

DEMOCRATIC
COMPACT:
**IMPROVING
DEMOCRACY**
IN EUROPE





DEmocratic Compact:
Improving Democracy in Europe

Partners of the project

Lead partner

- ▶ ALDA – the European Association for Local Democracy, France

Other partners

- ▶ Comune di Reggio Emilia, Italy
- ▶ Vejle Kommune, Denmark
- ▶ Municipality of Santa Eulalia de Gallego, Spain
- ▶ The Mountain Community Iezer Muscel Association, Romania
- ▶ Primaria Godeni, Romania
- ▶ Primaria Comunei Domnesti, Romania
- ▶ Association for Developing Voluntary Work Novo Mesto (ADVW Novo Mesto), Slovenia
- ▶ Birgu Local Council, Malta
- ▶ Union of Bulgarian Black Sea Local Authorities, Bulgaria
- ▶ Municipality of Balchik, Bulgaria
- ▶ Municipality of Nessebar, Bulgaria
- ▶ Center for Community Organizing, Slovakia
- ▶ Municipality of Banska Bystrica, Slovakia
- ▶ Town of Petrinja, Croatia
- ▶ Local Democracy Agency Sisak, Croatia
- ▶ UG Agencija Lokalne Demokratije Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- ▶ Municipality of Zavidovici, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- ▶ Local Democracy Agency Zavidovići, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- ▶ City of Skopje, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- ▶ Bashkia Shkoder, Albania
- ▶ Local Democracy Agency Albania, Albania
- ▶ Center for research, Cooperation and Development, Albania
- ▶ Mórahalom Városi Önkormányzat, Hungary
- ▶ Municipality of Ujbuda, Hungary
- ▶ National University of Public Services, Hungary
- ▶ International Development Alliance (IDA), Bulgaria

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Introduction

What is DECIDE?

DECIDE (DECIDE: DEMocratic Compact: Improving Democracy in Europe) aimed at developing, through the establishment of a thematic network of towns and by adopting a bottom-up approach, a democratic compact, namely a set of measures that are needed in Europe to increase the quality of democracy and citizen participation.

In more than two years, these measures were identified, exchanged, further elaborated and tested by all the project partners. The partnership was composed of 26 partners from 14 countries: 4 countries of the “old” EU15, 6 countries accessing the EU between 2004 and 2007 and 4 IPA countries. This allowed an enriching exchange among partners with different track record in the EU and contributed to develop a sense of belonging to a common “house”.

The main final outcomes of DECIDE are:

- the establishment of a thematic network of towns committed to increase the quality of democracy and citizen participation in the enlarged Europe
- the democratic compact, a set of measures which have been tested and that can be further disseminated and implemented.

Objectives

DECIDE envisaged to achieve the following objectives:

- ▶ Empowering citizens to play a full part in the democratic life of the EU;
- ▶ Developing a sense of European identity, based on common values, history and culture;
- ▶ Fostering a sense of ownership of the European Union among its citizens;
- ▶ Promoting intercultural dialogue;
- ▶ Fostering citizens' participation through volunteering;
- ▶ Promoting equal opportunities;
- ▶ Developing a thematic and long-lasting cooperation between towns;
- ▶ Raising awareness, reflection and debate on the relevance and implications of EU policies on citizens' daily lives.

THE PROJECT DECIDE

Democratic compact ► The final outcome of the project DECIDE is the development of a democratic compact: a set of **good practices** aimed at **increasing the quality of democracy** at local and regional level in Europe.

Methodology ► The methodology applied was based upon a double field of intervention: local and international. More particularly, it developed a five key stages process, as outlined below:



1st stage – Launching international event

Reggio Emilia, Italy (7-9 November 2013)

Partners reunited and defined a common methodological tool to be applied throughout the first local phase. Common guidelines were agreed on how to identify and collect good practices on citizen participation in public life at local and regional level. A common questionnaire was developed.



2nd stage – Identifying and collecting good practices on citizen participation

Stemming from the Action Plan and the common guidelines developed in the launching international event, as many as 15 local processes respectively in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain were launched in order to identify good practices. The action run through three main steps:

- *Identification of at least 6 measures promoting citizen participation by each partner*
- *Feedback from citizens*
- *Selection of 3 best practices*



3rd stage – Mid-term international seminar

Nesebar, Bulgaria (11-13 June 2014)

The aim of the activity was to promote the exchange and analysis of good practices among partners and produce the first draft of the Democratic Compact.



