

Non-governmental Organization «Lev Sapieha Foundation»
The European Association for Local Democracy - ALDA

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL DECISION – MAKING

Case studies in the framework of the European Local
Democracy Week (ELDW)

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Foreword by the Secretary General of ALDA – The European Association for Local Democracy

Participative democracy a way towards successful communities



Participative democracy – challenging representative democracy – is certainly not a new concept. On the other hand, we have not fully field-tested it yet and analysed the implication of its implementation. Where do we put the limits to it? Can that replace fully representative democracy? With which methods should it cooperate with the elected representatives? Politicians, understood as decision makers, are considered to be the counterpart of the action of «participative» citizens who may try to influence them towards better decision-making for all the community.

However, we also have the understanding that it's not all black and white. The examples of movements which are outside usual political representation lines – as they appear in many European countries – show that a different role for citizens' participation is possible. Though at this stage we do not know exactly how this will look like.

It is about time to shape a new form of decision-making. Europe could resume its role as a «political laboratory» which it had been several times since the beginning of a more united Europe. The old forms of politics, attributing to a «cheque en blanc» to the political and «skilled» élite is no longer possible or indeed sustainable.

We continue to find ourselves in the middle of this crisis. Citizens do not feel they have enough rights and/or adequate means to address the challenges at hand, even though they might have the necessary information to contribute meaningfully to the discussion. The world has become smaller with instruments like blogs and online communications slowly replacing some of the more established mechanisms of consultations and representation.

In the last 10 years at least, additional forms of consultations and engagement of citizens interacting with decision makers have been put in place. In many fields and for many topics, specific instruments (such as citizens'

panels) have been used to reach citizens who would normally find themselves outside the realms of society. Furthermore, and in particular at the local level, citizen committees have sprung up and are directly liaising with elected representatives, as well as mobilising themselves to have a greater say in the decision-making processes.

The practice of citizens' participation in Europe has been praised and valued. It is all the more important today as the processes have become more complex and globalised making the input from interested parties increasingly valuable to reach better results and initiate tailored action. Indeed, citizens' input should be highlighted when the decisions made with this modality do yield greater benefits than those taken using representative methods alone. This is the added value that we should strive for and would like to demonstrate.

Representative democracy as the only way of decision-making has probably passed its time – if it has ever existed as such. We are now talking about rewriting the rules and procedures of a system – with a multi-stakeholder approach and citizens' participation to respond aptly to issues and challenges ahead. We are working towards a «formal» recognition of something, which already exists. Referring to Europe, the co-existence of extremely complex countries and societies calls for sophisticated decision-making processes for the sake of fair and sustainable communities, protecting the most vulnerable of our society, and delivering social justice and dignity for all.

Through the experiences of practitioners and not only theories, we saw the importance of associations, citizens, and the role of building partnerships with these actors come to the fore. Citizens' participation leads to better decisions and ultimately better solutions. At local level, cases are more evident and visible. But the principle can be observed at all levels (national and supranational). Rather than creating chaos participative processes not only help deliver better solutions, but create spill over effects which are in fact essential for society: e.g. in terms of respect for each other and each other's differences, mediation capacities, sense of responsibility and ownership. The social capital, a cohesive community with a genuine sense of belonging of identity and solidarity, is one of the strongest elements for stability and welfare.

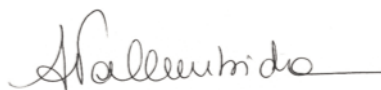
Citizens are often described as affected by apathy and hopeless attitude. One can only wonder if this is not the distorted vision of a glass being either

half full or half empty. Were citizens less affected by this «condition» in the past? Are those saying that «citizens were more active» then only referring to the hot 1960s or the violent 1970s? Are we only talking about the low voter turnout to the various elections? Our understanding from experiences and actions is that if the environment makes participation possible (if is not criminalised and dangerous for the individual, for instance, such as in non-democratic countries), citizens today are more participative than they have ever been. Citizens have the highest level of education they have ever had. They may not participate in the elections but only because decisions are often made somewhere else. Citizens' participation is here to stay and has become a constant and growing part of society at all levels. It is not only possible but also extremely beneficiary. It is a long journey but one worth to be undertaken.

In many cases we are confronted with «fake» participation (such as the limited number of people involved, processes oriented to serve particular political party lines, and pre-emptive decisions). Those aspects are diminishing the potential of a democratic multiplier effect and lead to a loss of credibility into the participatory process as a whole. But sometimes we must overlook these shortcomings. For instance, the limited number of participants is not always the sign of qualitative invalid participation if this limited number of people actually addresses and shows a certain need, expertise and involvement.

Citizens' participation adds value. Stakeholders are adopting on average better solutions to challenges faced. It is hence recommended to translate this added value into institutional frameworks. As with any societal processes it takes time and investment to achieve long-term results. As is visible throughout the examples, communities and cities which have invested in participative processes and partnership building activities do display higher quality living spaces with a better quality of life, better jobs, and better services for citizens. They are successful communities because they implemented participative processes, and not the other way round.

Antonella Valmorbida



Secretary General

European Association for Local Democracy – ALDA

Preface

About the initiators

The European Association of Local Democracy Agencies – ALDA

The European Association of Local Democracy Agencies – ALDA is an organisation dedicated to the promotion of good governance and citizen participation at the local level. ALDA in particular focuses on activities that facilitate cooperation between local authorities and civil society.

ALDA was established in 1999 at the initiative of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to co-ordinate and support a network of Local Democracy Agencies which was established in the early 1990s. It is a membership based organisation gathering more than 160 members (including Local Authorities, Associations of Local Authorities and civil society organisations) coming from more than 35 countries. The local and international partners of LDAs are encouraged to become members of ALDA and enjoy the benefits of participation in all ALDA's work. ALDA is funded through membership fees and project funding from the European Commission, the Council of Europe and other public and private donors.

Most of ALDA's work is based on the method of multilateral decentralised cooperation. This method involves a multi-stakeholder approach which focuses on strong partnerships between Local Authorities and civil society organisations. These partnerships create positive synergy and ensure that common goals are reached in a successful way.

Where does ALDA work?

ALDA works in most of Europe and the European neighbourhood countries. Activities in the European Union focus in particular on the promotion of Active European Citizenship. Activities in the Western Balkans and European Neighbourhood focus on good governance, citizen participation, European integration and decentralisation.

Most of the Local Democracy Agencies are located in the Western Balkans. But ALDA is also becoming more and more active in the European neighbourhood. In 2006 a Local Democracy Agency was established in Kutaisi in

Georgia and in 2011 a Local Democracy Agency was opened in Gyumri in Armenia. ALDA is actively working on establishing a Local Democracy Agency in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine at the beginning of 2015. An LDA is also planned for Tunisia in the near future. In addition, ALDA is leading several other projects and developing partnerships in other European neighbourhood countries, such as Belarus and Morocco.

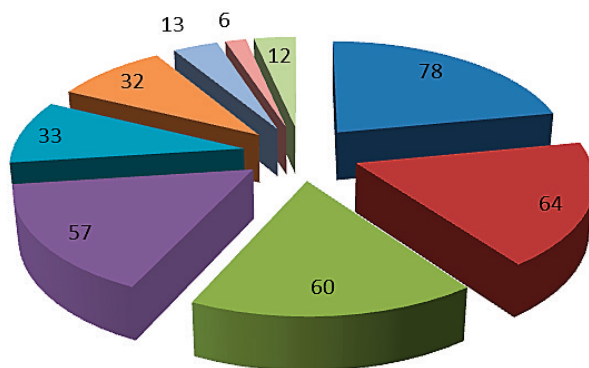
The activities of the LDAs

The LDAs are locally registered NGOs, usually hosted by the local authorities. All LDAs are supported by international partners who are usually regions and/or municipalities. The LDAs are working on the following objectives:

- To promote good local governance and support initiatives aimed at improved citizen participation;
- To enhance institution and capacity building at local level through exchange of know-how and training of local elected representatives and administrators;
- To develop a Europe-wide network of citizens committed to respect for human and minority rights;
- To foster the development of a civil society in which all sections of the community participate;
- To support intercultural dialogue and diversity management capacities in multicultural local communities;
- To promote the respect for human and minority rights in local communities.

