

**BET** on EU **Balkans and Europe Together:**  
Opportunity for a New Experience towards Unification!



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# Project partners

## Lead partner:

- City of Subotica (SRB)

## Other partners:

- ALDA (FR)
- Municipality of Ravenna (IT)
- Municipality of Cremona (IT)
- City of Osijek (CRO)
- Municipality of Érd, (HU)
- Municipality of Kiskunhalas (HU)
- Municipality of Odorheiu Secuiesc (RO)
- Mountain Community Iezer Muscel Association (RO)
- International Platform for Citizen Participation (BG)
- Union of Bulgarian Black Sea Local Authorities (UBBSLA) (BG)
- Municipality of Knjazevac (SRB)
- Municipality of Zavidovici (BIH)
- Wolverhampton City Council (UK)
- Municipality of Bijelo Polje (MNE)
- Municipality of Niksic (MNE)
- Municipality of Aerodrom (MK)
- Municipality of Kumanovo (MK)
- Municipality of Novo Mesto (SI)

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# INTRODUCTION

## About the project BETonEU – Metaphor of the bet on EU enlargement

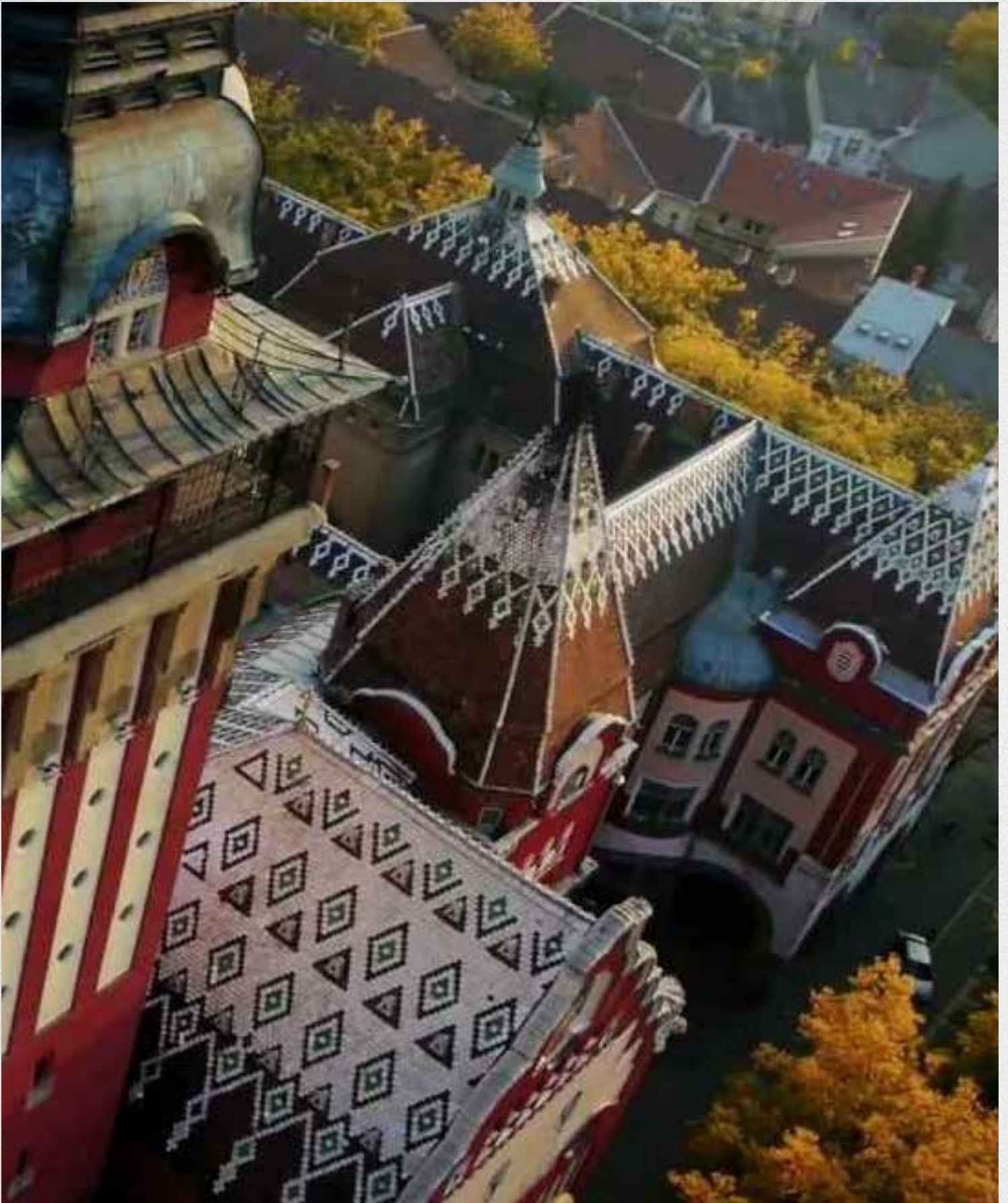
This publication - “game book” is a result of the project BETonEU Balkans and Europe Together: Opportunity for a New Experience towards Unification! which aims at representing an unbiased platform for exchanging, reflecting, debating and acting for the future of Europe, as ambassadors of the motto “United in diversity”. It encompasses 19 partners - 12 in the EU 28 and 7 in the Balkans - from 12 different countries.

