#37
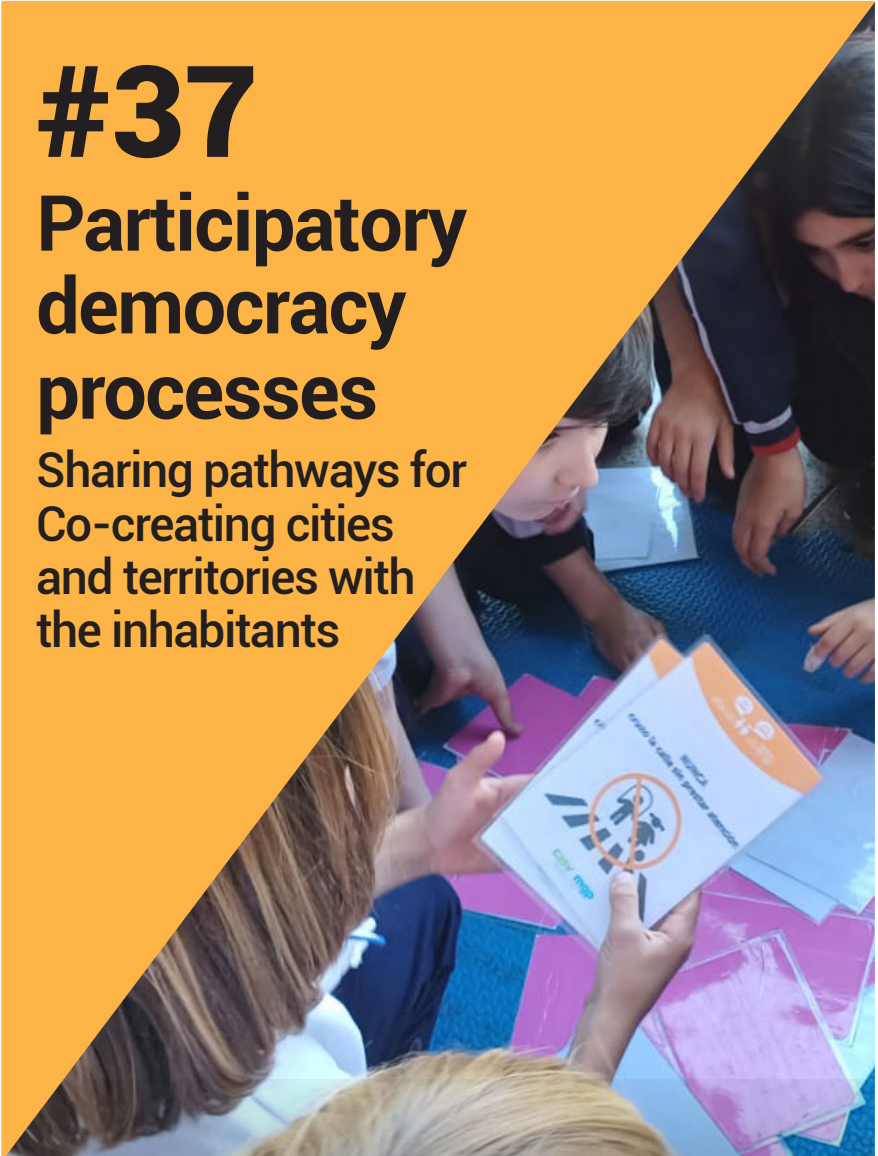# Participatory democracy processes

Sharing pathways for Co-creating cities and territories with the inhabitants

IOPD — International Observatory on Participatory Democracy

Learning UCLG

Content

This Peer Learning Note #37 is a special edition as it analyses and compiles 15 cases of local and regional governments in four continents (America, Africa, Asia and Europe) and their experiences of co-creation with inhabitants through four mechanisms of democratic participation: Participatory Budgeting (PB), deliberative processes and citizens' assemblies, child and youth participation, and inclusion.

Foreword

Democracy becomes stronger as it integrates the contributions of more and more people. The International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD), is built on the very notion of engagement with a network of more than 1,000 cities that practice proximity, decentralisation and democratic political leadership. As part of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the IOPD contributes to the study and promotion of good practices of local democracy, especially co-creation and participation.

I am particularly pleased that Valongo will be hosting the 23rd IOPD Conference from 17 to 19 October 2024. Under the theme "Populist Threats: Building Democratic Resilience with Participatory Communities," this gathering will be a privileged space for political debate and exchange. I am certain that participants will benefit from this space as I have been inspired, through my experience at UCLG and the IOPD, by practices and ideas that have found a way to the reality of our city.

Local and regional governments are at the frontline of public service provision for the people. We have to meet the inhabitants' basic needs amid multiple challenges: the environmental crisis, human mobility and the capitalisation of housing, water and other common resources.

Mayors and local authorities know that the only way to address these challenges successfully is in collaboration with our local communities. They know their most urgent needs, therefore, our task is to open up local governance through participatory mechanisms. Participatory mechanisms are instrumental in regaining trust. **At a moment when democracy is questioned standing strong with communities is critical and safeguarding target 11.3.2 of SDG 11. 3 is part of our mission. The target of enhancing the "Proportion of cities with a direct participation**

structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically" is at risk of disappearing due to the lack of available data.

The IOPD Peer Learning Sessions organised this year, with the support of the UCLG, have allowed us to learn from each other but also to align priorities as we work towards the future. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank all the participants for their commitment and candid sharing of experiences. Most of the cases have been awarded during the past years and will continue to build the legacy of our international community of local and regional governments. The engagement of civil society and partners is just as meaningful as they are a critical mass that underpins our legitimacy and accountability, helping us to engage and innovate.

As president of the IOPD and mayor of my city, I share the firm conviction that public participation is a vital tool for strengthening and regenerating democracy, making it fit for purpose as a guarantee for cities and territories where people can make their dreams and aspirations a reality. I encourage all my colleagues to put participation mechanisms into practice to involve inhabitants in the design and debate of our local policies. We cannot give up on democracy.

José Manuel Ribeiro
Mayor of Valongo
President of the IOPD

Introduction

The International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD) with the support of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Learning team has organised in March and April 2024 the IOPD Peer Learning Sessions, a series of online encounters between local and regional governments (LRGs) with the objective of deepening the practices of public participation from the local and regional levels. The learning sessions provide spaces of cross fertilisation between the practitioners who are behind the organisation and commitment to the participatory democracy from the LRGs.

Methodology

The methodology of each IOPD Peer Learning Session consisted of the presentation of two representatives of LRGs or members of civil society organisations collaborating with municipal or regional governments. The objective was to **bring together their experiences, ensuring the diversity of geographical context to enrich the discussion**.

