

THEME 2019-2020



Local democracy: building trust

Co-designing local democracy together with citizens

Practising open government

“The challenge of building trust takes on a particular importance today. There is a growing loss of confidence in politicians; however, at local level, citizens have more connection with their elected representatives. It is necessary to re-engage citizens, especially young people, showing them that they can make a difference at local level.” - Bryony Rudkin, Congress Thematic Spokesperson on the ELDW (United Kingdom, SOC)

BUILDING TRUST

Our societies today are facing a serious democratic and institutional crisis, marked by a loss of public confidence in politicians, as many citizens do not feel that they are properly represented, nor their interests defended. This crisis of political representation has a negative impact on the functioning of representative democracy. An honest dialogue between elected representatives and citizens has therefore become imperative.

Trust between people and authorities is key to the good functioning of democracy, and **local authorities play a crucial role in strengthening public confidence in the democratic system of governance.**

Citizens' confidence in local authorities means their greater commitment and engagement which benefits participatory democracy, a crucial tool enabling local elected representatives to effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities.

Today, the role of local authorities is more important than ever in building trust, since they can help significantly in **reconnecting with citizens and restoring confidence in institutions.**

CO-DESIGNING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Citizen participation in public decision making is the bedrock of participatory democracy and one of the key principles enshrined in the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#). Indeed, the local level ensures a substantial degree of people's engagement in public affairs and provides an excellent platform for using innovative practices and tools.

The right of citizens to participate in local affairs has been consolidated and guaranteed through the [Additional Protocol to the Charter](#), which entered into force in 2012.

Citizens' participation adds legitimacy to local decisions, provides a learning experience for both local authorities and residents and gives everyone a sense of belonging to the community and of common mission.

Elected representatives are responsible for providing citizens with ways and means to influence the decision-making process, and for **taking into consideration citizens' needs and concerns**.

Civil participation in decision making can take different forms and passes through various stages, from simple provision of information to consultation, dialogue and active involvement in decision making.

PRACTISING OPEN GOVERNMENT¹

Participating cities are encouraged to reinforce local democracy by practising open government. It is a simple but powerful idea that government will work better for people if it is **transparent, participatory and accountable**.

These three concepts have now become the cornerstones of good democratic governance. Through this practise, citizens can understand and influence the workings of the authorities and hold them accountable.

The main purpose of open government is to ensure **better decision making, greater public trust, reduced corruption and more effective public services**. Open government includes various practices, such as open data initiatives, access to information laws, political rights, whistle-blower protection, public consultation and engagement processes, among many others.

¹ [More information on *Transparency and Open government*, Coll. Public Ethics, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, December 2018](#)

New modalities for ELDW!

 Local authorities and their associations are now encouraged to organise events and activities in accordance with the theme of the ELDW during **the whole year**, culminating in a flagship event in the week of **15 October**.

 To highlight their active commitment to raising the citizens' awareness of local democracy, local and regional authorities taking part in the ELDW can request the title of **“Partner of the European Local Democracy Week”**. This title is granted *a posteriori*, upon the actual participation and report on activities.

The municipalities must submit a **short report** (by 15 December at the latest) showing that they respected the following criteria:

- ✓ Allocate a specific budget for citizens' participation
- ✓ Run an ELDW promotion campaign using the ELDW visual identity
- ✓ Carry out activities linked to the theme of the year
- ✓ Organise a pan-European event, extend the social scope of the initiative by reaching out to different groups of citizens
- ✓ Promote the engagement of young people and implement sustainable initiatives.

  Municipalities are invited to nominate a personality with local influence as **“Voice of the European Local Democracy Week”**, whose role would be to promote the initiative as its goodwill ambassador, to allow for a wider outreach.

 The ELDW participants are encouraged to actively promote exchanges of information and good practice between them, especially by using the **online platform** of the ELDW website.

What kind of activities to organise under this theme in 2019-2020?