4th stage – Implementing and testing one or more measure(s) promoting citizen participation at local and regional level

As many as 15 local processes respectively in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain were launched in order to implement and test one or more measure(s) promoted in the Democratic Compact. The partners identified the measure to test according to the needs of their communities. The action run through three main steps:

- *Identification of 1-2 measure(s)*
- *Implementation & Action Plan*
- *Functioning of the measure & test*



5th stage – Final international conference

Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina (9-11 June 2015)

Partners met to exchange experience and bring added value to the assessment of the measures included into the Democratic Compact and produced the last version of the document.

FOCUS ON THE MEASURES

Measures promoting citizen participation in public life at local and regional level

Support to NGOs

1. Intersectoral Commission

► **Measure:** the aim of the Intersectoral Commission is to include the representatives of citizens in the decision-making process and to consult with all relevant stakeholders when deciding which project should be supported financially by the Municipality, and in which amount should be funded.

► **Methodology:** the Commission meets in a defined period of the year when the budget

funding is being determined. It holds the exact figure of the funds to be used to support the different projects, as this was already defined at an earlier stage. It reviews the project proposals, evaluates them and decides which project will be funded and in what amount.

► **Target group:** NGOs that seek funding from the Municipality

► **Stakeholders:** Local authorities, Municipal Council, citizens (NGO members)

STRENGTHS

◆ Inclusivity (members from different areas of interest)

OPPORTUNITIES

◆ The Commission work could be further structured

WEAKNESSES

◆ The Commission's decision is not final and obligatory

THREATS

◆ It can be considered "just a show" because of its non-formal and non-obligatory nature

2. Committee of Local councils

► **Measure:** Local Councils are an important tool to encouraging sustainable citizen participation around the topics that people are passionate about in their particular locality. An active local council is a good starting point for the development of ideas and projects that fit the local area. They are supported economically by the Committee of Local councils. The aim of the Committee is to help back up citizens, associations and enterprises' projects and activities that promote the development of the community's territory as well as a strong interaction between rural areas and the municipi-

ality. In addition, the Committee promotes the dialogue with citizens, and can provide them with the opportunity to discuss their needs and concerns with local authorities.

► Methodology:

● The Committee of local councils has the responsibility to raise, develop and integrate several areas into the municipality's services, for example, rural-strong and vibrant communities or to develop and to implement policies for local development.

- The local councils can enter into a voluntary cooperation agreement with the municipality
- The local council is responsible for: contribution to the formulation of plans and policies, the coordination of the formulation of development strategies, etc.
- The municipality is responsible for: invitation to discussion and formulation of plans



STRENGTHS

- ◆ Backing in the municipality and funding from the municipal budget to activities
- ◆ The local councils run individually, so even if one is not functioning the rest are not affected
- ◆ Project manager in the municipality

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Each local council and community gets a voice, and gets aid (by counselling from municipality)

and policies essential for the local area, development, etc.

- The Committee shall meet at least once a year with local councils to be up to date with the current situation

► **Target group:** citizens, associations, enterprises, project and activities supporting rural areas' interaction with the cities

► **Stakeholders:** Municipalities, Committee, Local Councils, citizens



WEAKNESSES

- ◆ It can be considered "just a show" because of its non-formal and non-obligatory nature

THREATS

- ◆ Local councils may be easily affected by disagreement in a local area

3. NGO Center

► **Measure:** The establishment of the NGO Centre provides logistical support, counselling, consultation, adequate training and grants that focus on: establishing partnerships between NGOs, NGO and local government, media and business sector, and involvement of NGOs in public policy creation.

► **Methodology:** the measure is implemented through:

- Creation of a portal for the needs of associations of citizens, so called "NGO Gate"

- Electronic register of associations of citizens and foundations

● Leaflets sent electronically to all associations of citizens who are registered on the territory

- NGO forum
- Meetings and direct contacts

► **Target group:** associations of citizens and foundations of the territory, coalitions and networks of NGOs, their projects and activities

► **Stakeholders:** the Municipality, Associations of citizens

STRENGTHS

- ◆ It is available for all those who meet the basic requirements for using the NGO Centre

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Networking with same or similar centres on the territory and other cities in the country. Furthermore, expanding the offered services, introduction of volunteering in the Centre's management and strengthening its visibility

- ◆ Expand the offer of services
- ◆ Introducing volunteering in the management of the Centre
- ◆ Strengthen the Centre's visibility



WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Working until 5p.m. and not in the weekend restricts the possibility of participation to all those who simply volunteer in NGOs and work during the week

THREATS

- ◆ Lower budget

4. Bazaar of NGOs

► **Measure:** Bazaar of NGOs is devoted to practical and illustrative familiarization of visitors with the work they perform for the public benefit and the role they play in their local communities. The associations and private institutions are active in the fields of culture, social care, youth, sport, tourism, cultural heritage and civil protection.

► **Methodology:** Organise the event where every participating NGO has its own stand with

their products and promotional material, accompanied by a variety of presentations and workshops “live” where visitors can gain more information about the work of NGOs.