First, participants dedicated time to the **introduction of the city or local or regional territory**, deepening in the characteristics of the context, such as the number of inhabitants, the territorial organisation, the democratic tradition, and **all the information to build the case and justify the relevance of the implementation of the participatory democracy practices**. Then, the participants presented the implementation of the participatory democracy practice in their context, in most cases, it was a chronological development of the experience. Finally, they shared **lessons learned and policy recommendations** that resulted from the experience.

The sessions we analysed in this analytical note were held on:

5 March:	**with the cities of Cuenca and Esplugues de Llobregat**
7 March:	**with the cities of Mersin and Lisbon**
13 March:	**with the cities of Colombes and Grez-Doiceau**
14 March:	**with the cities of Oeiras and Mogi das Cruzes**
20 March:	**with the cities of Mar del Plata y Molina de Segura**
28 March:	**with the State of Nuevo León and the city of Accra**
10 April:	**with the cities of Brussels, Milan and Bogota**

Rationale

Participatory Democracy and Co-creation Practices: Pathways for Empowering Communities in Shaping Cities and Territories

In recent years, local and regional governments (LRGs) have promoted a paradigm shift in territorial development from top-down approaches towards co-creation. Recognising the invaluable role of community participation and collaboration in shaping the places we inhabit, co-creation emphasises the active involvement of all local actors and stakeholders in the design, planning, and governance of local territories. Through co-creation approaches, LRGs champion inclusive processes that harness local knowledge, creativity, and **collective wisdom to build happier, more resilient, and sustainable communities**.

S**ustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11.3 calls for a participatory and co-creation approach to territorial development: "By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries."** Six years ahead of the Agenda 2030, LRGs are committed to accelerating action to make the SDGs a reality. This commitment is consolidated in UCLG's Pact for the Future, which calls for a pact for government and democracy by putting communities at the centre of decision-making. Together with care and human rights, local democracy is one of the pillars driven by our constitution to ensure the provision of public services for all people, in harmony with the planet.

In an era marked by rapid urbanisation and complex challenges, engaging communities as key active actors in territorial development and public decision-making is essential to fostering a sense of ownership, belonging, and shared responsibility. By involving diverse voices, co-creation ensures that territorial interventions are responsive to the needs and lived experiences of the people they serve, especially taking care of commonly neglected groups, such as women, children, youth, migrants or people with disabilities.

Co-creation unlocks local knowledge and expertise, often untapped in traditional planning approaches. Inhabitants possess invaluable insights into the dynamics of their communities, including local customs, traditions, and informal networks. Planners, policymakers and LRGs can tap into this wealth of knowledge to develop contextually relevant solutions that address the unique challenges and harness the opportunities of each place. Co-creation initiatives draw upon the collective intelligence of communities to generate innovative and sustainable outcomes.

Moreover, co-creation fosters a culture of collaboration and partnership by bringing together diverse actors around a shared vision for their territory. It creates opportunities for dialogue and mutual learning, enabling stakeholders to bridge divides, build trust, and forge innovative partnerships that transcend traditional silos and hierarchies. In this sense, **co-creation lays the foundation for social cohesion and more resilient and adaptive governance structures that can navigate complexity, uncertainty, and change.** It is vital to analyse, systematise and disseminate co-creation practices to transfer them to other potential territories. Through this Peer Learning Note, among other initiatives, the IOPD and UCLG drive their mission to build capacity in all local and regional communities worldwide, leaving no one behind.

In conclusion, co-creation represents a transformative opportunity for territorial development that places people in all their diversity at the centre of governing and democracy. As we navigate the current complex challenges, through this participatory democracy mechanism, **we have the opportunity to build cities and territories together that reflect everyone's diverse needs, values, and dreams, ensuring a more sustainable and prosperous world for future generations.**

> **Inhabitants possess invaluable insights into the dynamics of their communities, including local customs, traditions, and informal networks. Planners, policymakers and LRGs can tap into this wealth of knowledge to develop contextually relevant solutions that address the unique challenges and harness the opportunities of each place.**

Participatory Democracy and Co-creation Practices

There are different methodologies and instruments to achieve co-creation at the local and regional levels. In the IOPD Peer Learning Sessions, the participant LRGs shared their experiences implementing four concrete participatory democracy mechanisms: participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies and deliberative processes, promoting child and youth participation, and inclusion. Participants focused on the adaptation to each context, shedding light on the transversal potential of these participation systems.

Participatory Budgeting (PB)

PB is a democratic process that enables the population to deliberate, decide, and prioritise public spending projects within a defined budget framework. Unlike traditional top-down budgeting approaches, PB prioritises bottom-up community engagement, ensuring that the voices of commonly neglected groups are heard and their needs addressed, including all women, migrants, children and young people. Through PB, communities are empowered to co-create policies and programs that reflect their unique aspirations and challenges, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among both the population and local government officials.

Citizen Assemblies and Deliberative Processes

A deliberative process stands from careful discussion, diverse perspectives, and evidence evaluation to reach a consensus on public issues. Citizen assemblies, a form of deliberative process, involve randomly selected individuals to represent the population to deliberate on specific issues, facilitated by discussions and expert presentations. These assemblies reflect public values and avoid domination by individual interests. Resurging to address the limitations of traditional democracy, local and regional governments draw on deliberative processes to set local development forward, ensuring the inclusion of the population in all their diversity, and empowering and building informed communities.

Child and youth participation

In the tapestry of urban and local life, the voices of children and youth are essential threads, shaping the future. Amplifying their voices brings diverse perspectives to public discourse, enriching decision-making. Child and youth participation forms empowered and informed future generations. When engaging them from an early age, children and youth become champions of participatory democracy, upholding the potential to imbibe other social groups, such as their parents and family members, in local democracy, advancing towards social cohesion and happier societies.
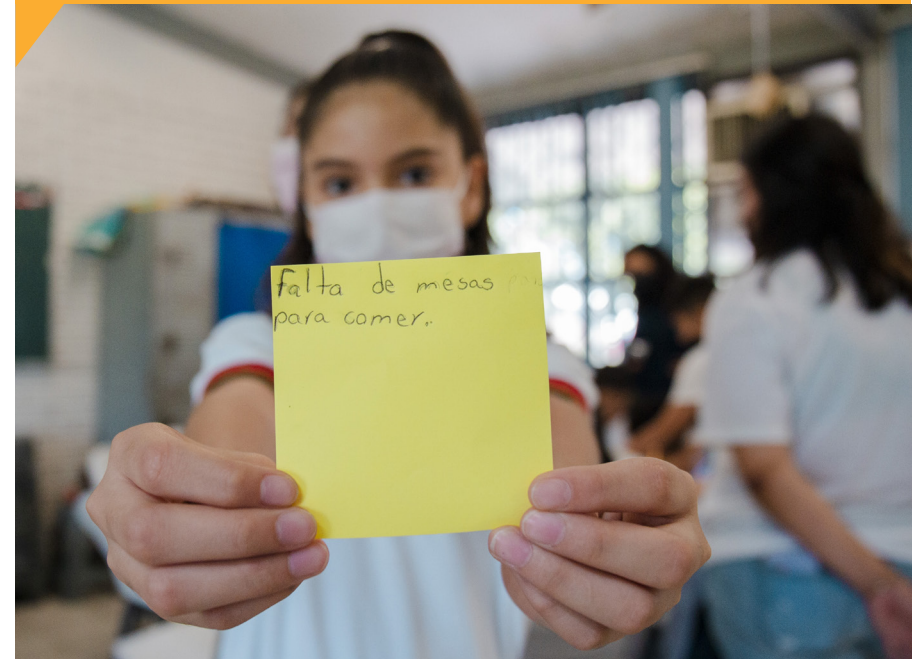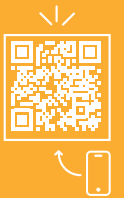
Cases presented in the IOPD Peer-Learning Sessions

