Strengthening Local Democracy in Armenia

in Armenia

Guidelines on citizens' participation

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TO START WITH ...

"Development does not start or stop with the production of goods. It starts with the people and the useable resources of people, such as motivation, initiative, organizational discipline. Without this, all resources remain potential and untapped .... "[1]

Since joining the Council of Europe, the consolidation of democratic principles and practices is progressing in the Eastern Partnership[2] countries and so is in Armenia. Democratic institutions, freedom of elections and check and balances of power are among the objectives that the recent Armenia has posed to itself for peace and development for the whole country.

The following guidelines, will give practical hints to all those who are seizing the challenge and embark on a new form and participative local governance!

Good luck!

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1   (Report on Sensitization Workshop on Community Resilience on Climate Change http://www.cwp--india.org/)
2   Eastern Partnership countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine

BASIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is Local Democracy?

Local Democracy is an essential component of the more general process of supporting democracy. It regards the inter-action, **existence and functioning** of formal and informal institutions (**local public authorities**, civil society, and media) and processes (**elections of political bodies and citizen participation**).

It essentially an on going cooperation between local authorities and citizens to build cohesive communities and addressing problem solving practices.

What is Local Democracy in Armenia?

Local Authorities have been elected in Armenia since 1996 and this represents a major step in the true consolidation of local democracy. The system implies one tier of local governance. State governance is implemented in 10 regions / marzes/while local self-governance is executed in 915 communities and in Yerevan. The strategy for strengthening local authorities is indicated by the implementation of the provisions of the **European Charter on Local Self Government** (CETS No. 122)[3], which Armenia ratified when it became a member of the Council of Europe in 2001. Armenia is among few States of the Council of Europe That on 13 May 2013 ratified the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (Utrecht, 2009, CETS No. 207). The provisions of the Additional Protocol became part of the Armenian legislation (RA Law on local self-government) on 19 June 2013. On 26 March 2014 the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 351(2014)[4] on the state of local democracy in Armenia, which, inter alia, recommends Armenian authorities to apply instruments promoting citizen participation at local level, and to seek opportunities to stimulate local residents' interest in their work and achievements.

What is Participative Democracy?

Participative Democracy is composed of Local Elections and Citizens participation at the local level.

Why local elections are important:

Elected local authorities must have the **right, competences and means** to perform their duties and to deliver services to citizens! Without these elements, they promised to be only a "Potemkin village"!

Why citizens' participation is important:

While elections and elected bodies at the local level are an integral part of the existence of local democracy, they are not the only founding characteristic features.

Local Democracy implies also a constant dialogue with citizens between one election and the next one. All the steps to have a **constructive dialogue with citizens/associations** during the mandate are all steps composing **citizens' partic- ipation** and **participative democracy.** They can be consultations, partnership or forums, or more elaborated forms of cooperation.

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3   http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/122.htm
4   Recommendation 351 (2014): English version: http://goo.gl/tYx6L1; Armenian version: http://www.coe.am/docs/clrae/report1.pdf

Why Citizens' participation in Armenia?

In Armenia, as in the rest of the Eastern Partnership countries, the challenges are huge and have to deal with the present situation and with weaknesses from the past. Certainly, the legacy from a centralised and abruptly collapsed system left many traces in the economic and political situation. The political instability and the chronic economic shortage leave most of the municipalities without real resources to implement their work. Because of these limitations, citizens' participation becomes an added value for a joint problem solving and for mobilizing all the best and motivated part of the community.

Why citizens participation at the local level?

Local authorities and civil society working together at the local level are a powerful instrument for change and improving the community.

1. It gives to the local authorities the possibility **to collect ideas and suggestions for better solution**
2. It engages participative attitude from citizens and therefore develop a sense of **responsibility** towards public goods/property and community
3. It creates public **trust** with a constant dialogue
4. It represent an **healthy watchdog** instrument against local corruption and mismanagement
5. It opens possibilities for identifying **new resources and energies** for the whole community

CHAPTER **1.**

Short points on Armenian legislation on citizens' participation

Present situation and the way ahead

Citizens' participation in local self-government is stipulated by **various laws** that enable the local authorities with **the possibilities to implement the process in their communities and to solve problems in cooperation and in dialogue with citizens**. Any kind of law or legal document on citizens' participation should be considered by the local authorities **not only as an obli- gation but also as useful guidelines** that can lead to the joint partnership for the community prosperous future.

Citizens' direct participation in self-government is considered to be a less developed and scrutinized component in about 20 year history of local self-government system in Armenia. Fully participatory process is not implemented in Armenia as such. The legislation itself is inadequate in this respect, there is no mandatory requirement for self – government to provide citizens' participation in defining the agenda, decision -making, monitoring. Although in a number of laws the requirement to properly **inform the public is defined**, the realizing its importance is still at the low level in most self-government institutions and the treatment towards its requirement is quite often a formality. **Citizens are mostly unprepared to take an active part in the affairs of their community**, they are indifferent, often hopeless because of their way of living and poverty and have no clue both about the ways of influencing the decision making processes in their communities and the possibilities of how to do it and also have no trust in the authorities.

T**his bilateral unpreparedness has several reasons**: The most important is the **lack of tradition, cultural heritage of the former period government as the governmental process was steep,** and the society was the object of government. This gap can be explained also by the absence of specific legislative requirements. The real picture of the citizens' participation is vague not only in the perception of the participants, but also the government doesn't precisely perceive it. That is why all the related functions are replaced with information provision and awareness.

Definitely, Armenia has still a long way to reach the utmost stage of participatory democracy but first steps of reforms and amendments are being implemented on both internal and external legislative level.

Where can we find citizens participation in the Armenian legislation?

The right of participation in local self-government is stipulated in **the Article 30 of the Constitution** that Eighteen-year old citizens of the Republic of Armenia have the right to take part in the elections and referenda as well as the right to take part in the public administration and local self-governance through their representatives chosen directly and through the expression of free will.

