



**Cities as Arenas of Political
Innovation in the Strengthening of
Deliberative and Participatory
Democracy**

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION TOOLKIT

October 2024

EUARENAS investigates the ways in which social movements coupled with local government reform initiatives, manifesting themselves in local-level experiments, create momentum for political change that include more inclusive and participatory forms of governance.



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1 About EUARENAS

There are wide-ranging and growing concern about the current state and future of democracy in Europe and beyond. Tangible manifestations of this ‘crisis of democracy’ are, for example, the disillusionment with the current workings of representative modes of democracy and the rise of populism as a purported alternative to ‘elitist politics’. The European Union echoes this concern in the Horizon 2020 Work Programme under which EUARENAS (*‘Cities as Arenas of Political Innovation in the Strengthening of Deliberative and Participatory Democracy’*) has been funded, stating that “citizens’ trust in many public institutions and their capacities to address effectively [contemporary] challenges is weakening while their concerns are increasing” (p7). Another indication for the recognition of the challenges and willingness to address them is also manifested in the creation of the EU’s Competence Centre for Participatory and Deliberative Democracy in 2021.

Designed to both investigate and address these challenges, by developing and testing innovative democratic approaches and tools, EUARENAS worked for almost 4 years on the potential for more inclusive governance in urban contexts by strengthening deliberative and participatory practices. As part of this, the project aimed at the activation of voices and communities who are all too often excluded from such arenas. Working towards that goal, EUARENAS starts from the conviction that cities are “vital political arenas and laboratories for the development of European political life and public sphere and the promotion of inclusion, social agendas and active citizenship”. It is indeed often cities that serve as incubators for democratic innovations which can create momentum for political change in general. Cities are often the drivers that champion more inclusive and participatory forms of governance that can strengthen the link between decision-making and citizens. Consequently, various forms of participatory and deliberative processes have emerged in urban arenas that have the potential to, and are in the process of, transforming governance cultures and structures in European cities.

By its nature, EUARENAS is not your ordinary academic research project. It is a trans-disciplinary and multi-actor project that has engaged social scientists, NGOs, city administrators and local activists from different countries across Europe. Beyond the project consortium, the project and its individual partners have been engaged in a wider, external knowledge exchange processes through the project’s Community of Practice and other dissemination and communication activities.

2 About this Toolkit

Over the time span of almost four years (January 2021 – October 2024), the partners of the EUARENAS project have departed from a bottom-up and practice-oriented perspective on political and democratic innovation while immersing themselves in a variety of questions about how to better facilitate the participation and inclusion of city residents in urban decision and strategy-making processes. The document at hand, the Citizen Participation Toolkit, draws together the results achieved within the project. This deliverable provides an overview and one-stop access point for more in-depth knowledge, findings and resources available within the numerous Deliverables and additional outputs that have been produced as part of the EUARENAS journey.

The aim of this document is thus threefold:



- To summarize the results and knowledge gained from the EUARENAS project
- To provide easy access to more in-depth knowledge, results and resources that have been produced within the different Work Packages or at the project-level
- To showcase and provide access to the tools, guides, methods, toolboxes and other resources that have been developed and tested as part of the EUARENAS project for engaging citizens in political processes

EUARENAS employed a significant variety of methods (background research, community reporting, action research, foresight comparative case studies) which have resulted in new knowledge (validated and valorized through stakeholder interaction and discussions with policy-makers and practitioners) interesting and valid for academia, policy-making as well as practice. Moreover, the research and innovation work in EUARENAS reflects the interlinked nature of theory, method and impact. These interlinkages will be discussed in the following sections.

3 The Role of Theory in the EUARENAS project

A solid theoretical and conceptual framework provides the pillar for any academic research activity. This is especially valid for transdisciplinary and multi-actor projects such as EUARENAS. A solid framework, however, does not mean a static framework, as theoretical debates evolve and develop over time. The connection between the conceptual framework and empirical parts of the project was designed to be both flexible and bidirectional, providing guidance for the practical research work and taking influence and inspiration from the results and experiences for theoretical developments.

On top of providing glossaries and general frameworks to allow for effective mutual communication across empirical and practical parts of the project, the SWPS team responsible for the project's theoretical work decided to adopt a proactive approach and engage with ongoing debates in philosophy and social theory. This has been achieved in multiple steps that can better be systematized in three phases, marked more or less by three deliverables provided in the project's lifespan.

Phase 1 – Mapping the Territory

The initial theoretical framework established at the project's beginning in the form of [D1.1 'Conceptual Framework'](#) was the result of the first six months of the project. The work combined desk-based research with intensive collaborations, discussions, and workshops within the consortium. The main aim of this phase was to “ensure that all project partners ha[d] a shared understanding of the most recent concepts in the field, together with their multiple connotations and meanings” (D1.1: 4). To achieve this, it was crucial to engage with the diverse EUARENAS partners and comprehend the wide range of concepts, assumptions, and needs specific to the planned project work.

In terms of content, the initial Conceptual Framework provides a relevant and logical progression of knowledge and information on the theory of deliberative and participatory democratic developments and innovations. It departs from the key characteristics and problems experienced by representative democracy and proceeds to show how deliberative democracy has been developed to address the shortcomings of representative models. Following this analysis of the epistemic foundations, in the 2nd Section, we move on to show how participatory and deliberative practices have evolved and explore some other approaches that have been applied to challenge traditional democratic practices and strengthen the voice of citizens and residents, such as protests and performance. Finally, some wider societal trends that are significant for and



influence participatory practices are explored, including power and leadership questions, online activism, and populism.

D1.1 has served the project researchers in several ways. By presenting the main theoretical fields relevant to the project, it was a source of critically reviewed concepts and debates, helpful in identifying lacunas, challenges, and uncertainties, that are relevant to EUARENAS research efforts and helping the project partners to frame their own activities within these wider contexts and debates. Moreover, the Conceptual Framework also contributed to a shared understanding of concepts among project researchers with various academic and disciplinary backgrounds. Another device that was developed by the EUARENAS team to solidify such a language infrastructure – a shared understanding of key terms and concepts – in the form of an EUARENAS Glossary. To this end, the academic partners came together in three online meetings and one face-to-face meeting at the early stages of the project to build a glossary of 33 ‘operational’ terms/concepts. The results of this work have been published in [The EUARENAS Working Paper Series 1](#).

There has also been an active presence of theoretical frameworks in the preparatory phase of other work packages. Theories of co-governance and inclusion summarized in the theoretical and methodological work packages informed the overall research design, providing grounding for quantitative research and qualitative categories in the case study, piloting and foresight work in the project. Throughout this collaboration process with leading teams in the preparatory phase for this more empirical work, these methodological frameworks have been fine-tuned to resonate with general conceptual debates on urban participatory and deliberative governance outlined in [D1.2 ‘State of Democracy Debate’](#). Such a dualistic approach is a consequence of the project’s complex and multi-faceted characteristic, which requires engaging various and sometimes even contradictory paradigms – systemic and interpretative. We explained this relationship in detail in further documents (D1.2: 3-7, 47-52), turning it into a theoretical intervention itself.

Phase 2 – Deepening the Research

After outlining the key conceptual areas and orientating research questions, methods, and tools toward them, efforts were redirected toward contemporary theoretical debates from a range of disciplines represented in the consortium. While the majority of the work involved a critical literature review, our most valuable findings came from deepening our understanding of the inevitable differences that surround key concepts and values depending on the background represented by various scholars and practitioners in the consortium. Through workshops and debates, we have discussed concepts such as participation, deliberation, inclusion, empowerment, and diversity to paint a richness of possible understandings of these particular terms from various practical and academic perspectives. This allowed us to indicate several opportunities for theoretical interventions by introducing new perspectives and interpretations in addition to the rich evidence gathered in the project’s lifespan.

The key outcome of the second phase was [D1.2 ‘State of Democracy Debate’](#). This dense document synthesizes the most important theoretical debates and groundings of the project and provides a comprehensive set of references. Its role is to guide consortium members and interested parties through the weeds of theoretical developments and pinpoint certain lacunas, loopholes, or inconsistencies that are awaiting evidence-based interventions. The State of Democracy Debate document is set to inspire new interpretations and understanding of the project activities and provide a conceptual background for forthcoming publications. The report starts with outlining discussions on the crisis of democracy on local, national, and EU levels. The next three chapters focus on three key project areas: urban politics, deliberation, and participation. We focus on themes that are still seen as problematic, pointing to potential pitfalls in making local co-governance fully democratic.



Phase 3 – Translating the Outcomes

After mapping and preparing the conceptual territory for development, we tended to cultivate our findings by fertilizing them with the research outcomes of the project. This was possible thanks to our constant engagement as collaborators in other parts of the project work via conducting empirical research, preparing and participating in various workshops, and discussing the preliminary and results. Close collaboration between partners allowed theoretical development to happen with a close entanglement with all empirical, practical, and future-oriented parts of the project. Based on our assessment of these developments, we have outlined a range of topics and fields where a theoretical development can be meaningful and timely. These were discussed during the a consortium meeting in Gdańsk, and amended towards a skeleton of our final deliverable [D1.3 'Updated Conceptual Framework'](#), in which we depict how the EUARENAS project can elucidate most contemporary dilemmas within the urban participatory and deliberative governance theories.

In the end, the content of the Updated Conceptual Framework provides an extensive examination of various themes that emerged during the project, sketching original interventions to recent debates and developing our own theoretical concepts. This deliverable pivots around the complexities and nuances of participatory and deliberative democracy, highlighting the need to transcend the binary categorization intricate to many frameworks, such as bottom-up and top-down approaches; government-civil society; or dialogue–conflict opposition. The project has revealed that these simplifications often fail to capture the intricate power dynamics within participatory processes, where roles and influences blur, instead providing a more integrated and holistic understanding of co-governance. Following these assumptions, one novel conceptual theme discussed in the Updated Conceptual Framework is the "Piano of Participation," serving as a metaphor for the multifaceted nature of civic engagement (see Figure 1). This conceptual framework emphasizes the importance of recognizing and incorporating diverse voices and perspectives into the deliberative process. Unlike the traditional "ladder of participation," which implies a hierarchical progression, the "Piano" indicates fluid and dynamic interactions among stakeholders. Furthermore, the document addresses the role of cognitive capabilities in ensuring inclusivity in deliberation. It highlights the need to design participatory processes that accommodate the diverse cognitive and psychological needs of participants. This includes recognizing and mitigating the barriers faced by often marginalized groups, such as older adults and neurodivergent individuals. Such considerations are crucial for fostering an environment where more voices can be heard and respected, enhancing the quality and outcomes of the deliberative processes while acknowledging the `inevitable forces that keep on excluding "Others".



