvement of the public in decision making; the public can be ordinary citizens, civil society, stakeholders of a particular policy, private sector or even members of government. Public participation means that the public is given the possibility to influence the policies which affect them and it can take place in various phases of the policy cycle i.e. planning, implementation, evaluation.

The interest of governments to promote citizen participation in the public policy is not a new phenomenon and has been increasing over the last years. This interest was developed to address problems such as lack of public trust and transparency of the institutions, difficulties in reaching consensus among relevant stakeholders (including political

parties) and/or incapacity of the state to solve key problems of the society by itself. Therefore, governments have initiated and conducted formal consultation processes on public policies and laws in various areas of social and economic life which resulted in a greater dialogue between various social actors outside the traditional political institutions. A series of legal and institutional frameworks governing the practice of public participation have been developed, responding to challenges in the reform processes of the government and public administration, and the development of civil society.

With regards to the European Union (EU), one can note an increased interest towards improving the quality of interaction between public institutions and citizens through regular consultations and public participation in shaping and delivering the EU policy. In its "White Paper on European Governance" (2001), the European Commission undertook steps to reinforce the culture of consultation and dialogue, to promote greater openness, accountability and responsibility for all those involved. The White Paper refers to <u>five principles that underpin democracy and rule of law</u> in the member states and which are applied at different levels of government – European, regional, national, local:

- **Openness** implies an active communication about what the institution does and what decisions it takes; and use of language that is accessible and understandable for the general public. This is of particular importance when efforts are made towards improving the public confidence in the institutions.
- **Participation** should be ensured throughout all phases of the public policy, from conception to implementation and evaluation. Improved participation is also likely to create more confidence in the end result and in the institutions which deliver policies. Participation crucially depends on institutions following an inclusive approach.
- **Accountability** requires that the roles of various institutions are clear and that they should have greater responsibility in developing and implementing policies at all levels.
- **Effectiveness** ensures that policies deliver timely and effectively what is needed on the basis of clear objectives, evaluation of future impact and, where available, of past experience and lessons learned.

- **Coherence** implies that policies and actions must be easily understood and consistent. The need for coherence is increasing because the context of political interventions is becoming more and more complex.

Furthermore, in its Communication "Towards a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue - General principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties by the Commission" (2002), the European Commission lays down a number of general principles that should govern the relations between interested parties and a set of minimum standards for the consultation processes. These reflect the principles outlined in the White Paper as follows:

<u>General principles that should govern the relations between interested parties:</u>

- To ensure a wide participation it is important to have an inclusive approach and consult as widely as possible when developing and implementing the policies.
- In order to ensure openness and accountability, the following must be clear: what issues are being developed; what mechanisms are being used during consultation; who is being consulted and why; what factors influence decisions in the formulation of policy.To be effective, consultation must start as early as possible. Interested parties should therefore be involved in the development of a policy at a stage where they can still have an impact on the formulation of the main aims, implementation methods and performance indicators.
- To ensure coherence, consultation processes must include mechanisms for feedback, response to the interested parties, analyses and evaluation of the proposals and review of the final result.

<u>Minimum standards for the consultation processes</u> :

- All communications related to consultations should be clear and concise and should include all necessary information to facilitate responses such as: summary of the context, scope and objectives of the consultation, description of the specific

issues open for discussion; contact details and deadlines; explanation of how the institution deals with contributions, what feed-back is expected, and details of the next stages in the development of the policy.

- The consultation process should involve: those affected by the policy; those who will be involved in implementation of the policy, or those that have a direct interest in the policy. Participation of non-organized interests, where appropriate and specific target groups (e.g. women, the elderly, the unemployed, or ethnic minorities) should also be considered.
- Set deadlines should give those participating in consultations sufficient time for preparation and planning - at least eight weeks for reception of responses to written public consultations and 20 working days notice for meetings.
- Receipt of contributions should be acknowledged. Results of open consultations should be made public.

For the consultation to succeed, the commitment to the above mentioned principles cannot be unilateral; all sides involved in the consultation process have a role in applying them effectively.

Though, neither the general principles nor the minimum standards are legally binding; the above mentioned documents are important for the functioning of the European Commission and are recommended for the member states to apply them.

Levels of citizen participation

As significant public (and private) resources are invested in public consultation and participation, both the process and the results are essentialThe Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD,)[1] considers that "there is a striking imbalance between the amount of time, money and energy that the governments in OECD countries invest in engaging citizens and civil society in public decision making, and the amount of attention they pay to evaluating the effectiveness and impact of such efforts". The willingness to evaluate

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1. Evaluating Public Participation in Policy Making. , OECD, 2005

public participation should stem from the government's responsibility and accountability for the use of public resources, which include both institutional resources and citizens' time and efforts. Analyses shows that public trust in public participation may actually decrease if evaluation does not take place and does not provide feedback on how the participation was conducted, the transparency of the process and the impact of policy development.

Consultation and public participation take place when citizens and public authorities have identified common needs and interests, and when mechanisms to support consultation and public participation processes exist. Some of the most commonly used mechanisms and tools include: public hearings, public meetings and debates, citizens' forums, consultative groups, opinion polls, focus groups, electronic communication, publications/reports/newsletters of the public administration.