While mentioning **referendum** in the Constitution, it doesn't mean that other types of participation in local authorities are excluded and the current legislation can define other international types of participation, the application of which is defined in the European Charter article 3 part 2. "This provision shall in no way affect recourse to assemblies of citizens, referendums or any other form of direct citizen participation where it is permitted by statute."

In 2002**, the new Armenian Law on Local Self-Government** was adopted, which was aimed at further enhancement of local self-government institutions, strengthening of financial and administrative capacity, and promotion of local democracy.
In Armenian legislation, there is a lack of civic initiative institutions relating the acceptance of statements/acts of citizens meetings and Local Self-Governance but the institute of **local referendum** is defined although there is almost no use in practice.

According to the law on Local Self Government there are at least two fundamental principles directly related to the participation. One of them is **accountancy** to community members; second the **transparency and publicity of local authorities activities.** As local Self Government doesn't comprise the part of power system and the local authorities act upon own responsibility, they are responsible and accountable about their activities exclusively to the community members.

In 2013 some amendments on Law of Local Self Government have been introduced and are already in force and in case of implementation by the local authorities or the citizens can partially meet the demands of participatory processes and can be used daily in the community life.

☑ 1. 1. Citizens could initiate:

Involving a question in the community council meeting agenda can be initiated as well by and beginning with16- years old, and higher persons, registered in the community. The initiative to involve a question in the meeting's agenda is signed by the community initiators and presented to the head of the community. The initiative is presented and discussed to the councils meeting in an obligatory way no later than within a month after its receipt by the head of the community. The same initiative can be represented in the council meeting six months after its first discussion.

Implementing a local referendum the results of which can be presented to the community leaders and council members.

☑ 1. 2. The Head of the communities should or are obliged to:

Allocate at least once a month a furnished room or a hall to the community council member to organize a reception of the community members, public meetings and discussions.

Create enabling conditions for the community members to inform them about the activities of Local Authorities and participate in the community management and development using any kind of possible information and broadcast means.

Provide convenient and proper place for the organization of information and participation activities for community members as well as create relatively necessary conditions for the people with disabilities that would like to participate in those activities.

Organize public hearings and discussion on important initiatives and projects related to legislation, in particular on the decisions of council and leaders of the communities on the public services provided by the community, development projects and annual budgets, urban development, environmental protection, the acceptance and presentation of suggestions on these issues to the initiators.

Implement public hearings or discussions of the community development four- year project and annual budget before presenting to the confirmation the community council. Information on the suggestions and remarks received in the result of those discussions are providing to the council by the leader.

Implement public hearings or discussions of the annual budget execution report before presenting to the confirmation the community council. Information on the suggestions and remarks received in the result of those discussions are providing to the council by the leader.

Provide necessary conditions for the population participation in the Aldermen open sessions such as.1. In a proper way inform the citizens about the meetings,

Provide sufficient seats for the people in the meetings' hall.

☑ 1. 3. Community council should:

In the case of necessity implement a local referendum that can be considered as an active participatory type of citizens' participation.

Hold meetings with the population of the community, inform them about the work of the Council, also organize receptions, be members of any of the regular committees of the Council, participate in the meetings and support the participation of the population in the Local authorities processes.

Be given the packages of the documents pertaining to the meetings before the meetings.

All the above-mentioned provisions of law create enabling environment for the community leaders to promote citizens' participation and provide participatory opportunities. Community leaders should show interest and tolerance for working in harmony and cooperation with the population.

CHAPTER 2.

Best Practices and Implementation

2. 1. Follow up of the Congress' project in Armenia (2014-2015)

In July 2015 in two communities of Armenia, Aghveran and Yeghegnatzor about 200 local authorities participated in the regional seminars that aimed to enhance the level of citizen participation in the decision-making at local level in Armenia. Following are presented the key points of these events.

2. 1. 1. Focus on participatory budgeting

What is participatory budgeting?

In few words: Engage citizens and association in the defining priorities identified in the community budget and give them a role in allocation of resources. It is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. It enables taxpayers to work with government to make the budget decisions that affect their lives.

Important elements of the participatory budgeting are:

First – the **political will** from the community heads, so that the participation processes in communities result in decision-making, and second – **civic will** of the population, so that their own benefits and interests would be secondary to the greater interests and benefits of the whole community. In the absence of these two factors, there will be no dialogue in any community. The aim of participatory budgeting is to ensure higher level of citizens' participation in community development programs. Several encouraging methods must be applied to incentivize more active participation of the population in forming these budgets, especially through tax collection..

Steps for realizing the participatory budget:

Initially, the **community council** should be really involved in decision-making to allocate some funds. If the relevant project is connected to infrastructures – project accounting documents are elaborated, a tender should be organized and realized. For the implementation of the participatory budgeting process these steps should be followed. While planning the projects, the costs of their future operation and maintenance shall be considered. It is also important whether the community is able to maintain and operate the project in the future. Public oversight is also exercised over the project.

The following are the steps on which participatory budgeting in Armenia communities process depends.

- First, meetings are organized to collect ideas and information from citizens on their willingness to participate in this activity of participation and monitoring.

- Second, criteria are elaborated about whom or what groups can participate.

- Then, the formation of a committee is put in place. The committee must be trustworthy and representative: the groups of citizens should pick a representative to participate in budgeting process that should later work in the committee.

- Further a meeting of the community is convened. The goal of the meeting is the classification of priorities, and making and distinguishing suggestions based on several criteria.

- Afterwards, specialists are invited; programs are developed, presented for the approval of the community council and for funding. In case of insufficient resources, fundraising processes are initiated.

- Subsequently, the programs that get funding are launched, aiming at bigger programs in the future.