► **Target group:** general public – citizens of a particular city or passers-by attracted by the event

► **Stakeholders:** engaged NGOs, local authorities, CSOs, citizens

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Diversity of activities represented at bazaars: culture, sport, health care, social care, youth, tourism, cultural heritage and civil protection

- ◆ Encourage individuals to engage in activities of NGOs and consequently larger active participation in NGOs

- ◆ Creating wider options for creating social networks

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Networking with same or similar centres on the territory and other cities in the country. Furthermore, expanding the offered services, introduction of volunteering in the Centre's management and strengthening its visibility

- ◆ Expand the offer of services

- ◆ Introducing volunteering in the management of the Centre

- ◆ Strengthen the Centre's visibility

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Very complex organisation and coordination

- ◆ Lack of resources

THREATS

- ◆ Higher costs for renting equipment and costs for infrastructure

- ◆ Lack of interest from general public



Use of public spaces

1. Temporary use of places for NGOs

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Empty and unused places are used and held in condition
- ◆ Encouragement for individuals to develop and realize new ideas, because costs are lower (no rent)
- ◆ Greater options for more active participating of NGOs and other organisations
- ◆ Encourage new groups of people to start an activity
- ◆ Encourage social entrepreneurship

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Starting new activities
- ◆ Development of social innovations
- ◆ Creation of new organisations, working in public interest
- ◆ Creation of new branches in social entrepreneurship
- ◆ Creation of places for cultural and other events
- ◆ Revitalization of urban centres
- ◆ Social inclusion

► **Measure:** to provide more spaces for the functioning of NGOs, and thus indirectly also citizens. The accent is on abandoned spaces in the city, which represent a missed oppor-

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Uneconomical behaviour of potential users
- ◆ Users are not aware of the real costs of business activities

THREATS

- ◆ No interest in political work
- ◆ Negative feedback of market oriented players and as a result negative feedback from general public

tunity to inspire additional content to the city, and thereby contribute to its revival. This way citizens would contribute to the conservation of these areas and at the same time to the revitalization of the city with its activities in associations.

► **Methodology:** the method is initiative and signature, along with the support of NGOs. The tools are resources for expansion of ideas through various media and modern ways of communication, person to person communication, and social networking.

► **Target group:** in broader view all citizens actively involved in NGOs, NGOs in strict sense

► **Stakeholders:** Local authorities



2. Mobile urban gardens

► **Measure:** The idea is to create sustainable green oases with new outdoor life and edible crops and establish a stronger social cohesion between different citizens. They also make residents of the cities aware that they by few and cheap means can produce some of their own food, even if they live in the middle of the city.

► **Methodology:** The urban gardens con-

tribute to the development of local networks, support the feeling of belonging to the city's communities and create ownership of urban space. The local networks are supported by organising joint activities, such as common meals, garden days, barbecue evening, etc.

► **Target group:** all citizens

► **Stakeholders:** Ministry of Environment, local authorities

STRENGTHS

◆ Low cost when using recycled materials and volunteer workforce. Can be done almost anywhere, only a small space is needed

OPPORTUNITIES

◆ Great way to transform previously unused city spaces or run down areas

WEAKNESSES

◆ Needs someone to take charge and form some sort of leadership of the project. If not, it may not run successfully or with the needed guidelines.

THREATS

◆ The necessity of much highlight and attention for people to have focus on it

◆ Exposure to vandalism

3. Regeneration of the public recreational area

► **Measure:** The aim is to create a tool, development plan, which would help reach consensus on issues such as the regeneration of public recreational areas involving local residents in the decision-making process.

► **Methodology:** The four stage toolset for public involvement:

- The public opinion poll
- The series of public forum
- The creation of a development programme on the base of the poll and public forum
- The presentation of the concept plan on final public forum

► **Target group:** the whole population of the housing estate

► **Stakeholders:** Mthe whole population of the housing estate

STRENGTHS

◆ Sport facilities

◆ Parks, green areas

◆ Improved flow of information regarding the residential volunteers work

OPPORTUNITIES

◆ More improvements in transportation (public transport, making the roads clean)

◆ Improving public safety

◆ Making voluntary work more popular

◆ Expanding discount cards

WEAKNESSES

◆ Passive mentality

◆ Failed reconnecting

◆ Transport difficulties

◆ Various conditions of elderly citizens

◆ Uneven distribution of civil services in space

THREATS

◆ Reduction of resources

◆ Ageing region

◆ Unsuitable allowances

◆ Segregation

Youth participation

1. Common students' councils

► **Measure:** The Common Student Council aims to represent all students in their municipality and at municipality level. It is the students' voice into the municipality, local politicians and municipality officials and the press. Furthermore, it is the council's job to focus on and expand and develop student democracy in the municipality in a positive direction. This can be done by participating actively in political work in schools for example by submitting responses, through debates e.g. with politicians or read letters and by doing various activities e.g. setting focus on an issue in the municipality. They work to ensure the good school life to all students at Danish primary schools, public, private, independent and youth schools. It is a collaboration that requires commitment, priority and will.