There are several approaches used to operationalize and analyze the concept of public participation. A first option is suggested by OECD[2], which distinguishes between <u>three different levels of citizen involvement in the public policy making process</u>.

1) Information - is a one way relation whichtakes place when the governments provide citizens with the information they need in order to assess to what extent government keeps its promises, observe various areas of public policy and evaluate the consequences and impact these may have on them.

Consultation -is a two way relationship which gives citizens the possibility to provide their feedback, comments, opinions on the public policy proposals and at various stages of the decision making process. It is a reactive way of participation – the citizens are involved because the government requests so. Analyses in the OECD countries on methods of public consultation indicate that invitations to consultations are primarily addressed to very well organized and visible groups, including trade unions, professional associations and business groups. 3) **Active participation** allows citizens to become <u>partners in the</u> public policy making. Participation implies that

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2. "Engaging Citizens in Policy-Making: Information, Consultation and Public Participation", OECD 2001

citizens actively take part in the decision of developing, implementing and evaluating public policy, they express their opinions, comments and views. It is the highest form of public participation and it is rather rarely encountered.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) defines five levels of public participation in the formulation of public policy. The first two levels are identical with those suggested by OECD, respectively public information and public consultation. IAP2 unfolds the third level of the OECD model into three distinct levels. Thus:

1) Information of citizens e.g. web sites, information newsletter

2) Consultation of citizens e.g. focus groups, surveys, public meetings

3) Involvement of the citizens throughout the process of public policies, in order to ensure that opinions of various stakeholders are understood and taken into consideration. Techniques to consider may include: workshops, public meetings

4) Collaboration with the citizens when governmental organizations collaborate and partner with various interest groups at each stage in the development of a public policy, from problem identification to evaluation. E.g. citizen advisory, various committees, participatory decision making

5) Empowerment by the government of various interest groups for implementation of a public policy, so both the decision and the responsibility to achieve the agreed objectives are transferred to these groups and the final decision making is placed in the hands of the public.

In order to ensure public participation in a democratic society, four key elements need to exist: strong legislative framework; a culture of participation in which each individual is in taking part actively in the community and collective actions; political will of the government and a good management of public participation and consultation processes.

Examples of Participatory Methods used around the world:

A. Focus Groups

Definition

A focus group is a planned discussion among a small group (4-12 persons) of stakeholders facilitated by a skilled moderator. It is designed to obtain information about (various) people's preferences and values pertaining to a defined topic and why these are held by observing the structured discussion of an interactive group in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Thus, a focus group can be seen as a combination between a focused interview and a discussion group. Focus groups can also be conducted online.

When to use

Focus groups are good for initial concept exploration, generating creative ideas. They are often used to test, evaluate and/or do a programme review. They are most appropriate to get a sense of regional, gender, age and ethnic differences in opinion. They are not effective for providing information to the general public or responding to general questions, nor are they used to build consensus or make decisions.

They are particularly useful when participants' reasoning behind their views is of interest, as well as the process by which participants' develop and influence each other's ideas and opinions in the course of discussion. Focus groups are useful to:

- obtain a snapshot of public opinion when time constraints or finances do not allow a full review or survey
- obtain input from individuals as well as interest groups
- obtain detailed reaction and input from a stakeholder or client group to preliminary proposals or options
- collect information on the needs of stakeholders surrounding a particular issue or concept
- determine what additional information or modification

may be needed to develop consultation issues or proposals further.

<u>Advantages</u>

Focus groups are relatively inexpensive and the format is flexible, allowing participants to question each other and to elaborate upon their answers. Focus groups, in contrast to individual interviews, allow for the participating individuals to develop and express their opinions in a more 'natural' social context, which some claim is more akin to the ways in which people form their opinions in everyday contexts. In addition, this discussion period highlights people's reasoning and thoughts underlying their expressed opinions. The method is relatively simple, allowing participants to readily grasp the process and purpose. When the power differential between the participants and the decision-makers is great enough to discourage frank participation, the focus group provides the security of a peer group. Furthermore, the method is particularly useful when one is interested in complex motivations and actions, when one will benefit from a multiplicity of attitudes, when there is a desire to learn more about consensus on a topic and when there is a knowledge gap regarding a target audience.

<u>Disadvantages</u>

The multiple voices of the participants, as well as the flexibility in process structure, results in limited researcher control over the focus group process. Sometimes group expression can interfere with individual expression and the results may reflect 'groupthink'.

B. World Café

<u>Definition</u>

The World Café is a creative process for facilitating collaborative dialogue and the sharing of knowledge and ideas to create a living network of conversation and action. In this process a café ambiance is created, in which participants discuss a question or issue in small groups around the café tables. At regular intervals the participants move to a new table. One table host remains and summarizes the previous conversation to the new table guests. Thus the proceeding conversations are cross-fertilized with the ideas generated in former conversations with other participants. At the end of the process the main ideas are summarized in a plenary session and follow-up possibilities are discussed.