The project structure followed the metaphor of a bet: first of all, it is important to know the rules of the game, secondly it is essential to consider your own resources and what you are willing to invest and finally you need to decide what to bet on. Therefore this publication represents a ‘game book’: which presents the results of the common actions of the partners and is prepared as a valuable tool to help disseminate and multiply the engagement of the European and Balkan local authorities in the EU enlargement process.

The partners of the project “BET on EU” were requested to play the role of stakeholders of the future enlarged EU, fully assuming their responsibilities in shaping the Union and functioning as “multipliers” in their own communities in order to engage in this challenge a wide range of local actors and participants: citizens from diverse sections of local community, civil society organizations, public bodies and institutions, etc.

By debating and learning about how the EU works, partners and participants optimise their available resources rather than merely gambling with funds due to a lack of information or knowledge. By discussing what resources they can commit citizens gain a sense of ownership not only of the resources and project but also of the EU. A collective bid, discussed and agreed upon by all the partners, reinforces a shared understanding of the European integration and unification, underpinning and promoting the EU enlargement.

In the following pages the action’s main results and recommendations will be presented.



## About the Lead partner – City of Subotica - Serbia

The City of Subotica is the northernmost city of Serbia and the second largest one in the Province of Vojvodina, with the population around 150.000, situated about 10 km from the Serbian-Hungarian border. Subotica is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious town, composed of more than 20 different nationalities.

The City is firmly committed to working together with the local civil society



and supporting the respect for diversity in multicultural society, with the aim to activate the role of civil society for improved participation and inclusion of citizens in public policy making and local community development.

The local self-government is encouraging the effective participation of diverse communities in the decision making process, effective

implementation of minority rights and citizen participation in public life on local level. The city of Subotica is among the founders of the European Intercultural Cities Network, now gathering around 90 cities and municipalities.



8 NETWORK OF TOWNS - The final outcome of the project BETonEU is the development of a long-term sustainable network of towns committed to the enhancement of cooperation between towns in Europe and the Balkans through fostering citizen participation in the decision-making within the framework of the EU enlargement process.





**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:

**1**

**1 - 1st international event: the rules of the game**  
(Osijek, Croatia, 1-3 December 2014)

The kick-off event focused on the “rules of the game”, with the objective of raising awareness on the EU affairs, namely the enlargement process and the role that local authorities and citizens have in shaping the future of EU, and highlighting the methods of joint participation in the EU project.

**2**

**2 - Local Path phase 1**

Local processes were activated, encompassing different methods and characteristics: the common aim was to multiply the effect at local level, offer the opportunity to get to know the “rules of the game” namely the European union and its policies in local communities and collect the resources of the community for the “bet”.

**3**

**3 - 2nd international event: the resources to invest in the bet**  
(Ravenna 14 - 16 April 2015)

Discussion and collaboration amongst the partners about the resources they can invest in the notable EU challenge, activities in relation to EU enlargement

**4**

**4 - Local path: 2nd phase**

Second stage of local processes were organized to listen and focus on citizens and civil society organizations' voice about the future of the EU, specifically on the enlargement. The common aim was to multiply the effect at local level, providing an unbiased platform for exchanging, reflecting, debating and acting for the future of Europe, as ambassadors of the motto “United in diversity”.

