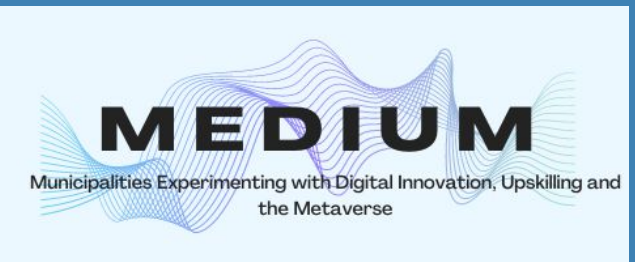




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# MEDIUM: Municipalities Experimenting with Digital Innovation, Upskilling and the Metaverse

## Training of Trainers



**Dafne Sgarra, ALDA+**

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26-27/03/2024, Lousada (PT)

# PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

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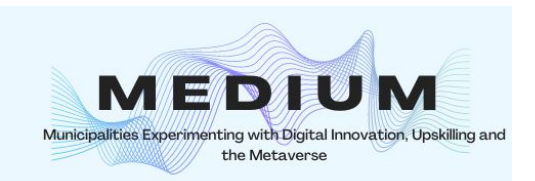
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### What is participatory democracy?



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*Participatory democracy is based on the right to seek to determine or influence the exercise of the public authorities' powers and responsibilities .*

*It contributes to representative and direct democracy .*

*Participation of **citizens** is at the very heart of the idea of democracy. Effective democracy depends on citizens having a say and being heard.*



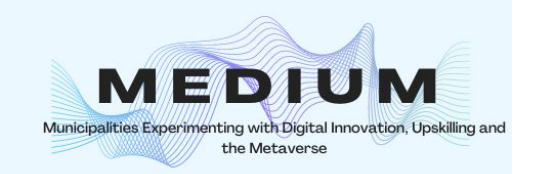
**The right of the citizens to participate in shaping the public policies «is one of the democratic principles that are shared by all member States of the Council of Europe» and «it is at local level that this right can be most directly exercised»**

(The European Charter for Local self government, Council of Europe)

# WHY NEEDED? WHY IMPORTANT?



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# PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

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- **Legitimacy** of the process
- Response to **complex issues require a collective effort** (and collective intelligence!)
- The **LAs** need allies among the **civil society, including experts and the business sector**
- **Ownership** of the results
- Decisions are more **sustainable**, better **accepted**
- Citizens will be more keen to **respect** and protect the territory if they feel they are part of the process

# PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY - ACTORS

## Training of Trainers

### LOCAL AUTHORITIES:

- **Elected representatives** represent those who define the vision for local authorities and main choices (mayors, councilors..)
- **Civil servants** represent the implementers of the policies identified at the local level.

### CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS:

- **Civil society** has the capacity to involve citizens and defend their rights; in general, the civil sector accompanies the development of participatory democracy.

### CITIZENS:

- Final beneficiaries of good governance
- Establish dialogue and collaboration at various levels with local institutions.
- Always to be kept informed as well as engaged through the different methods present - according to need and relevance

# STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT

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## STEP 1: Community Evaluation