with the cities of **Cuenca** and **Esplugues de Llobregat**
with the cities of **Mersin** and **Lisbon**
with the cities of **Colombes** and **Grez-Doiceau**
with the cities of **Oeiras** and **Mogi das Cruzes**
with the cities of **Mar del Plata** and **Molina de Segura**
with the State of **Nuevo León** and the city of **Accra**
with the cities of **Brussels, Milan** and **Bogota**

CITIZEN ASSEMBLIES

While it is one of the most traditional methods of civic participation, deliberative processes and citizens' assemblies have been brought to the present by local and regional governments to involve inhabitants in public decision-making. The aleatory character of the selection of participants allows the population to be represented in the most optimal way possible. This instrument supports the formation of an informed community, especially on the most urgent global challenges, such as ecological transition, building more caring territories and the public service provision.
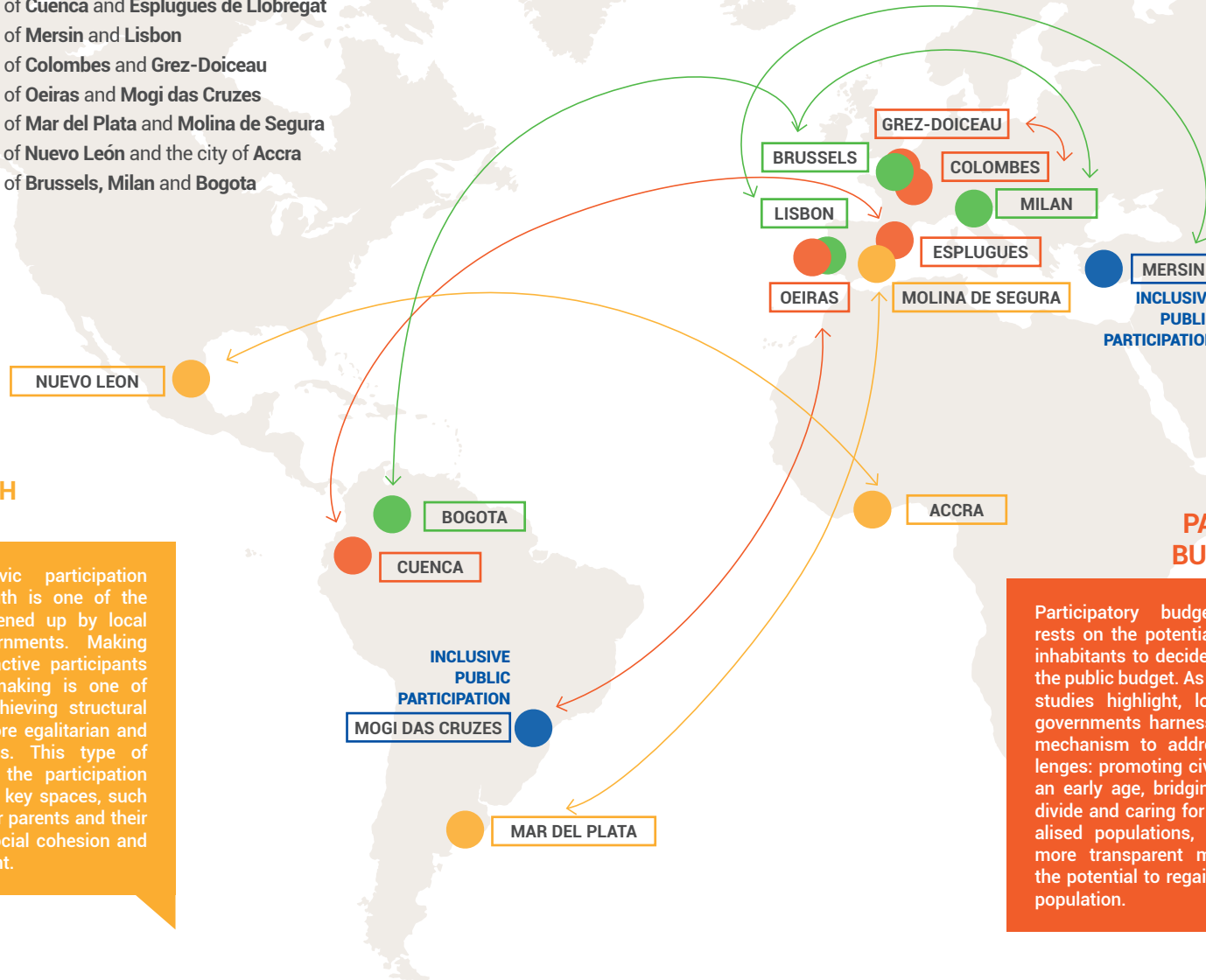
CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Promoting the civic participation of children and youth is one of the spaces of hope opened up by local and regional governments. Making future generations active participants in public decision-making is one of the pathways to achieving structural changes towards more egalitarian and happier communities. This type of engagement entails the participation of different actors in key spaces, such as school teachers or parents and their families, fostering social cohesion and integral empowerment.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING (PB)

Participatory budgeting's relevance rests on the potential for empowering inhabitants to decide on how to spend the public budget. As the following case studies highlight, local and regional governments harness this co-creation mechanism to address several challenges: promoting civic engagement at an early age, bridging the urban-rural divide and caring for the most marginalised populations, while fostering a more transparent management, with the potential to regain trust among the population.

GREZ-DOICEAU
BRUSSELS
COLOMBES
MILAN
LISBON
ESPLUGUES
MERSIN
INCLUSIVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
OEIRAS
MOLINA DE SEGURA
NUEVO LEON
ACCRA
BOGOTA
CUENCA
INCLUSIVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
MOGI DAS CRUZES
MAR DEL PLATA

Esplugues de Llobregat (Spain)

Esplugues de Llobregat is a municipality located within the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, with a population of 48,046 inhabitants distributed in 10 neighbourhoods. The municipality holds the commitment to display a participatory approach, from the local management to the implementation of international projects. Since 2014, this municipality implements participatory processes for all ages, involving more than 150 associations.

