alda*

European Association
for Local Democracy

The European Support to Local Democracy
- ESLD -

Backing resilient communities for sustainable and fair development

Europe
for Citizens

2020

WHY WE CAN DO IT

WHY WE HAVE TO DO IT

HOW WE CAN DO IT 22

THE VISION

*Local democracy is based on empowered **civic initiatives**, working with **local authorities** and it is solving local problems of resilient communities concretely thus contributing to sustainable and fair development.*

THE STRATEGY

Local democracy is a key factor for democratic transition, stabilisation and development. It is fully implemented thanks to empowered local authorities, civil society groups and citizens working together to solve local problems and shape the future through engagement and participation. In this moment, catching up to challenges like the COVID 19 pandemic and other global challenges (environment, democracy, migrations and demography), civic initiatives at the local level are fundamental from a social and economic point of view, building resilient and successful communities. Europe based its development and success in these last decades on decentralisation and subsidiarity, empowering local communities. We want to support communities by sharing our 20 years of experience and our powerful network.

The **European Support to Local Democracy** is ALDA's flagship initiative, kicked off with the adoption of the Strategic Plan 2020-2024. The initiative **includes a panoply of instruments** supporting local democracy through an institutional and civil society viewpoint. It encompasses councillors and local leaders. ALDA knows **HOW** to support local democracy from different aspects with various stakeholders and ALDA **CAN (technical capacity, network and experience)** propose the right path of activities for different situations. **Local democracy means to put local communities at the centre of the attention supporting human rights, democracy and sustainable development**. ESLD comprises hundreds of projects, participants and stakeholders from Europe and beyond. With the Strategic plan 2020-2024, ALDA is ready to bring its long-standing experience and added value globally to accompany countries, cities and communities in solving problems in order for all of us to **reach together the future Sustainable Development Goals and EU key objectives in 2020-2024:**
- European Green Deal
- A Europe that works for people
- An economy that works for people
- A stronger Europe in the world
- Promoting our European way of life
- A new push for European Democracy

WHY WE CAN DO IT

1. ALDA – the European Association for Local Democracy & the proposal

1. 1 The proposal

The present proposal aims to present and offer the experience of ALDA – the European Association for Local Democracy – in strengthening and developing local democracy in Europe and beyond, backing up resilient communities for sustainable and fair development.

We consider local democracy as a key point for empowering democratic practices having a fundamental impact in people's lives, while solving problems in resilient communities in a fair and sustainable manner. The practices of citizen engagement could be supported by a structured approach in civil society as well as in local and regional authorities. Decentralisation and the principle of subsidiarity can unlock the potential of civic initiatives, engagement of local resources and further citizen responsibility. ALDA wants to propose its 20th years of experience and its network, members and partners to further empower this approach, even more now in challenging times addressing global warming, the post COVID 19 situation, migration and demography.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals are the reference for ALDA's activities, working in the EU and in other parts of the world. Our work is embedded in the key priorities of the European Union for the upcoming years[1].

Our proposal stems from the various requests often addressed to ALDA from its members and partners and is articulated to respond to them. The chapters and instruments of this document can be used individually or in complementarity to one another according to the needs and requests of each situation. The proposal derives from a position on policy orientation to one that is focused on furthering local action, while supporting directly civic initiatives.

The European perspective is offered by 20 years of experience and broad network of members and partners, focusing on practices and results in all the EU member states and its neighbourhood.

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[1] https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/priorities_en

1.2 The experience of ALDA and its network

ALDA – The European Association for Local Democracy is dedicated to the promotion of good governance and citizen participation at the local level. ALDA focuses on activities facilitating cooperation between local authorities and civil society for finding solutions at the local level and unlocking potential of communities.

ALDA was established in 1999 at the initiative of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to coordinate and support the network of Local Democracy Agencies, which are self-sustainable, locally registered NGOs acting as promoters of good governance and local self-government. It developed strong projects' implementation capacities and today, ALDA is a key stakeholder in the field of local democracy, active citizenship, and cooperation between local authorities and civil society. ALDA keeps a strong link with the Council of Europe and with the Congress, having its headquarter in Strasbourg and liaising with the institution on policies and programmes.

ALDA is a membership-based organisation gathering more than 350 members (including local authorities, associations of local authorities, civil society organisations and universities) coming from more than 40 countries. ALDA is funded through membership fees, as well as project funding from the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and other public and private donors.

1.2.1 What is unique about ALDA?

Most of ALDA's work is based on a multi-stakeholder approach which focuses on strong partnerships between local authorities and non-governmental organisations and it engages local authorities from Europe and from other parts of the world. These partnerships create positive synergy and ensure that common goals are reached in a successful way while strengthening resilience of local communities. ALDA represents both a project-oriented organisation (with actions and networks members and partners) but also a policy making one with a capacity of drafting papers and positions and advocating for them. ALDA's values are deeply rooted in all of its projects: "The value of relationships and exchanges between countries particularly at the local level through the promotion of sharing knowledge and best practices as well as committing to the purpose that the activities and programs be developed and implemented in the respect of those founding principles are the basis of ALDA's reason for being. The values of Europe as a peaceful and constructive space of cooperation among citizens respecting their diversities." are

strongly present in our activities and governance and create an open space for dialogue, support and development.

ALDA brings together various actors and facilitates interactive exchange and conversation about current topics and creates solutions for the challenges that local authorities and civil society are facing. ALDA advocates effectively using innovative ways to reach out and make heard the citizens' interests in all public and political processes.

ALDA offers substantial resources that all members can benefit from, always informed and ready to discuss latest developments in the support of good local governance and active citizenship and any other issue that concerns its members and partners in Europe and beyond.

In the framework of promoting good governance and citizen participation at the local level, ALDA focuses on various themes such as: inclusive communities, decentralisation, civic initiatives and volunteering, human rights and sustainable economic development.

ALDA conducts its activities through different forms of action:

- Coordinating and supporting the 15[2] Local Democracy Agencies in the Enlargement countries and the EU Neighbourhood East and South.

- Conducting its own projects in the field of good governance and citizen participation at the local level (with more than 500 projects implemented in these last 10 years) engaging thousands of partners[3].

- Supporting other local stakeholders' initiatives by providing expertise gained through ALDA's knowledge and experience in the regions where ALDA and the Local Democracy Agencies are working.

- ALDA is also present through technical assistance and policy making actions for supporting participative democracy and decentralisation at local and national level.

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[2] So far in 2020
[3] Reference to the 20th anniversary (upcoming) report of ALDA

1.2.2. The network (members, partners, LDAs)

When ALDA was founded in 1999, under the patronage of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, its main focus and goal was to coordinate the Local Democracy Agencies in the Ex-Yugoslavian countries in moving forward with the reconstruction of Civil Society, of a democratic and participatory approach in the countries involved, and with the valorisation of the intercultural and interreligious dialogue as a way forward for the process of peace-building.

The Local Democracy Agency Programme, at that time composed of 4 LDAs, 1 based in Subotica in Serbia, and 3 based in Osijek, Sisak and Brtonigla in Croatia, represented only the first step towards the construction of the valuable network that ALDA has developed in the last 20 years. The approach developed through the establishment of the Local Democracy Agencies and the great results it achieved, as well as the best practices that emerged gave the foundation for the constant and consistent growth of ALDA. In this way ALDA has represented a catalyst for actors as Civil Society Organisations, Municipalities, Regional Authorities and other, the fil rouge linking it all together has always been a strong interest in Citizen participation for local democracy development based on a decentralised and multi-stakeholder approach.

One of the main successful approaches used in the first steps of ALDA's development was the constant commitment in keeping a balanced engagement of representatives coming from both paths of the community: Civil Society and Local Authorities. During the years, this winning and meaningful method has always been respected in the growing process of ALDA as a composite association of members and in the composition of partnerships for Projects either in Europe or in the neighbourhood countries.
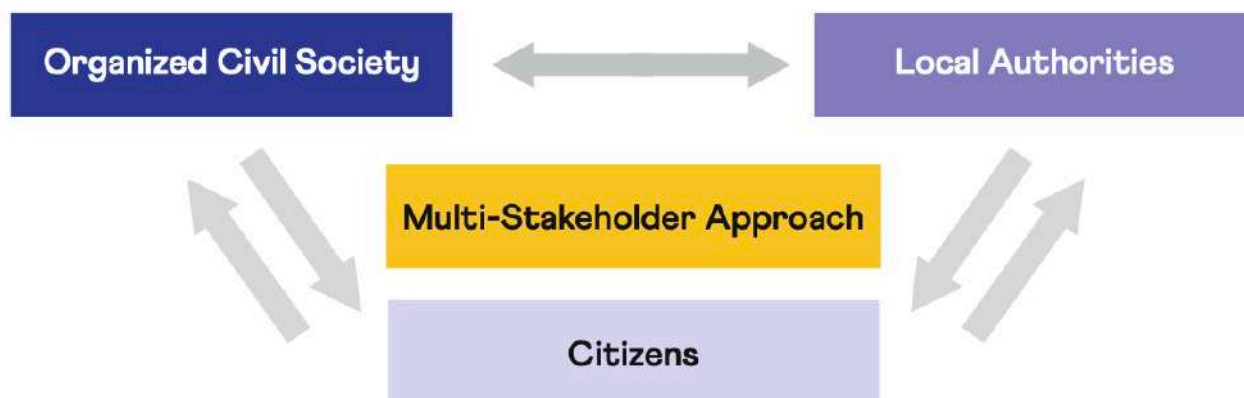
Nowadays, after 20 years of activity and with a Network of 15 Local Democracy Agencies that has been established in South-Eastern Europe, Middle East and North Africa and in the Eastern Partnership, ALDA is still investing in the development of a network composed of actors and representatives coming from the different components of communities.

1.2.2.1 Local Democracy Agencies partners' composition

In order to establish an LDA, the supporting network is the first step taken into consideration. The shared values and commitment among the founders of an LDA represent the binding link among the partners involved in the process.

The key conditions are[4]:

- Support[5] and engagement from the **hosting Municipality**.
- The interest of the **local community** to be actively involved in the LDA's activities.
- Support and engagement from other **local Civil Society Organisations** in order to respect the coordination of efforts and the development of local cooperation.
- Support and engagement of one or more **local or Regional Authorities** from another country in order to fulfil the decentralised-cooperation approach.
- Support and engagement from one or more **international Civil Society Organisations** in order to emphasize the effects of previously developed best-practices and knowledge-sharing.

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[4] Ref to Congress of the Council of Europe Resolutions, Res 73 (1998), Resolution on the Local Democracy Agencies, Res 257 (2008) Democracy and local governance in South-Eastern Europe: the role of Local Democracy Agencies
[5] Political, economic support as well as towards furthering the mission and priority of the new Local Democracy Agency's program

In this respect, the Local Democracy Agencies become the perfect hotspot and operational actors in implementing the mission of ALDA in the non-EU countries, in term of decentralised cooperation.

1.2.2.2. ALDA members' composition

Nowadays, ALDA can count on a well-established network of more than 350 Members coming from more than 45 Countries of the enlarged Europe area. The members are mostly composed in a balanced way by Local Authorities (Municipalities, Regional Authorities and Associations of Local Authorities) and Civil Society Organisations, and they represent the real added value in the implementation of ALDA's programme of activities. Through its members ALDA has a vast coverage of countries' representativeness and they have the opportunity to refer to a group of actors sharing the same values, commitment and best practices. Moreover, the mixed composition of ALDA's members, finds its representation also in the composition of the Governing Board.

ALDA members' composition and the percentage of the kind of members involved
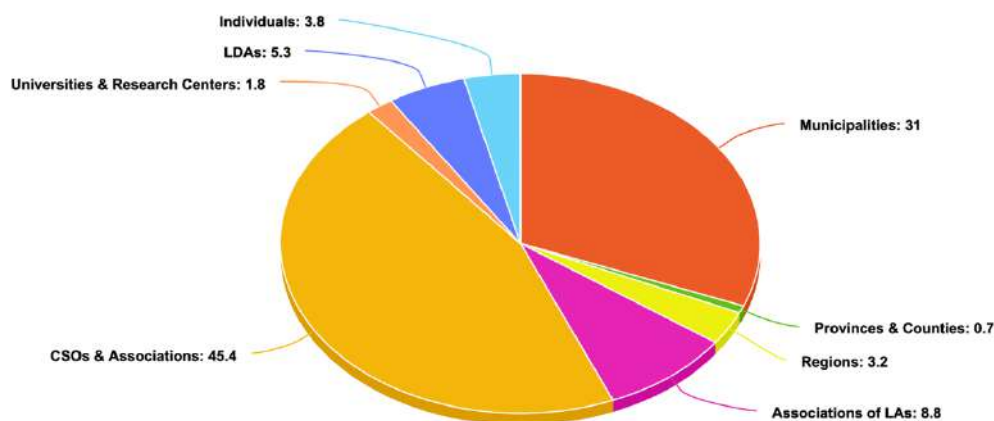
1.2.2.3. Projects' partnership composition

In addition to its members, ALDA can also count on a wide and strong network of partners with a long-standing cooperation in the implementation of project or ad hoc actions. Taking into account the last 10 years of activities, ALDA has built a network of about 1000 partners. The ratio of diverse partners is always respected in the operational life of ALDA: all our projects can count on partnerships composed on the basis of the multi-actor and multi-stakeholder concept, and those kinds of actors are also involved in the local processes that ALDA and its partners are and have been implementing.

While in some occasions the projects and actions implemented by ALDA are the result of its long-term partnerships' needs and ideas, sometimes new partnerships are built for a specific reason, developing cooperation among the actors and stakeholders needed for a specific topic, and giving the raise to new interactions and exchanges.

<u>ALDA partners' composition and the percentage of the kind of partners involved</u>
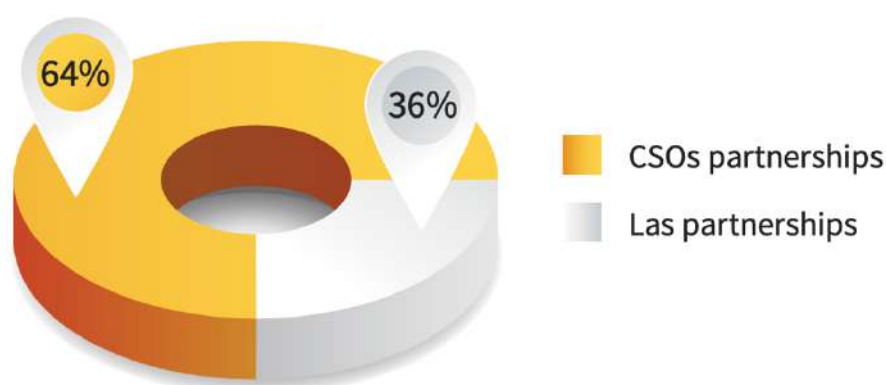
1.2.3. The technical capacity

In the last 20 years (2000-2020), ALDA has implemented 429 projects (in the total amount of: 43 203 666 Euro). Based on the pillars of ALDA's mission - good local governance and cooperation between Local Authorities (LAs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) - our projects support and build Las' and CSOs' capacities to engage citizens in participative democracy processes in their own communities.

The main themes tackled are: active citizenship, education, youth, EU values and integration, culture, media and sport, health and environment, employment, entrepreneurship and economic development, equal opportunities, minorities and vulnerable groups, migration and social issues.

