

Citizen engagement at local level

EUROCITIES principles on citizen engagement

We are today, more than ever, living in times of change. We are having to face new and unexpected challenges. 'Politics as usual' in our representative democracy is no longer delivering what people expect, leading to an increasing distance between political institutions and citizens.

In this context, citizens are willing to get more involved in the decision making processes that affect their lives. The increasing mismatch between people's expectations, existing democratic practice and the scale of our societal challenges is a real opportunity for cities. As the closest level of government to people, city governments are the place where democracy can start, and from where connections can be made to bridge the gap between people and politics.

But what role will cities choose to play in this democratic transition? How can they involve their citizens in a dialogue about our common future?

EUROCITIES has been working intensively on citizen engagement, notably through its 'Cities4Europe - Europe for citizens' campaign, and supporting cities to exchange and learn about the ongoing evolution of citizen engagement practices. As a result, the EUROCITIES declaration on citizen engagement has been signed by nearly 80 cities.

The EUROCITIES principles on citizen engagement at local level are the next step towards strengthening participatory governance in our cities, as well as to building a more citizen focused society.

These principles are the result of a collaboration process, initiated by the EUROCITIES working group creative citizenship, bringing together more than 50 European cities.

Across Europe, there are varying levels of development of citizen engagement initiatives in cities. Cities face the challenges of finding adequate resources and defining appropriate ways to effectively engage citizens in public decision making.

With these principles, European cities acknowledge the importance of citizen engagement, with the ultimate goal of co-creating a better European society capable of answering today's most pressing societal challenges.

EUROCITIES PRINCIPLES ON CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

We, European cities, have agreed a set of shared principles to guide citizen engagement processes. We commit to follow these principles, taking our local circumstances into account, and invite other cities and municipalities to associate themselves with them.

Principle 1

Greater citizen participation in governance is essential if we are to strengthen representative democracy. Therefore, we will:

- Adopt clear, precise and simple participation processes, accessible and open to all citizens, built on rich deliberation and discussion
- Ensure that those processes have the information needed to take good decisions by opening our data, policy and research to citizens and city partners.

Principle 2

Our most pressing societal challenges can only be addressed if public policy is a shared endeavour, developed continuously in partnership between city governments, citizens, civil society and other local actors. Therefore, we will:

- Work to create a culture of trust and collaboration between our governments and citizens by developing diverse and attractive participatory processes
- Provide adequate financial and human resources to support citizen engagement processes and initiatives.

Principle 3

Citizens are best placed to understand and propose solutions about their everyday lives - and this understanding can support city governments in taking decisions. Therefore, we will:

- Ensure that citizens from all age groups, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds have an equal opportunity to participate
- Promote a long-term participatory culture in our cities by recognising and supporting a creative approach based on citizens' expertise.

Principle 4

Our success in this work depends on rebuilding trust between city governments and their citizens. Therefore, we will:

- Communicate the opportunities to participate to all citizens
- Analyse and take account of citizen views, demonstrating how they have affected decisions, and feeding back why citizen views have or have not been followed

Principle 5

As citizen engagement processes are constantly evolving, we need to transform our public administrations to adapt to the challenge. Therefore, we will:

- Not stop experimenting and learning from other cities and actors involved
- Invest in organisational, administrative and political innovation for better citizen-focused actions