► **Methodology:** By involving students into

local democracy, the municipality achieves not only democratic education of students, but the aim is also to ensure improved well-being and happier students who feel ownership of their education and local communities. A good relationship is very important in common student council. If it needs to function optimally, it is important that you can talk freely and make room for each other. In the common student council it is also very important that you can cooperate, for through good cooperation there will be more opinions, views and perspectives, and it will perform better and provide more thorough and well-prepared projects. If you manage to make work fun, you will also have more desire to work, thus ensuring greater engagement and motivation.

► **Target group:** students, their families, teachers

► **Stakeholders:** Schools, teachers, students, municipality

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Student involvement
- ◆ The initiative is without direct costs, only needs time from municipal officials to coordinate
- ◆ The output and inclusion is very high compared to what is needed

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Student councils are very common in schools. Adding the layer above at municipality level with a common student council is a relatively easy step

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ The initiative needs highly involved and engaged students to make it run successfully. Also it is necessary to follow basic democratic rules

THREATS

- ◆ The municipal level needs to be open to the suggestions and comments the council makes. Otherwise they do not feel involved and the structure may dissolve



2. Youth advisory council for under 14

► **Measure:** The Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is a system made up of boys and girls attending primary and secondary school, and has consultative and advisory purpose toward the municipality. It arranges its own activities within two working commissions. The YAC is an educational project that tries to build a common consciousness among children, in order to make them active citizens, through a participatory planning method and community actions.

► **Methodology:**

- Active involvement of the schools participating in the project
- Insights/in-depth analysis of the topics characterizing the projects that YAC will develop
- Co-planning together with the children, specialists and educators (teachers)
- Discussion and exchange of views about



different options at each stage of work. Sharing with the group of decisions and tasks given after discussion.

- Transparency during each stage of work
- Cooperative approach
- Work in small groups (Commissions) with periodic moments of synthesis
- Work with school classes on actions agreed with teachers
- Building links and partnership between different actors working on the territory
- Worktables, periodic meetings, meetings for supervision and evaluation

► **Target group:** students under 14, schools, teachers, families, local administrators, citizens

► **Stakeholders:** primary and secondary schools (headmasters, teachers), municipal administration (council members, technicians), experts on issues concerning the project, local associations and partners



STRENGTHS

- ◆ The kids have to deal with reality (f. ex. Economic shortcomings, which force to downsize the imagined project)
- ◆ Enriching the civic culture of the students by educating them to active participation

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Building national and international partnerships with projects addressed to the same age group dealing with education, participation and active citizenship
- ◆ Giving greater importance to the means of communication to make many more citizens aware about the projects realized; enhancing student commitment; increasing awareness of the importance of participation political and social life

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Lack of communication action in order to allow a widespread visibility in the territory during the activity period
- ◆ The difficulties with finding the economic resources for the project

◆ Limited development and realization of the project

THREATS

- ◆ The awareness of each school (and teacher) about an idea of education for which students are active players and not passive listeners, about active citizenship
- ◆ School programs are not flexible and it's hard to promote projects that go beyond school subjects in order to develop interdisciplinary knowledge
- ◆ The unavailability of funds to support the YAC and projects to be implemented

3. YoungERCard/Young Protagonist

► **Measure:** The Young Protagonist promotes actions of active citizenship among young people to enhance their sense of belonging to the community through the participation in volunteering (and active citizenship) projects. The Young Protagonist wants to enhance local experiences and projects aimed at promoting civic engagement, volunteering and education in healthy and ethically responsible lifestyles among young people.

► **Methodology:**

- YoungERcard as a symbol of belonging to the community and as a tool for communication between city government and youth
- Website and related social network as tools of information, communication and dialogue about the active citizenship opportunities in the city, new proposals, etc.
- Orientation interviews to guide young

people into choices

- Building a network of collaborative relationships with associations and high schools
- Widespread distribution of YoungERcard in the first classes of high schools through meetings in which “Young Protagonist” will be explained
- Monitoring and on-going evaluation of the measure “Young Protagonists” in the coordination group
- Realization of events in which the local government (in the name of citizens) recognizes the importance of the work the young people have carried out.