In 2009-2012 period, the LDAs have implemented a total of 355 projects and actions in cooperation with local and European partners and stakeholders in the different fields of interest. The following chart and description offer an overview of their concrete activity and contribution to local democracy.

Total of projects implemented in the period 2009 – 2012



Total of projects – 355

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ■ Youth Policies – 78 | ■ Local economic Development – 33 |
| ■ Decentralized cooperation – 64 | ■ Active Citizenship – 32 |
| ■ Culture and Education – 60 | ■ Environment – 13 |
| ■ Social policy – 57 | ■ Human Rights – 6 |
| | ■ Other – 12 |

The LDAs have focused their efforts in different thematic fields which are in direct link with their primary objectives: the promotion of local governance and citizen's participation.

On the one hand, projects implemented on the field of Youth, Culture and Education, social policies, active citizenship and human rights have contributed to the promotion of community development and the concept of citizens' participation to the local life. Those activities have intended to raise the awareness of the target groups over the principles of democracy at local level, to enhance and support the role of civil society organizations as a vector of democracy and to improve the peaceful cohabitation of different communities.

On the other hand, projects focused on Decentralized cooperation, local economic development and environment have improved the quality of services that local authorities provide to their citizens, developed the links between local and European partners and established exchange flows of experience and good practices.

Non-governmental Organization «Lev Sapieha Foundation»

In 1991 the deputies of the local councils of Belarus, specialists in the field of law, economics, political science and culture, inspired by local democracy and local self-government principals, realized the need to establish a **Foundation for Democratic Reforms Support named after Lev Sapieha**. It was established on 26th June 1992 and was registered by the Ministry of Justice on 11th August the same year as a public non-political non-profit organisation. NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» has currently over 150 registered members across Belarus and its regional offices in every region of Belarus.

NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» enjoys vast international contacts and since 2001 it has been participating in the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe as an observer.

The main purpose of NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» activity is to assist the process of gradual democratic reforms in the Republic of Belarus, foremost in the fields of local self-government and democracy as well as in the field of economy, science, culture, human rights and ecology.

Principal goals of the organisation are therefore, the:

- support for preparation and reform of local self-government;
- support for establishment of NGOs and associated networks at the regional level;
- protection of human rights and freedoms in local communities;
- development and support for civic initiatives in local communities.

The Informational Educational Centre for Local Self-Government Problems within Lev Sapieha highlighted the European Charter of Local Self-Government to Belarusian experts and stakeholders for the first time in the mid-90's of the XX century. Much attention is paid to studying the legislation and practical experience of municipalities of Central and Eastern European countries.

There is knowledge sharing with municipal, scientific, and public organisations from other countries of the region such as Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, Sweden, Georgia, Hungary, Bulgaria and

Russia. Such knowledge exchanges take place in the form of seminars, round tables and conferences held in the Republic of Belarus, and in the form of foreign expert visits and study visits of Belarusian experts.

Throughout the entire period of its activity experts and coordinators NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» have been actively cooperating with the Parliament and local authorities of the Republic of Belarus and deputies of the Parliament and local Councils have been taking an active part in numerous seminars arranged by the NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation». The representatives of the NGO's have an observer status in the Standing Commission for study the experience of the State Building and Local Self-Government of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The Bureau on Non-governmental Organizations within NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» is focusing on the investigation of legal and socio-psychological aspects of establishing of NGO's in Belarus and their activities, as well as analysing current legal frameworks, and further developing of NGO's and their networks. More than 50 NGO's were established in different regions of Belarus with the support of the NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» during its operations. Civil initiatives in the field of social welfare, culture, environment, education, youth and sports are actively supported on a local level through the implementation of joint projects and consultations.

In its activities the NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» has built partnerships with foreign and international organizations, funds and initiatives aimed at the promotion of local government and civil society development as well as citizen participation at the local level.

The NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» is continually developing partnerships with leading organisations such as the European Association for Local Democracy – ALDA, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL), Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (FRDL) (Poland), Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania and others.

In cooperation with its partners, NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» has been successful in delivering projects supported by the European Commission, UNDP, the Open Society Institute (Soros' Foundation), and the Friedrich

Ebert Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, PHARE-TACIS, MATRA, USAID programs and others.

NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» offices operating in all the regions of Belarus enjoy a vast array of experience in the area of local citizen participation and local self-government. They plan and tailor their activities to the specific needs of the localities with the support of local NGO's.

The regional offices offer to all stakeholders educational seminars and support to civil society initiatives. They cooperate with delegates of local councils and NGO leaders, acting as resources centres for citizens. Thanks to these activities over the past 20 year of its operations more than 6500 representatives of public organisations and local government have had the opportunity to raise their professional and educational levels.

Throughout its history the NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» has been engaged in publishing aimed at disseminating knowledge and best practices in local self-government, civil participation and local initiatives, NGO development activities, review of current Belarusian and international legislation, showcase of projects and programs of the Belarusian experts for the promotion of local self-government reform in the Republic of Belarus.

The NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» has published over 70 books, publications, periodicals, scientific reviews, journals, guides and reference books for experts in the field of local self-government, NGO and civil initiatives leaders, researchers, academia and students including the following major publications:

- the European Charter of Local Self-Government translated into the Belarusian language;
- the first and currently the only fundamental scientific and practical guide in the country «Local Self-Government in Belarus»;
- quarterly journal «Bulletin of Self-Government» (27 editions);
- review of the major legal acts in the field of local self-government (a set of publications for 2006-2011.);
- a number of publications outlining Lev Sapieha's role and significance;

- reference book for the deputies of local Councils of the Republic of Belarus (2 editions);
- reference book for teachers of secondary and secondary specialized schools on democracy and civil society development challenges (a series of 10 publications);
- scientific and practical guide «Local Self-Government Associations»;
- a number of publications about some relevant local challenges (in the area of housing and land management, delivery of housing and utility services, environmental security, access to environmental and other information of public interest, guarantee of social rights and freedoms of citizens);
- reference book «Local Self-Government in Belarus and Foreign Countries (questions and answers)», etc.

For further information about the NGO «Lev Sapieha Foundation» please visit our web-site: <http://www.sapieha.org>

Acknowledgements

The 9 case studies referred to in this publication gather knowledge and practical experience from European and non-European stakeholders drawing from their efforts and activities surrounding the Local Democracy Week over the past number of years. Our thanks goes out to all stakeholders for sharing their valuable insights.

We wish to acknowledge in particular the following people and organisations for their contributions to the development of this short booklet:

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Ms. Elena Farca, Head of International Cooperation Office of Iasi City Hall, Romania

Ms. Barbara Decupere, Association de la Ville et des Communes de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale asbl, Belgium

Ms. Amelie Johansson, Association Migration Solidarité et Echanges pour le Développement, (AMSED), France

Ms. Fayçal Kaabi, Deputy Mayor of Kairouan in charge of Cooperation and International Relations, Tunisia

Ms. Selin Burçak Ünal, Büyükçekmece Municipality, Turkey

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**Brussels,
20.10.2014**

European Association for Local Democracy – ALDA

Introduction

The «European Local Democracy Week» (ELDW)¹ is an annual European event where local authorities from all the 47 member states of the Council of Europe organise public events to meet and engage with their citizens on issues of current interest. Starting in 2007, the Week usually takes place around 15th October as a tribute to the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Flexibility on the dates and implementation of events is granted to all partners. In 2014 the Week took place from 13th-19th October.

The ELDW aims to enable local populations to meet their elected representatives at national and/or local events. Its purpose is to raise European citizens' awareness of how local authorities operate, and inform them of the opportunities available for taking part in decision-making at the local level. It furthermore gives local authorities to reflect on their responsibilities as key actors in democratic societies and creates the opportunity to assert local democracy as one of the common components for constructing a democratic Europe, informing the public and elected representatives about the Council of Europe and its Congress's role in this area.

A useful tool – the ELDW website

Some of the events can be seen through the European Local Democracy Week website (www.coe.int/demoweeek) which not only advertises the events organised across Europe, but can also be used as a «knowledge-network» to inspire and encourage future ideas and activities for all interested parties.