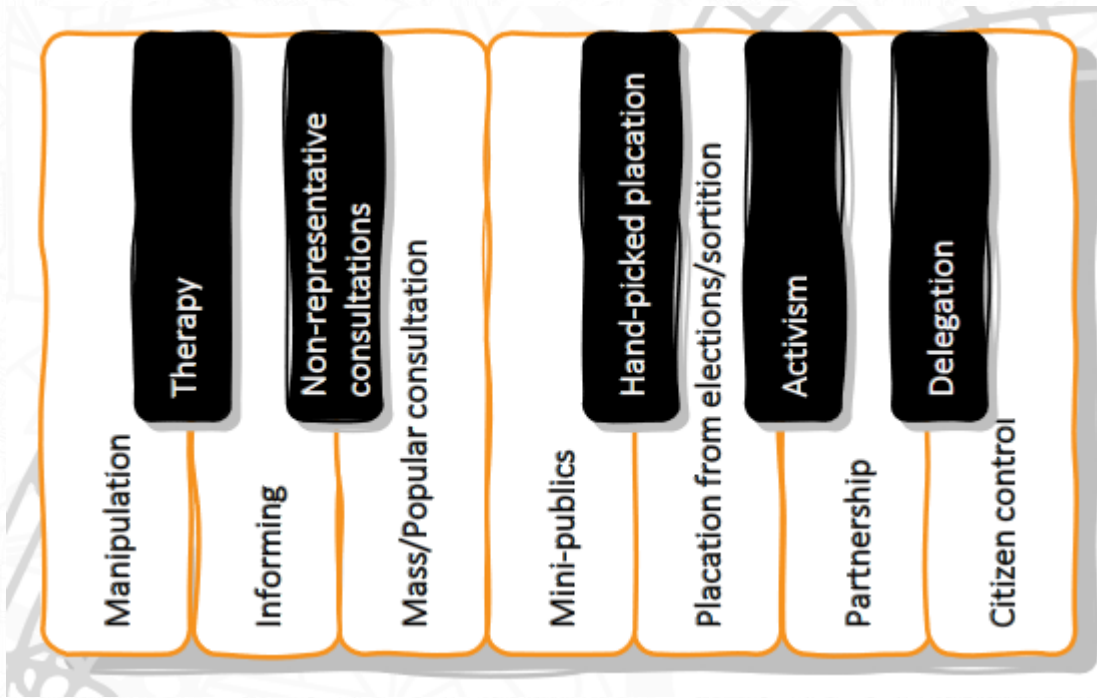


Figure 1 The Piano of Participation

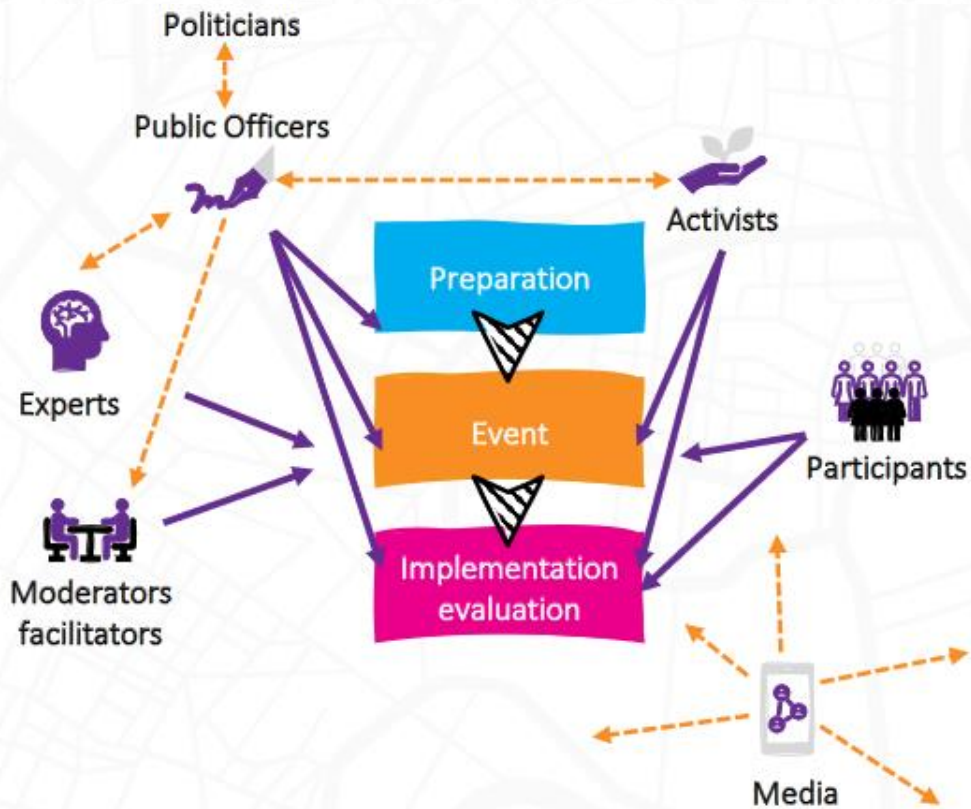


Figure 2 Three Stages of Deliberative and Participatory Practices



The final chapters of the Updated Conceptual Framework further focus on the interplay of power within deliberative and participatory practices. The discussion begins by breaking down the process into three critical stages: preparation, implementation, and evaluation (see Figure 2). In the preparation stage, the document highlights the influential role of politicians, public officials, and governance experts who influence the topic and select appropriate techniques. The preparation phase sets the foundational rules that shape the deliberations, guiding the outcomes toward assumed policy goals while aiming for recommendations that are relevant and achievable. The implementation stage focuses on the actual conduct of the participatory event and underscores the need for flexibility to accommodate improvisations and adjustments as the event progresses. Here, the roles of other stakeholders come to the forefront. Moderators and facilitators play a pivotal role in guiding the discussion and managing conflicts. Their proactive involvement is often in maintaining a balanced and productive dialogue, steering between genuine deliberation, expert inputs, ideological contexts, and political expectations and legal constraints of local governments. In the evaluation stage, the focus shifts to the aftermath of the participatory event, where the implementation of decisions and public discussions about the outcomes take place. This stage involves assessing the impact of the deliberation, learning from the process, and determining the feasibility of implementing the recommendations. Politicians and public officials again play a significant role here, as they have the authority to enact the outcomes.

The document also addresses the concept of "PR-ticipation," where participatory processes are utilized more for public relations purposes rather than genuine engagement. While a complex political context is inevitable in the processes we study, we observe situations in which they are distorted by personal interests and perspectives that make broadly understood "participation" as a mere goal to achieve their aims. This phenomenon can undermine the authenticity and effectiveness of participatory practices. Political PR-ticipation often manifests when authorities organize events to create an image of inclusivity and democracy but fail to incorporate the outcomes meaningfully into policy decisions. Such practices can lead to disillusionment among participants and the broader public. Beyond political PR-ticipation, the Updated Conceptual Framework identifies similar tendencies in civic and expert domains. Civic PR-ticipation occurs when NGOs and social movements engage in participatory processes not to contribute constructively but to oppose authorities and bolster their own visibility. This form of engagement is often marked by a confrontational stance, prioritizing public sentiment and organizational goals over genuine cooperation. Similarly, expert PR-ticipation involves consultants and researchers who promote participatory methods primarily to advance their professional agendas. These actors may emphasize positive outcomes and downplay challenges, inflating expectations and leading to greater disenchantment with participatory processes. By recognizing the different forms of PR-ticipation and their manifestations, stakeholders can be more vigilant and critical in their approach to organizing and participating in these events.

Another chapter in the document has also been inspired by one of the reviewer's comments made during the second project's review, suggesting conceptual research on the particularity of urban populism. Not surprisingly, we have noted multiple encounters with various populist attitudes and argumentations in the EUARENAS case studies and pilots, pinpointing several traces typical to urban populism(s) across Europe. By understanding this phenomenon as a discursive political strategy, the study identifies two primary strands of urban populism: conservative and progressive. Conservative urban populism typically centers on protecting individual freedoms perceived as threatened by policies such as restrictions on vehicle use to reduce congestion or improve air quality. This group tends to favour direct democratic actions like referenda, believing that straightforward, "common sense" solutions should prevail without the need for complex deliberative processes. Their engagement in participatory events often manifests as resistance to compromise or negotiation, posing significant challenges to fostering productive dialogue and consensus



On the other hand, progressive urban populism is driven by a desire for rapid and radical improvements in public infrastructure and social services, often aligning with broader European standards and policies. Progressive populists advocate for more inclusive and participatory governance, yet their approach can be equally uncompromising. They often consist of middle-class professionals who are well-versed in deliberative practices and aim to leverage rational public discourse to push their agendas. This group is typically more supportive of EU policies but remains critical of local elites, whom they perceive as barriers to their vision of urban development. The challenge here lies in integrating their often well-researched and data-driven proposals into a broader consensus without alienating other stakeholders. Both forms of urban populism, despite their differences, share a common skepticism towards the existing political system and its actors, complicating efforts to create genuinely inclusive and deliberative urban governance processes.

Overall, the final chapters of D1.3 compile a comprehensive framework for a deeper understanding of power dynamics within participatory and deliberative practices. By examining the roles and influences of various stakeholders and the stages of the participatory process, the document provides valuable insights into designing and implementing more effective and inclusive deliberative events. At the same time, we use these theoretical conclusions and concepts to design new research ideas, allowing us to foster an understanding of urban participatory governance. This dual entanglement marks our suspicion of the theory-practice divide often invoked in terms of research and innovation actions on participatory governance, showcasing them as intrinsically connected and in tension with each other.

The theoretical involvement in the project does not end here, though. Having established the foundation and gathered new ideas, EUARENAS now embarks on an intensified and extended phase of disseminating and exploiting its results. With the conclusion of the data gathering and analysis processes, our intuitions and concepts are yet to be tested and fine-tuned against the vast body of knowledge from the project.

4 The EUARENAS Methodological Framework

The project's methodological framework was developed by consortium partner Guido Carli University (LUISS) to facilitate the analysis and evaluation of data produced by the other project components. This framework included the creation of a bias-free methodology and ensuring compliance with ethical principles such as privacy and non-discrimination. The methodological work began with the research team drafting two documents: D2.1 Methodological Framework and D2.2 EURMAP Methodological Protocol for internal use within the consortium. The Methodological Framework defined essential concepts for the EUARENAS projects, such as experimental urbanism, deliberative democracy, and co-governance, within a social justice perspective. EURMAP Methodological Protocol then translated this reference framework into tools and steps to follow for the concrete application of these principles in pilot projects, hence a methodological protocol for practical use. It also enhanced the foundational approach of the Methodological Framework by creating a comprehensive "Pilot Project Cycle" to test these theoretical principles, ensuring just and inclusive participation processes. It structured a toolkit for practical application, helping cities democratize their policy processes. The document also included preliminary guidelines on participant diversity, engagement, and influence, central to designing just co-governance systems. These documents were updated over the course of the project, resulting in the production of D2.4 Updated Methodological Protocol EURMAP. The updated methodological protocol improved the previous one by directly integrating feedback received from the project reviewers, the consortium partners, the EUARENAS Community of Practice and international external advisors involved during the project's consortium meeting in Reggio Emilia in May 2022. The authors revised the protocol to provide more explicit guidelines on the principles of diversity, inclusion, influence, and engagement in deliberative democracy processes. This involved detailing how to engage specific target



groups, such as children and marginalized communities, and offering clearer criteria for ensuring that citizens have influence over decision-making processes. Moreover, the LUISS team worked on providing a more detailed explanation of diversity and inclusion, breaking down specific social categories like gender, age, and ethnicity to ensure the proper representation of various social groups in pilot projects. The Updated Methodological Protocol EURMAP now also included a table that the EUARENAS pilot cities, as well as any interested city or municipality, can use to guide the inclusion of diverse groups into democratic practices. The adaptability of the methodology to various contexts was a primary focus in the methodological work. This principle also guided the drafting of the impact assessment methodology developed as part of the project. In both methodologies, LUISS stressed the importance of experimentalism, which involves testing, adjusting, and refining participatory and deliberative democracy processes in urban settings. Experimentalism is framed as a continuous learning process that helps adapt governance models to local conditions. Both methodological protocols that have been developed as part of the project (EURMAP and EURARI Index) see cities as laboratories for this experimentation, where different actors can co-design, co-programme and co-manage different tools for implementing solutions. This experimental methodology profoundly impacted the entire project, as it was closely linked to and reverberated through the piloting activities - employing an Action Research approach to engage in a reflexive manner with piloting activities and interpret results - and theoretical development. The pilot cities served as experimentation grounds to evaluate different governance models and participatory processes in real urban contexts. The aim was to understand how these models can be tailored and adapted to specific territories and their governance challenges. These considerations also informed specific policy recommendations on selecting and adapting various Participatory and Deliberative Tools (PDTs), which can be found in [D7.4 Policy Brief 2](#), and [D7.6 Policy Brief 3](#).