To contextualise a participatory decision-making process

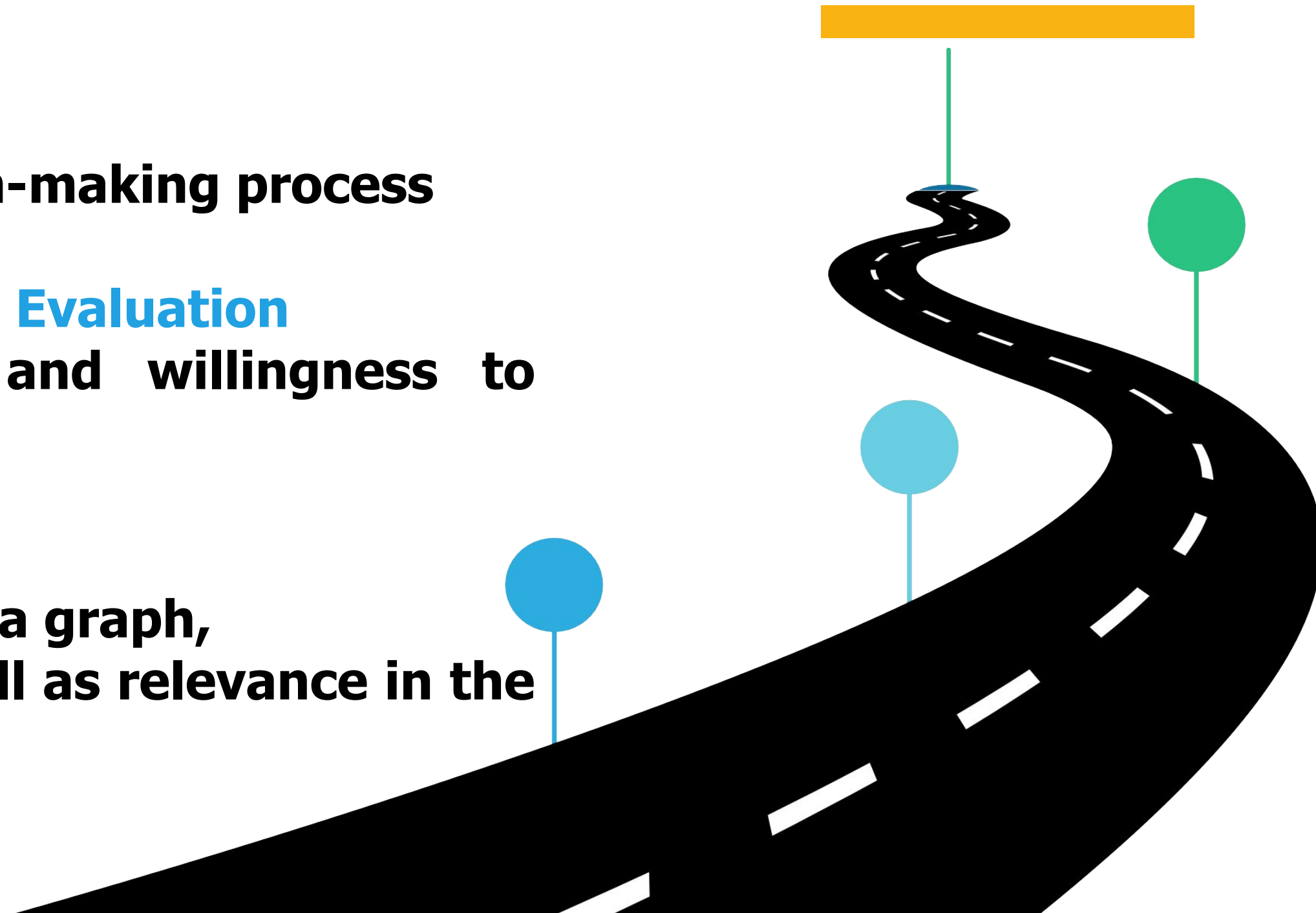
## STEP 2: Stakeholders' Identification and Evaluation

To identify stakeholders' capacities and willingness to engage

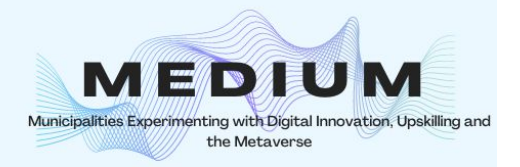
## STEP 3: Stakeholders' Plotting

To graphically plot each stakeholder on a graph, where his/her interest to engage as well as relevance in the process are clearly identified

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The *Code of good practice for civil participation in the decision - making process* :

- issued by the Council of Europe
- is a very handful tool to guide us through the conceptualisation and framing of participatory democracy
- will be our main methodological reference in this training session
- aims to set the **ideal frame for civil engagement**, by setting key principles and mechanisms that can enable an effective participation in the decision making process and support **good governance** at all levels: national, regional, local
- **sets 9 key principles** that shall all be respected in order to provide an enabling environment to effective participation

# PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY - 9 principles

## Training of Trainers

→ to foster a constructive relationship, NGOs and public authorities at different levels should act on the following common principles:

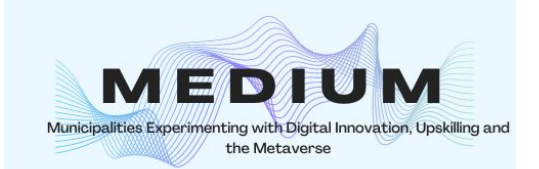
**1. OPENNESS.** NGOs collect citizens' views and needs, that provide key input for a good quality the decision making process. To ensure the process, participation needs to be open and accessible for all.