**5**

**5 - 3rd international event: decision on what to bet on**  
(Subotica 31 August - 2 September 2015)

Partners had the opportunity to put together their objectives of the bet with recommendations and goals for future activities with the aim of promoting EU



# RULES OF THE GAME – UNDERSTANDING ENLARGEMENT

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Today's European Union is the result of decades' long integration process. Over the past years the established European institutional architecture has provided its citizens with peace and stability, the single market, single currency, mobility, therefore the EU is and has been a place of decent living, equal opportunities and of success. However, looking back at the results of public opinion polls it has become evident that many citizens have expressed skepticism with a view to the European enlargement and integration perspective. Results of the recent public surveys conducted in the EU member states show that there is a significant decrease in support to enlarged EU .

Therefore, fostering relations and cooperation between the European and Balkan local authorities can become a strong tool ensuring a new impetus to the



EU enlargement process with contributing to the establishment of a long-lasting thematic network of local authorities strongly active and committed as key players for the EU enlargement.

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The enlargement policy is considered to be the most effective transformation mechanism that the EU has. During previous years it has proven its effectiveness in uniting

European countries in the joint European spirit and values, enhancing tolerance and mutual understanding between European citizens and contributing to intercultural dialogue. Its historic task is to further the integration of the continent by peaceful means, extending a zone of stability and prosperity to new members.

Enlargement is one of the EU's most powerful policy tools. It is vitally important for the EU to ensure a carefully managed enlargement process that extends peace, stability, prosperity, democracy, human rights and the rule of law across Europe, for the mutual benefit of all citizens. BET on EU brings diverse



stakeholders together to work towards the common aim of a stronger and more united Europe.

The current EU “enlargement fatigue” together with “reforms fatigue” in the Balkan countries shows that the cooperation between towns in wider Europe is one of the best tools in providing a space for interaction, best practice share and cooperation between citizens, on the common topic of enlargement. Fostering a sense of ownership of the EU and thus strengthening and keeping the momentum, motivation and understanding for the enlargement EU project.

Role of local authorities in the Enlargement process and their added value within this course is invaluable considering that two-thirds of the Acquis Communautaire has to be implemented by local and regional authorities. Therefore the BETonEU Network of Towns is a valuable asset for multiplying the ‘rules of the game’ of enlargement across EU and non-EU countries.

Effective enlargement process can succeed only with public support both in candidate countries and EU Member states as well. Therefore, exchanges, debates and cooperation giving citizens the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing a tighter-knit Europe, contributes to a rich united European spirit and future potential.



# 3. RESOURCES TO INVEST IN EU INTEGRATION

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The 2003 'Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans' endorsed EU enlargement. To meet EU requirements, countries in the Balkans have made improvements and concerted efforts to comply with these regulations. The EU must support these efforts to solidify relations and consequently the EU enlargement process. To strengthen and ensure the sustainability of EU enlargement, it is necessary for citizens to understand the relation between the EU and its citizens and to foster a sense of belonging to the EU Project.

During the international and local events experiences were shared from partner participants, as well as good practices in the field of engaging the local communities in the public debate related to the EU public policies, in order to help the EU integration process get closer to citizens, and ensure both transparency and ownership of the reforms.

The resources that can be 'invested' in the notable EU challenge which emerged during the action as a result of joint discussion and debates among the partners were the following:





## \*Resource 1) Open up the debate on enlargement

It is necessary to engage a wide number of citizens and stakeholders in the debate on enlargement, both in candidate countries and member states. There is a need for a continuous discourse about the principle, process and progress in ongoing enlargement policy.

As showcased EU and Balkan citizens interactions can contribute to the better understanding of each other's challenges, perspectives and joint measures to be taken for more successful future enlargements. In the candidate countries the EU's enlargement policy should provide channels for citizen participation considering that regular and public discussions can create the opportunity for citizens to be better informed about the logic and reasons behind the enlargement thus having a wider sense of understanding and stronger ownership of the process.

Throughout the action citizens and other stakeholders were given the opportunity to reflect, exchange and debate on the addressed issues and thus contribute to local level participation and democracy, showing the importance of this process.

## \* Resource 2) Acknowledgement of the positive impact of the enlargement

18 Popular discontent is easily exploitable therefore raising awareness of citizens that there is another side to all of the issues that the today's Europe is facing. The positive effects of enlargement have to gain more visibility in order to share the common European spirit of peace, prosperity and equality. The joint process made citizens reflect and debate of the impact of the EU in their daily lives, asking them to contribute to the improvement of EU policies thus reinforcing their ownership of the process while acknowledging positive effects of the joint EU project.