As was stated earlier, the analysis of the impact produced by the experimental piloting activities in the four EUARENAS pilot cities was fully integrated with the wider methodological work for the project through the [EURARI Index \(D8.2\)](#). Based on an initial context analysis, the EURARI Index determined the 'how, what and when' measuring the impact of the EUARENAS project in the various context of applications of the different pilot cities. This index starts off by measuring the starting territorial conditions for achieving project objectives. LUISS was also responsible for monitoring the progress and assessing the impact of activities across other work packages, ensuring alignment with the project's goals. The LUISS team continuously listened and dialogued with pilot cities representatives, Community of Practice members, and other Work Package partners in weekly meetings, discussing both direct and indirect outcomes, facilitating collaboration among stakeholders, comparison of results, connecting experiences for problem-solving.

The [EURARI Index](#) specifically presents an impact assessment model built on prior relevant EU experiences and customized for the EUARENAS project, focusing on assessing the impact of deliberative and participatory democracy initiatives at the local level. This model categorizes impact into three dimensions – social, political, and urban/environmental - detailing the methodology for the impact assessment and offering a wide range of indicators to evaluate each of those dimensions. The document, moreover, embraces the methodology adopted in the project (i.e. the co-governance cycle), underlining the importance of the process of impact assessment in all its different phases and the relevance of impact as preliminary condition and driver for the development of impact-oriented change.

The subsequent [Report of The Direct and Indirect Outcomes on The EUARENAS Project \(D.8.4\)](#) provides a complete impact assessment of the deliberative and participatory democracy initiatives implemented by the three EUARENAS pilot cities: Gdansk, Reggio Emilia and Vöru. Following the monitoring carried out at different stages of project implementation, it applies the EURARI Index to



concrete cases, measuring for them the social, political, and urban/environmental impacts, and comparing the expected versus the achieved outcomes. The report also discusses more in general the lessons learned from data collection and stakeholder feedback.

5 Learning from Past Practices: the Case Study Approach

A fundamental part of the EUARENAS research work revolved around the implementation of 11 case studies that explored and reviewed several urban deliberative and participatory initiatives/experiments in 10 European countries of different rank and size. The focus here was on learning from the past, i.e. on practices and tools that have already been implemented to increase the effectiveness of participatory and deliberative democracy. Under the lead of the University of Gdansk, particular emphasis was placed on the analysis of the methods, processes and tools applied in these innovative urban experiments, thus providing a broad yet in-depth perspective on experience with urban democratic innovations in Europe. The focus was not only placed on the actual processes and activities that formed these democratic innovations, but also on the underlying conditioning factors and operating environments that shape the practices over time and in local (urban) settings.

The implementation and analysis of 11 individual cases already produced a wealth of in-depth and contextualized knowledge. Moreover, the cross-case analysis conducted between the cases and the resulting body of knowledge and information provided an opportunity to address a number of synthetic research questions contributing to the overall research agenda of EUARENAS and providing valuable information for researchers and policymakers alike.

The case study work included a robust sequence of tasks that were carried out by local research teams (EUARENAS partners) under the guidance of the University of Gdansk. The steps included the selection of the case studies, desk-based research of existing knowledge on the cases investigated (review of secondary sources and media content analysis), field research that included community reporting and focus interviews with both citizens and stakeholders. Finally, final data analysis of individual case-studies and their cross-case analysis was conducted under the auspices of the University of Gdansk,

Especially for an academic audience, the evolution, modification and adaptation of the case study methodology over the course of the project, adapting it to specific contexts and changing conditions as the project progressed, might be of interest. The process of change and adaptation, triggered for example by new questions that emerged during the project or apparent limitations in the data, can be followed along the [Initial](#), the [Mid-term](#) and the [Final case study reports](#), which thoroughly detail the steps and modifications involved.

Table 1 lists the 11 case studies that have been produced in the EUARENAS project. Of these, three originated from cities where also EUARENAS piloting activities took place (Gdańsk, Reggio Emilia and Vöru) (see section 6), while the remaining cities were selected to represent a diverse range of participatory and deliberative methods from various regions across Europe.

Table 1 Case studies in the EUARENAS project (source: Final Case Study Report: 4)



Participatory/deliberative process	City/town	Country
The Deal for Communities	Wigan	United Kingdom
Citizen Jury	Galway	Ireland
Quartiersmanagement Pankstraße	Berlin	Germany
Borough Liaison Officers*	Helsinki	Finland
Citizens' Assembly	Copenhagen	Denmark
Quartiere Bene Comune	Reggio Emilia	Italy
Participatory Budgeting	Gdańsk	Poland
Citizens' Assembly	Wrocław	Poland
Office for Community Participation	Budapest	Hungary
Social Hackathon	Võru	Estonia
Socialising Cultural Policy	Wrocław	Poland

Summaries of the 11 individual Case Studies are available in the [Guide to the EUARENAS Case Studies](#) (see Figure 3 for an example) and on the EUARENAS website in form of [ArcGIS Story Maps](#). Each summary focuses on, first, the "urban arena", i.e. the context and background within which the case at hand is implemented. Secondly, the underlying idea and approach behind each participatory/deliberative process is described, also assessing how these were implemented and worked in practice. Thirdly, each summary highlights the successes and failures and draws some basic conclusions that could be useful for cities wanting to replicate, emulate or adapt similar practices. See the insert box below for an example of the case study summaries described above.

Figure 3 An example of a case study summary
(source: Guide to the EUARENAS Case Studies: 26)

Quartiere Bene Comune in Reggio Emilia

Reggio Emilia, a provincial capital and among the top-performing Italian and European cities, stands out for its thriving economy, high social capital indexes, and a well-established network of welfare and educational services provided by both the public sector and third-sector organisations. Leveraging its vibrant social fabric, the municipality has actively pursued the goal of enhancing citizen activism to implement the principles and practices of horizontal subsidiarity. This involves citizen participation in designing and implementing public policies, aligning with the administrative decentralisation that began in 1970 to focus citizens on their neighbourhoods and foster a "critical" relationship with the municipality.

Introduced in 2014, the Quartiere Bene Comune (QUA) programme employs the innovative Co-City Protocol, founded on the concept of an urban neighbourhood as a commons. This approach emphasises collaborative and polycentric governance of diverse urban resources—physical, environmental, cultural, knowledge, and digital—termed "commons." These commons are managed or co-owned through contractual or institutionalised public-community or public-private-community partnerships. QUA aims to establish an advanced collaborative model in which communities can design and implement innovative solutions tailored to their needs. The policy addresses a range of challenges: transforming participation into civic protagonism, introducing a new administrative paradigm and a more effective and efficient model of "public-community partnership" for service production, and enhancing social cohesion by fostering collaboration among various stakeholders, including citizens, third-sector organisations, and the municipality. Accordingly, the aim is to make stakeholders co-protagonists throughout the collaborative action's life cycle, from analysis and option selection to solution definition, project management, result evaluation, and impact reporting.

The QUA model is rooted in a place-based approach and community involvement. Mutual trust and open, two-way communication between citizens and the municipality are pivotal elements, ensuring commitments and responsibilities are shared for a successful process. The dedicated Department of Competitiveness and Social Innovation, equipped with experienced municipal staff adept in managing participatory processes, contributes significantly to QUA's effectiveness.

However, QUA does exhibit some shortcomings. Notably, it faces inclusivity challenges, with underrepresentation of certain citizen categories (e.g., young people, foreigners, those not typically engaged in participatory projects). Additionally, there's a shared perception that not all potentially interested citizens are involved. Some individuals are repeatedly engaged in various contexts for voluntary activities and co-planning initiatives. Sustainability of collaborative projects over the medium and long term is another critical issue, as prolonged implementation might erode trust between citizens and the municipality. Lastly, confining collaborative projects within neighbourhood boundaries risks fragmenting outcomes from the citywide perspective.

In addition, the University of Gdansk team developed a typology of cases based on the key criteria that characterize the case study processes. This typology includes 17 dimensions/variables through which the



case studies are classified based on their inherent characteristics along variables such as adopted method, spatial scale, temporal dimension and level of participation. This typology is further elaborated on in the [Final Case Study Report](#).

The results of the cross-case analysis are presented in form of answers to the eight research questions that were formulated at the beginning and refined over the course of the project for the purpose of the case study research:

1. How do local democratic governance innovations emerge and to what extent they are the product of learning from other local governance contexts?
2. What actor constellations and agendas in these governance innovations?
3. Which are the key drivers that influence or bias democratic governance experiments?
4. What is the potential of change/adaptation of the process to the changing conditions?
5. Which factors determine the effectiveness of governance innovations?
6. Which practices and institutional arrangements best facilitate citizen engagement and co-governance and democratize the local governance?
7. How do the innovations relate with regional, national and supranational levels?
8. How universal for implementation in other places and to other levels of governance successful local governance innovations can be?

These eight research questions served as operational guidelines, determining the directions for the research on the Case Studies, which was also informed by the work of other research teams in the consortium, especially the ones engaged in Piloting (see section 6) and Foresight (section 8), as well as theoretical and conceptual work within the project (section 3 and 4). At the outset of the project, it was assumed that the knowledge obtained from the case study research would inform the design and implementation of the piloting activities. However, due to delays in the research activities, primarily caused by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the intensification of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the work on the two components proceeded in parallel. Consequently, the knowledge exchange was predominantly bilateral, facilitating a more robust and mutually beneficial relationship between the two components. This knowledge exchange occurred on a regular basis, during weekly online meetings organised by the coordinators of the Piloting process since Year 2 of the project, as well as via occasional workshops and other meetings among members of the EUARENAS consortium.

As the project progressed, the work on Case Studies shifted from individual to cross-case analysis. This was due to several factors. Firstly, the Piloting activities required a comparative focus for knowledge transfer. Secondly, the large number of processes made juxtaposition more relevant than tracking individual stories. Finally, the EUARENAS Toolbox (developed with WP3's input) provided sufficient overviews of 'stories' across various urban contexts.