Possible problems:

Not all parts of participatory budgeting processes are realized in time, or at all. Nevertheless, in the budgeting process, the most drawbacks are encountered in ensuring the **publicity of the process**. Community heads sometimes prefer to make **unilateral decisions,** and even community councils are rarely informed of their actions. In this situation, it is hard to imagine the population to be actually (and not just formally) involved in budgeting processes. Due to the **absence of studies on the population's opinion of local government,** it is really difficult to give an objective evaluation about local government's activity. It can be assumed that the population's valuation of the local government's activity is not so positive. There are no minor details in participation budget planning. This process includes collecting ideas, thoughts, voting, evaluation, decision-making, approving and realizing projects, public oversight, maintenance of achieved results and so forth.

Feedback on Armenian cases:

- Small communities in Armenia don't have enough resources to satisfy citizens' needs and in this case it is not easy to ensure citizens' participation. Consequently, citizens express no trust towards authorities as once their voice wasn't taken into consideration.

- Citizens express different opinions and make suggestions on some themes and it is not real for the community leaders to take a decision that could satisfy at least the majority.

- The documents or projects elaborated by the community heads and council members passes through different levels that cost time, financial and human resources and very often at the end it is not possible to bring to life the document. In such cases citizens' participation cannot be considered as a fact.

2.1.**2.** Focus on Community Council's role

> *In few words*: At the local level in Armenia, the individuals that are elected to represent the population through the mechanism of direct elections are the members of **community councils** and **head of the community**. They are elected into office for a term of four years and implement powers established by the law. They can take into consideration proposals and recommendations of the population however they bear full responsibility for final decision-making and implementation.

Important elements are:

The Council members (Council of Aldermen) play a big role in the local self-government in involving and providing participation in the decision-making processes.

The Council members should:

1. Develop and adopt the rules and regulations on citizen participation;
2. Inform the population on the rules and regulations of civil participation;
3. Support and monitor the implementation of the rules and regulations of citizen participation.

Steps for developing Council members' cooperation with citizens:

- In order to provide all the aforementioned services, the Council of Aldermen should disseminate information on the activities, involve citizens in the system of training and educational programs and in decision making process at the local level, inquire about their opinions, ask for advice, provide participation in the meetings, etc.

- The Council should provide an interactive possibility for the feedback as the suggestions and recommendations received from the population could bring an added value for the further project developments of the community. Citizens participating in the local self-government should be convinced that they can have impact on serious problems solutions, suggestions and decisions The council should really estimate the community stereotypes, thinking and elaborate easy-use tools for the quick and productive feedback from the citizens. The community should be more informed about the possibilities of implementing certain means of participation at the local government level. (15 tips how to facilitate citizens' meetings are provided at the final pages of the guidelines).

- The most important tool is the trust towards "council" concept that he/she can really affect on the decisions made by the community leader and demand official references about any community related issues. The council should become a link-person between the population and the community leader.

✔ The *headquarters* or seats/offices of the councils that can receive citizens should exist in all communities of Armenia. The concept "seat/office of the council of Aldermen" is confused by the heads of the communities and the council members with the "place" where the council of Aldermen holds its meetings. In some cases the heads of the communities do not create satisfactory conditions for the seat/office of the councils for their proper activities.

✔ The local Council must be accountable before the members of the community, be transparent in their activities.

Feedback on Armenian cases:

- In many small communities the council of Aldermen doesn't have a seat/office at all. They at the best case just gather in the backyards together with the inhabitants and discuss their suggestions so as to apply further to the head of the village. Even there are villages, which don't have a village municipal building.

- In contrary there are communities that have the seat/office of the council members stipulated by law and the community residents discuss the community budget there and later inform the population about their meetings. It is necessary to expand the authorities of the Council of Aldermen institution to increase its role and give it some controlling and monitoring leverages.

- In many communities the council doesn't make any reports to the public as the population doesn't show any interest and the reasons are hard social conditions as well as an accountability tradition that doesn't exit in Armenia.

- The members of council should be given the packages of the documents pertaining to the meetings 7 days before the coming meeting and 1 day before the extraordinary session. The drafts of the decisions are mainly provided only in the time of the meeting and sometimes there are some "Additional Issues" attached to the agenda. The members of the Council read these documents in a couple of minutes before the actual voting and thus are deprived of the possibility to consult with the electorate the drafts of these decisions.

- All the documents given to the council members pertaining to the coming meeting should be publicized in the Aldermen Community seat/office, but this demand of law is always being violated, they are publicized neither in the existing seat nor in other relevant space inside the community. It results the unawareness of the population in all these documents.

Although almost half of these shortcomings or deficiencies are caused by the non-professional approach of the heads of the communities the role of the members of the Council is essential in eliminating these shortcomings. They can negotiate, convince or encourage the heads of the communities force them to properly perform their duties and follow the rules of law.

2. 1. 3. Focus on electronic platforms for participation

In few words: Computers and Internet can be a revolutionary means not steps but means/ in getting in touch with citizens, one by one, with consultation, quick feedbacks, information, even in remote and distant areas.

Important elements are:

Local democracy is complete when the participation of citizens in the process of decision-making is secured. Another important guarantee of democracy is the practice of free and independent elections in the country. All over the world there is **lack of trust towards the authorities** and Armenia is not an exception. The higher is the level of the authorities the lower is the level of trust. Raising the level of participation is necessary not only for the citizens but also for the authorities themselves because in that case all of their decisions would be even more legitimate.

The electronic tools are playing a very important role, as in raising the participation level of the citizens, as in different other spheres, as long as they are indeed the most effective and convenient means that are making possible for everybody to receive the needed information at any moment and in any place. In order to inform the society it is necessary to **develop capacities**. The Local authorities **should to be inclined to consult, to listen to accept advice**.

