



CITIES AS ARENAS OF POLITICAL INNOVATION IN
THE STRENGTHENING OF DELIBERATIVE AND
PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

EUARENAS POLICY BRIEF

THE FUTURE OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE

May 2024



EUARENAS & FORESIGHT

EUARENAS responds to a major European challenge - the need to strengthen legitimacy, identification and engagement within the democratic public sphere. The project investigates the ways that social movements, coupled with local reform initiatives that manifest themselves in local-level experiments, create momentum for political change that include more inclusive forms and participatory forms of governance. It nurtures active citizenship, social agendas and political life through citizen participation and democratic innovations in European cities through a range of traditional, applied, and mixed methodology research approaches.

Foresight and future-thinking approaches are one of the research strands present in EUARENAS. As a tool, foresight is both a tool for understanding democratic innovations as they emerge and for engaging citizens and other actors in such innovations within the participatory and deliberative realms. EUARENAS uses mixed method approaches to foresight to investigate and hypothesize over future trends and scenarios in participatory democracies. Its core objectives are to:

1. Use a hybrid methodological approach to foresight research in order to investigate and hypothesize over future trends in democratic processes.
2. Develop practical methodological guides on approaches to conducting foresight research in order to create future social scenarios.
3. Create both a conceptual synthesis of the learnings from the foresight research and visions of future equitable and inclusive democratic scenarios to inform wider project findings.

CITY OF THE FUTURE: RECOMMENDATIONS

The foresight and future-thinking research activities have culminated in a Future Scenarios Report, which can be read [on the EUARENAS website](#), and a visualisation of the EUARENAS City of the Future, which can also [be viewed online](#). Both outputs make the recommendation that cities wanting to strive towards more equitable local democracies should:

1. Address structural barriers to participation
2. Build relationships of trust
3. Invest in formal and civic education
4. Make decisions for the long-term

This policy briefing transforms these key learnings into actionable policy recommendations that can be implemented at city level.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

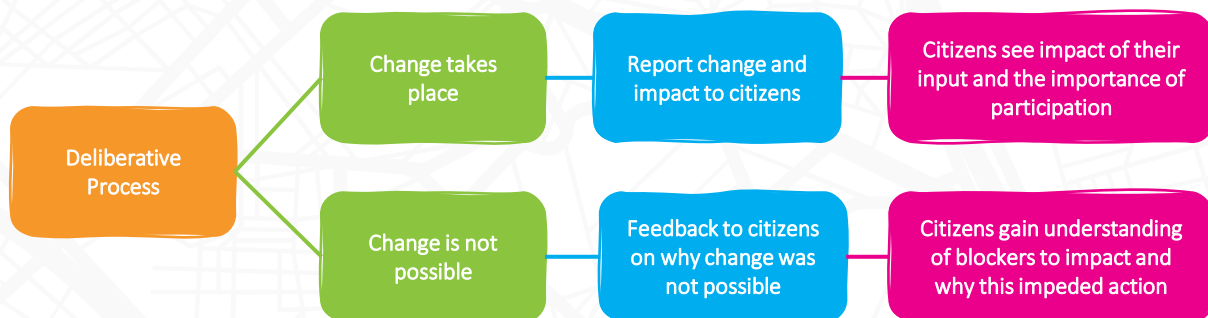
1. REMOVE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Barriers to participation should be removed so that people are not only encouraged to engage in democracy, but also have the means to do so. The removal of barriers should be enacted in policy to ensure inclusion is embedded at every level. Policies may include, but are not limited to:

- The introduction of universal welfare/income
- Participation incentives
- Diverse language translations as default on all local government documents
- Diverse visual representation of race, gender, sexuality, age, etc. in all media
- Age-appropriate education on democracy and participation at all school levels

2. CLEAR FEEDBACK LOOPS

There should be a clearly defined process of consultation and change implemented throughout the city, with feedback loops for deliberative processes to either demonstrate the impact of a consultation or to explain why change wasn't possible in an instance. This would help to prevent disillusion and disenfranchisement among citizens who take part in deliberative processes but then fail to see related change. It will demonstrate to citizens the areas in which they have the most power, while also increasing transparency on areas where change is difficult.



3. TEST AND LEARN

A culture of testing and learning should be cultivated, using the outputs from Recommendation 2 in order to learn what works and what doesn't. Ideas and actions resulting from these learnings should then be made mainstream at city level with the view to embedding tools and processes as a result of each deliberative process, rather than confining learnings to one-off projects. Again, this will aim to prevent the creation of disenfranchised citizens, as well as creating a culture in local authorities of continuous learning and implementation, and collaboration across projects and work streams.

ABOUT THE DOCUMENT

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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.



For more information:

euarenas.eu



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