The detailed findings of the cross-case analysis can be found in the [Final Case Study Report](#). In this document, the focus is on the key results and takeaways of the case study approach, grouped under two headings: general findings and common guidelines for successful participatory and deliberative innovations.

General findings



The objective of selecting case studies in participatory and deliberative democracy at the local level was to examine a range of processes that vary in terms of several factors, including geographical region and quality of co-governance culture, position in the country’s urban hierarchy, applied methods and approaches, and spatial scale (see Table 2). This provides a comprehensive overview of the diverse procedures and contexts. However, the inherent complexity of such diversity poses a challenge to the process of comparison and contrast, given the inevitable tension between the potential for transferability and the crucial role of local and process-specific conditions.

Table 2 Typologies concerning methods and approaches across case studies (source: Final Case Study Report: 16)

		Borough Liaison Officers HEL	Citizen Jury (PeopleTalk) GAL	Citizens' Assembly CPH	Citizens' Assembly WRO	Deal for Communities WIG	Office for Comm. Particip. BUD	Participatory Budgeting GDK	Quartiere Bene Comune RE	Q-management Pankestr. BER	Social Hackathon VOR	Social. Cult. Policy WRO
Method / technique	open participation	●				●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	participatory / delib. bodies involved in co-governance	●				●		●	●	●		●
	minipublics		●	●	●						●	
Approach	non-deliberative	●				●	●					●
	deliberative		●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Spatial scale of the process	district / neighbourhood	●				●	●	●	●	●		
	municipal			●	●	●	●					●
	regional		●								●	
Frequency mode	one-off		●	●	●							
	annual event since the launch						●				●	
	permanent/ continuous process	●				●	●	●	●	●		●

Our findings indicate that despite the diversity of the processes, the factors affecting/conditioning participatory and deliberative processes share common features, thereby rendering an interpretative approach to participation and deliberation feasible (as outlined in EU ARENAS Deliverable [State of Democracy Debate](#): 47-52). Furthermore, they have the potential to facilitate knowledge exchange, thus contributing to both empirical work and conceptual development within the project and beyond.

One of the principal findings to emerge from the cross-case analysis of the 11 innovations was that the relative importance of different factors varies depending on the stage of the participatory or deliberative process. To illustrate, a set of 15 factors has been identified as playing a significant role in determining the effectiveness of innovations across all cases. However, the relative importance of these factors varies depending on the stage of the participatory or deliberative process under consideration (Table 3). This particular finding was of significant importance for the updating of the conceptual framework and, subsequently, for the creation of the evaluation framework for piloting in EUARENAS.



Table 3 Factors affecting effectiveness of the analysed innovations at different stages of process implementation(source: Final Case Study Report: 34)

Implementation stage	Factor
Planning and pre-arrangements	Level of political independence (of the city where the experiment takes place)
	Political orientation of the local authorities
	Broader political context
	Legal procedures on the state level (level of bureaucracy, complexity of procedures)
	General level of knowledge on the process among the stakeholders/actors/participants (information provided by the organisers)
	Result-oriented approach (hierarchy of goals, focus on constructive solutions not criticism, addressing real problems)
	Willingness to share power
	Media campaign promoting the process
Implementation	Legal procedures on the state level (level of bureaucracy, complexity of procedures)
	Constant evaluation and adaptation
	Communication channels (direct in-person contact)
	Attitudes, skills and knowledge of people running/managing the process
	General level of knowledge on the process among the stakeholders/actors/participants (information provided by the organisers)
	Result-oriented approach (hierarchy of goals, focus on constructive solutions not criticism, addressing real problems)
	Level of citizen engagement (ensuring diversity, accessibility, inclusiveness)
	Level of trust (atmosphere of being heard, citizen ownership of the process, proper status of people taking part in the process, leadership, collaboration with NGOs and neighbourhood associations)
Completion and reporting	Constant evaluation and adaptation
	Legal procedures on the state level (level of bureaucracy, complexity of procedures)
	Communicating results to the citizens
	Willingness to share power
	Implementation of the agreed solutions (when they are implemented as well)

Common guidelines for successful participatory and deliberative innovations

The search for answers to research questions has led to the identification of key guidelines of success which appear to be universal, regardless of the local context, and thus transferable. In accordance with the metaphor proposed in the conclusion of the Final Report on Piloting ([link to D4.3](#)), which compares deliberative tools to jazz improvisation, combining spontaneous creativity with a set of rules and predetermined themes, these guidelines account for the latter. These include:

- **Flexibility, adaptability, constant evaluation and learning** - innovations must be regarded as unique social experiences that resist standardisation. Consequently, they require responsive administrative and management systems and techniques.
- **Subsidiarity** – innovations must be implemented as close to the residents as possible, from the neighbourhood level upwards.
- **Humanistic approach** – diversity and inclusion must be ensured, emotions must be recognised as valuable, mutual trust between all actors involved must be secured, and the conditions for participants to meet in physical space and interact face-to-face should be provided. Transparency and effective communication are indispensable.



- **Acknowledgement of conflict** – disagreements and conflicting interests should be regarded not only as threats but also as opportunities, providing conditions for a better mutual understanding among actors.
- **Result-oriented approach** – problem-solving and changemaking should be prioritised, and good (political) will and long-term commitment recognised as vital for sustainable cooperation, collaboration, engagement and impact.
- **The principle of “less is more”** – relies on realisation that complex procedures and/or (over)abundance of innovations can be counterproductive.
- **Systemic change and paradigm shift** – holistic approach and moving from a focus on individual responsibility and entrepreneurship to collective action are essential in mainstreaming innovations into local democracy.

The EUARENAS Library of Citizens' Stories

The EUARENAS project consortium actively utilized the Community Reporting methodology in their empirical investigations for case studies and foresight work. For former, this approach involved collecting lived experience stories to enrich the case study research in each city. For foresight, community reporting was utilized to gather people’s lived experience of democracy and explore signals about the future of democracy. For both Work Packages, the Community Reporting methodology was used.

Developed in 2007, Community Reporting has been employed across Europe as a mixed methodological approach for enhancing citizen participation in research, policy-making, service development, and decision-making processes. It uses digital, portable technologies to support people to tell their own stories, in their own ways via peer-to-peer approaches. Through gathering, curating, and mobilising, it is then to connect these stories with the people, groups and organisations who are in a position to use the insights within them to make positive social change. As part of their work in the EUARENAS project, partner People’s Voice Media has created [the Lived Experience, Storytelling, and Foresight Guide](#). This guide offers valuable insights on how to utilize personal stories as a foundation for identifying future trends and exploring potential futures.

30 individual Citizen Stories collected for the EUARENAS project from citizens living in Gdansk (Poland), Berlin (Germany), Voru (Estonia), Galway (Ireland), Reggio Emilia (Italy) and Wigan (United Kingdom) can be watched online [HERE](#).

6 Piloting participatory and deliberative practices in European cities

The EUARENAS project embarked on an ambitious journey to pilot and experiment with participatory and deliberative practices across three diverse European cities—Gdansk (Poland), Reggio Emilia (Italy), and Võru County (Estonia). Under the leadership of Comparative Research Network (CRN), the goal was to explore innovative approaches to citizen engagement and deliberation to enhance democratic processes at the local level. The detailed summary and analyses of the process can be found in the [Final Report on EUARENAS Piloting \(D4.3\)](#). The pilot activities also served the EUARENAS project as a living lab for various investigations related to other work packages (WPs). Specifically, they contributed valuable insights to the [Updated](#)



[Conceptual Framework \(D.1.3.\)](#) through a series of conceptual discussions held with the pilot cities during June and July 2023. The cities and their coordinating teams were also active participants in the foresight research activities and contributed to the formulation of the [Future Scenarios Report of Cities \(see Section 8\)](#). Moreover, WP4 exchanged information and methodology with WP8 on impact assessment and in this way contributed to the [Report on the Direct and Indirect Outcomes of the EUARENAS project \(D8.4.\)](#).

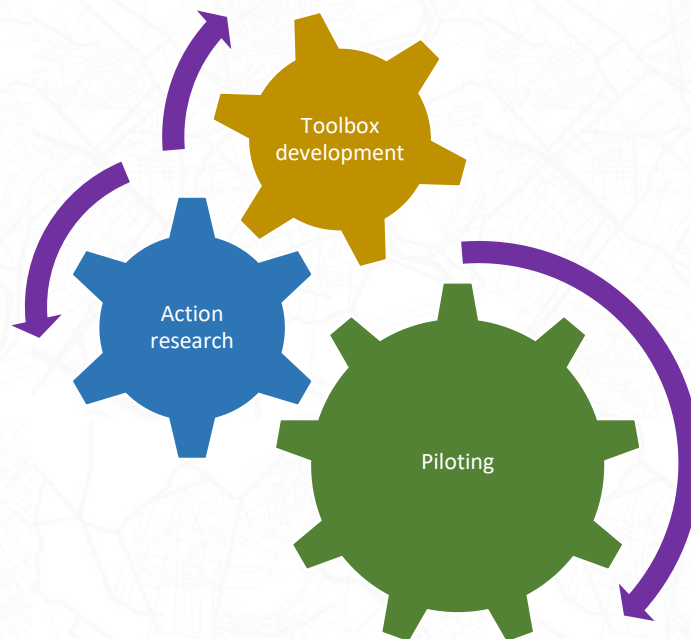
The Piloting was structured around three interconnected pillars (see Figure 4):

Piloting: Implementing participatory processes in urban areas.

Action research: Conducting practice-based analysis to understand and improve the use of participatory tools and methods.

Toolbox development: Creating an experimental toolbox informed by the experiences and analyses from the pilot cities

Figure 4 The interactive elements of the piloting



The methodological framework for the pilots was based on Action Research (AR), Living Labs (LL), and Design Thinking (DT), all operating in iterative cycles to ensure continuous learning, stakeholder engagement, and practical application of participatory tools. AR provided a robust framework for continuous improvement through real-time feedback and iterative refinement, facilitating a self-reflective cycle of planning, action, observation, and re-planning. LLs situated activities in real-life environments, supporting user-driven innovation and co-creation of solutions by acting as intermediaries among citizens, research organizations, companies, and local governments. DT emphasized a user-centered, iterative, and collaborative approach, ensuring that solutions were aligned with target group needs through close cooperation with participants from identifying needs to finalizing solutions.