Euroscepticism is an element of public discourse entering primarily through the mass media. As such it is given public expression through narratives that are targeted to draw attention of the wider audience. Understanding the responsive and public nature of Euroscepticism can reinforce citizens to develop new more positive narratives that help EU and Balkan citizens make sense of themselves and of their collective project.





BET Balkans and Europe Together

Assessing the Road Towards a Unified...

- \* We can't expect new members of EU until 2020
- \* What could the countries that hope to join the EU do in order to maintain momentum for the enlarged... and avoid...





## \*Resource 3) Increased awareness of citizens, local authorities and civil society about EU enlargement

The citizens both in candidate countries and member states need to have sufficient information about EU and its policies in order to bring them closer to the European idea, as public support is critical for enlargement. Communications strategies for advocating for EU policies have to be more present in the public arena. Information campaign should provide the enlargement process to enter public discourse and agenda.

The wide geographical coverage and diversity embodied in this partnership represents the basis for its further enlargement as the partners will multiply the effects of the project within their respective communities, regions and countries.

Facing a generally decreasing popularity of the EU enlargement a new communication policy is needed in line with the dynamics of the national public opinions and public discourses since they present distinctive narratives within each individual EU member state.. Both the EU enlargement as well as an enhanced integration of the EU Member States need to be viewed as parallel processes that do not hinder each other.

Citizens of the EU as well as Western Balkan countries will in this way be fully involved in the process of reshaping the EU towards future perspectives.

## \*Resource 4) Promoting shared European values

European Union needs to be recognized as a place of common history, values, culture and spirit that unites all Europeans and countries of Europe, not only as a political and economic entity. These are the elements that shape the European identity and provide the basis for being part of the European Union in its intrinsic sense, which in turn gives the incentive for the future of the EU, its integration and enlargement. Each country, and hence each partner, participated in the action contributing its own history, values and cultural features. This bottom-up approach in building the consciousness of EU enlargement can in turn underpin the intercultural dialogue, enhanced mutual understanding and strengthened shared belonging to a European identity.

## \*Resource 5) Maintaining of the momentum for EU integration

It is important to maintain the momentum for EU integration while at present the enlargement process has been postponed but the motivation and vision of EU perspective has to be nurtured for the benefit of both the applicant countries and the EU itself. Furthermore the current phase of the process must be used to better prepare the candidate states for full-fledged membership in the EU, and also exchange experiences with EU Members states.





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# 4. RESULTS/ IMPACT OF THE COLLECTIVE STAKE FOR EU INTEGRATION

The partners contributed to the establishment of a long-lasting thematic network of local authorities who are active and committed to being key players in the EU enlargement process.