As of June 2012 a new web platform has also been implemented to allow local and regional authorities to register their community and take part in the initiative in a more visible manner. EWLD partners can directly upload (and update) information about their events and activities which – after having translated and verified by the ELDW Team – can be seen under their personal profiles, eventually used for getting more publicity and network-

¹ Please consult http://www.coe.int/t/congress/demoweeek/info_en.asp?mytab-smenu=1 for full information.

ing. Events from previous editions back to 2010 are also available which can serve as good practices and generate new creative ideas.²

The information material developed for the theme of active citizenship has been widely used by the participating municipalities, cities and associations in launching their own communication campaign to promote the Democracy Week through local press and media, visibility events and social networks.³

A mile stone – 25 years European Charter of Local Self-Government

2013 was a special year for the Charter as it is 25 years ago that it entered into force. There is a lot of gratitude to learn about the activities organised by the various stakeholders to promote and celebrate the importance of citizens' participation and local democracy.⁴ «Participatory democracy: sharing, proposing, deciding» has been the slogan of the 2014 Democracy Week.

European municipalities are encouraged to develop targeted programs and activities according to their own priorities. Many partners use this occasion to set up permanent local councils targeting special groups in the community, such as the Councils of Children, Youth or Women. These institutions allow specific groups of citizens who are often underrepresented to speak with one voice, to be more engaged in the local decision-making process, and to develop a participatory culture among these actors in their community.

The importance of using one's voting rights has also been emphasised in many local communities such as in Huddinge Municipality (SE) and Iasi City (RO) by organising trainings and simulations of elections, including running an election campaign, proceeding voting, simulating local decision making in municipal councils or acting as a «mayor for one day». Indeed, there have been many creative and interactive ideas as well as fruitful conclusions, over the last number of years, and the Week of Local Democracy has always been a good opportunity to bring communities together to develop and encourage regional and inter-regional co-operation.⁵

² Cf. Assessment of the European Local Democracy Week 2013, handbook by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 7th edition, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France, Feb. 2014.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.* p. 2

The ELDW is intended for local and regional authorities (local communities, cities, municipalities, provinces, regions). Citizens and NGOs are both seen to be the principal beneficiaries of ELDW's activities, and its main actors. Furthermore, a special initiative called «12 Star City», aimed at municipalities wishing to give special prominence to their participation in European Local Democracy Week (ELDW), was launched in 2010.

As of 2011 the initiative saw itself being extended beyond the borders of Europe, as Morocco organised its own Moroccan Local Democracy Week that year, marking another important milestone in the furtherance of local participation processes. Indeed, as a result of this joint effort, in 2013, some 109 partners from 28 countries registered as ELDW partners. Among the 109 registered partners, 45 cities, municipalities or regional entities, representing around 15 900 000 inhabitants, and 45 associations contributed to a successful Week of Local Democracy in Europe.⁶ Out of the 28 partner countries, 17 participated in all the seven editions (as of 2013), while Iceland and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia took part for the first time in ELDW.

What's next?

In 2013, for the first time, the ELDW has linked up with a Council of Europe Campaign, the No Hate Speech Movement (NHSM), to extend actions based on common principles, such as citizen participation and cohesive communities, to new audiences. A committed team of NHSM organised online activities and debates on ways of combating hate speech at local level, and launched a joint action with the «12 Star City» Katowice (PL) to discuss online hate with young citizens. This new partnership will hopefully help both initiatives to make their events and efforts more widely known, and further boost participation in Europe and beyond.⁷

⁵ Cf. Assessment of the European Local Democracy Week 2013, handbook by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 7th edition, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France, Feb. 2014, p. 3.

⁶ Based on the information registered and uploaded on the ELDW website. Please see also *ibid*, p. 4.

⁷ Cf. Assessment of the European Local Democracy Week 2013, handbook by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 7th edition, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France, Feb. 2014, p. 5

The Week, in general, reflects the Council of Europe Congress' view of a society governed by its citizens and of a government that supports them in this undertaking – a view which has always been central to the concept of local democracy, which is itself deeply anchored in the towns and regions where our citizens live and where public affairs are conducted.⁸ Participation at local level is crucial to local development. It is only logical that, to stir up people's enthusiasm to participate in local decision-making which directly affects their lives, we should begin at the level closest to them – in our cities, towns, villages. Citizens' participation is essential for local development, and it starts when people are aware that they have the right to take action and are capable of doing so.⁹

Improving local democracy and boosting citizen participation is a longer process which doesn't end with the Week of Local Democracy. A large number of citizens' feedback has been received, a lot of ideas and challenges have been heard and need to be evaluated and followed-up by the local administration.¹⁰ There is general agreement however that the initiatives such as the ELDW leading to a better understanding and involvement of citizens in public life and interaction with local authorities and improving social cohesion and respect for others in the community.

The following short booklet has been compiled to highlight the various opportunities and initiatives of a few exemplary case studies which have been devised to make participatory democracy work and which have been running successfully as part of the Local Democracy Week during previous years.

The aim is to show the multi-faceted approaches of local democracy participation and active citizenship, as well as the exchange of best practices in the area that clearly show the ongoing commitment of the involved parties to strengthening democracy at grassroots level, and to enable citizens to have a say in the decisions directly impacting on their lives.

⁸ Conference "Youth, climate change and water: the stakes of territorial development and the impact on the most disadvantaged", Keith Whitmore, member of the Council of Europe Congress Strasbourg, 16 October 2010, <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1688825&Site=Congress&BackColorInternet=e0cee1&BackColorIntranet=e0cee1&BackColorLogged=FFC679/>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Assessment of the European Local Democracy Week 2013, handbook by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 7th edition, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France, Feb. 2014, p. 6.

Case Studies

The Municipality of Iasi, Romania

Iasi City, «the Cultural capital» of Romania, is situated in South-Eastern Europe, in the North East region of the country. It is seen as the most important city near the border, being the Eastern entrance gate to the European Union and the capital of the future Euro-region. With a population around 320,000 inhabitants, Iasi is one of the three largest cities of the country. It is also one of the oldest and most important university centres in Romania, with more than 70,000 students studying here every year across 5 universities. The municipality has good communication and networking channels with local and regional partners, public and private, as well as NGOs. It has a good ability to disseminate best practices to all its partners. As a regional growth pole for the North East region of Romania, the City of Iasi directly influences the regional policy. They have found new ways of using local and regional resources on attracting investors and on promoting best ways of putting into practice new ideas and citizens initiatives.

Since 2007, each year, during the week around 15th October (the day of signature in 1985 of the European Charter of Local Autonomy) Iasi City is participating in the «European Week of Local Democracy». This is a very special opportunity for the municipality, local NGOs and schools to network and share ideas, discuss about community needs and find solutions, learn about citizens' rights and obligations, about European values and institutions. Various types of activities have been developed over the years, picture and drawing exhibitions, debates in schools and in the City Hall premises, film projections, and events on open spaces (spectacles and dances) to name but a few. In 2009, Iasi City organised a video conference between children from Iasi and Ierapetra, Greece, to en-



hance the European dimension of the event, and in 2013 students from an Iasi high school produced a short film explaining the importance of EU values and the necessity to vote in the European Parliament elections. In 2013, Iasi was awarded the «12 Star City» recognition for its activities.



One of the most appreciated activities in the frame of the Week 2012-2013 in Iasi, which saw a high rate of participants from schools, was the contest «mayor for one day». Children and students were encouraged to do up/come up with drawings, paintings, texts, ideas around the particular SEDL (LDW) topics. The children were able to bring in their ideas about the city, propose solutions to existing problems, design the city of their dreams, realise short movies, and/or show how to be a voice of the community. The winners were invited to the City Hall of Iasi and awarded by the mayor, in a special ceremony, giving interviews to local TV and radio stations, as well as newspapers. They have also had the chance to exchange ideas with the mayor, local counsellors and civil servants directly. The event is organised by the municipality in partnership with schools, NGOs and the media. The advantage is that the idea is easily replicable and doesn't require a high budget. One challenge encountered however, was to convince the mayor to make time/be available to take part in the «game». Good coordination of activities is hence crucial for a successful outcome.

The motivation behind this idea was to find a fun and interesting way to get young people involved in community decisions, to make them understand what the roles of public institutions entail, how important public participation is and what local democracy essentially means. This activity has been really successful each year since and the impact has been higher than estimated, due to children and students dissemination efforts (before and post event) and to mass-media impact. The idea to meet the mayor and

to discuss their own proposals with him seems to attract young people and to motivate them to become more participative in community life. The NGO sector also has been willing to participate in this initiative and share their experiences. During the implementation of this initiative we learned that young people are more willing to and interested in getting involved and to finding new aspects and ways about local democracy and participation than expected. A lot of interesting ideas have come out of this democracy exercise, ideas about how to improve the city and municipal activities as a whole.