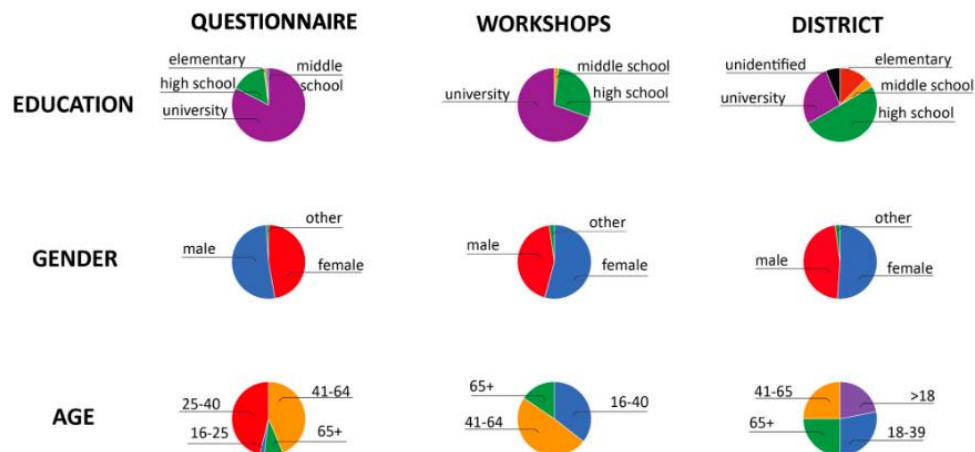
Gdansk: Transforming City Planning



Gdansk, with its rich history of public participation initiatives such as [participatory budgeting \(PB\)](#) and citizen engagement in social policy co-creation, embarked on a pilot project under the EUARENAS initiative to deepen and enhance its democratic processes. The city aimed to introduce new methods connected to deliberative democracy and increase citizen involvement in urban planning, as outlined in the New Development Strategy of 2030.

Inspired by the citizen assemblies approach, which emphasizes diversity and broad representation among participants, the Gdansk team allowed residents to apply for participation in the workshops and used selection criteria to ensure inclusivity. Two series of workshops were held: [the first in Piecki Migowo](#), a district situated in a transitional area between the city center and suburbs, and a second series was organised in a transition area between the city centre and the outskirts, and a second in Żuławy Gdańskie, a semi rural neighbourhood situated at the city boundaries. The aim of both workshops was to pilot a participatory planning process that would serve as the basis for the Master Plan of the area.

Figure 5 Composition of the participants at the workshops in Piecki Migowo



The action plan for the pilot was prepared by the Department of Social Development of the City of Gdansk. Initially, the focus was on conducting participatory workshops in Piecki Migowo. These workshops aimed to gather input from residents, social activists, and municipal officials to integrate citizen perspectives into the Master Plan. The Gdansk team prioritized inclusivity in the recruitment process to ensure a representative participant base. An extensive outreach campaign was conducted using various communication channels to ensure broad participation (see Figure 5).

The participatory workshops had several notable outcomes:

- Positive change in municipal support - initially skeptical, the City Architect’s Office became supportive after witnessing the success of the first workshops. This support facilitated the replication of the participatory model in another district.
- Enhanced community engagement - the workshops improved communication between the city and its residents, fostering a better understanding of local needs and conditions.
- Empowerment of local leaders - community leaders played a significant role in the planning process, enhancing their engagement and influence.



- Improved methodologies - the pilot led to better evaluation practices, which informed subsequent workshops and activities.

The Gdansk pilot project successfully demonstrated the potential of participatory planning processes to enhance urban governance and community engagement. By addressing initial challenges and leveraging the strengths of the participatory approach, the project made significant strides toward more inclusive and sustainable urban planning. The insights and methodologies developed during the pilot provide valuable lessons for future projects aiming to foster deliberative democracy and citizen participation in urban planning.

Reggio Emilia: Strengthening Collaborative Governance and Community Well-being

Reggio Emilia's pilot was based on a long experience of participatory processes linked to the [management of urban commons](#). As the follow up of these previous projects, the aim of the EUARENAS pilot was to strengthen dialogue between different city districts and the administration, improve the community's quality of life and well-being, and promote social and climate justice. The city aimed to institutionalize participatory decision-making and create a territorial co-governance system based on the quintuple helix model, involving inhabitants and stakeholders in local administration through a network of elected and non-elected local representatives known as the "[Consulte](#)."

The concept was to create a legally-binding co-governance system that includes nine neighborhood councils (Consulte), each representing different territorial areas of Reggio Emilia. These councils were formed through elections where citizens could spontaneously self-candidate. The elected members, along with non-elected and permanently invited components, would engage in structured dialogue with the administration to plan joint actions and improve community well-being.

To implement the pilot, Reggio Emilia used several methods. Approximately 25 listening assemblies were conducted in neighborhoods to gather input from residents. Customized surveys were distributed in three neighborhoods, with plans to extend them to six more, aiming to identify the most pressing issues for each council. Training sessions were held on co-programming tools and the Hamlet digital platform to support the councils' work. Additionally, email addresses were activated for each council, and council information was included on the municipality's website. Empathy maps were conducted with municipal employees to better understand their perspectives.

The pilot involved a diverse group of stakeholders, including municipal technical staff, consultants, developers, voluntary associations, public and private schools, labor unions, trade associations, informal citizens' groups, social centers, city government, and academia. This ecosystem was built on Reggio Emilia's strong tradition of participatory governance.

The sustainability of the pilot actions in Reggio Emilia is supported by the municipality's commitment to integrating some of the Consulte's decisions into the city plan and establishing the first Neighborhood Climate Contract. The successful model of Consulte has the potential for replication in other areas of Reggio Emilia and beyond. The Reggio Emilia pilot successfully demonstrated the potential of participatory governance to enhance urban planning and community well-being.





Võru: Upgrading Social Hackathons for Policy Making

Võru County aimed to upgrade its [existing social hackathons](#) into a policy-making tool, known as political hackathons, to empower the active participation of youth and retain young people in the area. The social hackathons provided an experiential learning and deliberation opportunity for local groups to innovate solutions and generate new ideas, addressing community challenges related to quality of life and participation in rural areas. The primary motivation for the pilot was to use the already tested [social hackathon model as a deliberative policy-making tool](#). The goal was to test how a typically bottom-up model could be adapted into a more top-down policy-making process. This involved involving municipalities and stakeholders in the hackathon process to ideate and develop solutions.

The pilot was structured around a series of upgraded hackathons, each designed to tackle specific community challenges through collaborative problem-solving. These events provided an experiential learning platform where participants, including local youth, tech enthusiasts, and social innovators, could ideate, develop, and pitch solutions directly to local government representatives and policymakers.

One of the key challenges faced during the pilot was ensuring meaningful participation from a broad spectrum of the community, especially from younger demographics traditionally less engaged in political processes. To address this, the Võru team implemented targeted outreach campaigns, utilized social media, and offered workshops before the hackathons to increase engagement and participation rates.

The hackathons led to several tangible outcomes, including the development of new community projects and policy recommendations, which were subsequently taken up by the local government for implementation. For example, the new local educational system concept relies more on local community resources in the tiny rural municipality of Setomaa. It took two years to start developing a new concept and implementing it in autumn 2024.



Plans are underway to integrate the hackathon model into the annual planning processes of local governance, ensuring that the voices of young residents continue to influence decision-making and policy formulation in a structured and impactful manner.

Key findings and insights

The aim of the EUARENAS piloting was to assess the potential transferability of deliberative tools across different urban contexts. The previous experiences of the pilot cities enriched the analysis of 20 good practices in the [EUARENAS Participatory Toolbox](#). The piloting processes implemented during the EUARENAS piloting were analysed in the frame of the Action Research process accompanying the pilots, through collaborative endeavours, including both physical and virtual meetings, leading to the formulation of an evaluation framework. This framework collected questions about the pilots divided into 4 main dimensions, such as the policy, the organisational, human and social and learning and exchange dimensions.

The EUARENAS project revealed significant achievements in stakeholder engagement across all pilot cities, enhancing the relevance and acceptance of the interventions. However, measuring the immediate and long-term impacts posed challenges due to the complexity and short duration of the project. Continuous communication and coordination were essential but sometimes difficult across different locales and stakeholders, highlighting the need for robust systems to support such collaborative efforts.

Throughout the piloting phase, communication channels were significantly improved, featuring regular meetings and workshops which facilitated better alignment and sharing of experiences. Impact indicators were refined to better capture incremental changes, and training sessions were tailored to equip local teams with the necessary skills, ensuring ongoing adaptation to meet project goals effectively.

The main learnings to take away from the pilots can be summarized as follows:

- A cautious preparation of the processes is needed, including the adaptation of the tools and methods to the local context, based on quantitative and qualitative needs assessment
- Recognizing the **diversity of their objectives and contexts**, deliberative processes need to adopt tailored approaches to ensure that interventions are context-specific and relevant. This enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of participatory processes.
- Adequate **allocation of time and resources** is essential for the successful implementation of iterative processes. Ensuring that projects are well-resourced will enable them to adapt effectively to emerging needs and challenges.
- Developing **integrated communication strategies** to enhance coordination and stakeholder engagement is vital. Clear, consistent communication helps align objectives, share insights, and foster a collaborative environment.
- **Continuous capacity building** for local teams and stakeholders needs to be prioritised. This will ensure that the skills and knowledge required for effective participatory processes are sustained beyond the project's lifecycle.
- Enhanced mechanisms for **collaboration, experience sharing and peer learning** among partners and with other cities that have already implemented the tool are crucial such as regular workshops, joint activities, and dedicated platforms for discussion that can facilitate mutual learning and support.



As the main conclusion, the analysis of the three EUARENAS pilots demonstrates the complexity of deliberative processes and the multitude of external and internal factors that need to be considered when transferring a tool or practice from one context to another. As a result, it is not about directly transferring processes between cities, but rather adapting them. This adaptation requires creativity, innovation, and a readiness for continuous improvisation, feedback, and dialogue. This process of transferring deliberative tools might be compared to jazz improvisation. Contrary to popular belief, jazz improvisation is grounded in a set of rules and predetermined themes. It requires a deep understanding and mutual attentiveness among musicians, enabling them to synchronize, play together, and innovate as necessary. What may seem like complete freedom and spontaneous decision-making on the surface is, in reality, underpinned by extensive preparation, shared reflection, the establishment of a framework, and ongoing feedback and co-creation. These are the hallmarks of deliberative processes: the adaptation of a set of tools and methods for the sake of good accordance and harmony of the actions and the results.



7 The EUARENAS Toolbox of Experimental Participatory Methods

EUARENAS partner Eutropian developed an online toolbox of experimental participatory methods designed to provide urban practitioners, public officials and civil society organisations/activities with practical information about tools, instruments, methods and good practices for including people into decision-making or governance processes. Eutropian is a research, policy and advocacy organisation helping civic involvement in collaborative urban transformation processes, with particular attention to local development and the social inclusion of marginalised groups.