ALDA has coordinated around 67% of the 429 projects mentioned. Moreover, more than 55% of the total funding was allocated to partners such as Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs), LAs and CSOs. Considering this data, two main conclusions can be made. Firstly, having coordinated a high number of projects has supported ALDA in building a solid expertise of management in terms of actions, partners and funds. Secondly, the high percentages demonstrate that ALDA has the trust and is considered reliable by its donors.

On the technical side, ALDA's Project Management Unit is monitored and structured following the objectives below:

1. Reach a coherence among its different projects

2. Increase the quality of the project outputs

3. Avoid any financial and narrative issues

4. Ensure projects are well communicated and visible

5. Optimise resources and tools

6. Improve the cooperation between PMs and the other departments

Specifically, a monthly-monitor process in terms of General Management of the projects and a bi-monthly monitor of co-funding processes are set between each Project Manager and the Head of Unit (as well as with the Fundraising Officer regarding Co-funding Call). Additionally, in order to capitalise and valorise ALDA's internal competences and coherence, a folder with useful documents and templates is shared among the team and ad hoc internal trainings are provided from colleagues of other units on different thematic such as specific financial training on programmes (ex: Erasmus+ Financial regulations), communication technicalities, ALDA Membership, etc.

On the financial side, ALDA is accountable and reliable thanks to a deep, accurate and up to date knowledge of the EU general financial regulations and main programmes. The EU

Programmes within which ALDA operates are: EuropeAid, Europe for Citizens, Creative Europe, External Actions, Erasmus +, Horizon 2020, AMIF, DEAR, LIFE, INTERREG, REC, etc.

On the basis of the EU regulations ALDA has developed internal procedures which allow a sound financial management of projects and application of all the EU eligibility criteria requested for the expenditures. Concretely, to manage projects successfully, ALDA put in place a financial scheme which entails a first phase of assessment focused on budgeting resources, cost for the structure and for activities and cash flows and a second phase of constant financial monitoring of the assessed aspects. The monitoring includes also a financial risk analysis which accompanies the development of the structure and projects.

The tool used for ALDA's financial management is the software programme - FILE MAKER. The software is a considerably versatile database tailor-made in order to be precisely adapted to ALDA's financial needs. Concretely, this tool provides for general accountancy, separate accounts for each project, automatic allocation of staff costs through online time sheets and automatic allocation of administrative costs through objectively determined criteria (time worked on projects per staff member as per time sheets), record of incomes, record of the co-founding per project. The software is reliable and ensures the prevention of double funding of expenses, it also allows an up-to-date status on

project expenses and permit the direct reconciliation between projects' declared expenses and general bookkeeping.

Financial guidelines are determined, within the role of Project Coordinator and are also shared with and for the benefit of projects' partners in order to ensure uniformity on the treatment of the information and compliance with the EU contract obligations.

Number of projects contracts signed per year
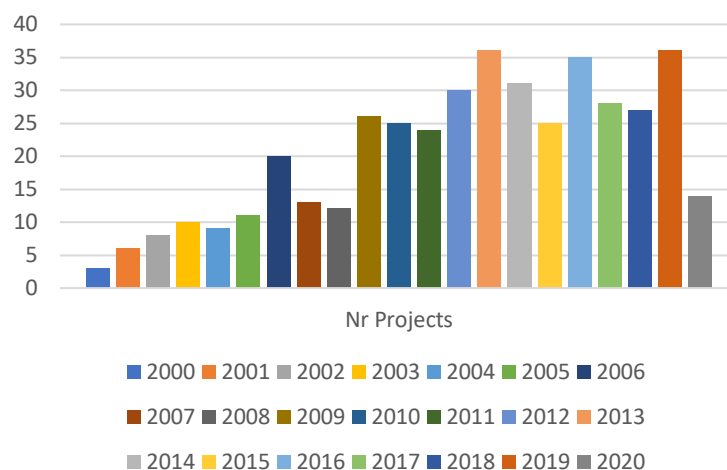
Project Contracts' amounts per year, for a total of 43.203.000 Euro
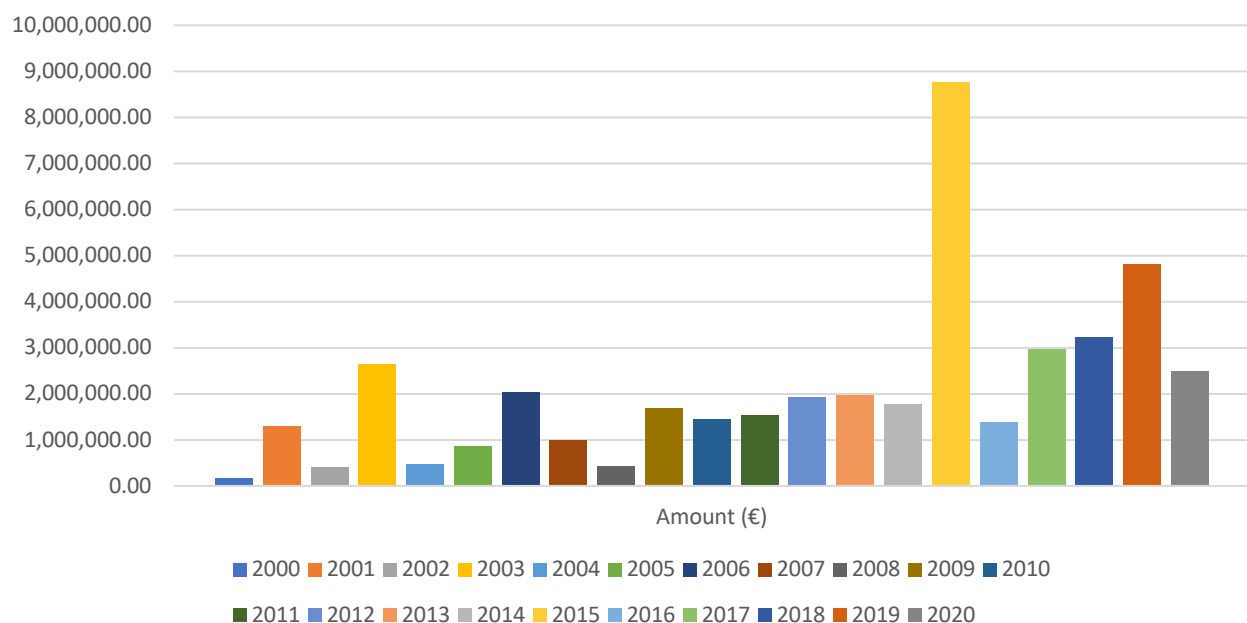
1.2.4. Donors and sponsors

In the period 2000-2020 ALDA has worked with around 220 different donors such as the European Commission and EU Delegations, Local Authorities, Associations of Local Authorities, CSOs, Cooperatives, Foundations, Universities, International Organisations. However, ALDA's main donor is the European Commission and EU Delegations with more than 70% of the total funds received.
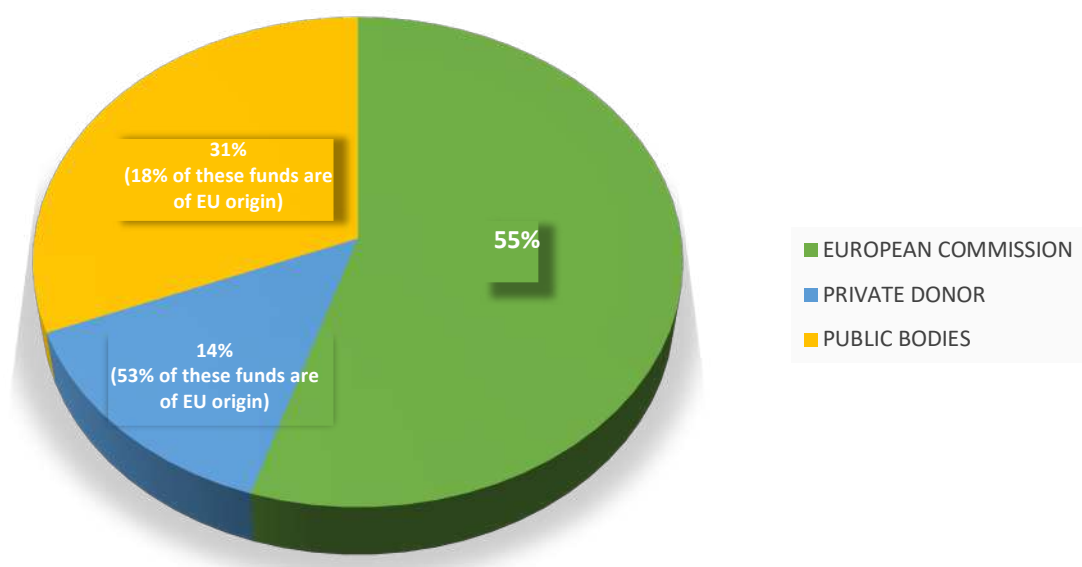
Audits:

Since 2000 around 10% of ALDA projects have been submitted to expenditure verification before the submission of the final report to the EC.

ALDA projects for a total amount of 3.232 727,79 Euro have been submitted to EC audits. The audits were completely successful, and only 0,03% of expenditures of the above audited amount was considered ineligible and re-funded to EC.

1.2.5. The team – Human Resources, qualification and numbers

Managing Human Resources is a considerable challenge for an organisation like ALDA, where deployment of the right people with the right skills, to the right place at the right time is critical for successful operations.

ALDA is an organisation that is permanently improving and thus requires from its employees a commitment to permanent learning. We can say that ALDA is a "learning organisation", its approach can be described as a process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to work with motivated people. Therefore, the process of recruitment for the most suited staff is of fundamental importance: ALDA selects people with talents that believe in ALDA's values, who are passionate about European issues and want to make a huge contribution to the success of ALDA. ALDA aims to find the most adequate and motivated workers, all the while training and supporting them in their work.

Staff is provided with internal and external training, specific for the different positions, not only during their first period in ALDA, but also during their whole career in our organisation.

Currently, ALDA's staff is composed by **43 employees** located in Italy, France, Belgium, North Macedonia, Tunisia and Moldova:
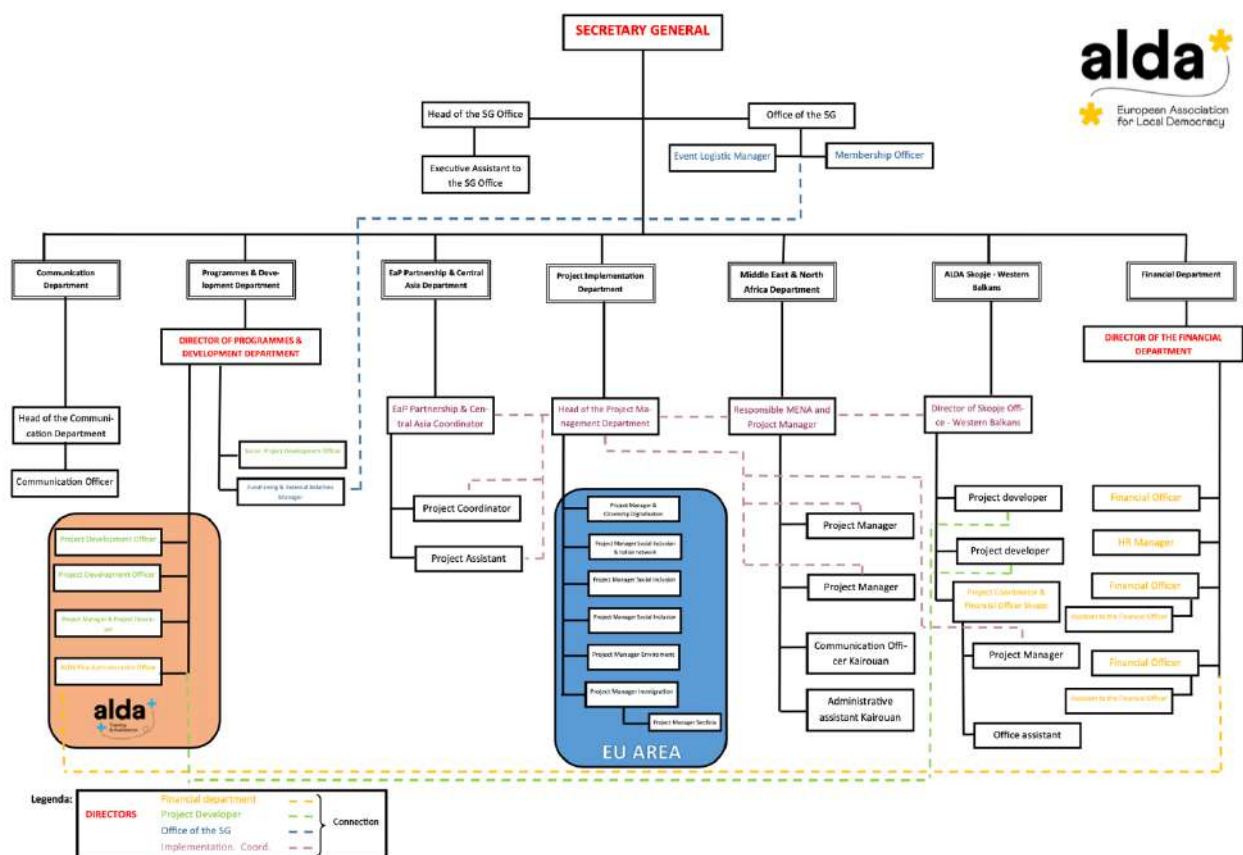
Every employee is evaluated on their performance and achievements; in order to achieve this, we are implementing a Management by Objectives (MBO) model, through which directors and all the other employees work together to set, record and monitor goals for a specific period of time.

In the end, we believe that our employees are our key strength, and we believe in providing to our people, in line with their contribution, fulfilling careers, along with an enjoyable working environment.

WHY WE HAVE TO DO IT

2. About the importance of local democracy for achieving the SDGs and the key objectives of the EU

2.1 The role of local authorities and civil society organisations in development

In a widely globalised and urbanised world, the local and territorial dimension of public policies have a paramount importance to provide citizens with services, a sense of belonging and a community to live in. Throughout Europe and in the world, in pragmatic terms and public policies, **the role of the local institutions and decision makers is fundamental to secure welfare, wealth, security, educations and good living conditions**.

Wealth and good conditions of living need to start by solutions at the local level and by implementing the policy of subsidiarity and it is strongly referring to the <u>localisation of the SDGs and the implementation of the key objectives of the EU for 2020-2024[6]</u>.

ALDA, with its particular membership basis and even participation of local authorities and civil society organisations, maintains its focus on the local perspective of citizen involvement and development.

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[6] European Union priorities for 2019-2024

The strengthening of local and regional authorities (with their real autonomy – as described in the European Charter on Local Self Government of the Council of Europe) and a vivid and strong civil society (articulated in different forms and ways of actions) are the key work of ALDA. *By strengthening these two stakeholders and letting them work together, the society would benefit in terms of better, fairer, and more efficient solutions adopted.*

Indeed, there is no evidence, in the last decades, that sustainable development and social stability can be obtained without implementing decentralisation empowering local authorities and civil society[7].

Devolution of powers, competences and consequent resources are the core of the administrative reforms in the countries in transition (as those from the former Soviet Union block) but also in many other regions of the world. ALDA uses decentralisation as a proven model adopted in public governance in Europe, where local and regional authorities are strengthened and represent a strong counterpart both to national governments and civil society.

Any form of centralism where the management of competences and resources come only directly from bodies of the central State or is maybe devolved to local administrations such as provinces, proves soon to be limited and thus requires a real development of forms of autonomy and self-organisation. The examples are numerous and administrative reforms in this sense are currently being implemented.