Many diverse activities allowing to achieve a broader understanding of the public institutions, the roles of local authorities and share best practices can be organised, such as:

- *Open days in the town halls;*
- *Questions and Answers Sessions with the mayor;*
- *"Speed meetings" with local elected representatives;*
- *Interactive on-line consultations and discussions through applications;*
- *Themed debates with community residents;*
- *Creation of citizens' councils for a regular dialogue with authorities;*
- *Art exhibitions and screenings, public encounters and conferences, media events, etc.*

These activities will improve the dialogue between the elected representatives and the citizens, and thus build trust. They will contribute to practising open government by promoting transparency, participatory approach and accountability.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION: A KEY PRINCIPLE OF OPEN GOVERNMENT

 The municipality of **Valongo** (Portugal) celebrated the EDLW by organising one event per day from 15 to 21 October. The activities were diverse: participatory budgeting, exchanges of good practices, lectures on citizenship and structured dialogues on youth participation in local life.

 During the Democracy Days, the **Huddinge** Council of Democracy (Sweden) organised a wide range of activities. Daniel Lindvall author of “Democracy in times of fear” gave a lecture on democracies facing the current challenge of populism. A dialogue between youth and politicians called “Youth of Huddinge: what is on their mind?” was held to discuss the commitment of young citizens. Elected representatives also visited five upper secondary schools to discuss the elections and the issues that concern young voters.

 In **Izmit** (Turkey), a “democracy wall” was set up in front of the town hall to enable citizens to write their thoughts and ideas aimed at improving public services. Furthermore, every floor of the municipal office was equipped with a letter box in order to submit proposals to the mayor for better infrastructures in the city.



 Information meetings, seminars and conferences on open government and citizens’ participation can also be organised. The municipality of **El Turro** (Spain) dedicated one day to local and participatory democracy. The participants were informed on local online tools and how to actively participate in local decision-making

processes. Representatives of local government bodies and local associations participated and answered questions from citizens.

E-DEMOCRACY: A FUNDAMENTAL TOOL TO ENGAGE CITIZENS

New tools of e-communication can be used to foster local democracy.

 The city of **Strasbourg** (France) held a series of workshops with local residents culminating the “Citizen’s Summit” which aimed to shape a new Pact for Local Democracy.

This campaign involved both local authorities and citizens in order to strengthen their engagement in local politics. The municipality also organised a discussion on the flagship project of the city’s “Pact for Local



Democracy”: the digital citizen participation platform *participer.strasbourg.eu* as a new interactive web site to inform citizens, help their participation and promote dialogue between citizens and the authorities.

 The city of **Maltepe** (Turkey) adopted an innovative approach to encourage active citizen participation. By means of an online ballot available on its website and social media accounts, the municipality invited citizens to decide the name of a public park before the opening ceremony.

INVOLVING YOUTH AND CHILDREN: A STAKE FOR THE FUTURE

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 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. The population can effectively take part in the decision-making by joining citizens' councils and local youth councils. By becoming aware of the role and responsibilities of mayors and local councillors, the young people would understand better the work of local self-government bodies.

 In **Kharkiv** (Ukraine), the youth council dedicated a session to the ELDW in October 2018. The members of the youth council took this opportunity to remind residents of the existence of a participatory budget and of the possibility for citizens to vote for it. As a result, the members of the Youth Council launched a “Kharkiv votes” flash mob.





 The Municipality of **Farkadona** (Greece) brought together 27 high school students to sit as City’s Teen Councillors, take on the virtual roles of administration, opposition and civil society. The Mayor,

the Deputy Mayor for Education and local residents joined the event where the young people debated the theme “Children and youth participation and commitment”. In addition, the municipality created the “E-Youth Municipal Platform” where the reports of activities and initiatives could be sent to the municipality’s web portal, thus to contributing to citizen participation at grassroots level.

 To encourage young people to get involved in decision making at local level and to call on young citizens to contribute to specific local initiatives, the **National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia** organised a Youth Forum for Local Governance, during which some young citizens were awarded for their outstanding active participation in the life of their communities.



As you can see, many types of activities can be organised in the framework of the ELDW in order to strengthen local democracy. Obviously, your municipality is free to imagine other events under the theme of the year.