► **Target group:** young people who work, live or study in the city between the ages of 14 – 29 years, teachers, the representatives of the associations, the families of the volunteers, people who directly benefit from the actions of active citizenship of young people

► **Stakeholders:** Municipality, media, youth

STRENGTHS

- ◆ The opportunity for socialization, collaboration and growth for young people
- ◆ Enabling connection between institutions, schools, organizations and the environment
- ◆ To identify and examine the needs of young people and also their expectations
- ◆ Raising awareness of youth about the environmental issues
- ◆ Raising awareness of youth about the importance of the debate
- ◆ Involving the youth to concrete experiences and active service
- ◆ Development of a network of collaboration within the area
- ◆ Creation and development of new experiences that meet the needs and expectations of the youth

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Possible move of this project to regional level which could be resulting in greater involvement of youth, creating thus a more cohesive community and more conscious citizens

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ It is difficult to reach and engage young people aged 24 – 29 years
- ◆ Lack of close collaboration with the universities



Promoting the participation of disadvantaged groups

1. Community Centres (Croatia)

► **Measure:** The aim is to improve access to services for all citizens and strengthen the regional identity of civil society. This leads to networking and capacity building of civil society and informed citizens in order to increase their awareness, promote human rights of fragile and socially excluded citizens, etc.

► **Methodology:** The Action methodology is primarily and intensively aimed to inform, educate and empower so that citizens and regional CSOs:

- Are directly given information and service
- Have ongoing access to this information and services
- Are encouraged and enabled to engage in dialogue and be given the opportunity to test their opinions and make informed decisions.

Activities implemented in the Community Centre – assistance on a daily basis, job seekers club, free legal aid, creative and interactive workshops, volunteering, public community fora, social networks, cooperation, networking and education of CSOs

► **Target group:** Socially marginalized community members: unemployed, socially excluded persons, returnees, minorities, etc., CSO working with marginalized groups, citizens, local media, socially vulnerable groups (people that will benefit from volunteers' programmes), local communities

► **Stakeholders:** community services organizations, NGOs, local government council, citizens.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Strong community partnerships
- ◆ The Community Centre model
- ◆ Careful and detailed planning
- ◆ Consistency in carrying out activities and crucial follow-up measures
- ◆ Competent and capable team equally motivated to conquer barriers

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Further capacity development of NGO
- ◆ Further strengthening of international NGO cooperation
- ◆ EU policies, strategies and funding opportunities especially ESF

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Financial insecurity of NGOs which compromises sustainability of services due to political climate and general lack of government support (especially local and regional) in efforts to develop democratic environment and systems
- ◆ Community members' inertia – lack of active citizenship and sense of responsibility due to a lack of understanding of the concept of democracy and citizens' role in creating a democratic environment

THREATS

- ◆ Political environment
- ◆ New laws and policies which impact on NGOs are creating impossible administrative workloads for NGOs compromising their existence and their "cause"
- ◆ Financial instability of NGOs due to lack of financial transparency and non-existent funding structure at local and regional government level for NGOs overheads





2. Community centres (Slovakia)

► **Measure:** Community centres can be defined as places where staff implement community development approaches in concrete area, empowering people by providing them with the skills so they can effect change in their own communities. The objectives are to create suitable conditions for the support of active citizenship of activities, which can contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the residents, to prevent the deepening of social exclusion, etc.

► **Methodology:** To create a community centre, there are several steps to follow:

- To do PROFILE community research – to determine the needs of the community
- Collection of the information – qualitative data

► **Target group:** residents of neighbourhood, local NGOs, non-formal initiatives and volunteers

► **Stakeholders:** community/citizens, local government, NGOs

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Linking the physical space
- ◆ Offering spaces and services for free interface with personnel capacity
- ◆ Community based measure

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Achieve multi-source funding

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Financial dependence on the city
- ◆ Central location on the edge of the complex interconnection with one space

THREATS

- ◆ Disinterest of new target groups
- ◆ City decides to stop financial support
- ◆ Burnout of key people

3. Commission for disabled persons

► **Measure:** The aim is to include people with disabilities in all aspects of public life, such as, equal participation in political, public and cultural life, including education and employment. The Commission should be composed of representatives of public institutions and CSOs dealing with wide range of disabilities. The created working groups will: better follow, collect, analyse and recommend concrete measures towards specific groups of people with disabilities.