The illustrated best practices are easily replicable and adaptable to the local context. It's important to point out the involvement of both parts: young people from schools and/or NGOs as well as the mayor and the municipality's representatives. Sharing, exchanging ideas, debating and participation to public decision-making are the most important milestones of local democracy.





Association de la Ville et des Communes
de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale



Vereniging van de Stad en de Gemeenten
van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest vzw

The Brussels Region, Belgium

Participation in local democracy in the Brussels Region – Cooperation between citizens, municipalities and Public Centres for Social Action.

The Brussels-Capital has been organising the European Week of Local Democracy since 2008. Through this initiative the municipality aims to strengthen the public's knowledge about their communities and to promote their participation as responsible citizens. It also emphasises the importance of local authorities for an active and effective local development.

Along with these goals, Brussels is presented with a number of challenges:

- Continue the development and actions aimed at young audiences;
- Work with elected officials on the principles of good governance;
- Include and extend the campaign in the daily activities of local authorities in Brussels.

How are things organised?

Brussels is a region composed of 19 municipalities. When the region became involved in the ELDW process, it did so in consultation with the municipalities and Public Social Welfare Centres (Centre Public d'Action Sociale – CPAS) because ultimately they are the key players in this operation. Given that there is not strictly speaking an alderman of citizenship in each community, various jurisdictions got involved in the process. So the group that makes up the coordinating team for the implementation of this operation comes from the areas of services participation, European affairs, social action, communication, youth and other various community groups. Each actor involved contributes in their own way and according to their

specificities. This is what makes or breaks but also shows the complexity of this operation in Brussels.

However, municipalities are not alone in achieving this event. The operation is characterised by a synergy between the region, the municipalities, the Association of the City, as well as the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital (AVCB). The region devises a budget to support the communication and coordination efforts of stakeholders, and to encourage municipalities and CPAS to take part in the initiative by developing actions incorporating a participatory dimension.

The budget is set at €60,000 for the region, half of which is allocated to the coordination of activities of the ELDW in general and half of which goes to the individual municipalities' events organisation.

How does it work in practice?

Group coordinators of municipalities and public social welfare centres (CPAS) meet several times a year, starting in January, to organise actions for the month of October. In addition, working groups are also organised to achieve these goals and work on the annual theme. This collaborative work ahead of the event allows a large number of events to take place. The municipality can thus realise about 70 or more individual and collective activities during this time. Each year, a particular community is organising the opening week academic session. It then becomes the host community of the year. This session takes place on the first day of the opening of the Week and is also an opportunity to organise large-scale collective activities. As part of the opening Week 2014 a seminar entitled «Structured youth participation at local level» made the start in the neighbourhood of Saint-Gilles.

Partner organisations involved in the success of the operation:

The Association is supported by a range of partners to best ensure the development of the educational component of this initiative. Thus, the municipality has been working in partnership with the association 'Festival de l'Enfance', the 'Délégué général de la Communauté française aux droits de l'enfant' and 'Amnesty International' for several years. The CCRE - Council of European Municipalities and Regions also participates in the European Week of Local Democracy in Brussels. The proposed activities fit with the

aim to raise awareness of democratic participation at local level between local councillors, officials and citizens alike.

Small Overview of activities in 2012 and 2013:

2012 – **Human Rights**. The slogan on the communication media was «All in solidarity».



The image below shows the Evere launching ceremony. Its theme was 'gender equality' and it was presented in two different ways.

The first part saw final year students attend workshops modelled on the Amnesty International concept called «Master Mind», exploring the theme of male and female stereotypes.

The second part saw a round-table discussion on 'the role of women in the communal sphere' being organised.

The 6 CPAS Brussels municipalities also organised a day of meetings and discussions with the students of the Social Paul-Henri Spaak High



School on «The role of human rights in public and social welfare practices in the Brussels-Capital Municipality».

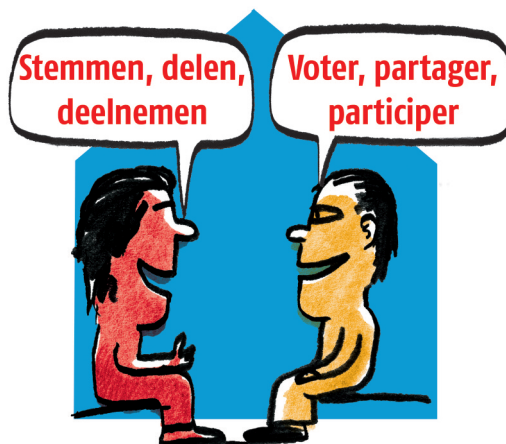
The event was divided into two distinct parts:

In the morning there was a discussion between the officials, agents of CPAS, and students from the high school. The aim was to raise awareness of the social work carried out by the respective departments. Professionals in this area also demonstrated the application of human rights within the CPAS. The second part of the day saw a group of students and teachers being invited by each CPAS to visit its institution and departments.



These visits gave a clearer picture on the role of social welfare workers within the municipality and district offices, as well as on the implementation of social policies as a whole. It also helped to share experiences and methodologies of social work.

2013 – Active citizenship. The slogan that year was ‘Vote, share, participate’.





Anderlecht, the hosting district of the 2013 ELDW jointly organised round-table discussions on local citizenship. These round table discussions enabled young people to meet and debate issues directly with local councillors. The aim was to increase awareness of civic, and in particular youth participa-

tion, as well as the implementation of principles of good governance for elected officials.

The neighbourhood of Etterbeek organised «The roundtable of local democracy», a joint activity within the European «12 Star City» status framework!

The aim was to exchange good practices between local youths and MEPs in the fields of civic and political participation, and in particular the involvement of young people. The elected officials tried to answer a series of questions, namely:

- What is the role of young people in our communities today?
- Through which channels of communication can we reach them better?
- With the upcoming European and regional elections in 2014, how can we motivate young people to participate?

This event was held in two formats: the invitation of young elected Brussels citizen to network with European officials and the creation of a structured dialogue among the young local elected officials (municipal councillors) where they could discuss the issues at stake. The Association of City and Municipalities was approached to manage this consultative organ which became known as the «Conférence des jeunes élus».

The district of Ixelles (community and CPAS) too organised a number of events, one of them being the «XL en action, la marche exploratoire»

(XL in action, exploratory walk») and one being the «XL en Action Europe» (see details below).

Its objectives were:

- The presentation of projects in collaboration with citizen associations;
- Animate operational structures in Belgian municipalities, and especially highlight the role of same in the daily life of citizens;
- Create representative examples of public citizens' participation.

The City of Brussels organised a video conference titled «La démocratie par les jeunes» («Democracy through young people»). Six youth associations explained how they contribute to the learning processes and spread of democracy principles among young people. The event was jointly organised by the municipality and the CPAS with the support of the association CFS, the «Journée participation citoyenne» in St. Gilles.

The objectives were to examine and critically analyse the concept of participation with the speaker Matthew Berger. Matthew is a professor in the faculty of science, eco-socio-political and communication at UCL. His research area focuses on urban citizenship and participatory democracy. The debate ended with the formulation of three experiences which can act as a cornerstone for further participative action.

A «*World Café de la citoyenneté*» («World Café of citizenship») was held after the debate mentioned above. The objectives were to examine the



notion of civil participation and experiences of citizens within the St Gilles district, reflecting on three main themes of:

- a Participation, a genuine tool for citizenship (How participation can act as a lever for youth empowerment?)
- b How to think about participation in the voice of the less well off?
- c Participation of migrants.

Other districts too organised events such as the workshop «Atelier respect photo-language» in Jette, which aimed to illustrate and explore the subjects of self-esteem, and attitudes and respect towards each other.



«Apéro des solidarités» («Cocktail of solidarity») and «Défi alimentation durable» ('Sustainable food challenge') in Etterbeek aimed to show another take on democracy participation.

Hopefully this short overview of ELDW activities which only represents a small part of what has been offered by the Brussels municipalities during the past two years, will encourage future organisers to engage and participate in the process of the new and upcoming European Week of Local Democracy.