**2. TRUST.** An open and democratic society can only function if based on the honest interaction among the actors. This is built on transparency, openness, respect and reliability

**3. INDEPENDENCE.** CSOs must be recognised as free and independent bodies in respect to their aims, decisions and activities. They have the right to act independently and advocate different positions from the authorities with whom they may otherwise cooperate.



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**4. PARTICIPATION.** NGOs have the **right to participate in governmental and quasi-governmental mechanisms** at all levels without discrimination in dialogue and consultation on public policy objectives and decisions. The diversity of people's opinions shall be respected.

**5. TRANSPARENCY.** All processes must be transparent and open to scrutiny from both sides, administration as well as NGOs. Timely **public access to all** documents, drafts, decisions and opinions relevant for participation process is essential. Access to information must be ensured.

**6. ACCESSIBILITY.** Civil participation should be propagated via the use of **clear language and appropriate means of participation**, offline or online, and on any device – based on agreed frameworks for participation



# PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY - 9 principles

## Training of Trainers

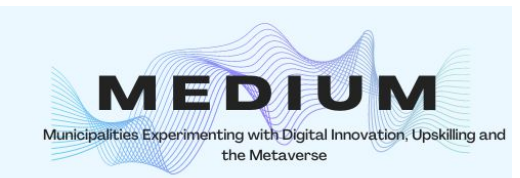
**7. NON DISCRIMINATION.** Civil participation should take all voices into account, including those of the less privileged and most vulnerable. It must **avoid all measures** in the proceedings, ways of publication of information, organization of meetings etc. which would exclude interested groups from participating.

**8. INCLUSIVENESS.** Civil participation should include all groups with particular interests and needs, such as minorities, the elderly, people with disabilities. Many of these groups do not respond easily to a call of participation. Therefore, **proactive measures** should be taken to reach out to these groups and empower them to participate.

**9. ACCOUNTABILITY.** Any process of participation must be directed to produce results and be open to change the original proposals. These results must be documented and made available to the public. **All decision makers take responsibility for their decisions;** decisions are reasoned, subject to scrutiny and can be sanctioned; remedies exist for maladministration or wrongful decisions.



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# PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

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## Training of Trainers

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**SO** →

❖ 9 principles mentioned

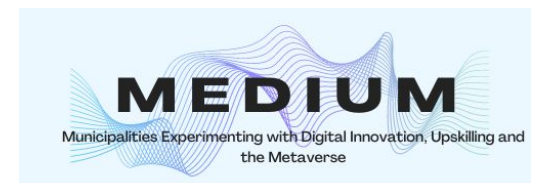
AND

❖ other key conditions for a healthy participatory process (rule of law, freedom of expression and association, political will, clear procedures, favourable legislation, etc.)

allow and facilitate an **effective participatory democracy.**



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### Main challenges:

- The decision-making process is still too **centralised**.
- The institutional bodies and civil society are often weak at local level, being too dependent on **central resources**.
- Civil society still needs to be strengthened and empowered to **create a strong dialogue** with the public authorities.
- There is still **limited knowledge about participatory instruments** and their benefits.
- There is a **lack of trust** between citizens and public institutions.
- Very often citizens are duly informed / involved, but then the **follow-up is missing**.



## GROUP EXERCISE

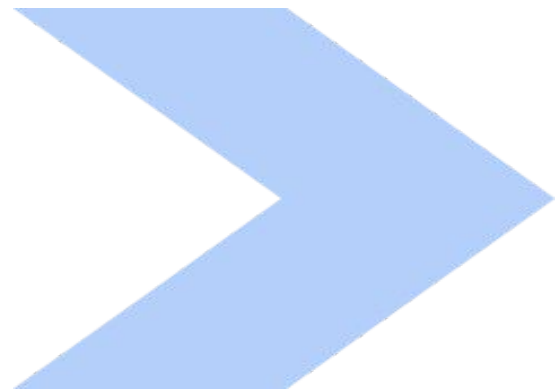
## 2 GROUPS WORK ON THE 9 PRINCIPLES

Each group reflects on one concrete case study of the Municipality. Think about one local intervention that affected the public community (municipal decision to build something, CSO organising a local mobilisation, etc.).