The Toolbox includes 20 participatory tools from different European countries that can be navigated through an online filtering mechanism (see Figure 6) based on seven categories: *Scale of the process; Initiators/coordinators; Methods/Tools; Participants; Level of participation; Duration, Transferability.*

Figure 6 The Toolbox filter mechanism

The figure displays a digital interface for filtering participatory methods. On the left, there are seven filter categories, each with a list of options and a selection box:

- DURATION:** One-off, Permanent
- INITIATORS / COORDINATORS:** City administration, District administration, National/ Federal administration, Non-governmental organisation, Private sector, Regional administration, Research institute/ university, Third sector
- LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION:** Collaboration, Consultation, Empowerment, Information, Partnership
- METHODS / TOOLS:** Bottom-up participatory initiative, Citizen's assembly, Digital participation platforms, Minipublic, Participatory body involved in co-governance, Participatory budgeting
- PARTICIPANTS:** City representatives/ officials/ administration, Representation of citizens, Third sector, Voluntary participants, Youth participants
- SCALES OF PROCESSES:** City, District, International, National/ Federal, Neighbourhood, Regional
- TRANSFERABILITY:** High, Low, Medium

On the right, 20 individual method cards are displayed, each featuring a photo, a title, and a location:

- VORU SOCIAL HACKATHON:** Voru (Estonia)
- GDANSK PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING:** Gdansk (Poland)
- G1000:** Belgium
- BRUSSELS MIXED PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES:** Brussels (Belgium)
- HELSINKI YOUTH COUNCIL:** Helsinki (Finland)
- NEWHAM PERMANENT CITIZEN COUNCIL:** London (United Kingdom)
- UK CLIMATE ASSEMBLY:** United Kingdom
- VIENNA YOUTH STRATEGY:** Vienna (Austria)
- WORLD WIDE VIEWS ON CLIMATE AND ENERGY:** Copenhagen (Denmark)
- JÓZSEFVÁROS OFFICE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION:** Budapest (Hungary)
- CIVOCRACY:** (Location not specified)
- DISTRICT LIAISON OFFICERS:** Helsinki (Finland)

Importantly, the cases were grouped into six overarching participatory methods (Figure 7) —participatory bodies involved in co-governance, mini-publics, participatory budgeting, digital participation platforms,



grassroots participatory initiatives, and citizen’s assemblies—and stands out as a noteworthy example of democratic innovation, demonstrating unique strategies and resulting outcomes.

Figure 7 Six overarching participatory methods that can be used to filter the EUARENAS Toolbox



Underscoring EUARENAS’ commitment to fostering inclusive democratic practices, the Toolbox prioritises tools that support the inclusions and involvement of marginalised as well as communities and citizens with less accessibility to democratic process (e.g. youngsters, women, foreigners, lower income groups).

In addition to the database of participatory tools, the Toolbox also offers a glossary of about 100 key concepts around the topic of participatory and deliberative democracy embedded within the tool descriptions (see Figure 8) and as a [glossary](#) (see Figure 9).

Figure 8 Glossary interface within the Toolbox

VORU SOCIAL HACKATHON Voru (Estonia)

Permanent Regional administration Partnership Minipublic Voluntary participants Regional Medium

ABOUT

The **Voru Social Hackathon**, first launched in 2018, is an innovative initiative designed to address societal challenges by adapting the traditional hackathon model for rural community engagement and **social innovation**. Originating from a critical analysis of subpar services and welfare services in peripheral rural municipalities in Estonia, the initiative sought to empower marginalised and disadvantaged groups, as well as regular citizens, encouraging them to become agents of change within their communities. A key to its success has been its localised approach, leveraging the strong sense of community identity and heritage found in areas like Voru County to foster a sense of belonging and collective agency. By focusing on building new networks and connections rather than just improving existing services, the Social Hackathon has facilitated inclusive and participatory community engagement. This process involves understanding local assets and contexts, utilising targeted **communication strategies**, and hosting events in community-centric venues to inspire innovative solutions to local challenges.

Communication strategies involve planning how to effectively deliver messages to target audiences, selecting suitable channels, crafting engaging content, and timing communications to meet specific objectives. These strategies aim to ensure message clarity, consistency, and impact, while also facilitating two-way interaction with the audience.



Figure 9 A glossary definition within the Toolbox

Leafleting

Leafleting involves distributing flyers or leaflets to share information, advertise events or services, or promote causes. It's a direct marketing or activism strategy used to reach a broad audience in public spaces, through door-to-door delivery, or in specific venues. Leafleting is often employed by businesses, political campaigns, and social movements to raise awareness, encourage participation, or influence opinions.



8 A look into the Future of Urban Democracy: Foresight

The third major component of the empirical work, which was coordinated by EUARENAS partner People Voice Media (PVM) from the UK, looked into the future of (urban) democracy in Europe by investigating and hypothesizing over future trends and scenarios in participatory and deliberative democracies. Foresight, or future-thinking, provides a way to think about our future, and associated challenges on the horizon that we can jointly address to achieve shared outcomes.

The empirical base that was produced within this part of the EUARENAS work was varied and extensive. Three major empirical and analytical approaches were employed for gaining insights into potential future of democracy in Europe in general and deliberative and participatory practices in particular.

As a first major approach, a media discourse analysis provided a layered investigation of signals and trends regarding the future of our democracies in local, national and pan-European press and broadcast media. The media, being a window into the drivers of change in society and societal discourses, is an important source for the identification of such signals about and trends for the future. Research teams in Finland, Italy, Germany, Poland and the UK were led and advised by PVM in the identification, collation, analysis of the media content in their countries, exploring future signals and drivers of change. In addition, a pan-European analysis was carried out by EUARENAS partner SWPS (Poland). After the initial analysis of the media content - ranging from national newspapers to television broadcasts to online magazines - the results were sense-checked in six collaborative workshops with different societal actors in the respective countries.

The learnings from this work have been compiled into an insight briefing titled "Future challenges and opportunities for democracy across Europe: An initial exploration of signals and drivers of change ([download here](#)). The Briefing presents the results of the media analyses relevant to the study and realisation of deliberative and participatory democracy by, firstly, identifying the key elements of societal change, including topics such as COVID-19, climate change, grassroots politics and activism. It also provides an overview of potential drivers of social change, grouped into challenges and opportunities, ranging from developments in technology to the polarisation of people's political views. Based on these findings, the Briefing concludes by recommending that actors with the social sphere, political institutions and knowledge hubs address three core questions in order to support the future of democracy across European societies at conceptual, structural and pragmatic levels:

- How do we mobilise people to be a part of creating the change they want to see, and move from talk to action?
- How do inequalities and structural issues impact on how our democracies work and who is included in them?
- How do we work with differing priorities between different people, organisations and countries in ways that make useful progress on issues?

As a second major approach, lived experience stories were gathered from citizens about their experiences participating in local democratic processes. Using the Community Reporting Method, a specific approach to digital storytelling that has been developed by People's Voice Media in 2007, research teams and local citizens in Italy (Reggio Emilia), Estonia (Voru) and Poland (Gdansk) used people's recent experience of democracy as source material for identifying signals about our future and to explore possible futures. With stories being powerful tools through which people connect, share understanding and build bridges, they are



ideal materials to incorporate into future-thinking activities. PVM guided the research teams through a process of organising and delivering Lived Experience Foresight sessions. These sessions involved:

- Citizens dialogue interviewing one another about experiences of democracy
- Collective sense-making to identify the key insights about democracy from the stories
- Participatory horizon-mapping activity that connected these insights into future trends in democracy

The learning from this work is presented in a dedicated Insight Briefing (HERE). Key learnings that have been extracted from the citizen stories and horizon-mapping activities include the feeling that young people aren't being listened to, that minority groups and those without 'citizenship' are usually excluded from formal democratic processes that there is a gap in communication and connection between different sections of society and, finally, that technology isn't currently being used to its full potential. Based on these identified challenges, the authors of the Briefing produced a set of actions that can help to address them, which are presented in the below Table.

Table 4 A set of actions that can help to address challenges

Challenges & Issues	Proposed Actions
Lack of collaboration between grassroots initiatives, formal democratic institutions and people not currently engaged in democracy.	Formalised collaboration between grassroots initiatives working in the field of democracy, formal democratic institutions and communities.
Lack of opportunities for young people to have their voices heard and be involved in political processes.	Education around grassroots democracy and less traditional methods of participation to increase awareness of how these can influence change.
Lack of opportunities for migrant and non-citizen communities to have their voices heard and be involved in political processes.	Funding for initiatives that provide a platform for minoritized groups (e.g., migrant communities), to have their voices listened to and acted upon.
The level of energy and commitment required to understand and engage with democracy and politics is often overlooked.	Investment in technology, as well as research into how this can be used as a tool for increasing participation in democracy and decision-making by enabling people to participate at times suitable for them.

As a third major approach, social media signals were probed to explore the future of democracy across Europe. Social media provides a window into current debates, social issues and topics pertinent to communities. Whilst the presentation of such content is not necessarily a reflection of society, and like traditional media representations is more of a refracted view on current trends rather than a mirror image, it is still a valuable source material for understanding society. Social media accounts, particularly those associated with civil society and social movements can provide us with signs of what issues and debates are pertinent to people (as opposed to institutions) and simultaneously offer a glimpse of emerging trends in the social sphere. PVM again led several research teams through a process of social media analysis for the identification of future signals in Italy, Germany, Finland, the UK and Poland. During the process, social media posts were combined with elements of the Delphi method and policy stress testing approaches to explore future trends in society and the policy environments needed for potential future scenarios. The different steps in the process included recruiting experts and selecting social media sources, setting up and using an



online board for the review of social media posts, setting up and sending questionnaires to experts and finally, synthesis and presentation of the learnings and results. The results from this exercise were used in the production of the **Future Scenarios Report** (see below).

Lastly, a series of local and European future scenario workshops were delivered that used the data and insights generated from the three sets of foresight activities described above. The local workshops took place in Berlin (Germany), Helsinki (Finland), Võru (Estonia), Reggio Emilia (Italy), and Gdansk (Poland), bringing together residents, policymakers, civil society actors, local administration and scientific communities to develop future scenarios for cities of the future, focusing on how participation in democracy can be enhanced. These workshops involved a range of creative and participatory methods, in addition to foresight approaches such as serious play, collaging and photo voice. Based on the local workshops and reports, a future scenarios workshop was held in Berlin (Germany) that brought together Berlin residents, workers in local administrations/Government, civil society professionals, academics, practitioners in deliberative methods and members of the EUARENAS consortium to develop a *pan-European* future scenario.

All of the above research strands fed into the **Future Scenarios Report**, which can be regarded as the main output of the foresight research strand within EUARENAS as it represents a synthesis of the learnings from across the EUARENAS foresight research activities and a presentation of the core findings. On the basis of the results from the different research strands, the report develops an understanding of the current state of play of local democracy and opportunities as well as challenges for local democracy in a number of European countries. The report then moves on to present future visions for local democracies in Europe, which share the following common elements:

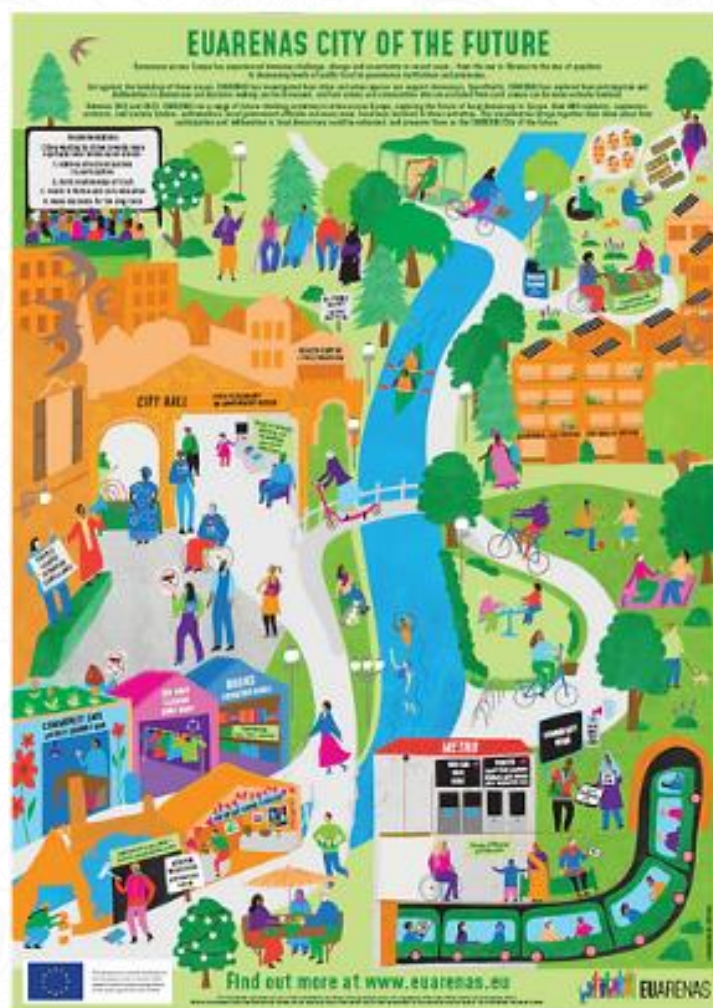
- Sustainable, long-term thinking
- Valuing difference and diversity
- Embracing the natural environment
- Being pro-actively inclusive and dismantling oppressive structures
- Re-humanising our cities – value-based working that centralises humanity, empathy, trust and transparency

For cities wanting striving towards such future visions - and more equitable local democracy for that matter - the report recommends to (1) address structural barriers to participation (2) build relationships of trust (3) invest in formal and civic education and (4) make decisions for the long-term.