By 2023, Esplugues de Llobregat has implemented the Participatory Budgeting for the 10th time. This mechanism has evolved through time: is started with representative groups and a reduced participation options to consolidating a direct, multichannel and inclusive participation model. In its tenth edition, the Participatory Budgeting of 2023 allocated an investment of 227,870 euros. Participants must be over 16 years old and registered in Esplugues de Llobregat. Over the years, the municipality has established a monitoring committee.

10th PB by 2023

The municipality has consolidated a process, open to improvement, divided into seven phases: information and dissemination, theme selection, elaboration of proposals, proposals study and evaluation, clarifications, prioritisation and voting. The process culminates with the implementation and accountability in the final phase.

Communication is a key pillar in the implementation of the PB in Esplugues de Llobregat. The communication approach is multi-channel to reach as many people as possible. One of the pillars of this strategy is the digital platform "Esplugues Participa" The municipality reinforces the communication with traditional channels and face-to-face tools. As Montse Zamora, Second Deputy Mayor, and Ruth González, Citizen Participation Officer, stated:

> **"It is vital to leverage those spaces where people already go at strategic times, such as parks when school is over, street markets and local festivities."**

Another important pillar of PB in Esplugues de Llobregat is **the special focus on specific groups by carrying out sessions with them**. For example, the municipality organises conversation groups with women, the migrant population, high school students, and people with functional diversity (a term used in Spain to refer to "people with disabilities"). An important component is the **promotion of intergenerational activities**, the municipality organises digital literacy activities, in which the young people teach older people how to use the digital participation tools.

Lessons learnt

- PB is an evolving process with room for improvement. The municipality of Esplugues de Llobregat opted for a biannual PB to allow time for the implementation of the projects.
- Public participation requires political will and the involvement of the various municipal services and departments, such as finance, urban planning and public roads, youth, parks and gardens, social services, among others.
- The hybrid format works, it is not enough to have a digital platform, it is necessary to go to the places people already frequent.

Cuenca (Ecuador)

Cuenca, the capital of the Province of Azuay, is the third largest city in Ecuador and was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1999. It is a predominantly rural territory, with 21 Rural Parishes and 15 Urban Parishes, covering 376 neighbourhoods and a population of 596,101 inhabitants.

The recognition and autonomy of the parishes has been a gradual process, considered as a major achievement for local governance. The decentralised parish governments receive funds through Ordinances; while in urban parishes, the Autonomous Decentralised Government (GAD) of the Municipality of Cuenca directly manages the works and projects, accompanied by citizens' assemblies to validate proposals.

Participation in Cuenca is meant to reduce the rural-urban gap, contribute to social inclusion and ensure environmental protection. For instance, the municipality takes care of including specific populations, such as the youth, and also transfers the budget considering the basic needs index. To achieve this, PB, both at cantonal and rural parish levels, is based on the five axes of the Development and Land Use Plan: human settlements, physical environment, socio-cultural, economic-productive, and political-institutional.

In the implementation of PB, project approval is a pillar phase, as the municipality needs to validate the feasibility of the proposals. Evaluation with a report of conclusions is also deemed vital, complemented with **communication strategies to effectively inform the entire community**.

Participation in Cuenca is meant to reduce the rural-urban gap, contribute to social inclusion and ensure environmental protection.

21 rural parishes out of 37

Lessons learnt

- It is vital to have legal and democratic instruments for the management of PB resources.
- The social, environmental and planning approaches need to be considered in the Parish Autonomous Decentralised Governments.
- Prioritise a responsible management of financial resources given to the Parish Autonomous Decentralised Governments.

Colombes (Francia)

The city of Colombes is located in the inner suburbs of Paris in the Hauts-de-Seine department and has a population of 89,000 inhabitants. It is divided into 9 neighbourhoods, of which three are considered Priority City Neighbourhoods (PCN), with a density of 11,380 inhabitants per square kilometre according to INSEE in 2021. Colombes stands out for its social mix, evident in the diversity of the inhabitants' needs.

PCN are considered targets for priority city policy actions, based on local considerations relating to the difficulties experienced by the residents of these areas. Residents of these areas can access specific aid and support schemes.

PB is one of the pillars of the current administration, seeking to promote social ties and gradually encourage public participation. It was introduced in 2020, representing a major political challenge for the city. Municipal infrastructure is dedicated to this participatory mechanism, underpinned by two dedicated elected

3 Priority City Neighbourhoods out of 9

representatives and a liaison officer, who oversee the process. PB gets allocated 2% of the municipality's total budget of €1 million.

The PB runs for one year, and is divided into four stages: submission of projects, evaluation, voting and implementation. Participants must be at least 18 years old. The process is overseen by three citizens' committees set up by the municipality, including a steering committee, a technical committee and a monitoring committee, which is made up of members of civil society and representatives of other citizens' bodies (such as the Council of Elders, the Communal Youth Council and neighbourhood councils). The monitoring committee is responsible for communicating with residents and coordinating the process.

Previously, the PB process was sector-based and the budget envelopes allocated varied. Now, each year, the PB is thematic and open for one or more themes, residents' proposals must fit into this framework. The municipality supports residents to put forward their design ideas and campaigns, to promote their proposals, which are then put to the vote of residents aged 18 and over.

The general criteria for the PB require projects to be located within the municipality, to fall within the city's remit, to be of collective interest and to be open and/or free to all. Criteria specific to Colombes include feasibility within two budget years, no recurring running costs and consistency with current projects and the municipal vision.

Lessons learnt

- Support from citizens' bodies and a clear framework to ensure the success of the participatory budgeting process are essential.
- The importance of opening up civic participation processes to people who are often marginalised, taking their diversity into account.
- Supporting citizens throughout the whole process is essential for its success.

Grez-Doiceau (Belgium)

Grez-Doiceau is a French-speaking commune in Belgium, located in the Walloon Region in the province of Brabant Wallon. It has a population of 14,084 inhabitants spread over an area of 55 km².

1st Belgian municipality distinguished as "*Ville citoyenne*"

A predominantly rural territory, Grez-Doiceau is the first municipality in Belgium to be distinguished as "*Ville citoyenne*," a recognition to acknowledge and enhance the value of local authorities involved in citizen initiatives. Grez-Doiceau champions citizens' consultations, citizens' committees and councils, a collective rural development plan, and the PB.

The municipality pursues several objectives through the implementation of the PB, such as strengthening the decision-making process, consolidating informed and empowered communities by improving the understanding of the functioning of public administration, promoting social ties through consultation and collaboration, and encouraging the co-construction of collective projects to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants.

Each year, the PB is launched as a call for projects open to all citizens aged 18 and over and to local associations. For 2024, a budget of €45,000 has been earmarked to fund projects promoting initiatives of municipal interest. The municipality supports the PB process with a digital platform. On this platform, participants can submit their projects, exchange ideas and follow the selection and voting process.