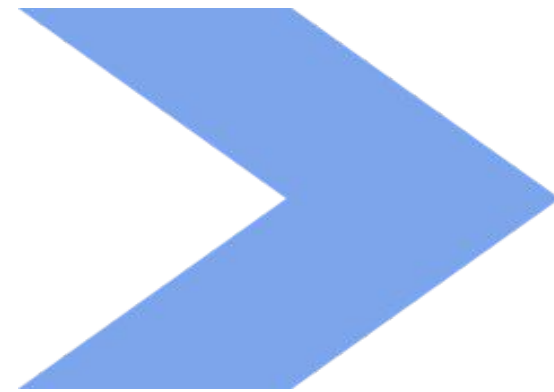
Think about the 9 principles. How were they respected?

# 4 LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

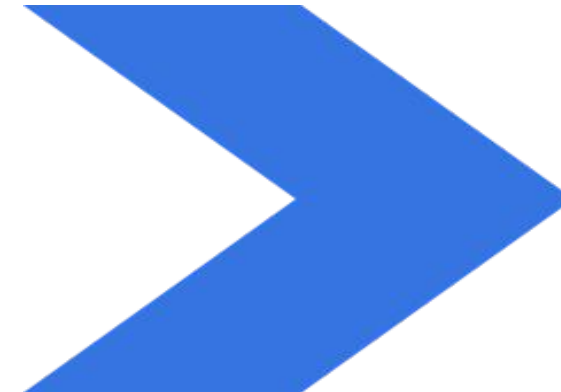
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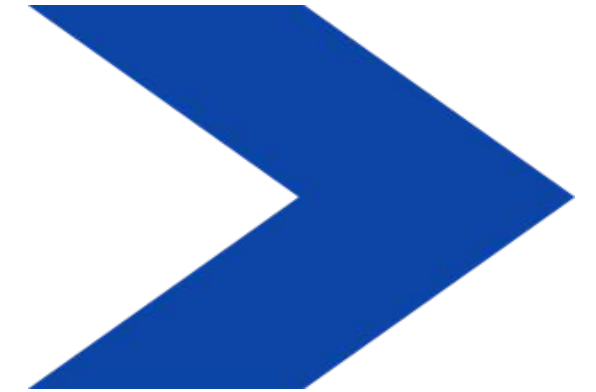
**INFORMATION**



**CONSULTATION**



**DIALOGUE**



**PARTNERSHIP**

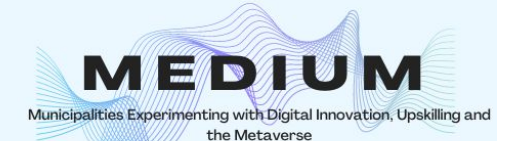


## Training of Trainers

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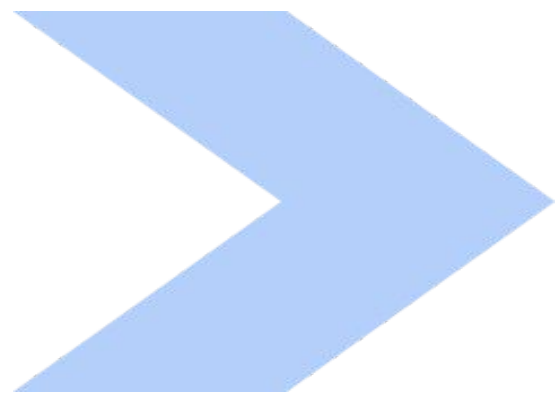


# 1. INFORMATION

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## Training of Trainers

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Access to information is **the basis for all subsequent steps** in the involvement in the political decision-making process.

→ **one-way provision of information** from the public authorities, and no interaction or involvement with NGOs is required or expected. It includes the right of the public to access all information.

### INFORMATION



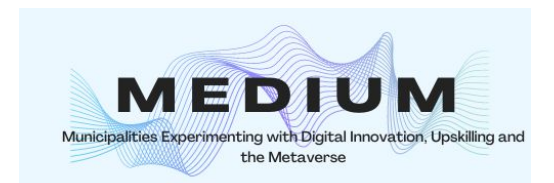
→ **Communication message** shall be clear, with precise objective, through the proper channels and addressing the appropriate target group

→ Possible **tools**: LA's website, social media, posters/brochures, office, meetings, ...