In order to inform the citizens it is very important to place the minutes of the Aldermen meetings in the network official sites of local authorites which can provide the citizens the required informaiton.
It is necessary to place on the websites the lists of the community real estate properties and land lots that are for sale through auctions.

Steps for developing IT consultations and dialogue with citizens:

✔ These days, a very popular information electronic means is the **social network Facebook,** which also can be used to provide the required exchange of information with the citizens but we should say it is very good from the point of view of transparency, however placing information in the site does not mean at all to provide participation through electronic means of communication.

✔ The electronic means are necessary for disseminating information. In Armenia the youth widely uses **Twitter, Facebook, social networks**, however there are many more other tools on international scale, which should be used. Of course electronic management is very important however while using the Internet you should not forget about the other means.

✔ It is stipulated to create a so called **"System of Community Management"** in Armenia, through which any mayor, deputy mayor will be able to be in touch with his peers or colleagues and discuss the urgent matters, look for solutions to them and exchange information.

✔ The "European Local Democracy Week" (ELDW) is an annual European event where local authorities, their associations and CSOs from all the member states of the Council of Europe are invited to organise public events to meet and engage with their citizens on issues of current interest, with the aim of promoting and fostering democratic participation at local level. The Congress ELDW initiative website (http://www.congress-eldw.eu/) can also be used a platform for exchange best practices on citizen participation.

✔ UN makes research on e-governance and promulgates e-participation statistics and index. As compared with 2012 in 2014 Armenia's electronic participation index has climbed with 102 points/rates up from the former 161st position to the current 59th. /see link http://unpan3.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Data/Compare-Countries/: The Netherlands, Southern Korea, France, Uruguay, Australia, Japan and Estonia are in the first positions in this rating scale. Russia is making big steps in moving forward in the direction of solving this problem.

Feedback on Armenian cases:

• People are the same in every country, and they would like to have improved conditions in their communities only for citizens' participation there are different starting levels. That is the difference. Another important circumstance is the years of experience.

• It is necessary to choose the right way of citizens' participation depending on the culture, traditions and peculiarities of the community.

• The participation of citizens should not be considered as an obstacle for the daily activities of Local Authorities.

• Citizens should realize that their participation at least in the elections is a must.

> ***In few words:*** Participation and dialogue is an attitude, which is paying off at all level of governance. More than explanations in theory, it should be seen as a problem solving and resources mobilization instrument.

Here is below good practices that you may easily reconnect to your daily activity and use them for work. The experiences are from the Local Democracy Agencies network but also from other institutions in Europe.

For more: www.alda-europe.eu

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2. 2. 1. The examples from the Local Democracy Agency Armenia[6]

"Local Democracy Agency" foundation established in Gyumri, Armenia in 2011 aims, with the support of European partners, to promote concrete initiatives to consolidate democracy at the local level and cooperation between civil society and the authorities and implemented some activities on citizens' participation in decision-making processes. The experiences on citizens' participation have clearly shown that participation **cannot just happen**; **nor can it be taken for granted, either**. There are several **preconditions** to participation, which have to be met before it can be applied and sustained in a particular situation.

- Participation has to be a gradually developed response to an actual and pressing collective need of the citizens. This is need is used as a rallying point for the community to come together.

- The benefitting target group of a participative action has to be clearly defined, in order to utilize the common interest in securing their position and improving their living conditions.

- It is of critical importance to inform the selected target groups, in a comprehensive manner, of all the relevant features of the programme. The aims, finance, technology, organization, management aspects have to be covered.

- A smooth functioning of the community organization structure ideally evolves through the collective efforts of the residents, with the aid of an accepted local leader. This is critical in representing the aspirations of the residents.

Based on LDA Armenia experience the **obstacles** for the promotion of citizens' participation are the stereotypes, the heritage of the previous government and system and of course social conditions that limit the opportunities of the community members for working together. But anyway in each community even a very active group can be found that will be able to affect the local authorities and establish community-wide decision-making environment.

During the trainings with municipalities' staff it became clear that they all need **necessary information and capacities for working with the citizens**.

In Armenia according to the legislation there are different types of citizens' participation /as mentioned above/ stipulated by law and some of them are used by the communities or at least attempts are made for the implementation of citizens' participatory processes.

- Public initiative and public hearings took place in Dsegh and Alaverdi and the citizen's took active participation.

- In Ashtarak, Vardenik, Yeghegnadzor they are using Internet communication /Facebook/, telephone surveys for the discussion of the four year strategic projects.

- In some communities (Vardenik, Hovtashen) there were initiatives for the local referendum on behalf of the citizen's group but because of the lack of resources it didn't take place.

- In Gyumri public hearings took place in order to discuss some city essential issues.

- Both in Gyumri and Vanadzor the municipalities provide information on councils' meetings agenda and plans of the projects.

- In Vanadzor a public hearing took place to discuss the annual budget of 2015 before the confirmation of the city council. In

- Gyumri the council meetings' are open to the public and also are broadcast online since July 3, 2012. is implemented thanks to the efforts of Jouralists' club "Asparez".

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6   http://www.alda-europe.eu/newSite/lda_dett.php?id=13

2.2.2. The examples from the Local Democracy Agency Georgia [7]

Local Democracy Agency in Georgia, with the support European partners, established on 2006 is implementing projects for the promotion of active citizenship and good governance.
 In Kutaisi and in small communities they have implemented trainings to raise awareness of the population on the responsibilities of the local authorities and citizens' rights to participate in decision-making processes. After the trainings the citizens were given an opportunity to write recomm**endation letters on different issues of the community and the solutions** that were presented to the head of the communities. TV broadcast and meetings were held with these leaders and they gave different answers and explanations as well as solutions to some issues. Fora with the community leaders and citizens were organized that enabled both sides to ask questions, remarks and suggestions and to work in dialogue.
So recommendation letters, TV broadcast, meetings and fora can also be considered **as means of citizens' participation.**

Petition, public hearings and citizens' panels are stipulated by the Georgian law but they have less use in practice but some rights enable the possibilities of implementation of citizens' participation processes.