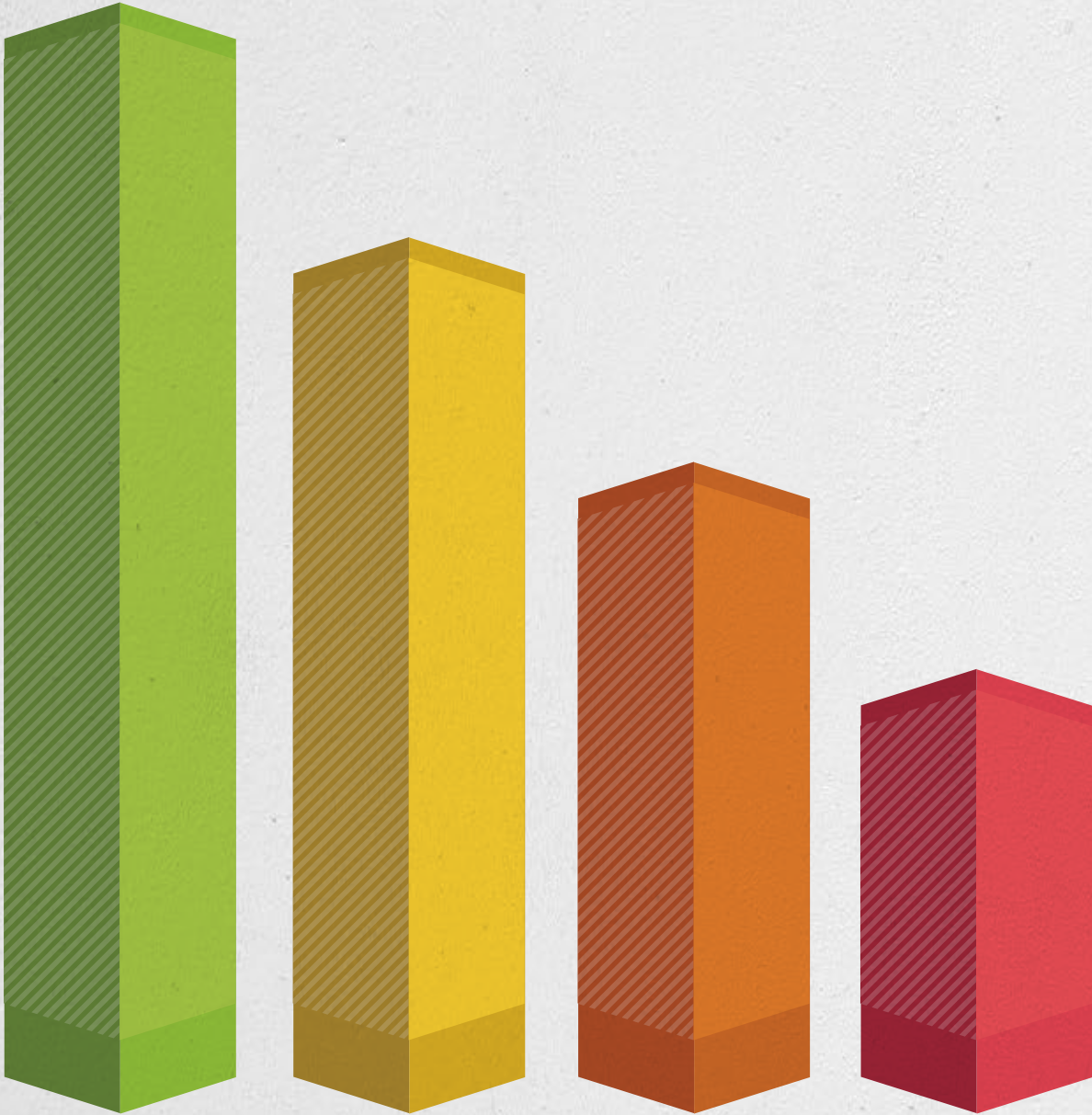
In this way the action gave citizens the opportunity to be informed and involved in a process which is ultimately affecting them all.

**With the identified resources to invest in the “bet” namely the EU project the impact of the action was the following:**

- 1) increased knowledge of citizens, local authorities and civil society towards EU enlargement
- 2) citizen participation in EU matters is increased
- 3) citizens awareness on EU policies and their related role is raised
- 4) a change in the attitude of citizens, local authorities and civil society towards the EU and enlargement process
- 5) cooperation between local authorities, civil society and citizens in the EU and Balkans is strengthened
- 6) decision makers are supported in their challenging task related to the identification and implementation of innovative participatory tools
- 7) importance of international cooperation on democracy and participation is raised.

One of the main outcomes of BET on EU the established network of local authorities, including civil society, which plays a relevant role in the promotion of local good governance - strongly committed to the constant improvement of democracy and participation in the EU and the Balkans. The BET on EU network will work within the larger network of ALDA (over 300 partners in the enlarged Europe) - an organization whose mission is the promotion of good governance by fostering

# GOAL



democracy and citizen participation. This provides a solid basis for its enlargement and sustainability in the long term.

BET on EU builds upon recent efforts by countries in the Balkans in supporting and contributing to EU enlargement. These efforts will be reinforced by the development of a long-term sustainable network of towns committed to the enhancement of cooperation between towns in Europe and the Balkans through fostering citizen participation in the decision-making within the framework of the EU enlargement process.

The areas for future cooperation emerged from the interactive workshops, where the partners proposed future joint activities in areas worth to bet for the future of the European Union: intercultural dialogue, remembrance, civic participation and dialogue, volunteering for democracy

# PARTICIPANTS' KEY MESSAGES CONVEYED DURING PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Enlargement is the most successful  
EU policy

At a time of major challenges,  
enlargement process continues to  
contribute to peace, stability and  
prosperity in Europe

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Despite the financial and migrants  
crisis - EU needs to work on  
deepening its integration

EU enlargement needs to  
be perceived as the process  
underpinning the democratic  
reforms and making the change  
happen

The risk of EU skepticism needs to  
be mitigated - with both consistent  
integration and enlargement policies

Acceding countries should be seen  
as partner countries committed to  
genuine sustainable reforms towards  
full EU membership

Roadmap towards EU membership can be cumbersome, but the prospect of moving forward needs to be real and credible