City of Tbilisi, Georgia

The Tbilisi City Hall is actively engaged in the Local Democracy Week. The first time, the City registered for the week in 2010, was dedicated to climate change and sustainable development. To contribute to that year's theme and to raise public awareness of climate change, Tbilisi City Hall organised different activities and events focused on transport and mobility, waste management and water saving.

The 2010 events included:

- Public lecture given by the Head of the Transport Department of Tbilisi City Hall at the Technical University to further educate young people about public transport fare concessions for various social groups, including students, and to promote public transport as one of the most efficient and sustainable means of traffic;
- A 'cycle marathon' was held in Rustaveli Avenue, one of the main thoroughfares in Tbilisi City to which the local authorities joined in, further highlighting the importance of eco-friendly travel;
- An organised visit of students to the new landfill of the municipality, designed in line with international standards, served to underline the importance of establishing a proper system of waste management;
- A joint visit of students and the representatives of the Georgian Water and Power Company to the Ghrmaghele Water Treatment Station served to educate the young people on the process of water treatment and highlighted the importance of safe drinking water;
- Providing public drinking water fountains with taps to promote the need for preventing uncontrolled waste of drinking water;
- Tbilisi City Hall also organised activities such as Safe playgrounds, Clean-up Day, and Tree Planting.

In recognition of the compliance of the ELDW criteria, the City of Tbilisi acquired the status of «12 Star City» of which it is very proud.

As of 2011 then, Tbilisi joined the ELDW with its new status as a «12 Star City» which carried a number of additional responsibilities. As part of this

the municipality staged a series of activities dedicated to the Week throughout Georgia.

The topic of the ELDW 2011 being Human Rights at local level, Tbilisi Municipality organised an event focusing on children's rights. Children from different art schools were given the task to draw pictures on the theme of children's rights, which were later exhibited in Mushtaid Garden, a public park, which served as a venue for the ELDW 2011 in Tbilisi. Apart from the exhibition of pictures, the young participants of the event became actively involved in making a quilt featuring various themes dedicated to children. Simultaneously, a concert of children's bands was organised. Special emphasis was given to the protection of children's rights. The young audience had another opportunity to learn more about the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

As the ELDW 2013 was dedicated to Active Citizenship: voting, sharing, participating aiming at motivating citizens to take part in local decision making processes, heads of district administration decided to meet local residents to discuss the budget 2014 as well as upcoming priorities giving citizen the opportunity to get directly involved.

All in all, it should be noted that the ELDW activities were mainly targeted at young people, who showed great enthusiasm in taking part in the campaigns. The ELDW received good publicity. All the events were widely covered in the media and enjoyed a highly positive public feedback.

The National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG)

The National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) has been actively involved in organising and implementing the events of Local Democracy Week (LDW) throughout the country since 2010.

The association considers the LDW as a great opportunity to promote and foster democratic participation at local level, especially among younger generations. Hereinafter, you will find an account of the events and activities carried over the past number of years by NALAG:

As mentioned above, the topic of 2010 was that **of sustainable communities and the fight against climate change:**

- In this context a meeting by the Georgian parliament and major stakeholders was held in Tbilisi that year discussing local government structures in Georgia, its opportunities and challenges, as well as potential solutions to overcome those hurdles. Participants of the meeting were local authorities, MPs, and the Ministers of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia. NALAG organised the event bringing all sides to the table;
- With the support of NALAG the City of Rustavi held a photo exhibition titled «Our City – vision in the future» in which the Rustavi youth played a pivotal role welcoming and hosting local NGOs and international organisations to the event;
- The Lanckhuti Municipality secondary school #1 invited guest speakers to give lectures on sustainable development and local development. They discussed the current situation, gaps in the system, and possible solutions with the students. The main aim of this exercise was to raise awareness of the issues at hand. The sessions were organised by Lanchkhuti Municipal Council with the support of NALAG;
- The Local Council of the self-governing city of Kutaisi invited local citizen to Open Sessions. These touched upon the existing ecological and economic situation in Kutaisi itself, local government structures, and future plans for the city in this regard. Among the participants there were also local NGOs and community leaders. Councillors responded to and discussed citizens' queries, potential room for improvement, and the im-

portance of citizens' participation in general. The sessions were organised Kutaisi City Hall with the support of NALAG;

- The Ozurgeti Municipal Council opted to hold round table discussions. The topics focused primarily on the role of citizens' participation and the improvement of processes and procedures of the local government system.

The theme of European Local Democracy Week 2011 was **Human Rights at local level**. To support this initiative various stakeholders organised a number of activities which proved very fruitful and engaged a wide range of citizens.

- Bolnisi Municipality and the local NGO «Bplnisi Youth Center» decided to organise a cultural folk festival incorporating arts and crafts and bringing together youths from cross-border states, such as Armenia and Georgia. The festival was a great success and the photos and paintings were displayed in separate exhibitions in Bolnisi Youth Park. The young people were also awarded with participation certificates. The event was supported by NALAG;
- Ambrolauri Municipality organised a photo/painting exhibition themselves titled the «World through the eyes of disabled children». Local disabled children were encouraged to express themselves through arts and crafts. The young people too were awarded with participation certificates. Mabrolauri Municipal Council organised the event with the support of NALAG;
- A similar approach was chosen by Ozurgeti Municipality in partnership with NALAG. They held a chess tournament between local disabled children to much enjoyment of all. The local Chess School of Ozurgeti Municipality got involved in the initiative showing great enthusiasm. The school has also access for disabled persons;



- The Mayor of Rustavi City, together with the Head of Rustavi City Council visited their respective Centre for Disabled Children. The officials distributed little presents and clothing to the children highlighting the need for active citizenship.

In 2012, due to the Parliamentary elections in Georgia, organisers were not able to organise a local democracy week that year. They did return to the initiative in 2013 however.

The theme for the week was **Active citizenship: voting, sharing, participating:**

- The National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) organised a major conference on decentralisation and citizen participation utilising the opportunity to present the draft amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia on Local Self-Governance. This conference was attended by highly ranked Georgian officials such as the head of department for regional coordination at the Prime Minister's office, the first Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure, the Head of the Committee on LG of the Parliament of Georgia and Deputy Head of the Committee on LG of the Parliament of Georgia. The conference was also attended by 50 representatives of Georgian municipalities, NGOs and the media. Participants discussed two visions of decentralisation and citizen participation, one presented by the ministry and a second one by experts of NALAG. Conference participants agreed to continue cooperation for finding a consensus and to come up with unified proposal. Representatives of the Georgian Parliament pointed out the continued necessity of wider public discussions and consensus building which they thought of as very valuable;
- In the framework of the Local Democracy Week 2013 Ambrolauri Municipality organised an Eco-Tour for schoolchildren of the municipality. The children were taken to Lajarun



Hydro Power Station where eco experts explained the advantages and disadvantages of the construction of power stations in general and in their region in particular. The aim of the tour was to raise the children's awareness and understanding of the various challenges faced in terms of environmental protection and local development;

- Chokhatauri Municipality used the LD week to present the Council's annual report and future plans for the area giving room to discussions with the regions citizen, especially local schoolchildren and students, after the presentations;
- The «I am a City Mayor» event of the City of Rustavi that year proved to be a particular success and fruitful exercise. The Head of the Rustavi Municipal Council Mr. Gurgenidze Kakha, together with the Vice Head of the Council Ms. Aptsiauri Leila held training sessions for 25 students on the themes: How to be successful leader and How to hold successful pre-election campaigns. After the training, mock elections for the position of the Mayor of Rustavi City were held. Four young people, trained on how to convince the electorate to vote for them, ran as principal candidates for the mock election. In the end of the seminar the strengths and weakness of each candidate were debated by the students;
- Participants also had the opportunity to discuss the results of the election of the candidate with Mr. Abuladze Mamuka – President of NALAG, and Co-Chair of CORLEAP and Vice-chair of Georgian Delegation in CoE Congress;
- The self-governing City of Kutaisi staged a very interesting exhibition titled «I am an Architect of My City». School children from different schools of Kutaisi were handed a schematic map of



the city and were asked to select places/locations of which they thought were in need of reconstruction or redesign. They drew/designed buildings, stations, squares, green spaces, play areas etc. which in their opinion should have a place in those particular urban areas. The event, which triggered lots of creativity and ideas around the area of urban development and active civil participation, was held in partnership with the Kutaisi Education Development and Employment Centre.