Another perspective adopted by ALDA is focused on the Territorial Approach to Local Development, bridging decentralisation with sustainable and long-standing development. It values the role of the stakeholders at regional and local level.

The approach is strongly anchored in the EU Communication, recognising Local Authorities as actors for Development. It also wants to match the UN Agenda 2030, which focuses on cross-sectoral and integrated development.

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[7] Citizens' participation at the local level in Europe and Neighbouring Countries, Antonella Valmorbida

"If you don't give autonomy to local authorities, you are basically saying that you are content with your handling of development and neither need their help to improve the efficiency of your resources, nor do you need their help to give you additional resources. If you decentralise without autonomy you are setting the stage for not producing any local development (…) Local Development is not the final part of the national plans but it is rather the starting point of the national development."

As for the TALD decentralisation is not always a guarantee of development. Decentralisation needs to be implemented and accompanied by a context of other conditions in order to achieve better results. TALD's principles help to look at social, political and economic processes from a different angle, avoiding the formal settings but rather looking, with pragmatism, at the communities we want to work with. For the national stakeholders TALD supposes a profound awareness raising to accept "not to think alone" and it should be embedded in a national strategy. It must be based on an accurate and comprehensive mapping of resources and potentials.

The mapping should be done in a participative way and incorporating all resources such as natural resources, networks, social capital, experiences, people and traditions, identifying maps and bridges between the various elements to be appreciated. The TALD supports decentralisation and not de-concentration: de-concentration means a transfer of competences and resources to local units of the State, which are "geographically located" away from the centre but with no accountability to local stakeholders.

Decentralisation could be a key to success if it is not only a decentralisation of competences, but also a transfer of consequent resources. Decentralisation is most effective, in terms of development, when it also transfers the agenda setting or the right to the initiative and when communities in a multi-stakeholders approach are involved completely in the elaboration of strategies and their implementation.

During its 20 years, ALDA has produced a consistent number of publications, in order to report its activities, the strategies and priorities of the Association and to deepen researches on specific fields:

- "ALDA: 10 years in the making of a new Europe in support of local democracy and citizens' participation", Strasbourg, May 2009[8]

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[8] www.alda-europe.eu/publications/1002

- ALDA Annual Activity Reports, from 2001 to present[9]

- ALDA papers and strategic documents[10]

- "Citizens' participation at the local level in Europe and Neighbouring Countries", contribution of ALDA

- - European Association for Local Democracy and edited by Antonella Valmorbida, 2013, Peter Lang Edition (ISBN:978-3-0352-6432-6)

- "The European Decentralised Cooperation: Acting for development engaging local authorities and civil society", Antonella Valmorbida, 2018, Peter Lang Edition (ISBN 978-2-8076-0609-8)

- New strategic views of ALDA 2020-2024

2. 2 References and position of the ESLD in the localisation of the SDGs and the 5 key objectives of the European Union

On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) officially came into force. The SDGs after years of negotiations were outlined in the Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and adopted at the historical United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in 2015 by 193 Members States of the United Nations. The SDGs were built and negotiated based on the experience of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim at being even more ambitious of these previous objectives. The achievement of the so-called Agenda 2030 appears to be possible only by applying different principles. Particularly relevant for the work of ALDA are:

- Its **UNIVERSALITY**: While the United Nations Millennium Declaration, in which the MDGs were delineated, applied only to developing countries; the Agenda 2030 does not have any specific geographical focus. Indeed, its goals, targets and indicators are applied to both developed and developing countries. Obviously, the context and the national circumstances can represent different degrees of challenges and ambition when it comes to implementation. However, European countries as much as others should bear in mind the SDGs when discussing policies, action plans and strategies at all governmental levels.

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[9] www.alda-europe.eu/library
[10] www.alda-europe.eu/library

- Its **INCLUSIVENESS**: From the very beginning, the process of creation and establishment of the 17 SDGs and their Agenda has been fully participatory, transparent and based on a multi-stakeholder approach. Governments together with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Local authorities, academia, the private sector etc. engaged in the generation of this framework. To achieve it is only possible if this process and approach is adopted also during the current-implementation phase.

- Its **LOCALISATION**: The achievement of the Agenda 2030 is possible not only if implemented globally and by various stakeholders, but also if all levels contribute. Particularly, the localisation of the SDGs appears to be a cornerstone for the achievement of the agenda. In other words, the implementation of local policies and initiatives which supports the achievement of the SDGs is essential for their success.

These three features fully fit with ALDA's nature and its operational work. In light of this, the adoption of the SDGs became immediately part of our DNA. In 2016, our work for the SDGs was represented through the project **LADDER – Local Authorities as Drivers for Development Education and Raising awareness**. LADDER was a 3-year long project co-funded by the EU under the DEAR – Development Education Awareness Raising Programme (DG DEVCO) in which ALDA was leading 27 co-applicants, LAs and CSOs. The project aimed at enhancing the action of LAs with the support of CSOs in informing citizens on development issues, promoting their engagement starting from the local level, including both individual and collective actions for development. LAs and CSOs working jointly had a considerable multiplier capacity and became drivers for change at local level. The project started in 2015, during the European Year for Development and in 2016 the SDGs were adopted. Following the same framework,

LADDER introduced the Agenda 2030 to LAs and CSOs from the very beginning of their endorsement. Moreover, on 13 October 2016 ALDA co-organised and participated to the launch of SDG Watch Europe. From then on ALDA is part of this informal cross-sectoral EU-level alliance composed by more than 100 CSOs from development, environment, social, human rights and other sectors which aims at holding governments accountable for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs.

Nowadays, our work on the SDGs has been expanded to the whole spectrum of the ALDA projects. Particularly, when a new project is approved, the Implementation Unit of ALDA works on a first phase of reflection and analysis of the project application. While doing this, a first analysis and identification of SDGs and targets challenged by the project is carried on. This new strategic approach allows our association:

• To have a common framework for all the projects and identify a "fil rouge" among different geographical and thematic areas

• To have a common communication strategy about our projects in a universal and understandable language for other stakeholders

• To identify which projects are targeting the same challenges and liaise with the other PMs to see whether there are common outputs in order to optimise the work

Our actions for the localisation of the SDGs are articulated differently and encompass technical and practical initiatives but also awareness raising and capacity building processes. Based on the current situation, our on-going 46 projects are divided among the 5 Ps (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership) as follow:

Additionally, each project covers one or more SDGs and specific targets:

SDGs in practice: a case study of the BRIGHT project

Funded by the REC Program of the European Commission, BRIGHT- Building RIGHTs-based and Innovative Governance for EU mobile women tackles the lack of protection for **women and girls who migrate within EU countries for work reasons**, finding employment mainly in low standard sectors - such as agriculture and care work. The migration of Romanian and Bulgarian women to Italy, for example, has the highest rates at European level and is accompanied by dangers ranging from the lack of protection provided only by a regular employment contract, to situations of psychological, social, economic and physical violence. BRIGHT aims at **improving the exercise of the EU citizenship rights of EU women mobile workers.** It does so through the adoption of the "Collaboration Agreements", a **participatory methodology that fosters the collaboration** between municipalities, CSOs, businesses, trade unions and citizens **to co-design tailored gender-sensitive public services** for underrepresented citizens. Thanks to ALDA's EU-wide network, the adoption of Collaboration Agreements is fostered in other 5 EU local authorities. A tailored capacity building program addresses these 5 local communities for them to foster the participation of EU mobile citizens in decision-making processes at a local level.

BRIGHT's action is oriented towards the all-round achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. To respond to the multifaceted challenge of the exclusion of women mobile workers, BRIGHT works both in sending and in hosting communities. In the former, awareness is raised on EU citizenship rights and official migration corridors through ad hoc training and advocacy campaigns addressing 400 Romanian and Bulgarian workers. These activities are designed to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, to provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (**SDG16**). In the hosting communities, BRIGHT supports the access to gender responsive public services (e.g. social housing, public transport to the workplace, community solutions for childcare) for Romanian and Bulgarian women employed in low standard labour sectors in Southern Italy, hereby directly answering to **SDG5** - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, **SGD8** - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. **SDG10** - Reduce inequality within and among countries and **SDG11** - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Finally, because local institutions need new and innovative strategies and instruments to guarantee access to fair, adequate and sensitive public services, BRIGHT also intends to enhance the capacity of 5 local institutions to adopt collaboration agreements systems that enable the participation of EU mobile citizens in decision-making processes. Through an EU-wide dissemination carried out by ALDA, sustainable partnerships are being created across Europe to improve the awareness and exercise the EU citizenship rights of migrant women employed in low-labour standard sectors, thus also contributing to **SDG17** - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Throughout its activities, ALDA tackles and implements projects to address the key priorities of the European Union in 2020-2024[11]:

- A European Green Deal

- A Europe fit for the digital age

- An economy that works for people

- A stronger Europe in the world

- Promoting our European way of life

- A new push for European democracy

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[11] https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/priorities_en

HOW WE CAN DO IT

3. Instruments to support local democracy

3.1. General introduction and package

Local Democracy includes stakeholders such as local authorities and civil society. Its implementation demands institutional setting (legislation and regulations) but also social and political background. **From ALDA's point of view, local democracy is embedded in the life of communities, active and working for their sustainability, welfare and development.** In present times, local communities are the driver for delivering services and quality of life to cities and they are also those who need to be more resilient in front of drastic changes on short and long term. Empowered, policies and programmes for inclusion are developed in local communities and it is within the community that we witness the true fight against inequalities. Local democracy is also "delivering the solution" in terms of urbanisation and local economic development, which are among the challenges of the future.

Our proposal – the European Support to Local Democracy – is articulated in chapters and through examples, which are result from our 20 years of experience. The chapters represent sets of actions and means that, according to our constant work, are often requested by our partners and members. Therefore, we have identified titles of activities, possible actions (also divided by stakeholders) as well as good examples and results that we have achieved. The actions can be selected and chosen according to the needs. They can also be adapted and combined to the specific situations in a community or in a country. It goes without saying that any proposal would need to be set case by case.

The European feature of the proposal is based on the composition of our membership basis (mainly EU based stakeholders with more than 300 members in the EU) but also on the policies and practices developed in Europe for those last 20 years. ALDA is also a close partner of the Council of Europe and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. ALDA works in dialogue with the European Union institutions and the European Commission, in particular, and therefore it implements their policies and strategies.

<u>**The support actions are thusly oriented:**</u>

Various stakeholders engaged	Local and regional authorities
	National institutions
	Citizens
	Civil society organisations
	Institute of research

Type of activities implemented	Analysis and research
	Training and capacity building
	Local community projects support
	Policy making and advocacy at national and local/regional level
	Best practices exchanges
	Support to local economic development
	Planning, programming and strategy development

Possibility to deliver	Through joint projects with ALDA
	Through technical assistance of ALDA staff
	Through the support of the Local Democracy Agencies
	Through the support of the partnership and membership basis of ALDA
	Though the support of ALDA +
	Integrated Territorial Development Diagnostic (ITDD)

3.2 Technical assistance, Expertise & Policy making

3.2.1 Types of technical assistance, types of beneficiaries

ALDA, its staff and the Local Democracy Agencies have been working at the local, national and international level in order to accompany policies to support the key areas of our mission. Being a very active organisation, implementing projects and being in contact with thousands of stakeholders, ALDA has the added value to bring experience and solid inputs to policy makers. The organisation developed since its establishment relevant policy papers that supported the development of local democracy in Europe, in the Neighbourhood and in the world (we contributed to organise some consultation for the 2013 EC communication on local governments' actors for Development).

> Our documents are evidence-based and report of activities with thousands of stakeholders involved. The documents produced go through a quality control as for the editing and they are user friendly and of quick use.

Policy making and technical assistance are oriented towards:

- National/regional and local stakeholders

- International stakeholders (mainly the European Union institutions, European Commission and EUD)

Our work can take the form of:

- Policy papers

- Analysis

- Recommendations following projects' activities

- Inquiries

Experience:

Relevant documents where ALDA had an added value in policy making and technical assistance are the following:

- Development of active citizenship: a way to strengthen local democracy in Eastern Partnership[12]

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[12] https://www.alda-europe.eu/publications/1004/

- Public administration and local government reforms in Eastern Partnership countries[13]

- Decentralised cooperation: an added value for Eastern Partnership countries[14]

- ALDA and its members coping with the refugees' crisis[15]

- Development cooperation and its evolution in Europe[16]

- Citizens' participation at the local level in Europe and Neighbouring countries[17]

3.2.2. ALDA+

ALDA is developing its activities of technical assistance and expertise through its own resources and networks but also thanks to the development of ALDA+, a company set up in 2018 to address needs of our members and other companies and communities. ALDA+ is owned by ALDA and respond to the need of supporting globally the mandate of the Association. ALDA+ roots its activities in the 20+ years of experience in the field of Local Democracy and European Affairs of ALDA.

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[13] https://www.alda-europe.eu/publications/1003/
[14] https://www.alda-europe.eu/publications/1005
[15] https://www.alda-europe.eu/publications/1006/
[16] https://www.alda-europe.eu/publications/1007
[17] Edition P.I.E. Peter Lang, Antonella Valmorbida (ed.), ISBN 978-2-87574-181-3

We offer a comprehensive and tailor-made approach to funding and development needs of organisations, local and regional authorities and companies, aimed at strengthening their capacity and autonomy in securing grants and successfully implement institutionally funded projects.

The scope of our expertise also spreads to several related fields, as detailed below, which constitute the necessary know-how to design successful projects.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- European and Transnational projects

- Project development

- Implementation, evaluation and monitoring

- Project monitoring

- Financial management and project reporting

- Fundraising

- Communication strategies

- Participatory governance

- Local governance and related topics

- Accountability and transparency

- Management of public services

- Internationalisation of local authorities

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Development of European and transnational projects "on demand"

- Supervision and coordination of projects

- Administrative and financial management

- Financial reporting and final project report

- Partnership building

- Information on European programmes

- Tailor-made scouting of funding opportunities

PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

- Participatory processes at the local level

- Participatory budget

- Participatory methods: Open Space Technology, World Café

EVENTS

- Organisation and facilitation of project events (trainings, workshops, conferences, etc.)

- Study visits

- Educational tours (visits to EU institutions)

COMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

- Development and management of projects' communication and dissemination strategy

- Development of promotional and communication materials/tools

- Project publications, manuals and handbooks

- Organisation of institutional and non-institutional meetings (with representatives of European institutions, with European Networks, etc.)

3.2.3 Decentralisation, local authorities' empowerment & territorial reforms

How should the states decentralise? Various options to be adopted and the way forward, including the study and analysis of the added value of the process. How could local authorities be consulted and how to open and channel the debate with civil society and the communities.

Decentralisation and territorial reforms (including the best choice and seize of local authorities and sub-national entities) are a key process for fair and sustainable development. Thanks to empowerment of decentralised bodies, new forms of governance are possible engaging local and regional levels. Decentralisation and support to local authorities are not only a process of decentralisation of powers but it is also a way to support democracy close to citizens, making it more concrete and "understandable".

ALDA, thanks to its experience, can support national authorities and guide them towards the importance of putting in place "a truly effective" decentralisation by focusing on short, medium and long-term action plans.

Proposed actions would be:

- **Accompanying the legislative process** towards decentralisation at the national, regional and local level, in a participative manner (with commissions, consultations and inputs from various levels of governance). A comparative approach through the European experience of decentralisation and its assets, opportunities and challenges could lead the newcomers to structure their approach.