After submitting their proposals on the digital platform, participants present them to a citizens' advisory committee made up of 10 members from the community and observers from the administration. This committee is responsible for validating the admissibility of projects according to pre-established criteria. The authorities then check the technical, legal and financial compliance of the projects before they are pre-selected for the citizens' vote.

Once the projects have been selected, they can be implemented either by the local authority or directly by the population, depending on the nature of the initiatives.
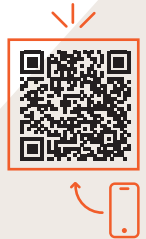
Lessons learnt

- PB has shed light on the real needs of the population and enabled the resource allocation to address them.
- This is an evolving process, which highlights the importance of co-construction with the communities.
- It is necessary to implement a clear legal framework for the implementation of PB.

Oeiras (Portugal)

Located in the district of Lisbon, Oeiras is one of the 18 municipalities that make up the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA). It stretches nine kilometres along the north bank of the Tagus River, covering 45.88 km² and divided into five parishes. According to the 2021 census, it has a population of 171,802 inhabitants. As a major centre of the LMA, Oeiras is home to a significant proportion of the country's scientific capacity, as well as multinational companies and research & development activities in various business, science and technology parks.

In response to the priorities of the current administration, notably investment in municipal housing, the municipality of Oeiras has opted for a distinctive PB approach, based on community development and adapted to municipal districts to strengthen social cohesion and citizenship. The fifth edition inaugurated a PB in the Municipal District, with a pilot experiment in the Laveiras-Caxias district, testing an innovative methodology.

The PB methodology stands out for its specific characteristics: it targets a micro-territory by prioritising socio-economic needs to leverage public investment. A specific budget is allocated to the neighbourhood, where only residents can propose, debate and vote on projects. The emphasis is on promoting dialogue and social relations within the community and with the municipality, supporting material investments to strengthen the sense of community.

Two local ambassadors are recruited to disseminate the PB among the population and mobilise them. The implementation of selected projects is coordinated between the residents and municipal services to ensure transparency.

This approach has been well received, with an enthusiastic turnout at the three participatory meetings, thanks to the two local ambassadors. In an innovative move, **ballot papers were replaced by tablets during the vote, facilitating the process and reducing paper consumption**.

Of the 32 proposals submitted, only nine were deemed feasible from a technical and financial point of view and were transformed into finalist projects put to the community vote. Six projects were voted as winners, which will be included in the operational management plan for implementation in 2024.

2 local ambassadors to promote the PB

ORÇAMENTO PARTICIPATIVO

OEIRAS VALLEY · Câmara Municipal de Oeiras

CONHEÇA OS PROJETOS VENCEDORES!

OBRIGADO PELA SUA PARTICIPAÇÃO!

oficina

Lessons learnt

- Working with different social groups means that accessibility is essential, especially to include the youngest generations.
- PB allows for proximity between municipal services and the population.
- PB methodologies have the potential to be easily replicated in other territories.

Lisbon (Portugal)

Lisbon comprises 24 Parish Councils, housing a total population of 545,796 inhabitants. In the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, spanning 18 municipalities and covering 3.3% of the territory, live three million people, constituting a quarter of the region's population, with 25% of the working population.

In January 2022, the municipality of Lisbon launched the Lisbon Citizens Council with three primary goals: creating a platform for deliberation and collaborative proposal development for the city, bridging the gap between the population and decision-makers, and enhancing the efficacy of municipal executive decisions by integrating inhabitants' input and tailoring policies to their needs.

Over 1,000 participants in the 2024 edition

In its third iteration in 2024, the Lisbon Citizens Council follows a structured timeline:

Phase 1 - Theme selection: from the major options of the Lisbon City Plan, in varied agendas, such as housing, mobility, public spaces, or environmental education.

Phase 2 - Registration: this edition registered over 1,000 participants.

Phase 3 - Draw: using a stratified sampling model and random selection process, ensuring representation of the city's population. Participation is open to individuals aged 16 and above residing in Lisbon.

Phase 4 - Sessions: providing a space for informed debate, which aims to submit citizens' proposals to the Lisbon City Council.

Phase 5 - Post-Citizens' Council Meetings: analysis and development of the proposals in collaboration with Lisbon City Council Services and citizens.

The deliberation process promoted by the municipality of Lisbon has four pillars: **impartiality,** the selection of participants is carried out by external entities; **communication**, which involves different municipal services with the participants; **representativeness**, in addition to the random draw, actions are carried out in schools and at important points in the neighbourhoods, such as universities, shops and fairs; finally, **monitoring** is carried out by citizens elected as 'ambassadors', who are also responsible for the implementation of the projects.

The Lisbon Citizens Council has opened up opportunities to co-create proximity and inclusion together with the population. Also, it has contributed to build **an informed community that has a say on the most complex current challenges, such as climate change challenges, the 15 Minute City, housing, human mobility, and care.**

Lessons learnt

- It is important to involve directy the municipal and external services during the preparation of meetings and activities.

- To guarantee the impartiality of the process, the selection and the evaluation must be conducted by external entities.

Brussels (Belgium)

Brussels boasts a population of 1.2 million people spread across 19 districts and holds the esteemed status of being the Capital of Europe, situated within Belgium and the Flanders region of the French Speaking Community. It is recognised as the second most cosmopolitan city globally and the first city to implement a permanent mixed assembly and a permanent climate assembly.

The Brussels Deliberative Committees were established in 2020, marking the inception of the first Parliament globally with permanent mixed committees. Designed over a year, these committees consist of a blend of majority and opposition members, as well as experts who provide insights during hearings. The composition includes 15 Members of the Parliament (MPs) and 45 citizens randomly selected from a pool of 10,000 individuals, aged 16 or older, who may be Belgian or non-Belgian residents. There are a total of six deliberative committees.

This innovative system of the mixed committees displays an array of virtues. It fosters inclusion, by allowing both citizens and MPs to propose the topics; if a citizen-proposed topic is rejected, MPs must provide justifications for their decision. Institutionalisation is deemed as crucial to ensure the sustainability of the process and the follow up, which is carried out by the MPs.

The deliberative process involves gathering information on the topic, engaging in small group deliberations, formulating recommendations, and voting. The final phase of the follow-up unfolds within six to nine months, during which the government and parliament present actions taken for each voted recommendation. Finally, citizens deliberate on the measures taken and provide feedback during the plenary session.