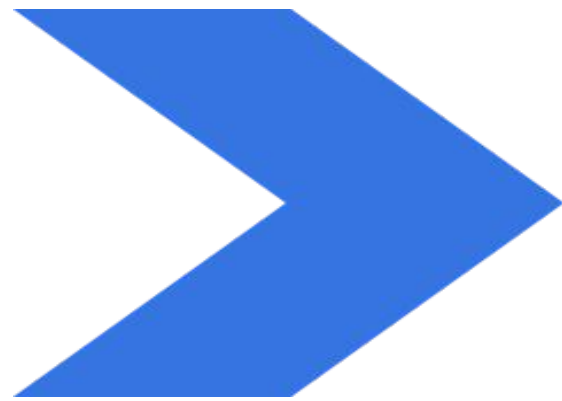
→ **Example**: open days to present the digital identity service - for all citizens



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## 2. CONSULTATION



It is a level of participation **used to cope with complex problems**, for which the public authorities might need advice from the experts, inputs from the citizens at large, and more.

→ Consultation usually involves the authorities informing CSOs of current policy developments. However, **the initiative originates with the public authorities, and not with CSOs.**

### CONSULTATION



→ It is important to foster an **open and accessible environment that allows for the exchange of ideas** as well as ensure follow-up updates ensure the accountability of the consultations.

→ Possible **tools**: Public meetings, consultative committees and referenda, surveys, petitions etc. ...

→ **Example**: Civic consultations to inform and co-design with beneficiaries the construction or improvement of a local school outside area.

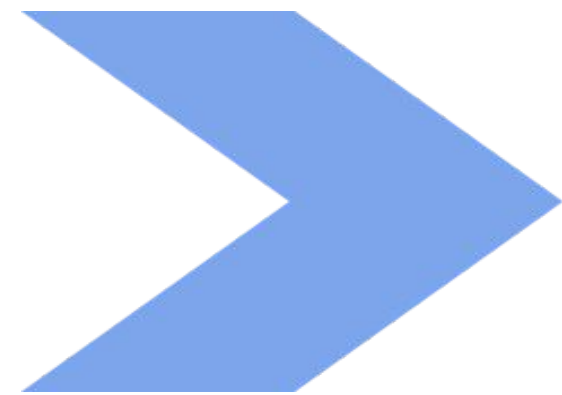
# 3. DIALOGUE

## Training of Trainers

It is a form of initiative where **the public authorities may ask CS for their opinion** on a specific policy topic or development.

→ Possible **tools**:

- **Dialogue tools (World Café)**  
Promoting natural conversations as a way to elicit dialogue and exchanges
- **Open space technology**  
Participant-driven activity that is particularly relevant when approaching a serious issue that has a high-level of complexity and sparks polarized opinions
- **Focus group**  
Useful to revise the drafting of a policy. It consists of a gathering of stakeholders possessing a certain degree of competence on the issue at stake



### CONSULTATION



→ **Example:** Citizens' Assemblies (Strasbourg Citizens' panel on the future of Europe)

## 4. PARTNERSHIP

## Training of Trainers

It is the **highest form of participation**. CSOs and the public authorities come together to closely cooperate - all whilst ensuring CSOs (remaining independent) have the right to campaign and act, irrespective of a partnership situation.

→ It may include **delegating a specific task to a CSO**

→ Possible **tools**:

- **Permanent**

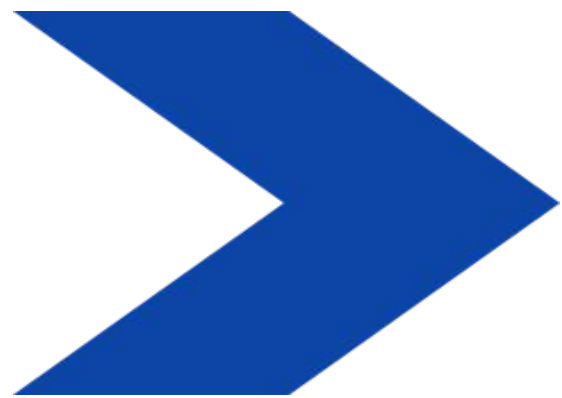
**structures:**

Serve as a point of contact between the citizens and the city council. They do not have legislative power, but they hold executive power at the neighborhood level.