- **Accompanying the territorial reforms process** (aggregation/merging or changes of territorial representation). ALDA can lead research and analysis on the added value of various options, putting in place a project research but also thanks to consultations with various stakeholders. ALDA can also work side by side with international actors, which are already following and supporting politically the process (UNDP or the Council of Europe) in order to bring citizens and various local stakeholders into the process.

- **Accompanying new local authorities to embark on their new responsibilities.** ALDA can also assist the new structures of local governance as well in the territorial reforms to be put in place. It can assist local elected officials and their staff to understand legislation and to practice new laws and provisions. ALDA is also active in making sure

that the new legislative setting is understood by citizens that could therefore be part of it. The approach is focused on working with citizens in a participative manner.

- **Accompanying a network of stakeholders**. ALDA can accompany the network of national and local stakeholders to support decentralisation and to find the best way forward, through participative platforms of cooperation, by engaging experts and soliciting various points of view from Europe and neighbouring regions. ALDA can draft a full plan of consultations and analysis elaborated by experts and citizens, making sure that the process is locally embedded and responds to the possibilities and objectives.

- **Accompanying activities and joint programmes**: Implementation of sub-granting programs to increase the cooperation between local/regional authorities and grass-roots civil society aiming at strengthening decentralisation and the community's development.

 Examples:

Ukraine: Contribution and inputs on how to accompany and/or revise the empowerment of local and regional authorities supporting voluntary amalgamation (for instance, feedback to national and European institutions on the difficulties of the process and proposal for improvement) ALDA contributed to share information to citizens and new staff of local authorities about new Hromadas' amalgamation by organising training sessions but also practical exercises.

Armenia: Support of the territorial reform in Armenia for an amalgamation and rationalisation of local authorities, with inputs brought thanks to a consultation of local authorities and civil society, among partners and members of ALDA.

Moldova: Drafting of the voluntary amalgamation methodology as a follow-up of a nation-wide consultation process in all 32 districts of the country. This was done at the request of the Prime-Minister's office with the support of EU.

Serbia: Supporting documents proposed to national institutions on the role of civil society and local authorities working together in consolidation of decentralisation.

Tunisia: Support to drafting Constitution (workshops organised between 2011 and 2013) with regional consultations of local authorities and civil society as for territorial development and decentralisation (project VOX in BOX)

Morocco: Support to the advanced regionalisation and development of the policies for dialogue and citizen consultation, dialogue and support to the Ministry

Togo: Support and expertise to decentralisation and local elections

European Union: Supporting papers and documents to the Committee of the Regions on various topics of international support to local democracy

Belarus: Promoting the participatory budget concept within local and regional authorities as a tool for better local governance.

3.2.4 Participative democracy & citizen engagement

How to increase the engagement of citizens in local democracy, solution oriented through a constant and productive dialogue? How to include more women and youth?

Citizen participation is key for any support to democracy, especially at the local level. Citizen engagement secures new resources and energies, ideas as well as better solutions for local problems and challenges. ALDA has 20 years of experience when it comes to citizen engagement and mobilisation as well as with the articulation of their work in collaboration with local authorities. ALDA has the capacity to build citizens' groups, mobilise associations and create skills and opportunities through ad hoc initiatives and long-term plans.

Democracy, especially at the local level, needs active citizens that are the counterparts and beneficiaries of local policies and programmes. Local citizens need to be informed and a large part of the programme starts with the support towards sharing information and raising awareness. We focus on dialogue and negotiation groups and mechanisms, with concrete examples and modern ways of engaging (with new technologies), also using media and internet (overcoming the difficult situation of the COVID 19).

Active citizens, aware and prepared, are a powerful tool against corruption. Animating communities and making them part of the decision-making process are an absolute added value in terms of reducing costs (or non-cost occurred in the community because of wrong or conflictual decisions) but also in terms of resources that citizens (individuals, companies, schools and other forms of aggregations) can bring to the city.

At the national level, policies that should be taken into consideration are those related to the citizen engagement in policy making at the local and national level. ALDA knows how to raise the profile at the national level of the citizens' requests by tracing patterns of cooperation and inducing good practices as a more systemised approach. Thanks to its European experience, ALDA has case studies where the added value was shared and contributed to build the appropriate path for each country and community approach.

Experience:

Algeria: Elaboration of the national code of participative democracy at the local level and advocacy

Ukraine and Moldova: Supporting national and local approach to local participative democracy to solve issues at the local level, 2019/2020.

Eastern Partnership Countries (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova): supporting citizen engagement at the local level, contributing to recommendation within the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum to national institutions and EUD, see also the Local Democracy Library of ALDA

Tunisia/Morocco: Supporting recommendations to improve women participation in local elections and local political life. Recommendation of the project PARFAIT (2020) and recommendation on improvement of women's participation in Morocco, project EGAL (2019/2020)

How to increase the role of civil society in local policies in the EU: numerous projects and reports were addressed to the European Union and European Commission.

Supporting the engagement of vulnerable groups such as women, youth, people with disabilities etc. in society is the core of many EU ALDA projects. For example:

• **WEMIN - Migrant Women Empowerment and Integration** which focuses on the promotion of a comprehensive integration model for women migrants/refugees

• **Mind Inclusion 2.0** which aims at fostering the competencies of educators for people with disabilities across Europe in order to promote the participative co-creation and use of an innovative online tool that contributes to the sustainable and inclusive involvement of people with disabilities in society

• **YouthMetre** which aims at supporting EU Member States, municipalities and regions in carrying out effective policy reforms in the field of youth, in line with the indications provided by the EU Youth Strategy and according to the priorities perceived by its target population: young Europeans. Within all these projects recommendations targeting policy makers were drafted.

Western Balkans: Policy paper on the role of youth in local policies for involvement and local development policies (as the results of the project Balkan Youth network and COMPACT (2016-2020)

LADDER, global programme on Development Education Awareness Raising: development of a programme for Citizen journalists.

3.2.5 Civil society empowerment

How to create and support a vivid civil society at the local level enabling it to be part of local policies and programme? How to make citizens solid partners of the local democracy process and active in local economic and social policies? How to stimulate the citizens' interest in local policies and communities and fight against apathy and passivity? How to make them aware of the importance of being involved and active?

ALDA has been actively involved since its creation in developing and empowering civil society and citizens. It accompanies awareness raising activities, strengthening capacities in engaging in public life through training and practices and it develops skills in lobbying and advocacy. ALDA focuses in particular in engaging disadvantaged groups such as women, minorities and youth in decision making processes. Close to the activities of the Council of Europe and other European institutions, ALDA developed – with the **Conference of the International Organisation – the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process**[18], giving useful tips for fostering a vivid civil society as an integral part of the community and engaging with local authorities. We focus on both formal and informal civil society categories by developing the associations as well as the community-based groups.

Civil society and engaged citizens are an essential part of democracy as well as fair and sustainable development. ALDA has been working closely with local groups and communities but contributed also to broader support to civil society engagement at the national level.

Examples:

Road map for supporting the role of civil society in local public policies, drafted during the European Union Delegations training activities, in Brussels (2016).

Council of Europe, INGOs, co drafting of the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process of the Council of Europe (2015).

Strong advocacy and founder of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF). Since 2009, when the Forum was created, ALDA held several leadership positions and took active part in the drafting of different recommendations and policy documents for the intention of national institutions, EU and EU Delegations in target countries.

Promoter and co-organiser of the network Civil Society Europe, since its establishment up to now, as a follow up of the European Year of Citizens (2013) i

Civil society empowerment: Several EU Projects implemented by ALDA tackled civil society empowerment. Among these, two projects focused on the regeneration of the cities through art and active participation: **StAR - Street ARt** which intends to create a network

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[18] https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/civil-participation

of towns with a common strategy to promote social inclusion and decrease marginalisation by rehabilitation of depressed and abandoned areas of European cities through street art; and **SPRAY - Space Regeneration through Art by Youth** which believes in the opportunity to reconcile street art and urban and social regeneration through the empowerment of youths at the European level. Another project which focuses on solidarity and active citizenship is FroMe2EU which aims at providing opportunities for European citizens and Migrants' communities to work together in order to promote the idea of a multicultural Europe and work together for more sustainable societies.

3.2.6. Local Democracy, local development, empowering social capital

How to make sure that local democracy delivers local economic development in terms of sustainability, efficiency and inclusiveness? Which are the steps to take in order to ensure it is functioning and interdependently embedded? How to respond to first the economy and then democracy, by confirming they are both necessary? How to present the role of local communities working together in order to delivery local economic development?

Local Democracy, working with civil society, paves the way to empower, globally the social capital of the community which is based on:

- Trust

- Collective actions

- Groups and networks

- Access to information

- Inclusion and participation

ALDA has been involved in numerous programmes supporting local entrepreneurship, based on a framework initiative with local authorities and civil society. The framework is focused on corporate responsibility and a sustainable and inclusive approach.

Examples:

Western Balkans: Recommendations for increasing the potential of local entrepreneurs engaging communities in local economic development and local participation, Report of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Western Balkans: Recommendations on how to engage communities in micro credit activities run with the Ministry of Norway and "Banca Intesa Sanpaolo" .

Libya: For the EUD, delivery of a technical assistance for the support to the TALD approach and the Integrated Territorial Development Diagnostic for Libya (2020)

Morocco: Recommendations to improve the role of women in local economic development and support to local and rural communities (2018-2020)

European Union: Recommendations and capacity building actions were implemented in different projects concerning local economic development and entrepreneurship. They were realised through the the following projects: GET UP – Gender Equality Training to overcome Unfair discrimination Practices in education and labour market; LIME: Labour Integration for Migrants Employment; EMEN - EUROPEAN MIGRANTS ENTREPRENEURSHIP NETWORK Crossing borders for financial and business development services; BRIGHT - Building RIGHTs-based and Innovative Governance for EU mobile women.

3.2.7 Assistance to local government reforms at the local level

ALDA actively supports changes and institutionalisation processes on local level. The practices of participation and citizen engagement become part of the community development and plans, securing a long-term impact in the community. We focus on engaging minority groups, women and youth and civil society in broad terms through the creation of rules and examples to be replicated. The focal point of our work is reflected through the potential of negotiation and conflict management between civil society and local authorities.

Examples:

Introduction of an Innovation Hub in the city of Schio (Italy) for engaging citizens and youth in local economic development. The city Hub will remain as a structure within the municipality after the end of the project.

In Prijedor (Bosnia and Herzegovina), together with the Local Democracy Agency, ALDA promoted the Forum of citizens, which remained several years as a go-between local authorities and civil society.

With our projects in Europe, and the programme for inclusion of migrants (the project **Urgent - Urban Re-Generation: European Network of Towns – URGENT)** we introduced in many municipalities in Europe practices for including migrants in various levels of the society (work, education and civil society)

3.2.8 Assistance to local elections

ALDA and the Local Democracy Agencies have been involved in actively preparing citizens to elections by informing them and providing them with the necessary tools. Nowadays, citizens could receive elements for elections but the relatively low turn-out has a negative impact on democracy and good governance. At the local level, it is possible to make citizens aware of the role of local authorities and the importance of their vote and engagement in the democratic processes.

The programmes of support could be composed thusly:

- Awareness raising material and dissemination on the importance of voting and the challenges faced on local level

- Organisation of forums and exchanges about candidates in formal and informal ways

- Work with the media to have a balanced space for presenting candidates and challenges

- Education of citizens on the civic duty of voting and valorising their contribution

- Cooperation with institutions for reaching out the more vulnerable people and giving them the possibility to vote

- Promotion of citizen engagement in local political life by raising the citizens' attention on local issues in particular for women and youth candidates.

Examples:

ALDA and the Local Democracy Agencies have an extensive track record on the matter.

Supporting women's participation in local political life, through the project PARFAIT in Tunisia, engaging and supporting the candidature of women in the first local elections in Tunisia and accompanying their process, awareness and preparation.

Several activities realised during local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the Local Democracy Agencies in Zavidovici and Prijedor including **information and dissemination of brochures, organisation of local events** (informal forums in the city squares or in the public activities institutions and bars).

Organisation of "informal" voting for the local elections in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (while the official elections have not taken place for more than 10 years). Our Local Democracy Agency with other local organisations organised their own "local elections" showing that citizens were interested and active. The elections could not take place for years because of the difficulty to find an agreement between the two different entities.

With the **Local Democracy Agency in Gyumri, Armenia,** we held classes for the pupils of the primary and secondary schools about the role of the local governments raising therefore the attention of pupils on that matter, acting on future mobilised voters.

ALDA contributed to raise **the attention on the right to vote on local level for EU mobile citizens in the project APPROCH.**

ALDA promoted the profile and participation of women in local elections in Europe through several projects such as: CROSS OVER, which focuses on fostering participation in the 2019 European Parliament elections and active engagement in the EU community life by all its citizens, by improving conditions for democratic civic commitment; Fair EU which activities include research into obstacles to free movement and political rights, evidence-based recommendations to inform local election campaigns in Belgium in 2018, and an EU-wide campaign targeting local, as well as on national and EU level authorities and stakeholders prior to the European elections in 2019.

The Local Democracy Agencies in the Balkans have worked with the **OSCE** for the preparation and support of local elections on many occasions.

3.3. Assessment & evaluation

3.3.1. Local governance assessment and monitoring

ALDA is able to make assessments on the potential, opportunities and challenges of local governance at the national and local level. ALDA has developed several such assessments in the Balkans but also in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean area. The assessment criteria are evidence-based and use methodologies tested on the field.

This step represents a fundamental phase in understanding future activities and how to invest efforts and resources, through a careful force field analysis of the situation, both for local authorities and civil society.

ALDA can run the quality and features assessment of local governance using the methods proposed by the Centre of Expertise of the Council of Europe, namely the **ELOGE criteria**[19]. It includes a set of 12 criteria through a framework of interviews and desk work evaluation. It refers to the Strategy for Innovation and Governance at Local Level of the Council of Europe as the body in charge of examining accreditation requests.

The criteria are:

1. Participation, representation, fair elections
2. Responsiveness
3. Efficiency and effectiveness
4. Openess and transparency
5. Rule of law
6. Ethical conduct
7. Competence and capacity
8. Innovation and openness to change
9. Sustainability and long-term orientation
10. Sound financial management
11. Human rights, cultural diversity and social cohesion
12. Accountability

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[19] https://www.coe.int/en/web/good-governance/eloge

Examples:

The assessment of 4 communities have been implemented in 2019 and 2020 with results presented officially and then used for future capacity building and project development. The assesments studied the existing laws and local practices on citizen participation and identified the difficulties and opportunities. They were implemented through the elaboration of action plans focused and concretely supporting local economic and democratic development. The programme was implemented in Moldova (Cimislia and Comrat) and in Ukraine (Dnipro and Mariupol)[20].

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[20] Participatory democracy in Moldova and Ukraine. Empowering authorities and civil society to deliver solutions at the local level, Antonella VALMORBIDA, The book presenting the experience is published in English and Russian by Susil Edizioni, September 2020, ISDN 978-88-5550-155-5 in English and 978-8855-401-562 in Russian

3.3.2. Assessment and mapping of civil society capacities and structures

Local Governance is based on a vivid, democratic and representative civil society. Associations of citizens and other forms of aggregation represent a condition since qua non for a good local governance, being able to be resilient in times of crisis and difficulties. Civil Society is the basis for democracy and for a vibrant economic environment. They represent also the watchdogs of the public institutions which should operate in transparency and efficiency.