15 Members of the Parliament &

45 citizens compose the Brussels Deliberative Committees
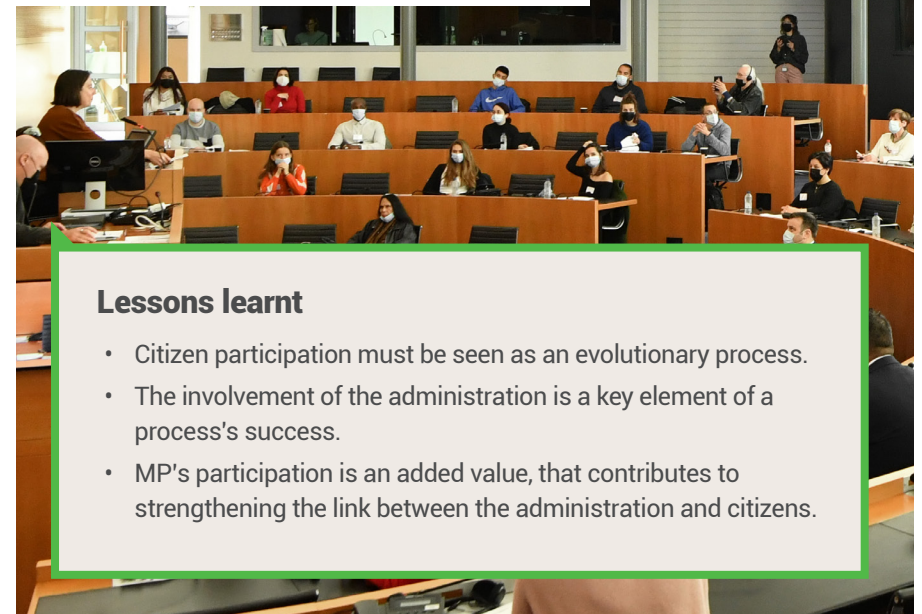
Lessons learnt

- Citizen participation must be seen as an evolutionary process.
- The involvement of the administration is a key element of a process's success.
- MP's participation is an added value, that contributes to strengthening the link between the administration and citizens.

Bogota (Colombia)

Bogota, the capital city of Colombia, has a population of over seven million residents, making it the largest city of the country. Spanning an area of approximately 1,587 square kilometres, it is a sprawling metropolis renowned for its rich cultural heritage, diverse neighbourhoods, and bustling urban life. The city is administered as the Capital District, however, it is a territorial entity of the first order, with the same administrative status as the departments of Colombia. As the economic and political heart of Colombia, Bogota serves as a hub for commerce, innovation, and creativity.

In 2020, the Bogota City Council launched the Itinerant Citizens' Assembly (ICA) through its public innovation lab, Demolab, marking a significant milestone as Colombia's first Citizens' Assembly and one of the earliest instances of deliberative mini-publics in Latin America. Recognised by the OECD as one of only eight instances of institutionalisation in global deliberative democracy, the ICA is a standout representation of the Global South, characterised by a mixed governance model and a membership of 240 individuals.

The ICA operates through five distinct phases: prioritisation, citizen recruitment, training, deliberation, and the subsequent organisation and promotion of outcomes. These phases are further subdivided into various "chapters," each with specific aims, such as exploring objectives, formulating policies, and evaluating effectiveness, all contributing to a cumulative learning process.

By 2023, Chapter III of the ICA comprised 70 members, selected through a combination of lottery (65%), itinerant (20%), and registration-based (15%) methods, with a primary focus on evaluating policies. Notably, **70% of Council members acknowledged implementing more than a quarter of citizens' recommendations. In comparison, 79.6% of participants reported increased trust and improved perceptions of the Council, and 63.3% expressed greater involvement in urban issues.**

The consistent integration of the ICA into the Council's strategic action plan for four consecutive years underscores its enduring significance and its profound impact on local governance.

Colombia's 1st citizen's assembly

Lessons learnt

- Citizen's Assemblies do not have a single design.
- The commitment of the institutions is key, they must understand and accept to give up a little of their power.
- Political will shapes the world, and the point is to learn and understand how to use it to the benefit of the general interest.

Milan (Italy)

The Municipality of Milan boasts around 1.4 million residents, including roughly 300,000 foreigners, ranking as Italy's second most populous city after Rome. Covering 181.8 square kilometres, Milan is divided into 40 neighbourhoods grouped into 9 zones (Municipi).

With the objectives of reducing CO2 emissions by 2030, becoming a Carbon Neutral City by 2050 and tackling climate change challenges, the Milan City Council approved, in February 2022, the Air and Climate Plan (Piano Aria e Clima - PAC). This outlines 49 actionable items organised into 5 key areas:

Area 1 - Healthy and inclusive Milan: aspiring to foster a clean, equitable, accessible, and inclusive urban environment.

Area 2 - Connected and highly accessible Milan: emphasising sustainable, adaptable, active, and safe urban transportation.

Area 3 - Positive energy Milan: advocating for reduced and optimised energy consumption.

Area 4 - Cooler Milan: striving for a greener, more temperate, and habitable city, adaptable to climate fluctuations.

Area 5 - Conscious Milan: promoting the adoption of eco-conscious lifestyles.

90 newly selected citizens annually

The "Permanent Citizens' Assembly on Climate" initiative was initiated within PAC's Area 5. This initiative sets up an ongoing civic engagement platform aimed at **providing citizens with a space to have a say on climate change mitigation, air quality enhancement, and ecological transition endeavours until 2030.**

This process unfolds in three distinct phases:

Phase 0: Formation of the Citizens' Group.

Phase 1: Launch of the Pilot year of the Permanent Assembly in 2023.

Phase 2: Implementation of full-scale activities of the Permanent Assembly in 2024.

The assembly comprises **90 newly selected citizens annually, drawn by lot to represent the city's diverse population.** Closed collaboration with the municipality is promoted to ensure the inclusion of citizens' recommendations and suggestions in Milan's PAC.

Lessons learnt

- A plurality of voices in providing information and education on the assembly topics is a key requirement to ensure full understanding and broaden the vision of the issues.
- The youngest bracket (16-20) is the hardest to involve.
- Bringing together a diversity of voices highlights the linguistic and relational difficulties encountered as a result of different social backgrounds. The administration must adapt and work on it.

Mar del Plata (Argentina)

Mar del Plata, Argentina's main seaside resort city, is located on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. There, a varied productive matrix can be observed, ranging from fishing and horticulture to the textile industry. The city is a regional reference in terms of university education, with both public and private institutions. It has a stable population of around 700,000 inhabitants and receives between seven and eight million tourists annually.

The culture of enjoyment of the common space and citizen encounters is palpable in Mar del Plata and is backed by a solid social fabric, which includes institutions and organisations committed to the management of the city. Owing to its vibrant environment, Mar del Plata is also facing a high rate of motorisation, which contributes to negative externalities such as congestion, pollution and, mostly, road accidents.

To address this situation, in 2019 the municipality of Mar del Plata started a general reconversion process, towards a more just, human and sustainable city, advancing a paradigm shift from road safety towards a mobility culture in which everyone takes care of each other. Presented in 2022, the Comprehensive Road Safety Plan is one of the main instruments of this transformation, in which child and youth participation stands as a fundamental pillar in this plan.