<u>When to use</u>

The World Café process is particularly useful in the following situations:

- to engage large groups (larger than 12 persons) in an authentic dialogue process; (group café of 1200 have been conducted!)
- when you want to generate input, share knowledge, stimulate innovative thinking and explore action possibilities around real life issues and questions
- to engage people in authentic conversation – whether they are meeting for the first time or have established relationships with each other
- to conduct in-depth exploration of key strategic challenges or opportunities
- to deepen relationships and mutual ownership of outcomes in an existing group
- to create meaningful interaction between a speaker and the audience.

The Café is *less* useful when:

- you are driving toward an already determined solution or answer
- you want to convey only one-way information
- you are making detailed implementation plans
- you have fewer than 12 persons (In this case, it is better to use a more traditional dialogue circle, council or other approach for fostering authentic conversation).

C. Planning Cell

Definition

The Planning Cell method engages approximately 25 randomly selected people, who work as public consultants for a limited period of time (e.g. one week), in order to present solutions for a given planning or policy problem. The cell is accompanied by two process-escorts, who are responsible for the information schedule and the moderation of the plenary sessions. A project may involve a larger or smaller number of planning cells. In each cell participants acquire and exchange information about the problem, explore and discuss possible solutions and evaluate these in terms of desirable and undesirable consequences. Experts, stakeholders and interest groups have the opportunity to present their positions to the cell members. The final results of the cells' work are summarized as 'citizen report', which is delivered to the authorities as well as to the participants themselves.

1) When to use:

The Planning Cells work best in a situation in which an urgent problem has to be resolved in a short period of time and when different options, each posing different benefits and risks, are available. The process works optimally when the issue is not too controversial and has not already polarized the attitudes of the affected population. However, Planning Cells can address even highly controversial issues if the majority of participants are selected randomly.

D. Technology Festival

Definition

A technology festival is a broad, easily accessible public event that is centered around one clearly defined subject. It is intended to provide a means for a popular and more comprehensive dialogue about socio-political issues that are complex, controversial and multi-faceted. Public debates about scientific and technological issues can be improved and enriched by organizing a festival. By visiting a festival, people have the opportunity to immerse themselves in various aspects of the subject within a limited period of time. A festival consists of a balanced mix of information, amusement and activities that help to raise public awareness and opinion.

When to use

A technology festival is particularly appropriate for complex issues that require a more active involvement of the broad public. It is designated to give people a neutral overview of the issue, a feeling of the richness of the subject, the various perspectives possible and the diverse ways in which modern society already deals with this subject in everyday life, politics, arts, media etc. A festival is not an appropriate means to substantially deepen the public and political discussion. However, it can certainly enrich an ongoing or stagnated discussion. It is possible to support political decision making through a festival, but to achieve this, a substantial part of the programme has to be deliberately designed for this purpose.

A technology festival can be usefully employed:

- to engage a large and diverse group (approximately 1000 visitors) of interested citizens in a specific subject
- to present a comprehensive overview of a complex and multifaceted subject
- to share and exchange knowledge about a specific subject
- when the subject influences the daily lives of the 'visitors' in some way
- when a lot of information is readily available
- when different viewpoints can be easily defined and presented
- when different disciplines (politicians, practitioners, producers, consumers, stakeholders, ethicists, artists) already deal with this subject
- to provide the institution with social visibility and a positive image

A technology festival is *less* useful when:

- the ultimate goal is to deepen the discussion
- the budget is too tight
- the availability of manpower is limited
- the location is not suitable for an extensive programme
- the subject is one-dimensional, reserved for a limited number of citizens or not controversial enough
- the subject is not on the political or social agenda, and is not likely to appear on it

E. Citizens' Jury

Definition

The Citizens' Jury method is a means for obtaining informed citizen input into policy decisions. The jury is composed of 12-24 randomly selected citizens, who are informed by several perspectives, often by experts referred to as 'witnesses'. The jurors then go through a process of deliberation and subgroups are often formed to focus on different aspects of the issue. Finally, the jurors produce a decision or provide recommendations in the form of a citizens' report. The sponsoring body (e.g. government department, local authority) is required to respond to the report either by acting on it or by explaining why it disagrees with it. Usually a 4-5 day process, the Citizens Jury is intended to provide a means for more democratic decision-making.

When to use

The Citizens' Jury is particularly useful for building a bridge between the jury and the broader public. The process is also an excellent opportunity for participants to explore values, as jurors frequently engage in thoughtful value-based discussions in developing policy recommendations.

The Citizens' Jury method has been applied to a wide range of topics, including economic, environmental, social and political issues. It is most applicable when one or more alternatives to a problem need to be selected and the various competing interests arbitrated. It was invented in the United States, but its widest use has been in the U.K.

The method is also being used in Australia and has been tried in India and Brazil.

Sponsors are usually government agencies, but can also be NGOs or anyone interested in providing a context in which competing alternatives can be expressed and arbitrated. However, the sponsor(s) should be seen as unbiased toward a particular outcome. The method is most likely to lead to concrete action when it is directly linked to legislation or other decision-making process.

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