- Sakrebulo /city council/ sessions are open and public

- Citizens have the right to receive public information from a local self-governance body and public servants

- The minutes of Sakrebulo sessions are accessible to the public. Citizens have the right to get familiar with draft decisions of a local self-governance body in advance and participate in their examination

- Citizens have the right to request to publish draft decisions and hold public discussion

Sakrebulos mostly post information on scheduled sessions on notice boards at administrative buildings. Only several Sakrebulo press services disseminate information on sessions. In regions where local television stations operate and local newspapers is published sessions-related information and taken decisions are disseminated in the form of TV plots and newspaper articles. Hence, in the event of interest, information on session dates and agenda are accessible. However, the degree of interest is too low. From the viewpoint of receiving public information, population interest is low as well. Several self-governance body representatives said residents have never requested this kind of information. Representatives of NGO or political parties are more interested in the information. The terms established by law for requesting public information are rarely violated. However, separate instances of delays in issuing public information were identified in seven self-governance bodies.
As for media attendance at Sakrebulo sessions, representatives attend although special seats are rarely allocated for the media in most self-governance bodies.

2.2.3. The Georgian Association of Municipalities from Georgia (NALAG) and its commitment in citizens' participation

The Association of Municipalities, for their capacities of dissemination and reaching out to most of the local governments in a country, can have a relevant impact in the orientation of practices of governance. A good example has been brought recently by the Association of Municipalities from Georgia (NALAG) that is a partner with the Local Democracy Agency Kutaisi and ALDA in a joint project to train and make aware NGOs and Local authorities from all the country on the capacity to cooperate. The programme, based on a cascade approach, created a group of trainers in the South East and one in the North West of the country. Consequently, the trainers approached and coached hundreds of NGOs and activities and local government representatives with practices of citizen's participation. We could easily say that, thanks to NALAG contribution, with its credibility and knowl- edge of the Georgian situation, almost all the municipalities of the region have been acquainted with the practices of citizen's participation and hundreds of new and remote NGOs have been involved too.

The impact of such a broad and **systemic** approach will be visible and relevant in the upcoming years.

See Mobilised Society for Local Democracy
http://www.alda-europe.eu/newSite/project_dett.php?ID=73

2.3.1. Problem to be solved:
Regeneration of a public recreational area, Budapest (Hungary)

Necessity to **regenerate public recreational areas** (playgrounds, sport areas, parks, promenades) in a densely populated residential area. It was a sensitive issue, which needed to reach consensus somehow between the whole populations of the housing estate.

Field: Active citizenship at local level, participation of citizens at local issues

LA in the spotlight: Budapest Municipality, Hungary

Instruments: Creation of public opinion poll and organisation of public forums for the involvement of citizens (the whole population of the housing estate, approximately 3200 people) in the decision making process on how to regenerate public recreational areas.

Methodology:

- **First step:** to solve the problem of consensus the Municipality created public opinion poll, providing a general overview on the resident's opinion on what the problems and the development needs are. This research was carried out as a safety measure in order to avoid the dominance of partial interest groups during the participation process.

- **Second step:** series of public forums were organised, focusing on different parts of the housing estate. On these forums participants had the opportunities to describe the problems, the values, the development needs of the recreational areas. Participants were asked to set priories for the development suggestions gathered through the public opinion poll.

- **Third step:** using the findings of the opinion poll and the summaries of the public forums a development programme was created. The designers were asked to create open space development plans according to the planning programme. Where there were contradicting development suggestions (e.g. playground vs. quite green space), the designers had to present more development alternatives for the given area.

- **Fourth step:** The concept plan with the possible alternatives was presented on a final public forum where there were more alternatives of the developments participants were asked to pick the one they preferred. Participants were asked again to create a priority list of the several potential development projects. This was needed to assist us to decide on which suggestions spend the limited budget. Following the final forum the concept plan was published and the detailed construction plans were elaborated according to that.

Results achieved: As a result of the public participation-planning project, the residents were not just well informed about the development aims and the planned timing of the project, but – as a result of the participation – they also regarded the project as their own. Despite the significant inconveniences and the disturbances caused by the construction work, the number of residential complaints remained very low compared to other regeneration projects. Following the completion of the constructions they have carried out the same public opinion poll as prior to the development. This enabled them to measure the success of enhancing the recreational functions of the housing estate according to the opinion of the users. In the opinion poll, they asked whether the information provided on the project was sufficient, and also whether the opinion, the requests and the suggestions of the residents had been taken into account by the municipality. On both questions the average of the answers were over four (on a scale from one to five where five was the best mark). This indicates that the residents were satisfied not just with the results of the regeneration, but also with the way and level of communication.

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8   Most of the cases following are taken from the progamme DECIDE and COHEIRS of ALDA – the European Association of Local Democracy, showcasing the best practices and methodologies of citizens participation in EU. See here : http://www.alda-europe.eu/newSite/project_dett.php?ID=57
http://www.alda-europe.eu/newSite/project_dett.php?ID=43

2.3.2. Problem to be solved:
Acting on an unhealthy environment, Birgu (Malta)

Unhealthy environment of Birgu, densely populated city, air pollution

Field: Environmental and health issues

LA in the spotlight: Birgu Local Council, Malta

Instruments: Workshops, contributions of experts, citizens' panel and draft of recommendations involving citizens, local authorities and major stakeholders on environmental issues.