Over 50 institutions, NGOs & stakeholders compose the Road Safety Advisory Commission

The Road Safety Advisory Commission, as an external body, manages citizen participation, bringing together over 50 institutions, non-governmental organisations and a diversity of stakeholders. It includes municipal departments, representatives of the Honourable Deliberative Council, professional associations, universities, public bodies, associations of victims' families, and disability organisations, among others. This rich mix brings to the forefront **"diversity as a value and an end in itself, as it enriches debate and collective construction,"** in the words of Gabriela Funes Balza, from Mar del Plata municipality.

Networking and games are two of the pillar strategies of the Commission to encourage citizen participation and co-creation. Within the game strategy, in 2022 the Commission launched the initiative "You take care of me and I take care of you" (Me Cuidas y Te Cuido), which aims to provide children with content on urban mobility, coexistence and respect through playful recreational activities. Through an array of activities, such as the recreation of a miniature city, children are introduced to the mobility culture, with concepts such as priority of passage, respect, maximum permitted speeds and distractions when cycling.

Lessons learnt

- The youth is more involved when they participate from the start to the end of the process.
- The youth shows themselves as transmitters of the process to other social groups, like adults in their families.
- PB is a key process to consider and include specific social groups in decision-making processes.

Molina de Segura (Spain)

Molina de Segura, located in the province of Murcia, Spain, has a population of approximately 76,074 inhabitants, of which 4,654 are aged between 15 and 19. The municipal budget amounts to around €88,500,000, focusing on citizen participation, divided into five Citizen Participation Zones.

Within the promotion of citizen participation and considering the high proportion of young people in the overall population, the Youth Participatory Budget stands out, with an allocation of 35,000 €. This project is aimed at students in the third and fourth years of compulsory secondary education, aged between 14 and 15. It focuses on the environment, to raise awareness of climate change issues among the younger generation.

The municipality carried out a community outreach strategy, going directly to the students in the classrooms, where they learnt about notions of participatory budgeting, such as budget structure and citizen participation. Workshops were also organised to elaborate proposals, with an outcome of 208 proposals developed.

To carry out this process, 47 information sessions were held in eight educational centres, during breaks or classes, involving a total of 1,124 students in classroom voting. One of the main challenges faced was to increase the participation of pupils, as well as to involve them in the proposals so that they could carry them out themselves. In addition, the municipality also had to handle balancing the open lists of proposals with the playful component of the process.

The municipality considers youth as fundamental actors in civic participation, as they become promoters of this mechanism. José Manuel Mayor Balsas, from the municipality of Molina de Segura, recounts how students leave school excited to tell their families about what they learned from participatory budgeting. This is how youth are the link between various specific social groups, promoting social cohesion.

208 proposals developed in schools

1,124 students engaged

Lessons learnt

- The youth is more involved when they participate from the start to the end of the process.
- The youth shows themselves as transmitters of the process to other social groups, like adults in their families.
- PB is a key process to consider and include specific social groups in decision-making processes.

Nuevo León State (México)

Located in the north of Mexico, close to the border with the United States of America, Nuevo León is a state hosting 5.7 million people. It's divided into 51 areas called municipalities and covers an area of about 64,156 square kilometres.

In 2021, the regional government of Nuevo León created the Ministry of Citizen Participation, to make sure that anyone can take part in decisions by starting projects and creating spaces where people can have a say. They aim to become a model for the whole country by getting people from every social background involved in government decisions, using an open style of government.

Within this inclusive approach to participation, the government of Nuevo León is carrying out a community outreach strategy, going directly to schools and letting them have a say in PB. First, they pick groups randomly. Then they talk about ideas to make their schools better. After that, they vote on the best ideas and start working on them. As of today, they have realised 13 projects in 13 different parts of the state. This initiative promoting autonomy aims to develop a citizen participation culture among the youngest generations.

13 projects realised

As part of the learnings of this process, Nuevo León's Ministry of Citizen Participation has acknowledged that it takes time and effort to set up participatory spaces where everyone can join in and feel comfortable sharing their ideas. They have also observed that children need specific methods to be involved in decisions that affect them, and grown-ups need to help them with that. Overall, this regional government is guaranteeing the full respect of children's rights throughout the process.

As part of the outcomes of the process of child and youth participation, they have published a guide and a book. The guide supports adults and young people to encourage children to take part in participatory processes. The book teaches children about their right to have a say in issues that matter to them.

Lessons learnt

- It is essential for young and adult people who guide and promote children's significant participation to be prepared and acquire experience.

- Building participatory spaces requires time and constancy to build confidence and a common understanding of the importance and impact of participation.

- Participatory Budgeting requires strengthening institutional capacities and skill development.

Accra (Ghana)

Accra, the capital of Ghana, has a population of approximately 1,782,150 people as of 2021. It is also the largest city in Ghana with the second-highest population and the highest population density and 13 district governments covering its territory of 199.4 square kilometres. Youth is one of the most important age groups to consider in Accra, as they make up 56% of the population in the city.

Due to its demographics, Accra prioritises the inclusion of youth and children in various city development agendas, including identifying needs, planning, finding solutions, implementing programmes, and decision-making in developmental and local governance. The city's development revolves around the active involvement of youth in budgeted plans and strategic projects aimed at improving their lives in the city.

Youth make up 56% of the population in the city

Children are empowered through initiatives such as free basic education and access to information provided at community libraries, digital centres, and national development feedback channels, overseen by Social Welfare and Community Development Officers. Additionally, the National Center for Civic Education and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection's Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit play essential roles in providing security and support to marginalised and vulnerable children, youth, and women at the district level, with designated desk officers.

Accra has launched several initiatives to promote youth participation through the **introduction of digital participation tools, such as youth employment applications, educational initiatives, advocacy programmes like "Better Life for Girls," and projects like "Youth in Agriculture: Planting for Food and Jobs**.

Lessons learnt

- Empowering institutions through effective decentralisation maximises efforts and outcomes.
- Economic hardships and inadequate access to infrastructure impede the participation of children and youth.
- Traditions and culture are key elements that impact children and youth inclusion.

Mersin (Turkey)

Situated on the Mediterranean coast of southern Turkey, Mersin has a significant commercial port, rendering it a crucial economic centre with 13 administrative districts and a population of 1,916,432 inhabitants.

Given its proximity to Turkey's border with Syria, Mersin struggles with the challenges posed by the migratory crisis and refugee reception. In response, the "Neighbourhood is Ours" initiative aims to foster active citizen participation, facilitate coordination between the municipality and neighbourhood representatives (mukhtars), and provide guidance services to refugees. By strengthening citizens' involvement in decision-making processes, the project seeks to increase awareness of municipal services and encourage the population to voice their opinions on neighbourhood-related decisions.