Mapping the civil society landscape of a community is very important and it can unveil possibilities which can pass unnoticed at first glance:

- Associations, their missions, format and representation, their projects and ways of working together

- Civil society leaders and their representative capacity and perception in the community

- Other forms of aggregation linked to history and traditions (the tribes or community groups)

- Innovative ways of citizens aggregation

The mapping offers ways for improvement and solutions.

Impact assessment is based on a professional approach, with identification of treatment and control groups. The way the group is identified is clearly expressed (thanks to random or quasi experimental experimental choices). The comparison will be possible either a posteriori or by initiating it, at the beginning of the study, allowing a better approximation of the research results. The impact assessment of policies on citizen engagement and local governments are presented in a professional way, indicating the research proposal (based on hypothesis Ho towards H1) and using statistical instruments to verify the development of variables and the relevance of the changes. The research and assessment are then substantiated in a policy brief and recommendations.

Examples:

ALDA projects have been dealing in civil society mapping in Europe when it comes to the policies for inclusiveness of the migrant population, within the project EPIC currently ongoing in a number of European capital cities. Another subject has been the community's capacities related to the Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRM) within the **project BEWARE** mainly implemented in the Veneto region.

3.4 Framework programmes & working together

ALDA implements and manages activities engaging local authorities, national stakeholders and civil society. They can be implemented separately or combined depending on the needs assessment of the communities. They are all oriented to support impactful changes and long-standing support to democracy and local economic development.

3.4.1 Planning and implementing an Integrated Territorial Development Diagnostic (ITDD) and developing a Territorial Approach to Local Development (TALD)

Local development strategies supported by local democracy are the powerful combination that produces sustainable and fair development. Citizens, being active partners in a project, elaborating the needs and plans and participating in the implementation, improve the quality of the project and generate energies and solutions. It is therefore important to strengthen local institutions and make them more democratic and inclusive, by involving minority groups, in order to enhance the capacity of communities to engage in collective actions.

3.4.1.1. Integrated Territorial Development Diagnosis

ALDA and its team has been involved in complex Integrated Territorial Development Diagnosis in order to identify the potential of decentralisation, citizen engagement and participation. ITDD has a political, social and economic ground. It is strictly connected to the needs of a territorial and integrated approach to development.

The ITDD studies the stakeholders in a community, their role and interaction in view of development and future strategies. ALDA, being active in communities and well acquainted with local stakeholders and their relationships, adopts this approach and methodology because it is particularly appropriate for such a process.

The proposed specific objectives of ITDD are:

- To assess the nature and progress of the decentralisation process, taking into consideration the extent to which decentralisation reforms have (or have not) created space for local authorities to play a developmental role on their own

- To assess the existence of relevant national urban, regional and/or rural development policies in a given country to gauge the impact of this national policy framework on the ability of local authorities to operate as developmental actors

- In view of the above, to assess the prospects and limitations for promoting territorial development and/or decentralisation

- To formulate the relevant recommendations to support the full implementation of existing regulations.

In order to evaluate the potential of TALD (the Territorial Approach to Local Development), further elements will be analysed:

- Factors/actors which have influenced the decentralisation implementation process?

- What are the main rationales of the local development policies for economic growth? integrated different areas, efficiency of public spending, infrastructures, unlocking local/territorial potential, improving social cohesion, reducing spatial inequalities?

- Have the policies been translated into implementable programmes (with or without international support)? How close did the implementation of these programmes follow their original design?

- What arrangements for multi-level coordination and multi sector integration were made and how effective were they?

- How is the implementation of these policies monitored, does an indicator framework exist?

- What is the attitude of the main (national and local) stakeholders vis à vis decentralisation and/or local governance? Are there champions? What are the challenges for the different groups of stakeholders?

Examples:

The ITTD was implemented by ALDA experts in Libya but also in the programmes in South Eastern Europe (see the programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy)

3.4.1.2 Territorial Approach to Local Development

"If you don't give autonomy to local authorities, you are basically saying that you are content with your handling of development and neither need their help to improve the efficiency of your resources, nor do you need their help to give you additional resources. If you decentralise without autonomy you are setting the stage for not producing any local development (…) Local Development is not the final part of the national plans but it is rather the starting point of the national development."

Professor Leonardo Romeo, New York University

The Territorial Approach to Local Development is aiming at bridging decentralisation with sustainable and long-standing development. It values the role of the stakeholders at regional and local level. The approach is **strongly anchored in the EU Communication, recognising Local Authorities as actors for Development**. It also aims to match the **UN Agenda 2030**, which focuses on cross-sectorial and integrated development.

As for the TALD, decentralisation is not always a guarantee of development. Decentralisation needs to be implemented and accompanied by a context of other conditions in order to achieve better results. TALD's principles help to look at social, political and economic processes from a different angle, avoiding the formal settings but rather looking, with pragmatism, at the communities we want to work with.

TALD is a learning process on democracy and how to solve problems on a daily basis.
Dr. Jorge Rodriguez Bilbao

For the national stakeholders TALD supposes a profound awareness raising to accept "not to think alone" and it should be embedded in a national strategy. It must be based on an accurate and comprehensive mapping of resources and potentials. The mapping should be done in a participative manner and incorporating all resources such as natural resources, networks, social capital, experiences, people and traditions, identifying maps and bridges between the various elements to be appreciated.

The TALD supports decentralisation and not de-concentration: de-concentration means a transfer of competences and resources to local units of the State, which are "geographically located" away from the centre but with no accountability to local stakeholders.

> "The way decentralisation has been done in the developing world has been an absolute disaster for development".
> **Dr Jorge Rodriguez Bilbao**

TALD takes the multiple role of local authorities and transforms it into a go-between for the State and the citizens, at the heart of regional development. It takes into consideration local development, economic diversification and job creation. TALD implements the two processes (development and decentralisation) in parallel so as to make them work coherently. Decentralisation could be a key to success if it is not only a decentralisation of competences, but also a transfer of consequent resources. Decentralisation is most effective, in terms of development, when it also transfers the agenda setting or the right to the initiative and when communities in a multi-stakeholders approach are involved completely in the elaboration of strategies and their implementation.

An example of completely decentralised processes and competences to the local authorities is provided below:

COMPETENCES	RESOURCES	AGENDA SETTING & AUTONOMITY

TALD is a policy framework providing the key ingredients to translate decentralisation reforms into development outcomes. Under this framework, the primary responsibility for planning, financing and managing local development stands with local authorities. These must be accountable and autonomous, "empowered with the ability to improve the efficiency of national resources and generate new ones". TALD builds on the inclusiveness of citizens as key democratic and development actors, on local resources' mobilisation, on the role of autonomous and accountable local authorities as catalysts for development. It also tackles the unbalanced development, like regional differences.

Competences for local authorities in TALD are provided below:

PLANNING	FINANCING	MANAGING

The TALD processes must be:

- **Endogenous**, because local authorities are given the autonomy to reach out to a range of other local actors to make the most of existing political and institutional resources.

- **Integrated**, because of the need to coordinate the work of state and regional actors, civil society and the private sector in any given territory (thus avoiding sectoral fragmentation of development assistance). Partnership and platform of cooperation are essential among the different stakeholders

- **Multiscalar**, meaning there must be mechanisms to allow for cooperation between those implementing national and local policies

- **Incremental**, because local authorities do not just improve the national development agenda, but also bring additional resources

- **Spatially integrated** while referring to a specific territory and community of reference with whom to work.

- **Pragmatic** and looking at the institutions while working with the decision makers in order to map those who are going to be the partners of the local development strategic team. It implies a **long (even uncertain) timeframe** to bring issues to the surface and to let them evolve at their own speed.

The **territorial approach** helps to forge a multi-dimensional coherence in development plans including:

- Multi objective (economic, social and environmental dimensions)

- Multi sectorial (administration, politics and social policies)

- Multi-level governance (including national, subnational and local communities, international agencies)

The holistic and multilevel and multisectoral approach to development proposed by TALD is also found in the concept of **localisation of SDGs** . ALDA is implementing TALD strategic projects to support activities with local authorities and national stakeholders.

Examples:

Framework programmes in Armenia, Supporting communities for local development (among others, ski resorts, cycle paths and rural tourism in the mountains of Northern Armenia).

In the Balkans and Eastern Europe, implementation of **Community Driven Development programmes**, focusing on local communities' involvement and support, especially with marginalised groups and with the strong support of local governments. The programmes included support to basic infrastructures with call for proposals and selections of communities, focus on empowering marginalised groups, support to institutional changes at the village and city level, creation of institutionalisation of participation (forums and groups, local authorities commissions, etc.)

ALDA experts have been engaged in an **ITDD for Libya** supported by the EUD for Libya in 2020.

3.4.2 Working together and implementing local democracy, re-granting schemes for small and medium seize projects and participative urban regeneration plans

ALDA's fundamentals are grounded on collaborative decision-making. We consider this approach more effective than a top-down approach. A cooperative approach takes into consideration all the actors affected by a problem into a collective analysis and elaboration of a creative shared solution.

Although participatory processes tend to be time-demanding, in the medium term, they prove to deliver more thoughtful and effective solutions, besides a general saving of resources.

ALDA promotes participative approaches at the local level across Europe and its neighbouring countries mainly a) by empowering local stakeholders through capacity building on how to use participatory methods – with the final goal of improving good local governance b) by implementing tailor-made projects that take into consideration the local needs assessment and a solid and long term dialogue with local stakeholders.

Example:

A participatory process on urban regeneration, experience in Vicenza (Italy)

The second example of local participative democracy implementation is referred to the re-generation process of an urban area of Vicenza, located in the North-East of Italy.

This was a 2-years participatory process, which targeted a neighbourhood of Vicenza connecting the city centre with its Western periphery. During the past 15 years this once wealthy district faced a deep degradation process turning into a so-perceived dormitory neighbourhood facing social and security challenges. It is overwhelmed with traffic, as it is a crucial thoroughfare, linking the East and West sides of the City and their highway gates. On the other hand, the area is left sadly empty after working time, as no spaces for social aggregation exist. As a consequence, social empty spaces are filled up with underworlds, triggering a vicious cycle which creates more discontent.

Together with local CSOs, businesses and inhabitants, ALDA decided to activate a process for its requalification. A working group of key stakeholders was set up to plan a

community-shared action. The initial group, so-called the Spark team, was established using the word of mouth and inviting friends of friends, with the only prerequisite of establishing a group which could well represent the whole of the target group (local inhabitants, business, institutions).

This group was formed by people particularly touched by the local problems and interested in changing the situation. Each of them assumed the role of local ambassador of the initiative itself, with the responsibility of inviting more people into the process.

A set of numerous consultations, using the world café method, were then held with inhabitants, to brainstorm on the challenges and potentialities of their neighbourhood and collectively rethink its destiny.

During this phase, the group acted with two parallel objectives: 1) improving the wellbeing of the neighbourhood in the short-term, therefore improving the motivation and commitment of local people in being part of the process; 2) analysing the problem from different perspectives and co-designing a creative solution to re-think its destiny, which would benefit all parts of the neighbourhood and the whole city, in the long-term.

After about 12 months, a decision was made: this area should become "the place to be". This motto summarises the intention to turn into positive terms the current unattractive scenario. The group brainstormed on a possible positive and driving force which could attract investments and connect already existent tendencies and initiatives. This would be "the new forms of employment and jobs", envisaging ideas connected to innovative research and technologies, smart-working, co-working and a general sense of co-existing in peace. To work in this direction, the group understood the importance of generating infrastructural improvements, in order to make the district a pleasant and healthy environment for its community and in order to solve some of the social challenges too. On this line, the group followed up the decision made by the citizens, upscaling their engagement, and addressing two of the most critical aspects emerged: 1) deal with the huge traffic and pollution, by introducing a green infrastructure; 2) improve the energy efficiency of its old towers, symbols of the area, where thousands of citizens live and work.

As the project embarked into more demanding and structural initiatives, the group agreed to create a more structural core-group, enclosed within ALDA, which could benefit from the opportunity to attract funds and investments.

On a parallel level, a more structural dialogue with relevant local institutions and businesses was started, i.e. the local administration, several local Unions (businesses, artisans, architects), local schools and representatives of other similar processes in other cities.

These stakeholders were invited to show their support to the whole initiative by signing a public Memorandum of Understanding.

In this example, ALDA acted as the facilitator and the coordinator of the whole process, bringing its expertise in participatory processes; in other words, using participatory methods, connecting different parts, facilitating dialogue with the local administration and guiding the Spark group into the several phases of the process.

Consequently, ALDA is a very operational actor, which operates in partnership with local stakeholders, guiding them into the co-designing of effective and creative solutions to local problems.

3.4.3 Local governance solving local problems

Local authorities nowadays have the difficult role to deliver solutions for their communities with limited resources (human and financial) in a complex society (economic and social challenges, environmental issues, radical changes in jobs and economy). Together, local authorities and civil society can identify better solutions for their own beneficial common living thanks to the implementation of simple and efficient tools and instruments. As a result of participative processes, it is possible to find ways to address community problems and challenges.

Therefore, the project builds capacities and solves problems by consolidating the approach in the years to come. By sharing the processes with international partners, supporting the Agencies, the impact of the work emphasises the decentralised cooperation approach as a mean to promote local development on solid, sustainable and fair basis, thanks to a multi stakeholder approach and aiming at implementing the global Sustainable Development Goals at the local level.

The activities aim at:

- **Assessing** the local governance capacities/failures of the cities engaged and creating a conclusive list of needs to be addressed in terms of local governance

- Giving to local authorities and civil society groups that are part of the project **capacities to address local problems with participative approaches** and therefore identifying more sustainable, fair and inclusive solutions

- **Identification** of cities, communities targeted

- **Training** days and Trainees

- **Dissemination** events

- **European partners involved** and consolidated in decentralised cooperation: local authorities and NGOs

- **Solving concrete problems locally**
  - increasing ideas and solutions for economic development processes
  - **joint solutions for environmental challenges** (waste management, waste plants, recycling and circular economy), raising awareness of citizens on environmental issues and boosting their responsibility
  - **solutions for critical neighbourhoods** with security issues and difficult integration of various communities
  - **supporting social integration and involvement of more disadvantaged groups of people** (unemployed youth, people with disabilities, etc.)

- **Creating permanent and solid links between local authorities and civil society** within the communities/cities of the project

- **Creating long-lasting links between communities and cities** in **Cooperation countries** and **European partners**, following the incentives of decentralised cooperation

Examples:

<u>Empowerment model in Moldova and Ukraine</u>

During 2006-2008, the establishment of strong cooperation with local authorities and civil society organisations from Eastern Partnership countries contributed to strengthening ALDA's presence in the region. The registration of Local Democracy Agencies in these countries[21] worked as an engine to co-design new projects and initiatives aimed at developing capacities of local stakeholders. ALDA's experience is very connected to the empowerment and capacities-development of local actors, in order to contribute to the sustainability of the project in the long-term. Consequently, ALDA developed a model to improve the level of good local governance. This foresees the participation of a diverse group of local people, namely decision-makers (representatives of municipalities, civil servants and local councillors), representatives of local civil society (associations, libraries, schools, etc). The model features three main phases: assessment of local needs, capacity building and implementation of action plans, supported by a re-granting scheme. The project here presented was implemented in 2 cities of Ukraine (Mariupol and Dnipro) and 2 cities in Moldova (Cimislia and Comrat). The project's duration is 18-24 months long. This envisages an initial assessment of local needs which takes place through a set of interviews addressing the target group. This phase is needed both for the target group to organise ideas and priorities, as well as for the trainer of the capacity building to design the tailor-made programme for the second phase. The second phase, the capacity building, is a comprehensive training on participation and participatory methods.

