



Concept paper ELDW 2018:

Citizen Participation, consultation and commitment: for a thriving local democracy

- Youth and children engagement -

Since 2007, the aim of the European Local Democracy Week is to foster citizen participation and promote democracy at the local level. Thus, during the week of the 15th to the 21st of October 2018, local and regional authorities of Europe and their associations will be encouraged to organise participatory events to celebrate local democracy, as a shared value across the European continent.

Why is civic commitment essential?

More than 1000 local authorities and their associations from the 47 Council of Europe member states and beyond have participated in this pan-European voluntary initiative since its creation, having organised a large variety of activities to meet and engage with their citizens. Most of these events can be seen on the [partners' platform of the official website of the ELDW](#).

These ELDW partners confirm that a growing number of local authorities and elected representatives see the benefits of getting citizens involved in decision-making processes: increased legitimacy, improved accountability and more efficient delivery of public services among other things. In the past 10 years, local authorities have developed new ways and opportunities available for citizens to participate in public life. Furthermore, we are living in the world of internet and e-democracy tools in which new technologies and emerging political actors are increasingly gaining space in complementarity to the traditional elements of representative democracy. Citizens are invited to express their opinion on public issues through a greater number of direct platforms, such as interactive websites, text messaging systems and social media. At the same time, these new opportunities come with new challenges for the work of local and regional authorities, such as issues related to data protection, accessibility, cybercrime, freedom of speech and social inclusion.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe – responsible for the coordination of the ELDW – decided to reflect on the changing context of citizen participation and its link to the core mission of the initiative. The theme **“Citizen participation, consultation and commitment: for a thriving local democracy”** has therefore been chosen for the 2017 and 2018 ELDW editions.

At the annual ELDW coordination meeting on 5 February 2018, it was agreed to place a special focus in the 2018 edition on the **participation of children and young people** (who are especially active, among other things, in the use of modern direct participation platforms), and to encourage specific activities by the ELDW partners engaging children and youth.

The importance of citizen participation

Citizen participation is the bedrock of democracy and good governance – core values of our society, represented and promoted by the Council of Europe and its Congress. Local and regional authorities are especially well placed to disseminate these values, on account of their proximity to citizens. On the occasion of the ELDW 2018, elected representatives and their citizens of all ages may be reminded of the importance of developing and engaging in inclusive participatory processes, in order to ensure effective and sustainable democracy.

Consultation of citizens on the issues that concern them is at the heart of citizen participation at all levels of governance. It is important to show citizens the different types of consultation that are available for them and the various ways to participate in decision-making, including the use of new communication technologies and new participatory methods to keep pace with the constantly evolving democratic processes. This is especially relevant at the local and regional level where citizens can practice their right to participation, as enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government and its additional protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority, on a daily basis on issues that directly affect their lives. Citizens should be aware of the positive effects of raising their voice and engaging in a dialogue for contributing to the development of grassroots policies.

In this context, it is crucial to emphasise that making democracy thrive necessitates a two-sided commitment to participatory processes: local authorities and politicians need to offer citizens – especially the young ones – the right tools and ways for consultation and participation, whilst citizens need to take these opportunities and get actively involved in local affairs.

While focusing on promoting the added value of participatory democracy at the lowest levels of governance, the theme of the ELDW 2018 also intends to raise awareness of the work and the role of the Council of Europe in promoting local democracy and good governance. In particular, it echoes the first of the [12 principles for good governance at local level](#) developed by the Council of Europe, “Fair Conduct of Elections, Representation and Participation”, which requires that citizens are at the centre of public activity and they are involved in clearly defined ways in public life at local level. The theme promotes also education for democratic citizenship.

Furthermore, the 2018 motto is in line with the Congress priorities for 2017-2020 developed within its role of improving local and regional governance, in particular, the priorities of “enhancing the quality of local and regional democracy” and “building safe and inclusive societies that respect diversity”. A more extensive list of Council of Europe and Congress reference texts related the 2018 theme of the ELDW is available on the official website.

Why is youth and children participation crucial?

Since the right of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs at local level is enshrined in the preamble of the [European Charter of Local Self-Government of 1985](#), and detailed in its Additional

Protocol of 2009, it is especially fundamental for an established and functioning local democracy to promote education for democratic citizenship among young people and children. Moreover, by engaging children and youth, local authorities will understand better their needs and will be able to develop more targeted responses for and with the younger generation, thus building a more inclusive democratic local community. During the previous editions of the ELDW, many youth councils and schools were already involved in art projects, role games and other activities, showing great interest among young people in the local decision- making process. Involving young people in the democratic activities of the ELDW will also improve their understanding of the functioning of local self-government and of the importance of effective communication between citizens and local elected representatives.