► **Methodology:**

- The establishment of the Commission
- The monthly meetings between Com-

mission and the municipality

- The creation of a strategy and monitoring of its implementation and recommendations of needed improvements

- The Commission is in daily contact with target groups gathering data, raising awareness and informing disabled people

► **Target groups:** the people with disabilities, members of their families and social environment; In particular: children with disabilities in development, disabled women and young girls, disabled youth and disabled elderly people

► **Stakeholders:** Association focusing on disabled people, municipality, public institutions and companies

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Joint action of experts and disabled person' associations
- ◆ Political support of the municipality
- ◆ Secured place of work of the Commission
- ◆ Adopted strategy

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Strategy as a base for continuation of the Commission work
- ◆ Knowledge, experience and motivation of the Commission members for change and concrete actions

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Not adequate level of interest for participation and implementation by the main target groups
- ◆ Low level of motivation by some members of the Commission
- ◆ Low level of informing citizens on the Commission work in the media

THREATS

- ◆ Political lobbying for particular association of disabled people
- ◆ Lack of continuum in work
- ◆ Participation in the Commission work on voluntary basis
- ◆ Work of the Commission not well recognized in the community

4. Q-Ageing programme

► **Measure:** The aim is to encourage and facilitate the activity of people over 60 in order to improve their mental health condition and to strengthen social cohesion among them.

► **Methodology:** the applied methods are:

- Public opinion poll and focus group meetings to map what kind of expectations they have towards the local government
- The survey on their willingness to par-

ticipate on the implementation of the programmes

- A group of volunteers involved in the advertising of the programme and informing about the opportunities and reporting back to the local government

► **Target group:** people above 60 with border line 75 years

► **Stakeholders:** people above 60, local government staff

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Sport facilities
- ◆ Parks, green areas
- ◆ Improved flow of information regarding the residential volunteers work

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ More improvements in transportation (public transport, making the roads clean)
- ◆ Improving public safety
- ◆ Making voluntary work more popular
- ◆ Expanding discount cards

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Failed reconnecting
- ◆ Transport difficulties
- ◆ Various conditions of elderly citizens
- ◆ Uneven distributions of civil services in space

THREATS

- ◆ Reduction of resources
- ◆ Ageing region
- ◆ Unsuitable allowances
- ◆ Segregation

Media and E-participation

1. TV show “Ask the Mayor”

► **Measure:** To broadcast a television show targeting citizens so that they can publicly express their inputs/feedback on given issues of interest at local level and interact with the Mayor’s cabinet. The measure further involves citizens in the decision-making process on issues directly affecting their life and stimulates debate between local authorities and ordinary citizens.

► **Methodology:** TV show “Ask the Mayor” would consist of three parts:

- Live broadcast where the mayor (or mayor’s cabinet) directly answers to citizens’ questions
- Collection of questions by phone calls that the Mayor receives via the moderator of the show
- The measure is accompanied by the establishment of a Facebook page dedicated to collect questions via social networks

► **Target group:** all citizens

► **Stakeholders:** Mayor, local media house, citizens

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Strengthen citizens’ knowledge of public administration
- ◆ Increase viewership of local television
- ◆ Tool able to reach vast majority of ordinary people

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Greater interest of citizens to participate
- ◆ Better collaboration between local authorities and citizens
- ◆ Better visibility of the NGO sector as moderator between local authorities and citizens

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Not all citizens are interested in the tool
- ◆ Citizens do not always feel at ease to express their opinions
- ◆ Political influence on citizen to express their opinion

THREATS

- ◆ Dissatisfaction of the Mayor with citizens turnout
- ◆ Dissatisfaction of citizens with Mayor’s turnout

2. ICT participation

► **Measure:** Use of alternative means of communication (ICT tools) in the relation between local authorities and citizens

► **Methodology:**

• To set up of a data base of residents' emails, to use as a constant communication tool between local authorities and citizens

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Interactive Communication
- ◆ Faster communication

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Further citizens involvement through ICT trainings
- ◆ Reduce of digital gap

• To provide free trainings on ICT to citizens in order to reduce the digital divide

► **Target groups:** city residents

► **Stakeholders:** city residents, visitors to the city, foreign residents living in the city

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Lack of ICT skills in still wide part of the residents
- ◆ Weak internet signal in some areas of the city
- ◆ Lack of IT equipment especially with the elderly population

THREATS

- ◆ Lack of investments in ICT
- ◆ Lack of public funds for ICT trainings
- ◆ Lack of reduced interest from citizens

3. Newspaper participation

► **Measure:** The purpose and objectives of a newspaper column are to give readers the opportunity to say what they think, what they notice and what they would like to alert the experts and local authorities about. The column engages citizens to paying more attention to their environment and provides them with an

opportunity to speak out and to get a quick response from the competent authority.