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[21] https://www.alda-europe.eu/network/#ldas

Throughout this activity participants receive notions, tips and examples of diverse effective models of participation applying the theory on their real local context (mapping of stakeholders, understanding the role, power and responsibility of each one, reflection of already existent participatory models, analysis of problems, potentialities, and designing action plans etc.). This is carried out as an interactive and role-based activity which includes a simulation of the whole participatory process. During the capacity building, participants who represent the diverse parts of local society, co-decide on the main priorities to focus on. Eventually, the activity ends with the co-designing of a couple of action plans addressing specific local needs or problems. Indeed, the concrete result of the capacity building is a co-designed and shared solution to solve a specific problem. The third and final phase of the project is the implementation of these action-plans by representatives of local stakeholders (same participants in the capacity building), under the mentoring of ALDA's experts. This is made possible thanks to the financial support provided by ALDA, through a re-granting scheme. The re-granting scheme model - therefore the provision of small grants to local stakeholders for the implementation of local actions - is a very effective tool to bring theory to the practical level. On the other hand, it nourishes the motivation of participants of the capacity building, who are more committed in co-designing realistic solutions to local problems and, eventually, it has a multiplying effect as it allows the engagement and participation of local communities throughout the phases of implementation of the action plan; as a consequence, it also contributes to raise awareness and develop ownership towards local problems and to promote active citizenship. Finally, the collaborative approach of the whole project contributes to an increased sense of trust and dialogue between local decision-makers and local society.

LADDER (Local Authorities Drivers for Development) implemented a broad **re-granting process scheme**. Some of the results are here mentioned http://www.ladder-project.eu

3.4.4 Assistance to project development on local democracy at the national and international level

ALDA supports members and partners to elaborate plans and ideas for future funding. With its development team, ALDA is able to organise a process for identifying potential sponsors for local authorities and civil society groups, working together and improving life in the communities.

ALDA is able to elaborate a plan for identifying:

a) Needs of the community (by using methods of inquiry online and on the field)

b) Stakeholders (identifying those who are directly and indirectly affected by the issues and the relevant topics to deal with, through a mapping of actors)

c) Resources (identify the possible resources, financial, social capital, human resources and skills, time and energy available)

d) Partnership (other groups or stakeholders useful for supporting the project proposal, institutional, private and citizens partnership)

ALDA is then able to develop a well-constructed project proposal so to be able to approach national and international donors.

The project proposal would be supported by a) Good and convincing narrative parts; b) Log frame of targets and indicators; c) Examples; d) budgets; e) partners.

ALDA has a broad network working on the topics of local governance and citizen empowerment and it is able to mobilise them in order to build a strong partnership and consortium, while negotiating between them in terms of project proposal but also for the future implementation.

Meanwhile, ALDA has the competence to scrutinise local, national and international donors and sponsors and approach them with the project, together with the applicant. The Development team is composed of 10 extremely competent and specialised officers. The project applications are about 300 per year towards various donors and they have an average rate of success.

The specificity of ALDA in this field is to have a "human" approach to the applicants and donors and to develop a true and genuine attention to the problem, while identifying the solutions and make sure that the whole process is well accompanied from the very beginning until the end. ALDA has a long standing and trusting relationship with its donors, based on constant exchanges and successful reports, both financial and narrative. We are proud and happy to share this great capital of knowledge with others.

Our sponsors and donors are:

- The European Commission (various projects)

- International organisations (UNDP, Council of Europe)

- Other EU foundations public and private donors

- Other worldwide public and private donors

- Private foundations and corporate

For other small and localised projects, ALDA can support fundraising through crowdfunding.
For this support, ALDA can either be a technical assistance or be a partner in the projects.

Examples:

ALDA has developed thousands of projects for its members and partners, with 2/3 of its income being then re-granted to them.

In the city of **Thiene (Italy)**, we have supported with our programme a European Centre for the municipality, delivering services for educations, jobs and mobility in Europe.

Supporting the **Region Normandy in France**, we have established a 10-year long term relationship and created a network with municipalities and local stakeholders engaged in local governance and empowerment of local development in **North Macedonia**. Together we established a network of partners, defined priorities and supported the project. The funding was and is secured through the Region Normandy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

of France and the local municipalities in North Macedonia. Through this programme policies on youth involvement in decision-making processes were developed, activities pertaining to food security and development of rural tourism were implemented, support to local authorities in empowering their role at the local level and it focused also on cultural policies for attractive territories.

For the city of **Paris, Etterbeek (Brussels), Amsterdam, Milan and Warsaw, Nea Smyrni (Greece) and Vejle (Denmark)** we have identified a project to support the digitalisation of European travelling and living in their communities. The funding came from the European Commission and local stakeholders.

<u>Donors' wall</u>

3.4.5 Permanent assistance to local democracy thanks to the Local Democracy Agencies

Even considering that in the past 20 years ALDA changed its role and extended its array of actions, passing from being the umbrella organisation for the Local Democracy Agencies to its current status of an International organisation working in the field of local participatory democracy and good governance, the LDAs are nowadays an even more important part of ALDA's network and fundamental implementers of ALDA's mission in the neighbourhood countries.

In particular, LDAs represent the most meaningful actors for ALDA in the implementation of processes intending to support citizen participation and the democratic life of communities in non-EU Countries, and they are also very successful and important

examples of decentralised cooperation. ALDA has been supporting the improvement of the Local Democracy Agencies network during the past years both locally in the country where each LDA is based but also through a regional perspective in the three geographical areas of interest: Southeast Europe, Middle-East and North Africa and Eastern Partnership, also following the development of the European Union's strategies and policies.

Most of ALDA's and the LDAs' work is based on an innovative and successful method of multilateral decentralised cooperation, which involves a multi-stakeholder approach and focuses on partnerships between Local Authorities and Non-Governmental Organisations. These partnerships create synergy and ensure that common goals are reached in a successful way. It focuses on the mutual benefits of the cooperation, through a participative and long-term approach in order to strength the real effectiveness of the impact on communities. The multilateral approach allows better sustainability as well as a multicultural input to the initiatives.

The LDAs partnerships by means of multilateral decentralised cooperation were developed on the basis of two main lines of action:

• Territorial based approach, involving all the actors of the communities of interest on a geographic base; • Thematic networking focused on specific, commonly determined issues connecting different local communities.

Objectives of the activity of Local Democracy Agencies and Operational Partners are:

- Promoting good local governance and supporting initiatives aimed at improving citizen participation.

- Enhancing institutions and capacity building at the local level through the exchange of know-how and training of locally elected representatives and administrators.

- Developing a Europe-wide network of citizens committed to the respect of human and minority rights.

- Fostering the development of a civil society in which all sections of the community participate.

- Supporting intercultural dialogue and diversity management capacities in multicultural local communities.

- Promoting the respect for human/minority rights in local communities

The Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) and the Operational Partners (Ops)

COUNTRIES WITH ALDA ACTIVITIES AND MEMBERS / EU MEMBER STATES

LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCIES (LDAs)
- LDA ALBANIA (AL)
- LDA ARMENIA (ARM)
- LDA CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN SERBIA (RS)
- LDA OF DNIPROPETROVSK REGION (UA)
- LDA GEORGIA (GEO)
- LDA KOSOVO (RKS)
- LDA MARIUPOL (UA)
- LDA MONTENEGRO (MNE)
- LDA MOLDOVA IN CIMIŞLIA (MO)
- LDA MOSTAR (BIH)
- LDA NORTHERN MOROCCO (MA)
- LDA PRIJEDOR (BIH)
- LDA SUBOTICA (RS)
- LDA TUNISIA (TN)
- LDA ZAVIDOVIĆI (BIH)

OPERATIONAL PARTNERS
- OSIJEK (HR)
- SISAK (HR)
- VERTENEGLIO/BRTONIGLA (HR)

ALDA OFFICES
- BRUSSELS (BE)
- STRASBOURG (FR)
- SUBOTICA (RS)
- VICENZA (IT)
- SKOPJE (MK)

Thanks to all the above-mentioned factors LDAs have shown a high-level of resilience and a winning approach in supporting local processes for the development of democratic communities leaded by the Local Authorities following the principles of good governance.

Examples:

ALDA and the Local Democracy Agencies in Southeast Europe

Considering the pace and scope of democratic institution building in both candidate for accession to the EU and potential candidate countries, transparency of the negotiation process and in particular the consultation with diverse sections of society in public policy making or introducing legislative changes have become increasingly important.

Making the reform process closer and better known to citizens and in local communities in particular, rather than keeping it within the realm of institutions is therefore among the key challenges for the policy and decision makers in the SEE countries. In other words, openness of the reform process for all who will benefit from the EU accession is among the key lessons learnt from the previous 2007-2013 IPA Programming period. Therefore, more structured civil dialogue and mechanisms of consultation with CSOs, academia, local self-governments are needed throughout the "chaptered" negotiation process, as the grounds for profound understanding and ownership over the legislative changes on one hand, and even more for the organisational capacity to monitor their effective implementation.

ALDA and the LDAs are actively contributing to the regional policy-making processes drafting evidence-based policy recommendations, monitoring activities, participating to consultation processes and being active in local advocacy networks. The LDAs have been developing partnerships with the Regional Cooperation Council, the Western Balkan Fund and other relevant stakeholders.

Local Democracy Agency Montenegro
Supporting Local Democracy in the field

CHECK, CHOOSE, ANALYZE!
Campaign for promotion of media and information literacy

The project, active from July 2019 to March 2020, was led by the LDA Montenegro, in partnership with the Media Institute of Montenegro through Media for Citizens – Citizens for Media regional Program and funded by the European Union. Its main objective was the promotion of media and information literacy using innovative tools and arts, through the development of online tools: workshops for creating video game and GIFs, Info-sessions in highs schools, creation of short video on partial reporting dangers and public performance.

Online quiz game, GIFs, Hip Hop song
A group of 11 high school students learned about media ads information literacy, internet security, fake news and click-baits during the workshop "Check, chose, analyze!". The workshop resulted with an online game compiling interesting quiz question related to local and national news that came as click baits or fake news. Another result and added value to the project was a hip hop song created by students referring to fake news and calling up to the listeners to double-check and think of the values standing behind certain news. It will be used in the following planed public performance. The song can also be heard at the end of the game during the credits.
Video game quiz: https://scratch.mit.edu/projects/337344468/

Acceleration of Info Point activities
This project accelerated Info Point dynamics, since volunteers gathered around it and kept coming to regular meetings, creating new GIFs and videos related to its subject.

ALDA and the Local Democracy Agencies in the Eastern Partnership

Under ALDA's umbrella, local and regional authorities and Local Democracy Agencies from EaP countries work together and in partnership with other European regions and CSOs to make local communities more socially and economically successful, more inclusive, sustainable and fair. Participatory democracy is well implemented at local level and contributes to life improvement of citizens and to achieving sustainable development goals.

ALDA and the LDAs are actively working together in order to implement activities and projects supporting the development of:

- Democracy in all of its dimensions: with free and fair elections; mobilised and prepared institutions; informed, prepared and engaged citizens

- Decentralisation process and subsidiarity in governance

- Participatory governance engaging elected representatives, civil servants and citizens

- Stronger and deeper value-based association with the countries of the eastern and southern neighbourhoods of the European Union

- Inclusive communities respectful of human rights and minorities

- Synergy between democracy and development.

The main goal for the 5 Local Democracy Agencies based in the region (Ukraine – Mariupol and Dnipro, Moldova – Cimilsia, Georgia – Kutaisi, Armenia – Gyumi) and for ALDA is to promote local democracy as key to achieve sustainable local development. ALDA and its Local Democracy Agencies are recognised as the most active and professional actors in the field within the Eastern area and beyond.

Local Democracy Agency Georgia
Supporting Local Democracy in the field

Projec**t "Citizens' Initiative for the Accountability of Self-Government"**

The project "Citizens' Initiative for the Accountability of Self-Government" kicked-off in October 2018 and targeted the municipalities of Baghdati and Zestafoni, located in the Imereti Region. The aim of the project was to ensure effective self-governance in those areas and to facilitate citizen involvement in the decision-making processes through systematic reporting and continuous dialogue between local authorities and the local population. During the project, LDA Georgia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with both mayors, facilitated focus group interviews, and identified concrete citizens' needs. LDA Georgia created the citizens' initiative groups on the basis of the members of the focus groups, who were then trained on "Planning and Implementation of CVA Advocacy." The project saw also the organisation of two Citizens' Forums, to increase the skills of the municipalities' public servants, and citizens' involvement in the budgeting process.

The project "Citizens' Initiative for the Accountability of Self-Government," presented the opportunity to conduct trainings for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) focused on participative budgeting and community mobilisation.

The main results of the project were an increased quality of local self-government accountability and citizens' involvement in public policy processes; an improved understanding and advocacy of CSOs target groups' needs as well as a strengthened dialogue among all society's components; the resolution of concrete problems, such as:

• Zestafoni municipality will give the priority to build the kindergartens in Sazano, Dzirula and Puti settlements for the 2020 budgeting period
• Zestafoni municipality city hall will repair the drinking water reservoir in Kvaliti public school yard
• Rehabilitation of the clinics in village Zovreti (Zestafoni) was implemented in 2019 within the framework of the village support program
• Zestafoni's 2019 Local budget already includes rehabilitation of the village roads in Gantiadi and Zovreti
• The railing of the rehabilitated bridge will be set up within the framework of the "Village Support Program" in Dzlourdaneti administrative district in 2019
• In the village of Kldeeti, the water supply problem will be solved this year within the framework of the "Village Support Program." Drinking water will also be provided to the public school
• Baghdati municipality developed a "Youth Development Strategy", the main task of which is the involvement of youth in the decision-making process at the local level
• In Baghdati municipality important projects will be implemented for different vulnerable groups, such as the rehabilitation and support of persons with disabilities.

ALDA and the Local Democracy Agencies in the Middle East and North Africa

ALDA has developed strong partnerships with several institutional actors working in the Mediterranean area.

The LDA in Morocco and the LDA in Tunisia constitute a great added value in terms of establishing a mechanism to support the development of local self-governance in the Maghreb and sharing best practices of cooperation of local authorities, associations of local authorities, civil society and local communities. These two Agencies are bringing an outstanding support for ALDA-Med's projects, by enabling the development of partnerships with local authorities and NGOs from all over Europe, giving to the whole network direct access to an international framework. The cooperation and partnership between local and international partners, between local authorities and NGOs, will give added values to the process of designing projects and implementing local activities in the

Maghreb region. Indeed, ALDA's experience from the Balkans has demonstrated the benefits of the multi-stakeholder approach to regional cooperation with the specific focus on people-to-people contacts, best practices and lessons learnt sharing, as well as trans-border cooperation.

**Local Democracy Agency Tunisia
Supporting Local Democracy in the field**

Development of community support and mentoring projects for socioeconomic integration and active citizenship

Ramadan Cultural Evening and Collective Reflection on Citizenship
By the end of the Islamic holy month "Ramadan", a cultural evening of collective reflection on citizenship, entitled "Kairouan and Mysticism: The Debate in the Service of Citizenship" was held. The interventions of scholars were highly enriching and constructive as they tackled inter-related issues such as gender, history, citizenship, sociology, religion and mysticism. The discussion included a presentation of academic papers that tackle the aforementioned issues. The purpose is to deepen a group reflection on the collective identity of the citizens of Kairouan and the role of women's leadership. It took place on the 20th May (By the end of Ramadan) at the Sidi Bouraoui Mausoleum (Kairouan city), through the cooperation between LDA Tunisia and SAWAMED.