Methodology: Three workshops were organised at local and EU level. The main topics discussed during the three workshops were the environment we live in, the direct hazards to the environment and the air quality surrounding the city and citizens. Experts in the field were invited to make presentations in order to help the community understand the importance of living in a healthy environment and showcasing the link between air pollution and public health in order to discuss solutions for a less polluted air. The Community had the chance to voice its concerns in relation to environmental issues and the problems they face as a community living in densely populated city. Various issues were mentioned and solutions discussed. The partic- ipation of the community was high, showing the great desire that the community has to be involved in issues related to their well being as well as in the correspondent decision taking processes. In the framework of the three workshops it was also stated that the European Union has raised the importance on the issue and several actions are being taken, both in Malta and at Eu- ropean level. Gathering together experts, representatives of local authorities and ordinary citizens from different backgrounds was key for achieving the objective of bringing in the voices of different sectors of the society in the drafting of recommenda- tions. The document was handed over to local and national authorities and it represents the main outcome of the whole local process in Malta.

Results achieved: After the analysis of the environmental violations affecting their own territory, citizens with dif- ferent social, professional and demographic backgrounds gathered together in citizens' panels to debate and draft a set of recommendations to be submitted to their local, regional and national authorities. More than 200 people were involved in each local process respectively in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Macedonia, Malta, Romania and Slovenia. Drawing from their local experiences, civic observers gathered in Mesagne, in the Apulia Region, Italy, on 13-15 March 2014. The event brought together more than 60 international participants and 50 locals to debate on environmental and health issues. It was an occasion to share common issues and to exchange good practices on how local authorities and civil society organisations can work together to tackle such violations.

Recommendations drafted:

- Need of regular workshops and open discussion with the involvement of the local council and representatives from various authorities.

- Establishment of contact points where complaints can be followed and the progress of works reviewed.

- Consultation and right for citizens to vote when major works which would affect their wellbeing are being suggested by the local council or central government, empowering people's voice.

- Dialogue with neighbour councils in view of the fact that certain issues are common or can have a negative effect on neighbour communities.

- Creation of sub committees chaired by a council member to prepare policy/works for the

- Locality on all matters under the responsibility of the council. (Already being implemented, some areas need more input).

- Provision of more information for the public via new channels of communication e.g. facebook, leaflets, council newsletter. (Council issues information on web page of the local council).

2.3.3. Problem to be solved:
Developing a community, Latvian cases

Weak cooperation between LAs and CSOs; citizens are not aware of development issues

Field: Strengthen development at local level

LA in the spotlight: Latvian self-governments (Bauska municipality, Jelgava municipality, Gulbene municipality)

Instruments: Launch of a call for project applications, establishment of an Evaluation Committee, involvement of CSOs, LAs, and citizens.

Methodology: In February 2013, following a call for project launched, three projects were selected and co-financed. Projects were proposed by three Latvian municipalities in cooperation with municipalities of Georgia, Belarus, and Moldova.

- **Bauska municipality:** Project focused on "Development co-operation opportunities through networking, information exchange and training". Main goals: to raise the public and citizens' awareness, skills and capacities at the local level; development cooperation networking between Bauska municipality and Khashuri municipality (Georgia). Among the activities, carried out: Workshop «Development cooperation experience and lessons learnt» was organised in August 2013; Participation of the Georgian painter in an international art plein-air «Bauska summer 2013»; Organisation of the creative master class in the Bauska Children and Youth Art and Craft Center; Participation in the Bauska municipality Festival 2013; Information campaign: publishing articles in local and regional newspapers, on web pages; created electronic promotional materials on development cooperation.

- **Jelgava municipality:** Project on 'Active partnership and communities for development'. The objective was to strengthen the already developed cooperation between municipalities of Moldova and Latvia in order to promote sustainable development and establish synergies, improve knowledge and capacity of LA's and CSO's in Moldova regarding sustainable development, and raising awareness among citizens. Among the activities carried out: Study visit for the representatives of the Cahul municipality (Moldova) was organized by the Jelgava municipality (Latvia); Networking and training event with exchange of best practices was organized; A follow-up meeting was held after completion of the project in October 2013, in order to plan future cooperation.

- **Gulbene municipality:** Project «Struve unites through the centuries» was implemented by the Gulbene municipali- ty (Latvia) in close cooperation with the partners in Belarus – Ashmyany District. The project brought together representatives of LAs, NGOs, youth centers, Belarusian partners, and citizens. Main activities: Seminar «Role of NGO in decision-making process»; Workshop «Struve's survey promotes development cooperation»; Expedition.

Results achieved: Raised public and citizens' awareness, skills and capacities on issues related to the development cooperation; promoted active role of LAs and CSOs in the implementation of EU development policy and issues such as sustainable development and citizen empowerment.

2.3.4. Problem to be solved:
Addressing the economic crisis in Sacile (Italy)

Necessity of better promoting possible resources to contrast the dramatic crisis gripping Europe, respectively local resources (synergies between local authorities, business community, civil society) and citizens (through active participation to the community life – i.e. voluntary work).

Field: Innovation and new resources

LA in the spotlight: Sacile Municipality, Italy

Instruments: Thematic workshops

Methodology: Involvement of citizens, experts, CSOs, NGOs in the organisation of the thematic workshops "Europe as a resource" in Sacile, Brugnera and Porcia (Italy). The rational of the event was to reflect on Europe and promote the positive impact that the EU has at the local level, as well as on the promotion of the quality of the life of all the citizens of the EU. In order to ensure a wide impact of the action, besides the international events, each partner will activate in its territory awareness and networking paths, aimed to mobilise local citizenship on the topics of the project.

Results achieved: Better realization and valorisation of the Municipality resources. Sacile Municipality is part of an Inter-municipal Association, together with the other municipalities it engages in the management of activities and services. As part of this Association Sacile is also place for the Territorial Marketing Planning and European Policies Inter-municipal Department and deals with large-scale European and local development projects.