► **Methodology:** weekly column in the local newspaper, the tools are phone calls from readers and ordinary citizens in general, and answers from competent authorities or journalists on duty

► **Target group:** general public, primarily readers of the local newspaper, more broadly all citizens of the territory

► **Stakeholders:** Local authorities and competent individuals or organisations responsible for issues at stake, newspaper and journalists



STRENGTHS

- ◆ The column appears periodically in the newspaper, therefore is a very important source of information
- ◆ The column gives the opportunity to literally every citizen to express their opinions

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ More citizens can be reached
- ◆ More publicity of the tool could increase the interaction between local authorities and citizens

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Young people are not relevantly involved given their inclination to social media and online information
- ◆ Issues raised by citizens are not always answered fully
- ◆ There is not much possibility to follow up responses and how these are concretely implemented

THREATS

- ◆ Citizens can much easier express their opinion through other social media (Facebook, Twitter...), mainly youngsters
- ◆ Printed newspapers are in decline

Other measures

1. Participatory budgeting

► **Measure:** The aim is to improve citizens' cooperation and their participation in public life, in particular, to improve cooperation between citizens and local authorities, the involvement of citizens in the decision-making on financial issues of the city and to improve cooperation between local authorities and NGOs.

► **Methodology:** several steps:
• The community members identify spending priorities and select budget delegates

- Budget delegates develop specific spending proposals with help from experts
- Community members vote on which proposals to fund
- The city or institution implements the top proposals

► **Target group:** Different NGOs working on the territory, local authorities, all citizens

► **Stakeholders:** Local authorities, NGO sector, citizens

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Local authority provides an opportunity for citizens to participate in decision making regarding living conditions
- ◆ Citizens are interested in participating in decision making process
- ◆ Better living conditions for citizens

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Possibility to realise the real needs of the community

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Political influence
- ◆ Lack of interest of citizens to participate in decision making process
- ◆ Lack of interest of local authorities to cooperate with NGO sector and citizens

THREATS

- ◆ Lack of financial resources in the budget of local authorities
- ◆ Manipulation of funds by political parties
- ◆ Possibility of non-implementation of the actual need because of citizens and NGO sector passivity



2. Citizens initiatives

► **Measure:** The aim is to launch a citizens' policy proposal initiative to be discussed by the Municipal Council in order to solve a specific issue, which is seen as a general problem by the citizens. Citizens' initiatives should be regulated in the municipal statute.

- **Methodology:** several steps:
- To include the citizens' initiative to the legal

statute of the municipality and to establish the conditions

- To create a citizens initiative dealing with a certain problem on the basis of citizens' opinion.

- **Target group:** all citizens in voting age
- **Stakeholders:** formal or non-formal group of citizens, municipality authorities, Municipal Council, Cantonal Assembly

STRENGTHS

- ◆ It is recognized in the Statute and legally defined

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ The legal nature of the measure puts great strength in the hands of people who would be willing to create a strong and successful initiative

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ People who sign the initiative cannot be included completely in the process

THREATS

- ◆ Even if a lot of people signed it, usually just a small group is more involved, so the signatures can be exploited

3. Public discussions

► **Measure:** The public discussion aims to gather the citizens and local authorities together and discuss issues that are deemed important by a large number of citizens. Citizens are involved in the decision-making process and can express their opinion on how to regulate a particular problem.

► **Methodology:** Through public discussions, the citizens take part in establishing the regulations in accordance with the municipality jurisdiction.

- **Target group:** all citizens
- **Stakeholders:** municipal authorities, interested citizens

STRENGTHS

- ◆ The possibility of engaging the public around something important
- ◆ The tool is recognized in the Statute of the Municipality and is legally defined as obligatory in certain situations

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ To engage more citizens to attend discussions to strengthen the impact on decision-making process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ The interest of the public can be short-term
- ◆ Very hard to get a lot of people to be present on public discussions

THREATS

- ◆ The lack of interest of citizens, their passiveness and thinking that nothing can be done





4. Civil District Council

► **Measure:** The Civil District Council is a consultative and advisory body set up on a voluntary basis and working with the mayor's administration. The purpose of the council activities are: to ensure transparency in the Mayor's administration activities and to assist in improving the knowledge of citizens about what is happening in the area, to lessen the time for setting and solving social issues, to act as a moderator to the mayor's work and the administration, to use the expertise and statements.

► Methodology:

- The Council takes decisions by a simple

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Participation of the district mayor in the council establishment
- ◆ Active participation of the local residents since the very beginning and initiation of activities aimed to improve the local environment
- ◆ Realisation of number of activities, campaigns and projects with local importance
- ◆ Involvement of variety of stakeholders i.e. the local authority, the business, the NGO representatives

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Increasing the communication and relations between the district administration and the local authority in order to involve more councillors in such initiatives
- ◆ Searching for additional funding through public, private and public-private partnerships
- ◆ Increasing the members of the council through involvement of more residents in the implementation of additional activities

majority, they are recommendatory in nature for the mayor

- The Council is working on quarterly action plans and Civil Board holds sessions once a month
- The adopted decisions are announced in writing at the local City Hall, local media, etc.
- The secretary of the board has the authority to recommend to mayor the acceptance or rejection of a Council decision
- The funding is ensured by the membership fees