After the events all participants of LDW 2013 activities were awarded certificates and received T-shirts with the LDW logo.

Organising the LD week and supporting the municipalities in their efforts to hold associated side events has been a very pleasant experience for NALAG. They received lots of acknowledgment from participants. The LD Week activities are seen as unique opportunities, giving a voice to less privileged citizens of society such as the disabled, the young and the elderly. NALAG tries to create incentives and acknowledges the efforts made by these participants. NALAG staff are well trained and actively engaged in supporting the organising of such events as well as sharing best practice and knowledge to all beneficiaries. The events are financially supported by NALAG however the budget varies each year depending on available resources.

The municipality Huddinge, Sweden (Good examples from the practice of the ELDW 2013)

During Local Democracy Week (LDW) 2013 Huddinge Municipality marked the theme with over 50 activities, among them lectures, local TV interviews, exhibitions, debates, and a «democracy lunch» to name but a few. Discussed topics were for example: the rights of the disabled, democracy in the EU, homosexuality in a «culture of honour», the women's situation in the world, and local housing policy. But the main focus lay on children and youth. Therefore, great emphasis was put on the four local public senior high schools with politicians visiting all schools for discussions and debates.

The democracy week was their third, and for the second time Huddinge put focus on schools, which has led them to talk to many more young people than they would usually have had the chance to. Both politicians and pupils have come to find this very rewarding and as a result of their cooperation with the Council of Europe some pupils were given the opportunity to visit its seat in Strasbourg last autumn where they gained valuable insights around the area of the local democracy week. It is envisaged that, in a couple of months, the municipality will be able to offer the same opportunity to even more students, e.g. to stay in the local Youth centre and learn more about democracy and human right issues.



During LDW, the senior high school pupils had to practice what they had learned about human rights in Strasbourg. Every participant received a 'secret note' which described to them which person they should represent, for example a white privileged middle aged men, a black photo model, a girl living in a strictly religious home, an

illiterate person and so on. Statements were read out and if applicable to the students they had to take a step forward. After some time some students had progressed quite significantly while others had not. This was very illustrative, and a little later this exercise also fed into a democracy and equality preparation meeting which the students attended and which got local politicians to carry out this exercise themselves. The whole exercise was very insightful. Indeed, it taught all stakeholders involved that a practical exercise can sometimes make a real difference and tell you much more than documents or books as people get to experience the situation in a more vivid, realistic way.

The LDW first became a success back in 2011 and many non-profit organisations, political parties, politicians from our parliament and the EU, as well as young people living in Huddinge have been part of this initiative ever since. In 2012, one of the preschools staged child friendly discussions about democracy. It was an experiment which was very well received by all participants. There is always room for improvement however. There is the question of whether enough inhabitants are reached through the initiatives, although the number appears to be rising and it is believed that the Local Democracy Week will become more and more well-known and visible going forward.

From experience Huddinge has learned that it is good if the municipality can provide premises for non-profit organisations as they do usually have very limited budgets and/or facilities. Also the invitations to the democracy week should be sent as early in advance as possible. 9–12 months beforehand is very welcome as most stakeholders prefer long term planning. To get the most out of the days, it is advisable to seek partners to work with during the planning and ac-



tivity stages. It could be a local education facility like a university for example. Furthermore, it's important to allocate funds for advertising, make use of the internet, blogs, one's website, Facebook, and/or other places where one knows that one is able to reach people. The key is to be active, to invite widely and let the concept «democracy» include lots of things, e.g. follow an open approach to democracy. Let people voice the things they feel passionate about and they would like to participate in. It has been very interesting to observe the development over the years.

Huddinge is a municipality working very much for equality and believes that all residents are important and have something to contribute to. This is one of the reasons why there is a great focus on residents' participation in their work. They are also keen on encouraging citizens to vote, especially first time voters, so this will be natural for them from the beginning. The slogan followed is the one of: 'Without you no democracy!'

Fredrik Lindvall Dejert, one of two teachers, who accompanied four out of six pupils to Strasbourg, states:

Within the framework of the Local Democracy Week I accompanied four pupils from Huddinge Senior High School to Strasbourg where we visited the Council of Europe. The group stayed at the European Youth Center and participated in a workshop called «take a step forward» dealing with human rights. Back in Sweden the pupils used their newly gained knowledge from this workshop/exercise and «took a step forward» with their peers and friends at school. They repeated the exercise at the Local Democracy Week. Now however this very same exercise is staged on a yearly basis at Huddinge Senior High School on the annual Human Rights Day in February. This day is a big day in the school, aiming to give both knowledge and a sense of what it means to 'have or not have human rights.' The pupils who went to Strasbourg led several workshops and again did «take a step forward». The participants were very engaged and positive throughout the exercise as it really made them think about what it is like to not actually be able to claim or indeed have your own human rights met. The pupils who visited Strasbourg concluded that the trip, and above all the experience from the workshop gave them a deeper understanding and very valuable insights into democracy and human rights issues as a whole.

City of Kairouan, Tunisia

In summer 2012, during several institutional meetings, the Congress Secretariat presented the concept of the European Local Democracy Week to Tunisian and Moroccan mayors as a mean of boosting local democracy. As a result of this, eight municipalities registered as partners of the Week, and involved their citizens in different activities and events. Leaflets and posters of the ELDW were translated into Arabic and distributed in the Arabic communities. In 2013, for the second year running, the city of Kairouan from Tunisia contributed to the LDW by choosing its own way of improving democracy and participation at local level and organising the «Arab Week of Local Democracy».¹¹

The town of Kairouan with a population of nearly 170,000 people is situated in central Tunisia. On 14th January 2011, the Tunisian people managed to bring down the totalitarian dictatorship that ruled the country until then and which controlled all aspects of life of its citizens. Over the span of the autocratic governance, people became more and more dependent subjects to this absolute power resigning themselves to this existence. They had lost all notions of initiative, sharing responsibility or participation.

The motivation to bring about, together with some municipalities in Morocco, their own initiative in 2012, and organise an Arab Week of Local Democracy (SADL) in collaboration with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, on the same dates as the European Local Democracy Week, has been to highlight the similarity of the issues faced between our different societies in particular in terms of participatory democracy. Indeed, we face the same evils, intolerance, racism, exclusion and marginalisation of the weaker social strata, hopelessness, withdrawal and loss of interest in public affairs.

The Arab Week of Local Democracy (SADL) aims to:

- Create and share a new political culture and mindset of living together in mutual respect of our differences;

¹¹ Cf. Assessment of the European Local Democracy Week 2013, handbook by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 7th edition, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France, Feb. 2014, p. 5.

- Reflect, decide and act together (all social, ethnic professional groups, women, men, the young, the elderly, the working and the unemployed...) each with its resources and needs;
- Know how to learn again to work together and implement projects for the welfare of all. Consolidation and social cohesion are the only ways forward to ensure the progress of each and every one.

As Tunisia prepared for presidential and parliamentary elections in October 2014, Kairouan had brought forward the dates of SADL activities, and chosen to reiterate the theme: Active citizenship: to vote, share, participate.

Throughout the SADL activities proposals for participation of civil society have been manifold and are very varied. They range from human rights associations, women's groups, youth, and ecology. The themes proposed are equally as varied such as the processes of local democracy, human rights, the role of women and youths in the processes of local democracy, a full day on the aspects of ecology in a local democracy context, the role of school education in strengthening democratic concepts and attitudes, or the role of transitional justice in local democracy to name but a few.

Kairouan has itself encountered a number of challenges to get their activities off the ground, namely the funding of publication costs, (the Mayor of Kairouan allocated a budget (not exceeding the equivalent of €200 to the respective projects), lack of communication and passing on information, the theme of democracy not being given due attention by the media, the difficulty of convincing people and/or organisations of an opposing school of thought to participate in the same programme and work together towards a common goal (even a physical get-together is seen as a major achievement), the integrity of the SADL organisers and facilitators and the maintenance of their neutrality, as well as the rejection of hate speech. The municipality's call for participation in all aspects of society without exclusion or marginalisation of sections of society remains undeterred however. The ultimate goal of the SADL activities is to achieve social cohesion. There is clarity of rules in the debates, clarity of humanistic values shared, and willingness to work with partners, establishing trust and consolidation.