The city of Sacile can count on different resources: Livenza rivers' water is a tourist, industrial and sports resource, also very useful for rescue purposes. Tourism is a further resource for business and accommodation facilities, in particular thanks to the artistic and historical heritage and the excellent manufacturing, such as Fazioli's pianos. The "Healthy Cities Network" to which Sacile belongs and the "Sacile model" are an example for the entire region. Mention should also be made of the significant number of dynamic volunteering associations in the city, like the municipal group of Civil Protection.

Historical and artistic heritage preservation and sustained care of the town are a guarantee of success: guests and visitors discover unique city views becoming direct promoters of the territory.

2.3.5. Problem to be solved:
Civil society development, Slovenian cases

Lack of place for non-governmental organizations

Field: Active citizenship at local level, participation of citizens at local issues

LA in the spotlight: Municipality of Novo Mesto, Slovenia

Instruments: Involvement of all citizens who actively participate in NGOs dedicated to activities of public interest and/or planning to set up activities in the field of social entrepreneurship

Methodology: By signing initiatives, NGOs urge the Municipality of Novo Mesto to write down a list of places (buildings and lands) owned by the Municipality itself or by the state that are not used, and that the list is made public. NGOs could use these spaces as collection points for their members, as well as for the implementation of their activities. The initiative aims to provide more spaces for the functioning of non-governmental organizations, and thus indirectly also for citizens. Particularly outstanding are abandoned spaces in the centre of Novo Mesto and represent a missed opportunity to inspire additional content to the city centre and thereby contribute to its revival. In this way citizens would contribute to the conservation of these areas and at the same time to the revitalization of the city centre with its activities in associations.

Results achieved: Local authorities as property owners can help NGOs in public interest and social enterprises in the sense of lowering costs. The payment for rented workspaces is not in cash but in social innovations and other non-cash benefits, such as better social services. By activating unused spaces, the Municipality of Novo Mesto would make a big step forward for the development of the NGO sector towards providing a supportive environment for their operations without additional costs. Meanwhile the citizens would also have a place where they could contribute to the wider society with their activities.

CHAPTER 3.

Instruments & Tools

We are presenting here a possible tool to systemize your approach to citizen's participation and to choose the good method at the right time!

3. 1. The Code of Good Practices for Citizens Participation [9]

In few words: Participation of citizens in the decision making at the local can be adapted to cases and situation, but every local authority can do it! We can approach the problem from the different forms of participation (consultation, dialogue or partnership) or from the point of view of when it is necessary to intervene (at the beginning of the process or when things are already on going). The Code of Good practices for Citizens Participation offers some good hints also for the processes at local level.

Some are the preconditions for aiming at the good processes to participation!

☑ **Freedom of participation and expression** – citizens must have the right to participate and express freely their opinion

☑ **Trust** – citizens must trust their authorities and they should be sure their voice will be heard as well as have a good understanding of how their contribution will be taken into consideration

☑ **Accountability and transparency** - policies of local authorities should be openly managed and accountable to citizens

☑ **Independence** – citizens and association, while active in participating in policy making and contributing to local authorities policies, should be independent and represent a real contribution to the process

The interactivity between citizens and local authorities can be more or less intense and binding. **These are the different levels of interaction:**

Information

Consultation

Dialogue:
- Broad
- Collaborative

Partnership

Low ← Level of Participation → **High**

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9   Information taken from the Code of Good Pratices, see here http://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/civil-participation

Information: Process which is presenting facts from local authorities to citizens. It represents the basic element of participation. Without INFORMATION, there is no PARTICIPATION. It already represents a very big issue, which need to consider the capacity of local authorities to collect and disseminate information, and to bring them in forms and ways the citizens can get them (which language and means, for instance).

Examples:
- Notice in the newspapers
- Information in the radio and TV
- Openness of the city councils
- Openness of documents

Consultation: The consultation is a presentation of the facts and decision and it is open for being consulted with citizens. The comments of citizens are not necessarily taken into consideration for the decision. The consultation is a NON-binding process.
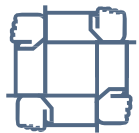
Examples:
- Conferences
- Public presentations
- Workshop
- On line consultations

Dialogue: the dialogue represents a consultation with a more bilateral attitude and feedback from citizens. The comments given by citizens in a dialogue are taken into consideration and is an integral part of the decision making process. The Local Authorities gives a clear line of how the comments and inputs will be taken into consideration. There is – for example – a working group taking in consideration and elaborating the proposals.

Examples:
- Workshop
- Focus groups
- Joint committee meetings
- On line consultations and feedbacks

Partnership: Partnership represented a fully integrated cooperation between citizens and local authorities, when the decision is made together, programmes thoughts and elaborated in joint groups.

Examples:
- Joint committees
- Joint working teams

Each level of interaction could happen in a certain moment of the **decision making process**, which is the following described below:

Reformulation — Agenda Setting — Drafting — Decision — Implementation — Monitoring
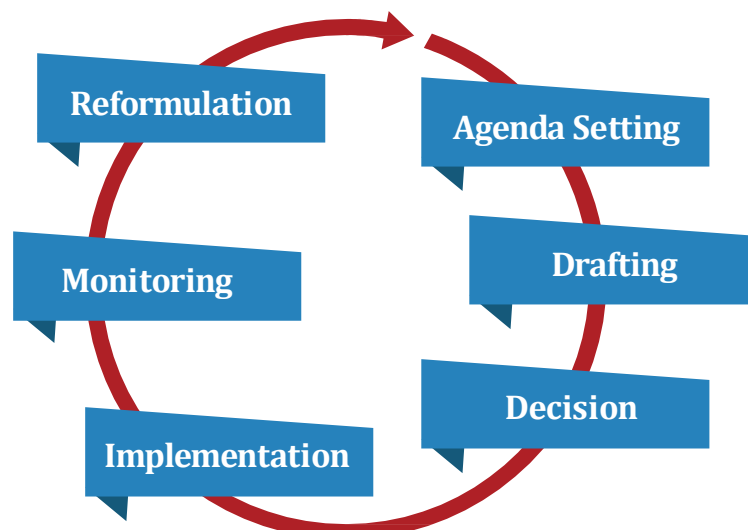
The process starts with …

1. <u>An agenda setting:</u> it means that for a certain reason, and for a certain fact, the issue becomes "known" and reach "the political agenda". It can be a case, an article in the newsletter, a meeting requested by citizens.