Women & migrant participation championing

In efforts to bolster citizen engagement, Mersin has introduced **the "TEKSİN Mersin application," designed to streamline access to municipal services, improve communication between the population and the municipality, and offer essential information for navigating the city.** Through this app, inhabitants can easily access services, lodge requests and complaints, and stay updated on public transportation.

Furthermore, the Mersin Metropolitan Municipality is committed to fostering closer ties between civil society and the administration. To this end, regular City Participation Meetings are held, allowing representatives from various social and cultural nonprofit organisations in Mersin to engage with the mayor, addressing pertinent city issues and submitting concerns.

Women's organisations and representatives in Mersin have convened weekly meetings since 7 March 2023, to address a range of issues, including women's rights, gender equality, violence prevention, empowerment, and political participation at the local level. Collaborative efforts with women's NGOs aim to enhance access to educational programs for women in underserved areas, furthering the goal of societal inclusion and empowerment.

Lessons learnt

- Organisations recognise that their collective efforts and actions have a greater impact in addressing local challenges. In this sense, receiving their viewpoints and holding regular meetings are very important for strategy development.

- Authentically engaging the youth requires a genuine effort to understand their perspectives and include them in decision-making processes.

- It is easier to engage the population through "civil projects," independent from political affection is an easier way to account for sustainability.

Mogi das Cruzes (Brazil)

Mogi das Cruzes, with a population of 451,505 residents, comprises 11 districts and 107 neighbourhoods. Situated in the Alto Tietê region, within the eastern sector of Greater São Paulo, it shares borders with nine other municipalities. After the capital, it ranks as the second-largest municipality in Greater São Paulo, holding a vast rural area.

The introduction of Participatory Planning in the Municipality of Mogi das Cruzes in 2021, under the auspices of the Municipal Planning and Strategic Management Secretariat, marked a significant step toward citizen involvement in decision-making processes regarding urban development. The initiative aimed to engage the population in shaping budgetary documents such as the Multi-Year Plan and Annual Budget Law. City officials ventured into local communities to solicit input, conducting thematic and territorial meetings.

Interpreters & live broadcasts to ensure inclusion

Mogi das Cruzes actively engages in various fields, including participatory planning, citizen education, neighbourhood plans, consultations and public hearings, and municipal councils, demonstrating a commitment to inclusive governance and community involvement.

Thematic Meetings covered a wide array of topics, including Social Assistance, Culture, Development and Agriculture, Education, Sports, Housing, Environment, Urban Mobility, Sanitation, Security, Tourism, and Health. Accessibility measures such as interpreters and live broadcasts were employed to ensure inclusivity.

The timeline for this initiative included alignment meetings with secretariats, presentations of planned budgets to the public, opportunities for inquiries and proposals, live responses to questions, and the publication of received demands and corresponding responses.

In terms of engagement, the initiative garnered significant participation: 3,606 registrations on the website, 1704 online contributions, 34 neighbourhood meetings spanning 20 neighbourhoods, 38 themed meetings, 9117 views on YouTube, and 2086 participants in meetings, along with six public hearings.

Lessons learnt

- Accessibility is indispensable as the action is realised with different audiences.

- It is necessary to involve the political interest and participation of the Secretariats to make it work.

- Reaching everyone is very complicated even if initiatives are implemented to do so.

Key lessons and recommendations

1. **Empowering communities at an early age by opening up participation to children and young people**

   Democracy and participation are learned by doing, and there is no better way to promote participatory communities than by implementing co-creation and participation practices from early childhood. In schools and other key spaces, children and youngsters can be protagonists of change and not mere spectators.

2. **Define clear objectives and strategies in line with them**

   Any participatory process must have clear and concrete objectives with aligned strategies to achieve them. Ensuring the feasibility of the proposed projects is vital to regain trust in the government and institutions, as communities see their needs met and dreams come true. Participation must be a way to build better cities and territories, and fairer and more efficient policies.

3. **Implement adequate and connected participation channels, methodologies and resources**

   In this note we have presented some examples of successful participatory methodologies. Each context with its specific challenges and circumstances may require different participatory tools. It is important to match objectives with mechanisms, and to coordinate them to leverage efforts from the diversity of stakeholders.

4. **Potentiating coordination between institutions and areas of government**

   Public participation is not a minor task; it requires the effort of all public entities involved to be successful. As illustrated in the cases, it is vital to have a dedicated area in the municipalities and, in addition, to support it with the offices in charge of other relevant public issues, such as finance, gender, parks and public spaces.

5. **Inclusion: think of ways to reach and mobilise all groups**

   We must conceive and implement participation in terms of inclusion to avoid the reproduction of inequalities. It is necessary to consider how to reach out to all groups, especially the most commonly neglected, those who are far from institutions and excluded from traditional processes.

6. **Communication: innovative tools and face-to-face methods to reach as many people as possible**

   Communication strategies are key to promote participation and engage as many people and as diverse as possible. As evidenced in the cases of this note, innovative and digital tools can support amplifying the scope of the strategies or reducing the ecological footprint. However, as learned, it is vital to maintain face-to-face methods to ensure the inclusion of specific groups such as older people, women, children and youth.

7. Monitoring and follow-up of agreements. If there are no results, trust and credibility are lost

It is crucial to provide feedback and follow-up when there are agreements or votes on specific policies. Transparency and traceability are key aspects to ensure that population trust and want to participate again in the local political life.

8. Evaluation and redefinition of participation practices

Like any public policy, participation policies need to be continuously evaluated and reviewed. We must analyse what is being done well and what is not so well to continuously improve and improve. We should not be afraid of innovation, but it is more efficient to start from a factual analysis performed both by the communities with the support of experts.

Participant Local & Regional Governments:

Participatory Budgeting
Alcaldía de Cuenca: Mónica Vargas
Ville de Colombes: Joachim Muller & Laura Monteverdi
Ajuntament de Esplugues de Llobregat: Montse Zamora & Ruth González
Commune de Grez-Doiceau: Julien Vanden Steene & Philippe Goergen
Município de Oeiras: Ana Vieira

Citizen Assemblies and Deliberative Processes
Alcaldía de Bogotá: María Alejandra Victorino Jiménez
City of Brussels: Jonathan Mosković
Município de Lisboa: Josefa Rosado
Comune di Milano: Sara Copelli & Christina Paci

Child and Youth Participation
Gobierno del Estado de Nuevo León: Alejandra Silva Salcido
Municipalidad de General Pueyrredón (Mar del Plata): Federico Chioli & Gabriela Funes Balza
Ayuntamiento de Molina de Segura: José Manuel Mayor Balsas
Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration in Accra Metropolis: Kofi Ocran & Perpetual Lamptey

Inclusive Public Participation
Mersin Metropolitan Municipality: Ghaid Nassi & Nisa Ozgokceler
Mogi das Cruzes: Lara Abreu