- **Collaboration pacts and shared administration**

regulate the cooperation between the regional and local authorities and the citizens, with respect to subjects related to the protection and valorization of the goods of common interest

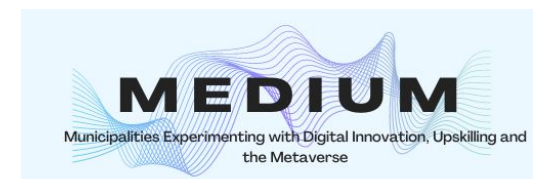
→ **Example:** Desk for conflicts mediation between citizens (Bologna)



**PARTNERSHIP**



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- **Digital tools** play an important role in fostering inclusive and effective active citizens' participation across the various stages of civic engagement.
- **Social media platforms** and **online forums** serve as dynamic channels to disseminate information, reach different audiences and encourage public awareness.
- The use of **interactive websites, mobile apps, and social media analytics** not only broadens participation, but also enhances the transparency and responsiveness of each stage, empowering active citizens to contribute meaningfully to the democratic process.

### E-DEMOCRACY

- The support and enhancement of democracy, democratic institutions (at all levels of government) and democratic processes by digital means / ICT
- Additional, complementary to, and interlinked with traditional processes of democracy.
- It must respect and implement fundamental freedoms, human rights and minority rights. Concerns all actors in society and all levels of government.

### E-PARTICIPATION

- The support and enhancement of democratic participation;
- Civil society and businesses are involved in drawing up formal and informal agendas and shaping and taking decisions;
- Any type of participation can be achieved through e-democracy:
  - the provision of information
  - communication, consultation, deliberation
  - transaction, empowered participation, co-decision and decision making

- **Online consultation**

- Collecting opinions of designated persons or the public at large on a specific policy issue without necessarily mandating the decision maker

- **E-petitions**

- Electronic delivery of a protest or recommendation to a democratic institution about a public institution, a law, or to provide the public authorities or representatives with their opinion

- **Other options** are Digital surveys Dialogue stages, Virtual town halls, Collaborative platforms, Virtual reality and the Metaverse

### → Strategies and other tools:

- *Virtual meetings:* This can break down geographical barriers, allowing citizens to participate in discussions regardless of their physical location.
- *Digital Decision-Making platforms:* They enable citizens to participate in political discussions, referenda, and community planning from the comfort of their virtual environments.
- *Collaborative Civic Projects:* Digital tools in the Metaverse can facilitate collaborative civic projects, bringing together diverse groups of individuals to work towards common goals.
- *Inclusive Access and Representation:* Individuals with physical disabilities or those in remote areas can participate in civic activities without facing traditional barriers.





### The use of virtual reality and Metaverse for Citizen Engagement:

- The use of virtual reality and the Metaverse for citizen engagement offers innovative ways to enhance public participation.
- Digital voting systems and decision-making platforms within the Metaverse could promote secure and transparent democratic processes.
- Virtual reality and the Metaverse can be employed for immersive civic education, creating interactive and engaging simulations.

### The use of virtual reality and Metaverse for Citizen Engagement:

The **Metaverse** allows for a greater engagement of participants:

- By adding elements of metaverse into a process, it allows to unlock new avenues for the understanding of key challenges in deliberative processes:
  - City planning, deliberation on autonomous mobility etc.
- Fosters higher levels of empathy and engagement that would benefit discussions and collective decision-making.
- By overcoming physical borders, it makes it easier to engage experts, citizens and observers, therefore making transnational deliberation cheaper.



### Mixed and facilitated group activity

Create two groups and brainstorm ways in which digital tools and immersive technologies (i.e. virtual reality and the Metaverse) could enhance citizen engagement in your municipality (30 min.)

Each group then selects a spokesperson to present their top ideas.

#### **Guiding questions:**

##### Round 1.

- Which kind of initiatives already exist?
- What are the key enabling conditions for participation in your Municipality?

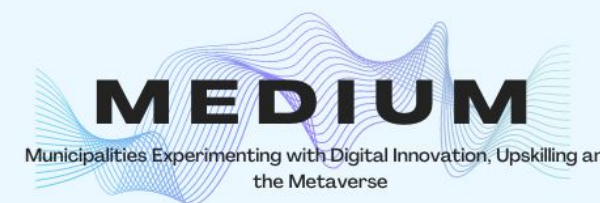
##### Round 2.

- What would you like to see next?
- Which would be the main topics and issues to be addressed?
- Which tools would you use?





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# THANK YOU!

Dafne Sgarra, Project Coordinator  
ALDA+