Thematic ideas for this 2018 edition of the ELDW:

Events organised could focus on fulfilling the principal mission of the European Local Democracy Week – i.e. **to raise citizens’ awareness of how local authorities operate** and on **how shared values on good local governance elaborated at the European level contribute to improving their practice**. The events may also offer accessible information to citizens on how they can effectively take part and make use of local consultation processes – including by using the latest communication tools and new forms of citizen participation as complementary to more “classical” ways of citizen participation.

Activities to achieve a broader understanding of the functioning of public institutions, the roles of elected representatives and ways of participating in public life could include: open days in the town halls with multimedia presentations; virtual Question & Answer sessions with the mayor; “speed dating” with local politicians; interactive expositions on participatory tools; mobile participatory budgeting, door-to-door visits; board games on the values of democracy and human rights for youth or online questionnaires to prioritise issues for discussion with the residents, etc.

Activities would valuably target citizens of all ages and all groups of society. Especially the younger generations should be involved in participatory events, through enhanced co-operation with local schools and universities. Educating young people about their rights and responsibilities and helping them developing a critical thinking towards democratic processes will contribute to a thriving local democracy in the years ahead.

Along with the relevant legal instruments of the Council of Europe and its Congress to be promoted at grassroots level, the thematic ideas listed below may help and inspire the participating local and authorities, their associations and civil society organisations in implementing their activities in the ELDW 2018. To help achieve the above-mentioned goals, this document provides examples of different types of activities which could be organised during the European Local Democracy Week 2018.

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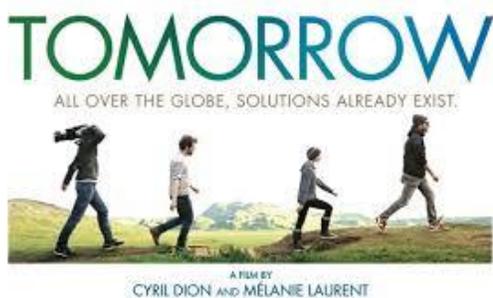
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1. Creating dialogue areas with the aim of promoting consultation and active citizenship at the local level

“A robust democracy requires active participation”, Pete Gallego

The right of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs is one of the democratic principles that are shared by all member States of the Council of Europe and enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government since 1985. Thus a valuable dialogue between citizens and their elected representatives is essential for a democratic participation. This way of communication allows the representatives to **better understand the needs and expectations of the citizens**, to **deliver public services more efficiently**. It is moreover the occasion to **gain in confidence and legitimacy towards the community**.

To foster consultation and dialogue, in 2017, the “12-Star” city of **Strasbourg** (France) organised the “**Citizen’s Summit**” which aimed to shape a **new Pact of Local Democracy**, involving both local authorities and citizens in order to strengthen their engagement in local politics. In the first instance, citizens were invited to give their opinion in several workshops related to local public policies. Then, the propositions made during these workshops were submitted to the elected representatives in the second phase of the initiative.



For purposes of promotion of citizen’s consultation, last year the “12-Star” city of **Bischwiller** (France), installed **suggestion boxes** all around the city. Moreover, as part of this project, the projection of several movies in the city like “Tomorrow”, was another way to promote citizen participation, given that the movie is promoting positives citizen initiatives.

The “12-Star” city of **Amadora** (Portugal) promoted participation at the local level, as well, through a big art project called “Conversas na Rua” in 2017. The aim of this project was to promote the relationship between Urban art and the local community thanks to the cultural, artistic and social activities of the city. Furthermore, this city implemented a communication campaign including the installation of a large canvas in front of the city hall.

In 2014, **Cavan Town** (Ireland), hosted an event called *Active Participation: Female Participation in Local Democracy* in the aim of stimulating citizens' involvement in public life and interactions with local authorities. The goal was especially to encourage the participation of women and young people in all aspects of local democracy.

In 2016 and again in 2017, the city of **Katowice** (Poland) decided to give 20 million zlotys (5mln €) to its inhabitants in order to help them to choose the projects that will be organised in their neighbourhood. This participatory budget was implemented in the 22 neighbourhood where district councils were already functioning. In this context, the "12-Star" city of **Amadora** (Portugal) proposed 16 propositions including the possible acquisition of a rescue vehicle for the Amadora Volunteer Fire-fighters and the Portuguese Red Cross, the setting up of an informal library in the park, a Christmas shop window contest, etc. which were submitted to vote in the framework of a participatory budget in 2017.