World Clean-up Day campaign for citizens to promote active citizenship and raise awareness of environmental challenges
The LDA joined the international campaign "World Clean-Up Day" to raise awareness on environmental preservation issues and active citizenship. Consequently, the LDA organised a campaign to collect a maximum quantity of plastic bottle caps within a period of one week. The campaign was also inclusive as it included students, housewives, cafés and offices in sorting and collecting plastic caps for recycling. Many associations collaborated and contributed to the success of the event as hundreds of citizens from different walks of life came and celebrated the accomplishment of the objective. The campaign was widely covered by the media, and local radio interviews and face-to face communication were the main channels used. The campaign was implemented in the third week of September by LDA Tunisia in cooperation with the Association de Protection de la Nature et de l'Environnement de Kairouan – APNEK, Jeune Chambre Internationale de Kairouan – JCI, Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne de Kairouan – UNFTK, the Association We Love Kairouan and Radio Sabra FM.

Training in digital communication for local CSOs
Following a strong demand from local associations and public actors concerning digital communication in the context of citizen mobilization and dialogue between citizens, the LDA Tunisia organised on the 2nd and 3rd November at its premises a training course entitled: "Digital Communication for Active Citizenship and Local Governance". The training aimed at improving digital communication as an effective tool for citizen mobilisation and local governance.

Recycling workshop for citizens to promote active citizenship and raise awareness of environmental issues
On the occasion of the Tree Festival, the LDA and its partners organised an event entitled "Gardening in A Container and Plant in Colours". During the event, various workshops were held that brought together students of all generations, who enjoyed creating colourful and varied artworks and participating in these activities while fulfilling a task of active citizenship. The aim was to promote active citizenship and raise awareness of the importance of contributing to gardening and recycling through workshops that teach both gardening culture and skills through the Recycling and Relooking of Plastic Buckets.

3.4.6 DEAR – Development Education and Awareness Raising, education to global citizenship

ALDA has implemented activities to promote Development Education and Awareness Raising as education to global citizenship. The programmes engaged local authorities and civil society in promoting a good understanding of our global interconnectivity when it comes to environment, migration, demography and economy. Everyone is part of the world and responsible for one another. Through the approach, every single action (implemented locally) has an immense role at the global level, to change ways of living and systems. Local authorities, usual partners of ALDA, are a particular good vehicle of this awareness and its connected activities.

The DEAR, Education to Global Citizenship, put each citizen of the world at the same level of responsibility, whether it is in Europe or in Africa.

We are promoting:

- Training and capacity building for awareness raising and changing peoples' ways of living

- Building partnership between local authorities, civil society and the private sector in order to put in place sustainable plans for development, social issues and business

- Working with schools and institutions so to change curricula and introduce a global approach to sustainable development

- Create ad hoc programmes for working together and creating platforms of support

Examples:

Working Together for Development and LADDER (Local Authorities as Drivers for Development Education and Raising Awareness) were both 3-year programmes with hundreds of partners engaging local authorities and civil society, with cascade re-granting schemes and addressing thousands of citizens in Europe. The non-EU countries where also engaged and contributed immensely to the development of the activities and found that they also have a role in development.

3.4.7. Local democracy and civic initiatives in post Covid-19

The constant evolution both in Europe and in the rest of the world makes our efforts even more important. ALDA is successful, and so are the Local Democracy Agencies, because they are proposing a model of governance which is so much needed: good local democracy, engagement and powerful/empowering responsibility of citizens.

ALDA aggregates and strengthens participation even during the lockdown and self-isolation imposed by the virus which have been so challenging for all us. **Resilient communities will be the base for a future re-launch of our common mission, and their role is currently more crucial than ever for all of us.**

The crisis due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has triggered ALDA to reflect on its role and efforts in the society from a new paradigm.

A reflection on different topics and timeframes is needed:

- What does citizen participation mean when the highest effort in terms of citizen engagement is represented by staying at home?

- How does civil society exist in a potentially less mobile world?

- What is a "community" in a locked down world?

- What is ALDA's added value in this situation?

- What kind of support is needed for Municipalities and Local Authorities to involve their citizens in the management of the crisis?

- What is the role of sustainable communities and the SDGs in this situation?

The answers are not easy and static. They are instead coming from a shared and continuous flow of reflections with ALDA's members[22], and our approach will change in the upcoming months and once we will be working in the "reconstruction" of the social life of our communities.

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[22] More than 200 members of ALDA have been consulted since early March

<u>**What do we do now? ALDA and the Covid-19 crisis**</u>

In order to respond to the questions posed above we initiated a variety of actions, both for the short term and in a mid and long-term perspective.

PHASE 1: **ALDA within the crisis and the emergency** (with the support of an emergency management unit)

- Update of the **calendar of activities**

- "**Policy messages**" to stakeholders with various proposals on how to approach the crisis

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- **Staff management** and protecting partners and beneficiaries

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- **Contacts** with members and partners to support their needs and plans

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- Fighting against **biased and fake news**

- Supporting **communities in difficulty**:
    - ALDA has promoted crowdfunding for three organisations that are active in the health crisis: the Italian Civil protection, Doctors Without Borders (Greece) and Women Refugee Route
    - Supporting particularly affected communities with letters of support
    - Supporting projects aimed at helping particularly affected communities with re-granting schemes

PHASE 2: **ALDA managing the post-emergency in the short and medium term**
While some of the lockdown measures are still being discussed, a challenging period is starting in Europe and throughout the globe[23]. Though "we know that we don't know" entirely where we are headed to, we are sure that a rather long period of cohabitation with the virus will be confirmed. In this situation, to protect our communities from the disease but also to help them be real, democratic communities that are socially and economically viable, ALDA is proposing a short and medium-term plan, in full respect of its mission and of the potential of its constituency and experience.

Strongly convinced that cooperation is the only way to overcome the crisis and do it stronger than before, ALDA wants to take stock of the immense number of actions that make our communities resilient, even in such difficult circumstances. We want to listen to

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[23] Reference to https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/AUTO/?uri=JOIN:2020:11:FIN&qid=1585741296732&rid=1

the communities and partners and share experiences so that the whole network can benefit from them. The collection of practices will then also be useful to identify the future of our work and priorities. Starting from the inputs received from our members, we will be in the frontline to support them in the construction of networks and projects for the reconstruction phase.

The resilience of communities and civic initiatives is at the heart of our proposal for our short and medium-term plan.

Through actions such as:

Support to local communities, local authorities and civil society groups

Support to local communities with resources and means to allow them to better address the emergency. ALDA will support (financially and with other means) the activities of our members and partners that engage with local governments and civil society.	• Buying/supporting the buy of necessary material for protection and **sanitary support** • Supporting the **digitalisation of public administration** • Supporting **digitalisation of civil society** • Contributing to the **awareness and education of how to use tools and work together**
	Collecting practices and supporting them: a collection of best practices is to be shared among our consortium regarding the ways that Municipalities and locally based CSOs are cooperating in this period on the following topics: • Protecting citizens from infections • Helping citizens with service delivery • Supporting jobs, economy and growth • Being social in "social distancing" • Digitalisation and IT in our life • School system management
	Protecting democracy and citizens' engagement by monitoring decision-making and potential non-transparent decisions due to the lockdown and the consequent reduced mobility of citizens.

Support to civic indicatives, visualising the future

In a period of lockdown and social distancing, the practice of participation needs to be re-invented but not abolished. We are at "home" but not invisible!

Providing a combination of actions to make sure that participation does not disappear and to keep a voice for citizens and democracy: encouraging small and safe meetings combined with a strong IT support to make sure that all proposals are shared with communities and properly engaged.

Valorising and disseminating the practices of participation and sharing good knowledge (through the network).

Identifying new practices of participation: through interactive webinars that are well-attended and participative, through moral and professional support to actions.

Informing and disseminating on how to be a community despite the virus.

Engaging and informing citizens on the social behaviour that is necessary for correct **cohabitation with the virus.**

Supporting debates among communities with the aim to sort out local problems and **identify a better future together.**

Helping communities to identify civic initiatives and **address local economic disruptions,** e.g. with ideas and plans on local options for tourism, local productions, digital alternatives for communities, arts and the entertainment scene, etc.

Global citizenship – raising awareness on shared responsibilities and community's interdependence and solidarity

Isolation is not a solution when it comes to our future. Our world is interconnected, and communities need to be driven **by concrete actions and solidarity.**

Providing a combination of actions to make sure that participation does not disappear and to keep a voice for citizens and democracy: encouraging small and safe meetings combined with a strong IT support to make sure that all proposals are shared with communities and properly engaged.

Exchanging experiences with other communities that are part of the network and staying connected.

Supporting projects in the Western Balkans and in the East and South Neighbourhoods towards social, democratic and economic development.

Focus on inclusiveness and attention to the most vulnerable

In such a social and economic situation, those who already were the most vulnerable of a given community will continue to be even more. Attention should be directed to them.

Supporting projects on the inclusion of the most vulnerable (those living at the border of survival, migrant communities, people with disabilities…) and engaging them in public polices and programming.

Women and the crisis – focusing on the role of women in the crisis management.

Women's rights – operating in protection and support of women's rights in the crisis and in the upcoming future.

Targeting **rural communities** and supporting them in light of their isolation.

Focus on environment and climate change

The focus on climate change and environment should not be forgotten even in the short and medium term. They are the basis for future actions.

Implementing internal policies to respect the environment and fight climate change.

Working on climate change prevention programmes and circular economy, and supporting partners and members to do the same.

Paying attention to the effects of the lockdown on the environment and to the efforts in place for the construction of sustainable communities.

Europe in our mind

The information and media contents regarding Europe are often biased and not fully exhaustive. ALDA is part of the global struggle to fight against misinformation and provide the right answers to questions.

Campaigning with correct information as per Europe's role in the crisis.

Holding debates and webinars at international and local level to provide correct information.

Collecting information and bringing inputs for future activities to the EU institutions and stakeholders.

Digitalisation support

Digitalisation is a cross-cutting topic for the months to come and could help citizens' engagement, the relaunch of the economy and of social initiatives.

Purchasing devices (software and hardware)

Conducting training activities and creating training material to help users become proficient in the use of these devices.

Initiating innovative solutions to engage citizens in the use of these platforms.

Taking education- and learning-related initiatives.

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for Local Democracy

Europe for Citizens

Post Covid-19 skyline

The post Covid-19 era is yet to be defined and its precise timing is uncertain. ALDA is taking stock of the lessons learned and the processes followed during phase 2 (and more) in order to further plan its relevance in the strategic view for the years to come.

This crisis has the potential to be a challenging time not only because of its imminent repercussions, but also as it risks straining the democratic life of citizens and the balance of power, thus impacting the balance that is the foundation of democracy nowadays. **Citizen participation will not stop being the key to democracy and to economic and social development, too. Even more, citizen responsibility and sense of community will be what our future shall be based on.**

That's why, in the framework of the reconstruction period that will follow, in addition to the concrete line adopted above, ALDA will focus its work on 4 main pillars from a political and social point of view:

- Advocacy for EU and governmental support as to the role of CSOs and local authorities in the reconstruction phase

- Efforts and support to democracy in all its forms and at all levels, in particular regarding participative democracy at the local level

- Advocacy in the new EU MFF for supporting budget lines that will emphasize the reconstruction of sustainable, democratic and participatory communities

- Engaging the EU as an international actor of support and solidarity.

#ISTAYATHOME

3.5. Capacity building framework programmes for local/national authorities and civil society

The activity of ALDA is especially oriented towards the capacity building of our partners, members and various stakeholders:

- **Local authorities** (elected leadership and civil servants)

- **Civil society**, expressed in many ways (associations, natural leaders, citizens' committees)

- **National representatives** dealing with local governance (at the Ministries or in the deconcentrated territorial offices)

Capacity building is essential since we want to **make our partners the key actors of their future development** by assisting them to be able to move independently in the future steps. Our capacity building responds to the needs and the methods appropriated.

ALDA develops training and capacity building plans based on:

- In-depth theories - examples and practices

- Interactivity and adult education

- Use of all methods of trainings (group animations, technological tools, etc.)

- Applied theories and exercises with contextualisation on the field

- Piloting exercise and approach to streamlining

- Action plan follow ups

- Toolkits and modules

ALDA works on motivational issues and adult learning, putting the participants at the centre of the training and giving them practical tools.

The capacity building encompasses all the topics relevant to ALDA's mission:

Local authorities	Civil Society
Methods of engaging with citizens and participatory democracy	Methods of engaging with local authorities
Develop plan of local development	Empowerment and sustainability plans
Participative urban regeneration	Advocacy
Environmental plans	Fundraising
Civil society engagement and animation	Engaging vulnerable groups
Functioning of local authorities and plans of support for staff and for local elected leaders	Being part of the local development processes and urban regeneration
Human rights approach and gender balance policies	Awareness and action for sustainability social, economic and environmental
Other ad hoc and tailor-made topics	Other ad hoc and tailor-made topics

Examples:

In Georgia, with the programme Empowering of citizens at the local level, ALDA and the Local Democracy Agency in Georgia (based in Kutaisi) trained more than 400 civil society activists from grass roots organisations. The participants were introduced to the potential instruments of working with local authorities at the local level, with tools for advocacy but also presenting small projects for joint funding.

ALDA and ALDA+ develop on regular basis a number of trainings in presence or online on the better knowledge of EU policies and programmes. Municipalities members of ALDA are currently informed on the future priorities and the opportunities as well as how to address them. Among the trainings offered by ALDA+, we mention the ones on EU funding opportunities and the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, participatory democracy, European citizenship, fundraising, media literacy and digital security. A feature distinguishing ALDA+ is also its ability to deliver customised trainings designed to answer to specific needs. This was the case, for instance, with trainings on funding opportunities focusing on precise areas of interest, capacity building to empower internal staff or promote the integration of foreign volunteers.

Through the numerous activities of the project Erasmus+ and Youth in Action, ALDA has developed the capacities of thousands of young people in Europe in liaising and creating a community motivated on citizenship and European identity. We have contributed to thousands of exchanges of young people, who brought with them their enthusiasm and future.

ALDA's project GEM IN (Game to EMbrace INtercultural education) focused on intercultural education, involving multiple communities to get to know each other as well as approach and discover cultures and opportunities.

3.6 Networking assistance

3.6.1. Assistance to partnership for local governance

ALDA represents a network of experiences and contacts useful for our members and partners. It also offers the possibility to build networking alliances for raising common campaigns and recommendations but also for acting together in concrete actions.

- ALDA can support contacts and exchanges of best practices with more than 350 members and thousands of partners in Europe, identifying **best practices** for all topics of local governance, for **local authorities and civil society groups**.

Experience:

Example of best practices relying on members and partners' support:

Platforms of civil society support at the local level (like Forum for NGOs and civic alliances) Support to association of local authorities and building up their competences and network

- ALDA can create **platforms for raising campaigns and advocacy** for national and international networks (relying on a vast number of networks that can multiply the outreach of the campaign). It can work on the identification of the topics and work internally on lobbying expertise with our communication team

- ALDA can also strengthen **multi stakeholders' alliances in order to advance complex and multi-level policy and programmes**. It has the capacity to map the numerous stakeholders at the local, national and international level. It identifies the possible partners better matching with the needs of the alliance and puts in place broad negotiations and platforms of discussion, which are either oriented to promote policies or actions. ALDA's team is also able to draft a clear force field analysis of the partnership's needs so to identify the right supporting partner in any circumstances.