The municipality Büyükçekmece, Turkey

Büyükçekmece Municipality took part in the European Local Democracy Week – a pan-European event coordinated by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe – as «12 Star City» in the years 2012 and 2013.

Büyükçekmece Municipality was established as a township in İstanbul, Turkey. Büyükçekmece has been well-known for its agricultural and tourism potential. There has been significant development since the 1980s, and on 4th July 1987, Büyükçekmece officially became a district. It was thoroughly revamped by city planning officials after 1994 (such as the modernisation of drainage works, decontamination facilities, the establishment of public parks and street lighting systems, environmental monitoring, and bringing energy and telecommunication networks underground to name but a few).

For the activities of ELDW, Büyükçekmece Municipality worked with partners such as institutions, NGOs, universities, and other municipalities.

Partners: Municipality of Gelsenkirchen (DE), Municipality of Ardino (BG), Municipality of Aalen (DE), Municipality of Umeå (SE), Municipality of Cheonan, South Korea, NGO of Turkish Culture and Sports (DE), NGO of Supporting the twin cities Gelsenkirchen (DE) and Büyükçekmece (TR), NGO of Turkish Women Unity, NGO of Büyükçekmece Gymnastics Sports Club, İstanbul Arel University, İstanbul Kültür University, İstanbul Fatih University, Büyükçekmece District Governorship, Büyükçekmece District Directorate of National Education, NGO of Atatürkist Thought Association, Association in Support of Contemporary Living, Fatih Youth and Scouting Club.

The Budget: €17,500 in total. There has also been the support of volunteers for some of the activities.

YEAR: 2012

THEME OF THE YEAR: Human rights make for more inclusive communities

Büyükçekmece Municipality organised 12 activities in 2012 and 17 activities in 2013 during the ELDW. Below, you will find a short overview illustrating some good examples. You can find more info and photos under these links:

<http://sedl.alnetis.fr/en/88-buyukcekmece-municipality/?edition=1>

<http://sedl.alnetis.fr/en/283-buyukcekmece—municipality/?edition=2>

YEAR: 2013

THEME OF THE YEAR: Active citizenship at grassroots level – voting, sharing, participating

City Hall Tour: Secondary and high school students had a chance to visit the city hall and to learn about the roles of each department. The directors of the respective municipality departments filled them in on what kind of duties and responsibilities they have. The Mayor, Dr. Hasan AKGÜN was the guide of City Hall tour. He answered all questions of students about the municipality system, local democracy, the roles of the various departments as well as his own role as mayor. About 100 students and 4 teachers joined this activity.

Drama workshops on children's rights: In this activity, children and young people came together to learn about human rights in general and the Rights of the Child in particular. It is believed that education needs to start at a young age. That's why Büyükçekmece Municipality organised drama courses on the theme of children's rights. With the support of professional drama educators, children learnt about their rights in a fun way including the right to one's own culture and the right to shelter. Over a course of 10 days a total number of 228 students joined the activities. They were all between 7-16 years old. In the sessions, children created a 'peace tree' where they wrote on and attached their wishes to sending to the Mayor of Büyükçekmece Municipality thereafter. Thanks to this unique format the young people not only learned about their rights but also about the arts in general, creativity, stage craft and performance through which they were encouraged to express themselves giving them increased self-confidence and motivation to get involved.

A Panel Discussion on «The Rise of Women Rights»: A Panel Discussion on the subject «The Rise of Women Rights» which was open to the public was held in a conference hall of the municipality. Representatives of NGOs, students from high schools and universities, members of youth councils and the public, especially women were invited to the panel discussion. The main speaker was a well-known lady, who is both a professional lawyer and the director of the Women's affairs Istanbul Lawyer Bar Association. She is also the member of the Turkish Women Unity NGO which is one of Büyükçekmece Municipality's partners connected to the ELDW. She talked to the participants about women rights, fighting violence against women, and the role of local governments on this issue. In addition, she reported on some examples and court cases, as well as sharing some of her own experiences on the issue. She focused on human rights not only women rights. Her speech and the organisation itself received great interest from the public. At the end of the discussion, people had the opportunity to raise questions with the speaker as well as discussing the topic with fellow participants. About 200 people, 13 NGOs, 5 high schools, 2 universities, and 3 youth councils joined the panel activity.

«Sisterhood Game» between women volleyball teams: One of the ELDW celebration activities was a volleyball match between countries. It was called a 'sisterhood game' with the neighbouring country of Bulgaria. The teams were Bulgaria Ardino Municipality Aladag Young Women Volleyball Team and Büyükçekmece Gymnastics Sports Club Young Stars Women Volleyball Team. Ardino Municipality and the Sports Club are also Büyükçekmece's ELDW partners. In the audience, were about 200 people, young students from high schools, members of NGOs and the Disables Scout Group from Büyükçekmece Municipality. The latter group played the drums while the teams were playing. In advance to the match the Turkish and Bulgarian players also spent two days together, both within the sports centre itself and in the living quarters thereafter. They came to know each other well during that time. They learnt more about each other's culture and daily life realities. They spoke about human rights in their countries and discussed ideas about the roles of municipalities and NGOs in this regard.

The Roles of Local Governments on Human Rights – International Discussion Days: The European Local Democracy week events continued with a discussion day on 'The Role of The Local Governments on Human Rights'

with the participation of students from the Istanbul Kültür University International Relations Department. In the role of the local governments on human rights discussion, the students discussed local government approaches towards youth, women's rights, children's rights, disabled people, human rights and democracy. They also carried out an overall evaluation of the current approach and what should be done to improve the current status. Students examined the works and services provided by Büyükçekmece Municipality on these subjects. At the end of the event, a report was prepared; this report included concrete proposals and shortcomings identified by the students. Students were both Turkish and foreign such as Erasmus students at the university.

Sweet wishes from the kids: Büyükçekmece didn't forget the little citizens. One of their activities was organised for children aged between 7 and 10 with parents also joining in. In this event, the children baked cookies in the shape of star, referring to «12 Star City» of ELDW. Among the parents a survey was conducted examining the question «Are you an active citizen?». The Director of International Relations, Selin Burçak Ünal told the audience about the Council of Europe and the Congress and ELDW. She also explained the commitment of «12 Star City» and the importance of this week. Related to the theme «active citizenship», she asked parents to add some points about being an active citizen. The Mayor Dr. Hasan Akgün was also present and announced that specific Children's, Youth and Women's Councils were to be established in the municipality. He invited parents and their children (over 9 years old) to join these councils in order to be more active and to participate



in the decision making of local government administration. He also reminded citizens that the municipal council meetings have been open to the public for years and encouraged them to join, talk and discuss about the issues concern-

ing Büyükçekmece. The children, wearing protective 'kitchen clothes', really enjoyed the event. Balloons with the logo of ELDW were distributed at the event. The children talked to the mayor about their wishes, which we also wrote on small pieces of colourful papers. Mayor Akgün read out the wish cards one by one. Most of the wishes were about parks and green spaces. This activity was organised four times in two days. In each one, about 50 children and 60 parents took part.

The NGOs and Local Governments Cooperation Meeting: The NGOs from the city of Büyükçekmece and Gelsenkirchen (DE) met with representatives of the local government to discuss the subject of active citizenship. After introducing their structure, mission and activities, the NGOs heard a presentation about the ELDW and its topic of the year, as well as the role and projects of the Council of Europe. The participants shared their thoughts about the role of NGOs and the local government in promoting active citizenship. They discussed how individual citizen can be active, what citizens should do in order to participate in local government, and what the role of NGOs and local governments is/must be in this regard. The representatives of the NGO from Germany talked about the concept and practices of «active citizenship» applied in their country. The conclusion of the meeting has been sent to NGOs and the mayor's office in form of a report. The participants decided to meet every month to discuss issues of cooperation between the NGOs and the municipality and support the exchange of ideas.