2. Promoting and developing education for democratic citizenship and human rights

"Human rights education is [...] a process to equip people with the tools they need to live lives of security and dignity." Kofi Annan

Education for democratic citizenship and human rights education are closely inter-related. These two educational areas contribute fundamentally to our ability to live together in communities, in countries and as neighbours across national borders. They also help to enable a flourishing global community. The wider aim of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education is to establish **democracy-based societies**, characterised by human rights principles such as **non-discrimination, inclusion, participation, and the rule of law**.

In this respect, the "12-Star" city **Katowice** (Poland), which has been actively organising its ELDW since 2009, focused, in 2015, on the education of children and young people, on the basis that democracy must be taught at a very early age, in order to achieve positive effects in the future. For example, **workshops on the consequences of intolerance and stereotypes** were organised with children.

In 2013, other municipalities such as **Chania** (Greece), **Festos** (Greece) and **Södermöre** (Sweden) organised specific activities to reach the youngest generation with information events on children's

rights in primary schools, and also through educational games and activities for children to **learn about Europe by playing, drawing or enjoying a puppet theatre.**

In order to teach children the democratic functioning of institutions, the mayor of the “12-Star” city of **Edremit** (Türkey) received children of an Elementary School in the city hall in 2017. He explained them the tasks of his appointment and the several assignments of the other department of the municipality. Then the children were invited to sit in the Council Chamber where they established a **children council**. The theme of this session was to choose, through a secret ballot, with which color an over bridge of the city was going to be painted. The purpose of this activity was to **acquaint children with the election mechanism** of a democratic system showing them how much democracy can be efficient and crucial in decision process. At the end of the Children's council session, the students received several gifts from the Mayor like, balloons, leaflet of ELDW and the book “Lokum’la Avrupa’ya” an introduction to EU edited by EU delegation of Turkey.



Children experiencing democracy in Edremit (Türkey)

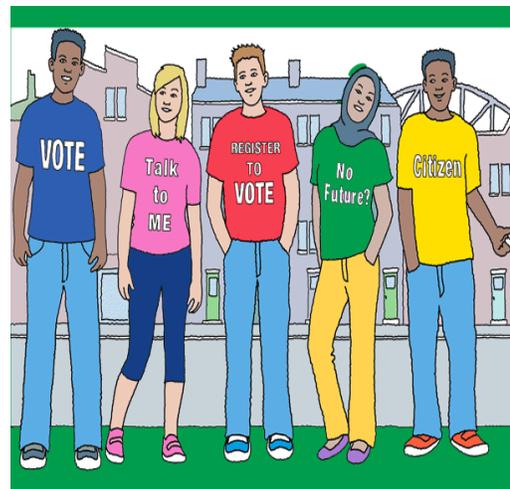
3. Encouraging young citizen’s involvement in the development of local public policies

The implication of citizens in the decision-making being vital for an active democracy, it is especially necessary to encourage youth to participate. Activities organised during the ELDW can improve their knowledge of their local representatives. These events can also be the occasion to give them a sense of responsibility by involving them in the decision making process. Moreover, communication with local politicians helps people to be more confident in politics and in their representatives. Municipalities and

associations can incite citizen participation in various ways such as debates, spectacles, role games, or even the use of new technologies.

In 2010, the city of **Strasbourg** (France) as well as the city of **Katowice** (Poland) in 2013 installed « online-Chats » in order to facilitate the communication and create a confidence rapport between the mayor, deputy mayor and their citizens. More recently, during the 2017 Edition, the city of **Chania** (Greece) created an activity called “Updating, participating, improving my city, easily and instantly 24 hours a day”. During the Week, an information campaign comprising an app called “Citizen of Chania” was launched. The use of new technologies represents an innovative and attractive tool of e-government – e-democracy.

The city of **Kirklees** (United Kingdom) organised an event called “Participatory Budgeting: How would YOU spend the money?”. The goal was to empower students from several School Councils, who had the possibility to allocate a small budget for a worthy community or school project in a neighbouring school. They thus discussed real project ideas which young people had submitted and determined the most appropriate to be awarded funding. This involved listening, discussion and debating skills, by identifying the merits and potential drawbacks of each project.



In 2012, the municipality of the “12-Star” City of **Festos** (Greece) organised a number of initiatives aimed at **increasing awareness about volunteering among young people**. To this end, a meeting was organised with youngsters to discuss volunteering opportunities and develop a joint action plan for future activities in the municipality in this field. The organisation of the meeting required the voluntary participation of trainers who had implemented lifelong learning programmes in the municipality of Festos.