As part of the report, PVM also worked with Artist Lizzy Doe to create a visualisation of the EUARENAS City of the Future (see Figure 10). The illustration is available both as a [web version](#) and a [print-ready version](#).



Figure 10 EUARENAS City of the Future



(Illustration by Lizzy Doe)

In addition to the production of new knowledge regarding signals about the future of democracy in general and participation and deliberation in particular, the Foresight work also produced practicable and actionable knowledge that is made available to anybody interested in similar work in form of three Guides. Each Guide is presented in a manner that enables them to be practically applied and implemented as a means of engaging experts from across policy, practice and research in conversations about the future. Each Guide contains step-by-step guidance and several editable templates for academic or practitioners wishing to replicate or emulate the work that has been done in EUARENAS, or just taking suggested approaches and tools as inspiration.

[Media Discourse Foresight Guide](#) – The Guide combines media discourse analysis with future-thinking approaches. Through a series of practical activities and step-by-step instructions, the Guide enables practitioners from different sectors to use media discourses as source material for signals about our future and to explore the drivers of change in society.



[Lived Experience, Storytelling and Foresight Guide](#) – The Guide supports the combining of lived experience stories with future-thinking, enabling practitioners from policy, research or services to use people’s stories as source material for signals about our future and to explore possible futures.

[Social Media Foresight Guide](#) - This Guide presents the use of social media posts combined with elements of the Delphi method and policy stress testing approaches to explore future trends in society and the policy environments needed for potential future scenarios. Included within the toolkit are step-by-step instructions that outline how the research tasks can be implemented, alongside templates and tips.

9 Policy messages, processes and tools

Under the leadership of Guido Carli University (LUISS), the EUARENAS project consortium consolidated the scientific results and insights from the various elements of the project into policy-relevant messages. These policy messages on better and more effective engagement of citizens in political decision-making through participatory and deliberative practices have been developed to address one of the pressing challenges facing Europe today, the apparent and widening gap between political decision-making processes and citizens in the EU and beyond. The resulting policy-relevant messages were published in several policy briefs addressing pertinent topics and specific issues. These briefs were designed to target policymakers and practitioners, synthesizing EUARENAS results to propose ready-made solutions for ensuring diversity, inclusivity, and long-term engagement in the use of participatory and deliberative tools.

The work of the LUISS team on policy messages started with an exploration of another central topic of EUARENAS, which is connected with both methodological and policy considerations, i.e. stakeholders’ inclusion, the importance of including multiple stakeholders, such as citizens, public authorities, and private sector actors, in the participatory and deliberative processes, in the pilot cities and also throughout the whole project. Echoing the Updated Methodological Framework EURMAP and EURARI Index, the resulting [Stakeholder Inclusion Guidelines \(D.7.1\)](#) emphasizes the need for an inclusive and diverse range of participants to ensure that the co-governance structures reflect the complexity of urban governance.

All policy briefs produced by the LUISS team, in coordination and cooperation with the other partners, [Preliminary Policy Brief](#), [Policy Brief 1](#), [Policy Brief 2](#), and [Policy Brief 3](#) place emphasis on building trust and creating open, accessible platforms for civic participation, adapting them to local conditions and needs. Moreover, the policy briefs stress the relevance of advocating for real empowerment of citizens, moving beyond simple inclusion, and involving citizens into influencing decision-making and potentially reshaping rules and policies to meet the needs of previously excluded groups. The policy briefs also provide concrete policy recommendations on how to design participatory and deliberative processes that are inclusive, diverse and with a long-term engagement perspective. Policies should ensure continuous and structured engagement, as seen in Reggio Emilia's Consulte pilot action, where public involvement goes beyond specific issues, fostering sustained collaboration and trust between citizens, government, and all Quintuple Helix actors involved in the diverse initiatives.

Results of the project indicate that in different contexts municipalities employed various tools, deliberative practices, and participatory processes to pursue a range of objectives while implementing co-governance. Therefore, a primary recommendation for municipalities and practitioners that are willing to start deliberative or participatory processes is related to the adaptation of the general guidelines (as outlined in the [Stakeholder Inclusion Guidelines](#) and the [Preliminary Policy Brief](#)) to the specific needs in their communities. The explanation on how to tailor these guidelines to different contexts passes through the



concrete examples provided by the pilot cities. In [Policy Brief 1](#), we started by addressing the foundational steps, essential knowledge, and expectations that municipalities should consider when planning actions to improve access and inclusivity. By gathering insights from the EUARENAS pilot cities of Gdansk, Reggio Emilia, and Vöru, we delineated the distinct policy strategies each city employed. In Gdansk, the municipality recognized that a lack of trust in public authorities was a significant barrier to citizen participation. Understanding that enhanced democratic access is closely tied to fostering a 'sense of belonging' within communities, the municipality took steps to open up governance processes. This was achieved by increasing the number of initiatives under the Citizens' Fund and ensuring a broader range of citizens and stakeholders were meaningfully involved in decision-making. The process began with identifying community needs—such as environmental challenges—linking spatial and social concerns, amplifying citizen input at the foundational stages of policy development. On the other side, the pilot city of Reggio Emilia, although starting from a historical greater degree of active citizen participation, struggled to find a way of integrating citizens input into municipal policy programming, designing and management, and aimed at building a proper system of co-governance. Therefore, these new administrative and policy mechanisms were first systematized in the City's Regulation on Democracy and Urban and Climate Justice, to ensure transparency and administrative compliance through standardized processes. The municipality aimed to foster greater citizen participation in policy planning and improve overall dialogue with the administration, thereby enhancing the quality of life in local territories. A key strategy involved the creation of Neighborhood Councils (The Consulte), which were established through elections as mandated by the regulation. These councils played a critical role in generating their own Pact for Development and Innovation, a collaborative document outlining public policy guidelines and civic co-designed projects tailored to each territorial area. Another tool that was implemented in Reggio Emilia is the City Science Office (CSO), which serves as a specialized and decentralized unit for research in urban and social innovation. This approach was chosen in order to establish a more structured access to democracy and continue dialogue among the different stakeholders in the community. Another step in this direction is the communication campaign that has been organized at different times and through different means in order to reach different targets to accompany all phases of the implementation of the project. Differently from Reggio Emilia and Gdansk, the region of Voru tailored its project to the participation and engagement of a specific key target: younger generations. In order to achieve their goal, they defined a structured approach, ensuring access and inclusion in the city's policy-planning and policy-making through the establishment of youth councils and the periodical organization of the Vunki Mano hackathon, in initiative that aims at gathering young people's need and ideas on a specific topic, for instance climate change. This inclusive governance strategy involves collaboration among local government, institutions, politicians, and citizens to support and guide the participation of youth in the community. The primary research takeaway from [Policy Brief 1](#) is that the complexities of access and inclusion in democratic processes require a case-by-case approach. This is especially true for the tool selection process, which seeks to match mapped demands with stakeholder involvement arrangements. These early results gathered through the experiences of the pilot cities were subsequently synthesized into policy recommendations aimed at tackling specific issues related to systemic issues (such as structural inequality), distribution of power, how to mainstreaming participatory and deliberative practices, and tools and methods selection for increasing inclusivity and access to democracy.

First of all, in order to engage marginalized groups, one must first understand the community demographics, and analyze specifically the barriers and frictions that are preventing them from participation and avoid methods and instruments that may have exacerbated people's dissatisfaction. Although some social phenomena are widespread and have general relevance in urban contexts (gentrification, marginalization of minorities, lack of affection and sense of belonging), municipalities should identify their specific structural barriers—such as economic, social, and time constraints—that prevent marginalized groups from



participating, and design targeted outreach efforts to engage these groups. While for participation and deliberation to be mainstreamed in cities, one must establish a cyclical processes that starts with perceived will and need to engage in such practices, continues with setting the rules of the game, experimentation and continuous listening and dialogue processes (i.e., assemblies and councils, planning for real, focus groups, and storytelling practices). For instance, Gdansk's use of the Citizens' Fund and Reggio Emilia's Neighborhood Councils serve as replicable models for fostering long-term community engagement. Decentralizing decision-making, as seen in Reggio Emilia's co-governance through the City Science Office, can break hierarchical structures and empower citizens to influence policy. Involving younger generations, as demonstrated by Vöru's youth councils, ensures that democratic processes are inclusive and forward-looking.