Establishing new Children's, Youth and Women's Councils for more active participation: The Children's, Youth and Women's Councils were established in the framework of ELDW, related to this year's topic «active citizenship». Thanks to these councils, the inhabitants of Büyükçekmece were given an opportunity to come together to talk about their needs, problems and wishes, and suggest solutions to authorised institutions. The aim of these meetings was to give citizens the possibility to participate easily and actively in the local government policy-making process. They can actively be part in the future of Büyükçekmece which aims to implement and reflect their ideas. Büyükçekmece made the decision to establish all councils in at the municipal council meeting and have started to announce application dates and places. They also explained who can apply and how people can do it. They provided some locked glass boxes and special forms (green for the youth, blue for the children and purple for the women) for the ap-

plication procedures. The forms included the details about the respective councils, their specific objectives, target groups, and working times. Büyükçekmece announced the application procedures on their official website, on billboards, by distributing posters, and in the newspapers.

The Children Council: The aim of establishing a children's council is for the children of Büyükçekmece to express their concerns and wishes, to be part of the solutions and to look confidently into the future. The council consists of 50 children aged between 9-13 years. At least 30% of them are disabled. Officially, they come together four times in a year, however, if they feel the need, they can get together more often.

The Youth Council: As above, the aim of establishing a youth council is for young people of Büyükçekmece to express their concerns and wishes, to be part of the solutions, gain awareness about the issues at stake, and speak as a unified voice when dealing with the municipality. The council consists of 45 young people aged between 16-26 years. Officially, they come together every month, however, if they feel the need, they can get together more often.

The Women Council: The aim of establishing the women council is for women of Büyükçekmece to identify problems and bring about/offer solutions to same, to gain awareness about the issues at stake, make themselves heard, and speak as a unified voice when dealing with the municipality. The council consists of 45 women. Officially, they come together every month, however, if they feel the need, they can get together more often.

Survey on «Are You an Active Citizen?»: A survey was conducted by our organisation committee aiming at raising public awareness of active citizenship, the activities of the municipality, ways of participating in local democracy, etc. The target group of the survey were people over 18 years of age living in Büyükçekmece. More than 1200 citizens were asked on the streets, in schools, at work and in shops whether they see themselves as active citizens. Survey questions were among others: Have you ever voted in the local elections? Did you know that the municipal council holds a meeting every month? Did you know that these meetings are open to the public? Are you a member of any NGO or a social club? Are you thinking of participating in the councils of our municipality?

Solution & Suggestion Tables: For more than two years, Büyükçekmece has been recording complaints, citizen's concerns etc. via phone, e-mail or in person aiming to solve them at local level. They also created so-called «Solution & Suggestion Tables». Colleagues responsible for the tables direct the people to the right department concerning their complaints or problems. They then follow the process of finding an answer for them and return to the citizens with the results. At these tables, citizens can think and talk about their complaints' possible solutions so that they can become more participative and active. The initiative was advertised with banners and posters placed in all main squares of Büyükçekmece and via Internet, social media (Facebook, Twitter). The efficiency of the tables will be evaluated based on its vision, mission and a working diagram created throughout the year.

School visits – Lessons of «Democracy and Citizenship»: Municipal members visited the lessons of «Democracy and Citizenship» held in the primary and secondary schools in Büyükçekmece and discussed the topic with students. In addition, they introduced them to the ELDW project and the main theme of «active citizenship». They discussed what an active citizen can do and what kind of support the local government can give. Students received ELDW T-shirts and bookmarks and they were invited to join the Children's and the Youth Councils to be active in the local government administration. The students' parents were given questionnaires which were returned within a week. Related to this activity, municipal members visited 65 classes in 12 schools and 420 filled questionnaires were sent back to the municipal offices.



City of Strasbourg, France (Participation and inclusion of disadvantaged young)

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During 10 days in June and July 2014, AMSED (Association Migration Solidarité et Échanges pour le Développement), a French youth association, welcomed youth association leaders, social and youth workers, as well as marginalised young people from eight different countries in Europe, North Africa and the Caucasus to the training course entitled «Participation and inclusion of disadvantaged young», carried out with the support of the European Union through the Youth in Action programme. The training course gathered 32 youth workers, youth leaders and disadvantaged youths from France, Italy, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, Georgia, Morocco and Algeria. The event took place in the centre of Strasbourg, a city located in the Alsace region in Eastern France.

The overall aim of the training course was to train and empower the participants, equipping them with knowledge and tools related to the management of intercultural projects. Focus was placed on understanding and analysing the realities of social exclusion, as well as practical projects on the participation and inclusion of young people in trans-European (European Union, Eastern Europe, Caucasus) and Mediterranean countries. Furthermore, the training course aimed to create awareness among participants of the opportunities of democratic citizenship and civil participation, the inclusion of young people in vulnerable situations, and the fight against discrimination, stereotypes and prejudice thus contributing to social cohesion in Europe.

Specific objectives and methods of the training course

More specifically, the 10 days of working together included activities such as the sharing of best practices and local experiences, workshops, roundtable and small group discussions, as well as study visits and the immersion in the local community. This was conducted in order to:

- identify, analyse and understand the concepts of «local democracy», «representative democracy», «participatory democracy», «inclusion» and «citizenship» in the context of participants;
- exchange and share experiences, perceptions and emotions experienced by participants in their professional and personal lives regarding the participation and inclusion of marginalised young people in public life;
- create awareness among participants of the different mechanisms of representative and participatory democracy, analysing their strengths and weaknesses;
- equip participants with skills to be able to act effectively as multipliers in their local communities and national contexts through the creation of projects that promote inclusion and participation of excluded young people;
- foster empathy and solidarity among the participants towards other young people in terms of justice, respect for equality and diversity by working on encouraging a positive self-image and appreciation of our differences.

Evaluation, outcomes and lessons learned

No major difficulties were encountered during the preparation and implementation of the project. Minor challenges included making sure participants from outside the EU got their visas, organising field visits and inviting guest speakers, as well as ensuring good group dynamics throughout the project. A high level of commitment by project staff and partner organisations contributed to overcoming these challenges.

The evaluation carried out at the end of the training course showed that participants were generally very satisfied with the project. Some of the learning outcomes highlighted in the evaluation included a better understanding of the contexts and challenges faced by young people in the different participating countries; a better awareness of existing mecha-

nisms for participatory and representative democracy; the expansion of personal and professional networks; improved language and public speaking skills; and the acquisition of new project management skills.

A number of factors contributed to the success of the project, and can serve as «lessons learned», if not best practices. **A large number of highly qualified trainers and guest speakers** from partner organisations as well as external partners (the European Local Democracy Week, les Jeunes Européens, and elected representatives of the Strasbourg Municipal Council) ensured the quality of the pedagogical content of the project. Likewise, the use of a **wide range of different non-formal education methods** boosted participants' learning motivation and catered efficiently for the different learning needs. The locality of the venue, right in the heart of Strasbourg, provided many opportunities for participants to discover Strasbourg and its European and international dimensions and interact with the local population on issues related to the main topics of the training course. The simultaneous use of French and English as working languages promoted bilingualism and allowed the participants to develop their ability to use these languages. A Youth pass was issued to all participants upon completion of the training course, as a means of recognition of the key competencies they developed during the project.

Follow-up

The project included group work on new, innovative high quality intercultural projects aimed at fostering participation and inclusion of disadvantaged youths in the partner countries. The use of social media, email, Skype and the project blog let participants stay in touch and has been encouraging them to continue working on their projects. With the continued support of AMSED and the partner organisations, the aim is for a number of these projects to be submitted for funding and hopefully be implemented in 2015.

Summary

The ELDW introduces various beneficial aspects to local communities. It provides invaluable opportunities and education which serve to promote more local political participation and instil in citizens the idea of participation and active engagement in their local communities. This is particularly true for the young. Communities are brought together under the ELDW and it allows more citizens to be heard. Through the events held citizens become more informed and participative, especially in the case of forums, debates and other activities which allow them to interact with each other and elected officials.

At the local level examples of ELDW vary. Creativity and thorough planning are only two of the key elements promising a successful outcome to the activities as the case studies in this booklet aptly demonstrate. Stakeholders' efforts have been duly rewarded and many ultimately continue to reap the benefits.

At this stage it is important to mention that the selection of partners for this publication is by no means exhaustive. The ones featured have merely agreed to share their experiences and efforts for the benefit of other municipalities and civil society partners to encourage them to take initiative in their own respective communities.

We want to once again sincerely thank them for their contributions.

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Links

- Council of Europe – <http://hub.coe.int/>
- COE – European Local Democracy Week – <http://www.congress-eldw.eu/>
- European Association for Local Democracy – ALDA <http://www.alda-europe.eu>

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