2. <u>Drafting:</u> the decision is elaborated and discussed. We check what we know and discuss the pros and cons. It is identified the different possibilities of solutions.

3. <u>Decision:</u> It is the actual vote on which solution we will adopt

4. <u>Implementation:</u> it is the realisation of the decision

5. <u>Monitoring:</u> control of the solution adopted and this good implementation

6. <u>Reformulation:</u> if the decision and its implementation need to be revised, we discuss the possibility of adapting the steps or choose others.

The Code of Good practices [10] puts in relations the level of participation together with the decision-making process, giving points and suggestions.

3.2. The 15 golden rules for holding public meetings

In organising public consultation and dialogue for citizens, you may need some specific hints for improving the process.

<u>Here are our 15 best advises for facilitating the success of public meetings!</u>

1. **Distribute written materials at the beginning** (or publish in posters on the wall), including "the rules of the game", so that people can consult them.

2. **Exposing (orally or on written posters) the competences** of the local authority which is engaged in the process, so that people will concentrate on feasible proposal; but leaving a space for exposing ideas/problems related to other levels of government, with which the local authority could propose to act as a "mediator".

3. **Opening remembering GOALS and RULES** of the game. Deciding how much time each spoken intervention could last.

4. **Having a CLOCK** (projected on wall, for example) so that people can calculate and control the respect of schedule and maximum time of each speech. **Respect the time-table** (for the sake of those who were punctual) but being open to welcome any new arrival

5. **Making rules be respected by everybody** (including powerful actors) but without stiffness: inflexibility and impoliteness are not the same thing….

6. **Being always respectful with the intelligence of participants** (avoiding saying they must be "trained" or "made aware"). It is important to remind that we are talking to people, and their perception on the conduction of the meeting can affect the legitimacy of the process.

7. **Avoiding to shut-up participants in case what they propose does not fit exactly in the streamlines** provided for the meeting. Imagining that every contribution for the municipality is worth, even if does not fit perfectly with the pre-decided format. In this case is possible to note such proposals or complaints into a "special workbook" assuring it will appear in the final proceedings of the process (although in a side-list, or in an annex).

8. **Avoiding the creation of two-persons debates**. If someone wants to speak more times he/she can (if shared rules allow that), but – before – it is important to give priority to those who are speaking for the first time.

9. **Possibly working in small groups, so to make every person feel "at ease",** and not intimidated by too big audiences.

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10   The Code of Good practices has been recently considered for a revision with a more local authorities approach. See the report adopted by the Congress, prepared by Raymond Stevensson

10. **Trying that complaints are always connected to proactive proposals/solutions,** so to avoid feeding the creation of an environment dominated by negative energies.

11. **Avoiding giving the impression that the moderator has tight relations with some participants** and there is a "special family" inside the audience (so avoiding to use terms like "brothers and sisters", "tavarish", "companion", or to call someone by personal name and threat the others are as anonymous).

12. **Trying to "readdress" the discussion on the right-path in case of visible diversion or bifurcations**. Don't allow any personal offense, and ask speakers also to motivate personally the utility of their proposals avoiding generic phrases like "everybody know that...." "people need" which are tautological forms to justify proposals.

13. **Valorise symbolic moments** (as voting or election of speakers/delegates) and, **at the end of the meeting, trying to summarize** (possibly on a projected screen or on a poster) all the conquests/gains of the day, to show that something changed through the meeting in what people knew or could decide.

14. When collecting proposals, **try to induce reflection on the possible costs of maintenance of infrastructure/ equipment proposed,** so that people could take responsibility to contribute to it, and make the implementation of proposals more sustainable in time.

15. **Let some informal space after the end** for people meeting informally (possibly such informal talking could be stimulated trough a small table of beverages and biscuits...).

CONCLUSIONS

Citizen's participation at the local level is an opportunity to seize in Europe, in the Eastern Partnership and in Armenia. It offers valuable added value to local governance and create a sense of community as well as unlock potentialities among different stakeholders. Despite the difficulties, it represents certainly a short term objectives in Armenia and it can be an absolute partner in the process of consolidation of democracy in the country as well as for the sake of development and stability.

Levels	Agenda setting	Drafting	Decision	Implementation	Monitoring	Reformulation
Partnership	Work group or committee	Co-drafting	Joint decision-making / Co-decision making	Strategic partnerships	Work groups or committee	Work groups or committee
Dialogue	Hearings and public forums / Citizens' forums and future councils / Key government contact	Hearings and Q&A panels / Expert seminars / Multi-stakeholder committees and advisory bodies	Open plenary or committee sessions	Capacity building seminars / Training seminars	Work groups or committee	Seminars and deliberative forums
Consultation	Petitioning / Consultation online or other techniques	Hearings and Q&A panels / Expert seminars / Multi-stakeholder committees and advisory bodies	Open plenary or committee sessions	Events, conferences, forums, seminars	Feedback mechanisms	Conferences or meetings / Online consultation
Information	Easy and open information access / Research Campaigning and lobbying Website for key documents	Open and free access to policy documents / Website for key documents / Campaigns and lobbying / Web casts / Research input	Campaigning and lobbying	Open access to information / Website for information access / E-mail alerts / FAQ / Public tendering procedures	Open access to information / Evidence gathering / Evaluations / Research studies	Open access to information
Levels of participation						
Steps in the political decision making process	**Agenda setting**	**Drafting**	**Decision**	**Implementation**	**Monitoring**	**Reformulation**