In [Policy Brief 2](#), pilot cities indicated how they have dealt with different challenges as part of their participatory practices. Since the City of Gdansk has placed particular emphasis on tackling inclusion, Voru has focused on diversity and Reggio Emilia on establishing long-term engagement, from these experiences we have identified a number of policy relevant messages. Through the process of promoting inclusion in participatory mechanisms in Gdansk, we highlighted how crucial it is to create a safe and emphatic space, i.e. information should be presented in a simple and accessible manner, ensuring that knowledge gaps and misunderstandings are minimized. Stakeholders should be encouraged to offer their expertise in a friendly and supportive manner. From the experience of Voru, we extracted recommendations on how to recognize and tackle diversity in participatory and deliberative processes starting from the identification of the reasons that lay behind the reluctance of specific groups at participating. For instance, marginalized groups (often the target for ensuring diversity) frequently lack the material and social capabilities to engage in a deliberative process on equal terms, which can discourage their involvement. Surprisingly, also privileged groups who prioritize their individual, "private" citizenship over the common good, are often reluctant at participating in these processes. Participatory and deliberative processes might also be the object of distrust and discredit by conservative stakeholders that might not support an 'open' and co-governance approach to policymaking, which might lead to a 'progressive bias' in decision-making. Finally, co-governance practices are seen as a key strategy to rebuild confidence and a sense of community among citizens that have been estranged from democracy, although institutions must ensure the openness of the process and be held accountable to bring these citizens back on the track of democratic participation. The issue in Reggio Emilia has been to assure the sustainability of multi-actor commitment to co-governance, starting from the conviction that citizens could be engaged in all aspects of the participatory process, shaping its organization (co-design), assessing needs and debating options (co-programming), proposing recommendations, and overseeing implementation (co-managing). For meaningful and democratic participation to take place, this perspective needs to be embraced and embedded in long-term planning, compelling politicians and decision-makers to focus on methods and relationships that extend beyond singular issues and avoid reactive reliance on citizens' inputs. Finally, stepping from the pilot cities' experiences, [Policy Brief 2](#) provides key policy recommendations on how to tackle diversity, inclusion and long-term engagement in different contexts. To ensure diversity in participatory processes, requires active efforts to engage marginalized groups, including those who may be reluctant to participate. Participation should be structured in a way that requires involvement from these groups, rather than simply allowing it as an option. Cities must allocate resources to support underrepresented groups by offering compensation for participation, covering expenses such as travel, childcare, and interpretation services, and providing necessary accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Additionally, multiple communication channels should be employed to reach different stakeholders, leveraging relationships with community leaders and local organizations to foster trust and encourage engagement. Finally, institutions must implement systems to remunerate participants and professionals (facilitators) and ensure that all necessary resources are available to facilitate broad and equitable participation. To promote inclusion in participatory processes, municipalities should invest in



capacity-building by offering training programs for moderators and facilitators. Professionals can be hired, or administrative staff can be trained, while third-sector organizations involved should also possess the necessary skills. Building trust is essential, so incorporating relationship-building activities and awareness-raising exercises can help engage participants and foster empathy. It's crucial to accommodate special needs, such as providing breaks for participants with cognitive limitations or adapting venues for neurodivergent individuals. Processes should avoid overwhelming participants with complex or excessive information and instead spread learning across multiple days. Clear and accessible communication is key: experts should present knowledge in plain language, avoiding academic jargon, and additional services like text-to-speech or materials for individuals with impairments should be provided to ensure that all participants can engage fully and meaningfully. While to ensure long-term engagement in participatory processes, it is essential to start small and gradually scale up. Begin with small-scale participatory events that allow for experience and adaptation to local conditions, rather than large, costly assemblies that may strain resources. It is crucial to carefully define the scope of participation by focusing on clear, manageable issues, such as choosing between a few well-defined options, to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes and build momentum for future participation. Dedicated staff should take ownership of the process, overseeing all stages, fostering trust, and motivating participants. Their role is critical in anticipating challenges and ensuring the government implements the process outcomes. To maintain engagement, establish co-governance routines by keeping participants informed through regular updates via email newsletters, face-to-face meetings, or other communication channels. This consistent communication fosters accountability and helps sustain interest, encouraging further participation and strengthening the democratic process.

In [Policy Brief 3](#) we focused on scenarios of local deliberative and participatory democracy based on foresight methods and the actual experiences of collaborative governance. The document draws attention to the “EUARENAS Future City” and the “Collaborative city” of Reggio Emilia as examples that offer policy insights. The former is a result of the foresight work co-ordinated in EUARENAS by partner People's Voice Media activities on future foresight and future-thinking as tools for understanding democratic innovations as they emerge and for engaging citizens and other actors in such innovations within the participatory and deliberative realms (see Section 8). To foster equitable local democracies, cities should implement policies that remove structural barriers to participation, ensuring citizens not only have the encouragement but also the means to engage. This can include initiatives such as universal welfare, participation incentives, diverse language translations on official documents, and diverse visual representation in media. Building trust through transparent and continuous feedback loops is crucial. Cities should establish clear processes for consultation, with mechanisms in place to report back to citizens on how their input has impacted decisions or, if change wasn't possible, explain why. Investing in civic education from an early age can help develop a culture of participation. Furthermore, cities should adopt a long-term approach by embedding tools and learnings from participatory processes into mainstream governance, rather than limiting them to one-off projects. This continuous learning and implementation will cultivate collaboration across different initiatives and prevent disillusionment among citizens. The foresight and future-thinking research activities have culminated in a [Future Scenarios Report](#), and a representation of the [EUARENAS City of the Future](#). The latter stems from the experience of the City of Reggio Emilia and the collaboration with the City Science Office and the Municipality, providing insights and policy recommendations on co-programming and co-designing. When the municipality reviewed the strategy on participation in 2022 to tackle the disruption brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, the objective was to create a structured framework where public involvement directly influences policy creation and urban planning. The new provisions introduced in the Regulation in 2024 feature an innovative form of multi-actor partnership called Urban Sustainable Development and Innovation Partnerships (USDIPs). The objectives of USDIPs are co-designed to achieve specific impacts, and the results of every action taken under a USDIP are evaluated through Community Budgeting. This budgeting process



considers nine impact dimensions and a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators. This reviewed strategy has been the framework of many relevant projects such as the neighborhood car-sharing, the renewable Energy Communities (RECs), the Rodano Park protected area. From the experience of Reggio Emilia we draw policy recommendations for facilitating the introduction of co-programming and co-design procedures. Cities should focus on expanding multi-stakeholder partnerships, to address diverse urban challenges collaboratively. It is also essential to increase adaptability in administrative resource allocation by providing targeted funding and using tools like Community Budgeting to ensure projects are sustainable and impactful across social and environmental dimensions. Regulatory support should be enhanced to create a legal framework that encourages ongoing collaboration between the city, residents, and stakeholders. Additionally, robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to assess projects' effectiveness and refine strategies as needed. Finally, municipalities might experiment with innovative administrative procedures, such as engaging adaptable bureaucratic structures and utilizing pioneering instruments like a City Science Office (CSO), to address modern governance challenges.

The EUARENAS project analyzed and employed various participatory and deliberative tools to foster citizen engagement and co-governance. Beginning with a workshop carried out by the LUISS team in Wroclaw in September 2023, which was focused on evaluating and understanding the effectiveness of various participatory tools for co-governance, a report on Change-making Tools (D7.5) was produced. During the workshop participants discussed how the different tools could be integrated and used to address specific local challenges. One takeaway was the need for combining multiple tools (e.g., participatory budgeting with citizen assemblies) to increase the effectiveness of democratic processes. There was also a focus on the political and technical dimensions of tool selection, understanding that the decision to use a specific tool is influenced not only by its design but also by its reception among decision-makers. These takeaways were all reflected in the report a considerations and criticisms voiced by the participants were collected. They were engaged in role-playing to simulate real-life policy decisions using tools like citizen assemblies, social hackathons, and participatory budgeting. Moreover, the report on Change-making Tools also provides a general description of Participatory and Deliberative Tools (PDTs), and a more detailed theoretical and practical framework for changemaking, offering a roadmap for how these tools can be implemented to foster more democratic urban governance, underscoring the importance of social innovation and collaboration in shaping the future of local governance.

In addition to the policy recommendations that came from the policy-specific work done by LUISS, there are several policy messages that came from other components of the project work, namely digital tools, regulatory aspects, inclusiveness and ethics. In the **digital sphere**, the project emphasizes the importance of applying technology to expand participation and accessibility. For example, as emerged in particular from the case study and foresight work as well as the EUARENAS Toolbox, cities should adopt and implement online platforms that allow citizens to participate remotely and anonymously, ensuring accessibility for people with busy schedules or those who might be hesitant to engage in person. These platforms should be user-friendly and designed with inclusiveness in mind, incorporating features such as translation services, text-to-speech functions, and tools for visually or hearing-impaired participants. Hybrid formats combining online and in-person participation are recommended to maximize outreach and inclusivity. Additionally, tools such as community reporting mechanisms, developed by People's Voice Media, are key to maintaining continuous citizen engagement. In the **regulatory** domain, creating formal structures that institutionalize co-governance processes is critical. Cities are encouraged to embed participatory frameworks within their legal systems, similar to the approach taken by Reggio Emilia's Regulation on Democracy and Urban and Climate Justice, which introduced Neighborhood Councils as a structured, transparent part of the city's decision-making processes. These frameworks need to promote multi-stakeholder partnerships, such as Urban Sustainable



Development and Innovation Partnerships (USDIPs), to foster collaboration among different actors, including citizens, government, and private sectors. The regulatory environment must also support long-term planning by incorporating foresight methodologies to address future challenges. By creating such formal structures, cities can ensure that participatory processes are not only reactive but also proactive, enabling continuous civic engagement in shaping policies. This approach will help overcome political shifts or electoral attempts driven by the pursuit of consensus. Another pivotal focus area of the project has been the inclusiveness of the participatory and deliberative processes, that has engaged all components of the project work. The recommendations on **inclusiveness** underscore the importance of actively engaging marginalized and underrepresented groups. For participation to be effective, it needs to be designed in a way that removes barriers for these groups, addressing structural challenges such as economic and social constraints. Cities should plan a small budget for providing a little compensation to participants who might otherwise be unable to engage, covering expenses like transportation, childcare, and interpretation services. For example, in Vöru, youth councils and hackathons successfully targeted younger generations, ensuring that their voices were heard in city policy planning. Inclusiveness also requires the use of diverse communication channels to reach different demographics, leveraging community leaders and local organizations to build trust. Furthermore, capacity-building initiatives should be prioritized, offering training for both facilitators and participants to ensure meaningful and effective engagement. This capacity-building approach guarantees that citizens, regardless of background, are equipped to participate in and influence decision-making processes, as demonstrated in both Gdansk and Reggio Emilia. Finally, **ethical** considerations in participatory processes are essential for building trust and ensuring the legitimacy of civic engagement. Therefore, transparency shall be a key guiding principle, with cities needing to establish feedback loops that inform participants how their input has been used or explain why it could not be implemented. This was particularly significant in Gdansk, where building trust in public authorities was a central challenge. Ethical participatory processes must also address power imbalances, ensuring that marginalized voices are not only heard but have a meaningful influence on policy decisions. Co-governance frameworks should be designed with ethical guidelines that protect vulnerable groups, ensuring that they are not exploited or marginalized further through the participatory process. Moreover, foresight methodologies offer an ethical approach to long-term planning, ensuring that future generations and marginalized groups are considered in policy decisions. This is particularly important when addressing systemic issues such as inequality.

In conclusion, the policy consideration derived from four years of the EUARENAS project provide a holistic framework for cities looking to enhance democratic engagement. By leveraging digital tools, establishing robust regulatory frameworks, ensuring inclusiveness, and embedding ethical considerations into participatory processes, cities can promote more resilient and inclusive governance models. These recommendations are adaptable to various urban contexts, providing practical solutions for municipalities and practitioners aiming to create sustainable participatory tools in their communities. The policy messages at the heart of the EUARENAS's experimental research is that to move government towards inclusive governance – namely co-governance – it is necessary first to address and remove the social and structural obstacles that prevent citizens, stakeholders, other relevant actors, and marginalized groups from engaging in democratic processes. This includes the developing inclusive regulatory frameworks and providing tools to empower underrepresented voices: this doesn't just underscore a logic of social justice, but also concretely affects positively the gathering and empowerment of human and non-human resources, involved in policymaking, enhancing the efficiency of public policies at the local level. Moreover, tools, strategies and practices outlined during the project are exportable under the condition that they must be adapted to the specific context and public needs in which they are applied, and shall be carefully chosen in order to tackle specific issues and pursue the city's distinctive objectives, in order to be successful.