- ALDA is also part of **partnership and global campaigns** (we have been, for example, very active in the elaboration of the policies for the SDGs and their localisation, also addressing the European Commission policies).

3.6.2. Assistance to Decentralised Cooperation & twinning between local authorities and communities

ALDA and in particular the Local democracy Agencies are based on the concept of Decentralised Cooperation[24]. In recent years, local and regional authorities have been recognised fully fledged actors of cooperation, initiators and implementers of development policies[25]. The local dimension is not considered any longer the final part of a top-down long chain of processes bringing democracy and wealth but rather its essential and founding part. The local and regional authorities may even represent the most important elements of a more global approach to development. Local authorities have gained relevance in the EU policies as well as at the global level. They deserved their special place in the programmes supported by the European Commission and are actors and beneficiaries of the main supporters for Development policies around the globe. The new Sustainable Development Goals identify a strengthened role for local authorities in the framework of the policies for the localisation of Development. This renewed approach is necessary and certainly brings efficiency and sustainability to processes for development. But many issues remain unsolved and weaken this potentiality. In particular, Local authorities as such do not have - alone - all the elements for development and democracy consolidation. Certain conditions need to exist around them. To be real actors of change they need to have real power and autonomy as well as a vivid and strong civil society, actively engaged in the local democratic process.

Twinning is also considered an important tool for developing long term partnerships for communities. They have now evolved into something more specific and topic oriented. This enhancement offers fundamental possibilities for creating connections and generating sustainable development. This part of cooperation is also known and inter-municipal cooperation.

ALDA has been animating and supporting exchanges and long-term partnership between EU local authorities and counter parts in cooperation countries, thanks to the Local Democracy Agencies but also in other more specific processes.

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[24] See, European decentralised cooperation: working for development engaging local authorities and civil society, Author: Antonella Valmorbida, Peter Lang Edition, 2018

[25] More on this: Hafteck, P., "An introduction to decentralised cooperation: Definitions, origins and conceptual mapping", Public Administration & Development, 23(4), 333, 2003

What can ALDA do:

1. Identify potential partners and long-term town twinning between EU local authorities and local authorities from cooperation countries.

2. Map stakeholders in both communities and develop partnership as well as grounds for cooperation (education, job creations, urbanisms, etc).

3. Identify and put in place partnership projects.

4. Develop a long-standing strategic plan of cooperation. 5. Fundraise for partnership and project.

Examples:

Examples of partnership support by ALDA:

Gdansk (Poland) and Mariupol (Ukraine), supporting the Local Democracy Agency in Mariupol (Ukraine) Strasbourg (France) and Kairouan (Tunisia), supporting the Local Democracy Agency in Kairouan, (Tunisia) Brescia and Roncadelle (Italy) with Zavidovici (Bosnia and Herzegovina), supporting the Local Democracy Agency in Zavidovici (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

3.7 Local Democracy and digital tools

3.7.1 Citizenship in the digital era

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and her cabinet put at the heart of their strategy six ambitious pillars to build "A Union that strives for more"[26]. Digital is at the frontline of these objectives and will play a key role in the accomplishment of the other

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[26] Ursula von der Leyen, A Union that strives for more, My agenda for Europe: political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024, September 10th, 2019 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en_0.pdf

five pillars. Digital brings forth a lot of issues, challenges as well as opportunities which have to be taken into consideration. All concerns have to be identified especially when democracy and citizenship are part of the debate. At the same time, new words are becoming more and more present: E-democracy, E-governance, e-government[27]. These three wordings designate slightly the same thing and are focusing on their own digital definition. Similarly to processes, words are going digital too. Digital has to be used in an efficient way and allow every citizen to exercise fully and consciously their rights.

No one should be left behind[28]. Every citizen should be involved in this digital revolution.

The question of digital citizenship is still a current but unfamiliar subject because it raises various issues such as: How to guarantee the full exercise of the citizens' rights? How will personal data be protected? How to avoid cyber-attacks? How to manage the fake news? And so on. These questions show the need on one hand to have public institutions ready to go digital and on another hand to make sure that all citizens have the skills and knowledge to exercise their e-rights. Digital tools give new opportunities as well as new challenges for each citizen, social, economic, public and private actor. Citizenship is a precious element of our democracy. Going digital needs to be done in the right way and keep the place of citizenship at the heart of our societies. Digital has to be a means for improving the way citizens are exercising their rights. Being able to exercise e-citizenship will ask first from the various public institutions to be ready to adapt, have a new strategy regarding digital as a whole and especially understand the role and place of citizenship in this new digital strategy.

When we talk about citizenship, another point has to be raised. It's the significance of having digital tools that answer to the needs of the citizens, accessible and understood by them. There is the need to meet the top-down approach coming from the various institutions (European Union as well as local authorities) and bottom-up approach coming from the citizens, the civil society organisations when digital tools are in question to improve the exercise of the citizens' rights. Aligned with this vision, the European **project APProach**[29] was developed. This project aimed to help the European citizens (especially

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[27] E-government refers to the use of information and communication technology in public administration procedures. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:E-government

[28] Leave no one behind (LNOB) is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole. https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind

[29] APProach is a project co-funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme. This is a pilot project targeting EU mobile citizens, i.e. EU citizens resident in another EU country, to help them have better

European Mobile Citizens, EUMCs or European expatriates, resident in another member State)[30], to have better communication with their welcoming city thanks to digital tools. Following the multi-stakeholder and co-creation approach, the project was developed by involving on one hand the European citizens and on the other hand local authorities. It focuses its attention on three significant aspects of EUMCs inclusion: Access to the voting system, Kids schooling enrolment and the active participation in civic and social life. The project can only be implemented thanks to the collaboration of the municipalities: Etterbeek (Belgium), Lisbon (Portugal), Milan (Italy), Nea Smyrni (Greece), Paris (France), Vejle (Denmark). Municipalities have a key role in the project because they are the ones holding the information that can help the European mobile citizens to settle in the city. This information is essential to be delivered, accessible and understandable.

communication with their welcoming city. A digital ecosystem was designed with the active participation of EU mobile citizens and the partner cities. https://project-approach.eu/

[30] Currently, around 17 millions of European citizens are living in another member state than their own. European Commission, "New EU rules cut red tape for citizens living or working in another Member State as of tomorrow", Press release February 15th, 2019 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_1148

The online platform created is the result of a cooperative work of the European citizens, the municipality and the IT company. All information circulating on the platform is reliable. We can guarantee true information. Each page is unique and built to be easily accessible to citizens. Each page can be in the national language or/and in English. Thanks to focus groups and test groups, the platform was designed and improved based on the views of the citizens of the 8 cities.

In other words, each stakeholder has to be part of the development of digital tools. This approach has to be followed in order to include everyone in the process. Otherwise, it's sure that some citizens will be left behind. They will not be able to exercise their due rights and inequalities will keep rising. The vulnerable persons (old people, persons with disabilities, minority groups...) will be the first forgotten in this process, if their voices are not heard. The last Digital Economy and Society Index Report 2020 - Human Capital[31] published in June 2020 provides an analysis of digital inclusion and skills. Currently, 42% of European citizens do not have basic digital skills. Although new digital skills are more and more needed at work, 37% of people in the labour force such as farmers, bank employees and factory workers are lacking sufficient digital skills. Regarding age, the youth are more attracted to digital technologies. On the contrary, only 35% of the 55-74 years-old-persons and 30% of the retired and the inactive possess basic skills.

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[31] European Commission, "Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2020 - Human capital - Digital Inclusion and Skills", June 11th, 2020 https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/human-capital

Inclusion is a keyword. Digital transformation will not be efficient if inclusion is not part of it. A concrete example is the European project **Mind Inclusion 2.0**[32], which has at the core of the project a multi-actors group in order to design an app toward people with intellectual disabilities. In order to co-design the final output of the project, an app, the project partners decided to organise various working sessions with different actors not used to working together. Those sessions are organised at the local level (Spain, Italy and Lithuania). These working groups are composed of a mix of actors: Intellectual Disability Persons of different age (IDP), caregivers, health professionals and managers of public spaces. The three first quoted are used to work together. But, the last one, not really. Nevertheless, managers of public spaces have to be part of the session in order to hear and understand the daily issues of the IDP and their caregivers. During the workshop session, each actor has the opportunity to express his/her own opinion. Making these 4 groups working together helps to raise the awareness of each group on the issues faced by the others, to enable them to work together on an app to develop something which really represents the 4 groups and to learn and share within the working group which is not used to work together. Furthermore, the working sessions are moderated and facilitated by either a social educator, researcher or IT developer. Having the support and views of the research and an IT company help to understand how science and technology can help. The combination of the knowledge, experiences and views from these various actors is a real added-value, first, in the development of the app, second in the development of the project as a whole and last to create a common vision of the inclusion and integration of the disabled people in social and civic life. A multi-actor working group or platform is the opportunity to have a great reserve of knowledge and to build a solid group of people with ideas to share.

Digital tools are essential to citizens.

3.7.2 Digitalisation: challenges and opportunities. Critical points and best practices

Digitalisation goes with challenges and opportunities as well as strengths and weaknesses. Going digital is a decision that should be taken seriously, and all variables need to be considered thouroughly. From a technical point of view, investing in digital means to be ready to change and improve skills, knowledge, processes, guidelines, to innovate and so

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[32] Mind Inclusion 2.0 is a European project funded by the programme Erasmus+. This project aims to find sustainable and inclusive solutions to help caregivers improve their skills, on one hand, and allow disabled individuals to participate in social life on the other. https://www.alda-europe.eu/progetto/mind-inclusion-2-0/

destroy old habits. From the social and economic point of view, innovation can cause employment as well as unemployment (the concept of creative destruction of Schumpeter[33]), can help to grow up and develop new competencies, improve work, social and civic life but also can create or reinforce inequalities. The characteristic of complexity is the cause of the apprehensiveness of some people towards digital. Digitalisation is complex and can have a double effect depending on how it's used.

The positive effects of digitalisation are numerous and offer real new opportunities. Digitalisation of society means that new needs are coming out and digital innovation seems to be the right answer.

Challenges are part of digitalisation because it raises various questions and issues that need to be understood. Digitalisation represents a cost. Being ready to go digital means also to be ready to spend a certain amount of money in order to undergo the digital transformation. Digitalisation needs to be guided by a long-term strategy not only on digital but also culturally speaking. The people as citizens, employees or students have also to be ready to change, adapt and mostly they have to be part of the process.

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[33] Creative destruction was first coined by Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter in 1942 and can be described as the dismantling of long-standing practices in order to make way for innovation.

All stakeholders have to be part of it. Otherwise, the designed digital innovation won't be used at its full potential and people will feel left behind without having been able to make their voice heard in the process. That is why it's important to include all the protagonists in the process to understand what they need and how the digital transformation can help them. Inclusion is significant and should be part of the digital strategy. Linked to that, support needs to be set up in order to facilitate the process, for example, workers to adapt to changes caused by digital shift or to promote digital literacy and competency programs. To help in this way, the European Commission launched DigComp which is the European reference framework to support the development and a comprehensive understanding of digital competences. DigComp[34] has identified skills and knowledge people need to have in order to face and use digital technologies in the different aspects of their life. The identified skills were divided into 5 key areas: Information and data literacy, Communication and collaboration, Digital content creation, Safety and Problem solving. "DigComp is about people." In fact, one of the main characteristics of this tool is to be adapted for everyone, any actors interested to learn, to develop and to improve their digital competencies. The goal of DigCom is to guide the European citizens in their journey with digital and mostly to help them understand what it is to be digitally competent.

Aside from the cost of the digital transformation in terms of money and human resources trained, there is another obstacle which is data protection and especially how to ensure digital security.

There are different kinds of digital attacks. It can be disinformation, the intentional proliferation of fake news, illegal use of private data, cyber-attacks, cyber-bullying... A concrete example is the entry into application in May 2018 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union[35]. This set of rules is regulating the use of the digital private data. All companies which are operating in the European Union have to follow these regulations even if they are not based in the EU. GDPR is a way to better protect the citizens from inappropriate use of their data as well as the use of their data without

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[34] European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp) - DigComp is the European reference framework to support a shared, comprehensive understanding of digital competences developed by the European Commission.
https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1315&langId=en#:~:text=DigComp%20is%20about%20people..need%20in%205%20key%20areas

[35] General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is the EU data protection rules. Entered into application in May 2018, this set of rules means people have more control over their personal data and businesses benefit from a level playing field. https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/eu-data-protection-rules_en#abouttheregulationanddataprotection

their consent. People got more control over their data and companies are developing in the market with a level playing field.

Current events as the global health crisis COVID-19 are showing at which point everyone needs to use digital devices in order to stay informed, to work, to stay close to relatives, to keep a certain social life[36] and so on. Nevertheless, the crisis shows various issues and the rise of inequalities linked to digital transformation. Some citizens were not able to have access to the internet, to have a computer to follow courses, to have a phone[37] to have access to information. It is called a digital divide. Nowadays, having access to a neutral and affordable internet connection should be a right. Without it, some citizens are not able to exercise other human rights. Digital transformation should go along with an awareness of the institutions. Digital citizenship can be fully embraced when basic rights will reach every citizen.

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[36] Eurostat, "Are you using social networks?", June 6th, 2020 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20200630-2?inheritRedirect=true&redirect=%2Feurostat%2Fweb%2Fcovid-19%2Flatest-releases

[37] Eurostat, "Can you afford the basics of life?", April 24th, 2020 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200429-1?inheritRedirect=true&redirect=%2Feurostat%2Fweb%2Fcovid-19%2Flatest-releases%3Fp_p_id%3D101_INSTANCE_tZDXHcKFrBzQ%26p_p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_p_state%3Dnormal%26p_p_mode%3Dview%26p_p_col_id%3Dcolumn-2%26p_p_col_count%3D1%26_101_INSTANCE_tZDXHcKFrBzQ_delta%3D20%26_101_INSTANCE_tZDXHcKFrBzQ_keywords%3D%26_101_INSTANCE_tZDXHcKFrBzQ_advancedSearch%3Dfalse%26_101_INSTANCE_tZDXHcKFrBzQ_andOperator%3Dtrue%26p_r_p_564233524_resetCur%3Dfalse%26_101_INSTANCE_tZDXHcKFrBzQ_cur%3D5

4. Conclusions

ALDA has the capacity and the experience to support local governments, national policies and citizens to improve life in their communities through a better implementation of local participatory democracy. The work of ALDA engaging local authorities and civil society is based on a solid experience of 20 years engaging thousands of stakeholders and with more than 400 projects implemented on the matter.

ALDA is based on values and relationships and it is ready to put its entire network available to communities that need support in the field of local governance and civil society empowerment. In COVID time but also well before the pandemic, our network cares about global responsibility and considers that community relations are the basis for peace, sustainable development and a better future, especially for those who are left behind and marginalised. We aim at engaging citizens, making the difference at the local level for results today and in the future.

Local democracy and good local governance are an integral part of fair and sustainable development and a key part of the process brining us to comply with our common objectives, whether we live in the North or South of the World, the Sustainable Development Goals towards achieving them in 2030.

2020