Getting the citizens in local communities closer to shared European values is the main mission of EU policy makers

Civil society needs to pave the EU way through promotion, research, monitoring and advocacy

For the EU to work better, we need more integration, not less

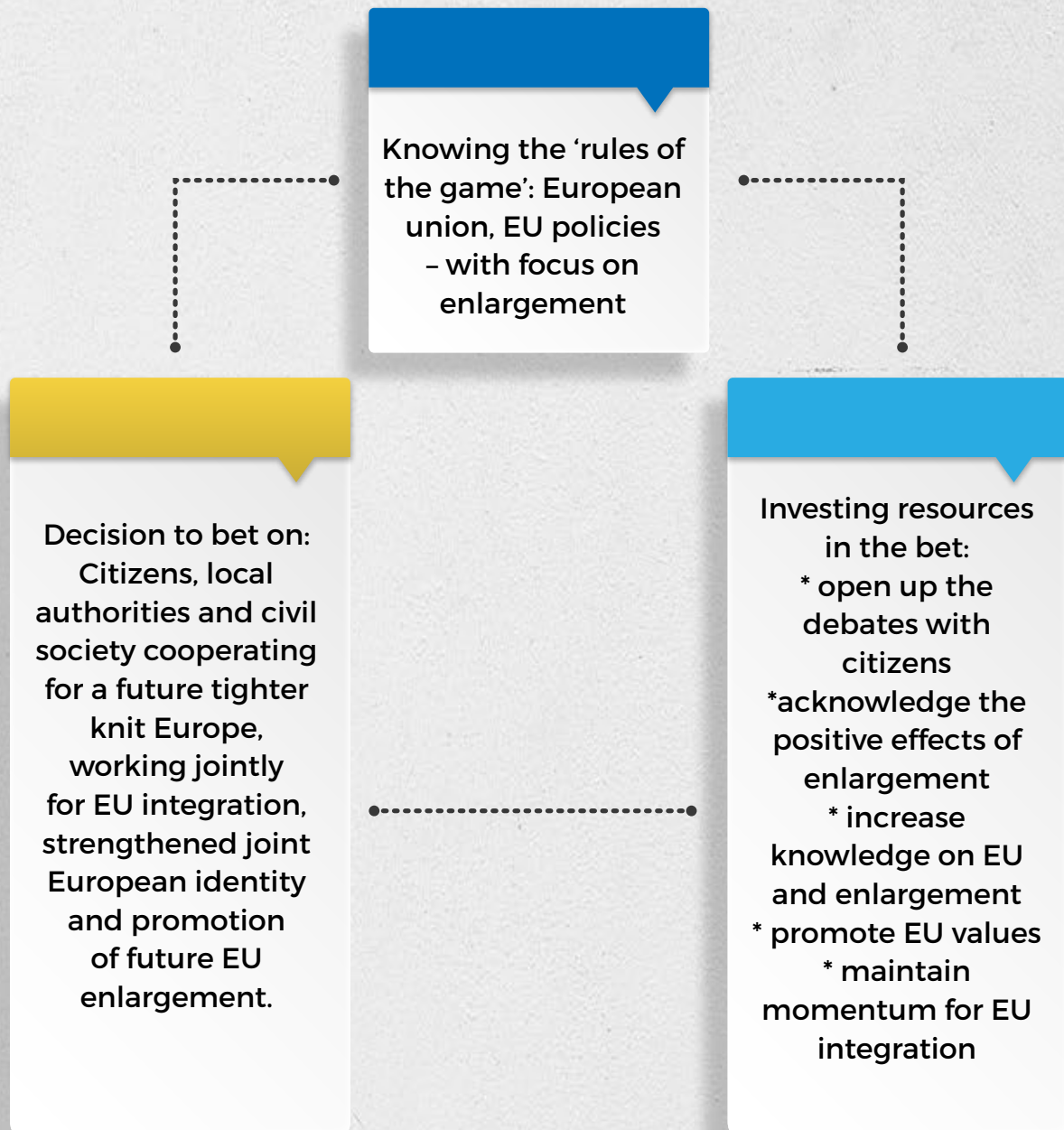
The problem is that very little people even know how EU operates and what would further integration mean. There is very little interest in European politics

CSOs and local authorities should be more involved in promoting the regional co-operation in the Western Balkans and contribute to improving the culture of dialogue for the EU integration perspective





# FINAL RESULTS OF THE METAPHOR OF THE BET





# PARTNERS OF THE PROJECT