► **Target group:** local population specifically related with the district environment and the businesses active, guests of the area, the foreign business active in the relevant area

► **Stakeholders:** mayor, experts, specialists and NGO, local authorities, residents

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Not so high level of support from the local authority and the local government
- ◆ Difficulties in fundraising and implementing charity campaigns
- ◆ Lack of funding for realisation of particular local initiatives coming from the residents

THREATS

- ◆ Lack of support by the local authority to public initiatives
- ◆ Lack of necessary resources, including funding of actions and projects
- ◆ Unwillingness of the local residents to take part in the activities

5. Citizens' panels

► **Measure:** Using a bottom-up approach, through employing and further advancing the method of citizen panel, ALDA – the European Association for Local Democracy seeks to assure interaction between citizens and



decision makers at local and regional level, fostering at the same time their active participation in the life of their communities. To collect the opinion of citizens and allow them present their recommendations to the decision makers represent the main focus of the whole process.

► **Methodology:** 8 steps:

- Selection of the themes and analysis at the local level
- Training for citizens' panel activators
- Set up of local citizen's panels
- Research activity at the local level
- Activities at local level
- Production phase
- Presentation of the recommendations to the decision makers
- Evaluation and follow up

► **Target group:** citizens over 16 years of age not often engaged in the public, with different backgrounds and coming from different walks of life. The different segments of the community should be represented in the panel.

► **Stakeholders:** Regions, provinces, municipalities, NGO, civil society groups, ordinary citizens

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Direct relation citizens – decision makers
- ◆ Space for free expression
- ◆ Involvement of the community as a whole
- ◆ Direct involvement of citizens
- ◆ Minority positions taken into account

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Bringing citizens' voice directly into the decision making process
- ◆ Further development of the impact through ICT tools
- ◆ Peer to peer relations
- ◆ Empowerment of citizens as resource persons

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ High cost for direct participation in the panel
- ◆ Not always enough time

THREATS

- ◆ Low participation
- ◆ Representation of the community not in all its angles
- ◆ Information provided politically
- ◆ Process politically driven
- ◆ Scarce capability and creativity of activators
- ◆ Lack of time
- ◆ Lack of trust – recommendations not taken into account

CONCLUSION



Fostering cooperation between local authorities and civil society has been proven to be an efficient tool to create the necessary conditions for political and social development of communities all across wider Europe and to bring better results in terms of equality, welfare, security and sustainability. Engaging citizens in all aspects of the life of their community and making their voices heard through peaceful and legal forms of participation is an antidote to populism and anti-democratic movements across Europe.

The project DECIDE, through a two year process developed by a consortium of 26 partners from 15 countries, highlighted the will of local authorities and civil society organisations to work together in order to develop tested measures promoting the participation of citizens in the public and political life of their community.

Local authorities are called to increase their transparency and accountability as well as to develop mechanisms effectively involving citizens in the decision making process. Civil society organisations also play a key role, they being a unique link between citizens and their local and regional governments. Together they can provide the needed mechanisms towards participatory democracy, and strengthen democratic institutions at all levels of governance. The DEMocratic Compact would like to be an effective toolkit at the disposal of local authorities and civil society associations to developing, through tested measures, citizen participation in public life.





DEmocratic Compact: Improving Democracy in Europe

Partners of the project

Lead partner



European Association for Local Democracy – ALDA, France



Comune di Reggio Emilia, Italy



Vejle Kommune, Denmark



Municipality of Santa Eulalia de Gallego, Spain



The Mountain Community Iezer Muscet Association, Romania



Primaria Godeni, Romania



Primaria Comunei Domnesti, Romania



Association for Developing Voluntary Work Novo Mesto, Slovenia



Birgu Local Council, Malta



International Development Alliance (IDA), Bulgaria



Union of Bulgarian Black Sea Local Authorities, Bulgaria



Municipality of Balchik, Bulgaria



Municipality of Nessebar, Bulgaria



Center for Community Organizing, Slovakia



Town of Petrinja, Croatia



Local Democracy Agency Sisak, Croatia



UG Agencija Lokalne Demokratije Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina



Municipality of Zavidovici, Bosnia and Herzegovina



Local Democracy Agency Zavidovici, Bosnia and Herzegovina



City of Skopje, FYRO Macedonia



Bashkia Shkoder, Albania



Local Democracy Agency Albania, Albania



Center for research, Cooperation and Development, Albania



Mőrahalm Városi Önkormányzat, Hungary



Municipality of Banska Bystrica, Slovakia



National University of Public Services, Hungary



Municipality of Ujbuda, Hungary

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