



European Capital
of Democracy

European City Network

Yearbook 2024/25



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Democracy delivers.

When we conceived the European Capital of Democracy Initiative, we realised that it would be great to connect all the cities that apply for this honorary title and thus aspire to be the top leaders in Europe in the field of citizen participation and democratic practice.

Since then, our European City Network (ECN) has become a remarkably successful newcomer to the - some would say quite overcrowded - field of international city exchanges. The ECN has demonstrated that the challenges to reach out for and to manage citizen's feedback is a continuous one, seemingly similar from case to case, but rather different when looked at more closely.

Bringing together experts in citizen participation and public innovation, working closely with other networks such as Eurocities, German Marshall Fund Cities Program, the Strong Cities Network, ALDA and others has been rewarding for all participants.

The different challenges and perspectives that have been shared among the wonderful crowd of democracy operators from the cities and organisations assembled by the ECN have been inspiring. This as well as the strong focus on collecting, sharing and increasing the impact of existing best practice has thus greatly amplified the impact of the European Capital of Democracy Initiative. It is another testimony to what we deeply believe in: Democracy delivers!



Helfried Carl
Founder
European Capital of Democracy



Every time I join a meeting of this inspiring community of practice - our beloved European City Network - I feel electrified. In the most challenging years for liberal democracy during my lifetime, it is with those resourceful and hard-working people, who devote a good part of their life to public innovation and service, that I can feel the beating heart of democracy.

A democracy, one might say, as it should be: Close to its inhabitants (not only citizens), results-driven and courageous. Courageous? Yes, because for the public administration in general and public servants in particular, being innovative and trying new ways is a risk. And still, cities are champions of finding new ways to cope with the massive side effects of migration, to develop effective solutions to mitigate climate change and to make new technology work for democracy.

Talking to project owners and drivers of innovation provides you with special insights. It is not always easy to listen to their personal stories or their experiences at work - because more often than not, they support people in need - victims of violence, migrants, oppressed minorities, marginalised groups, homeless people, troubled youth communities or the ever growing group of elderly citizens. They put so much energy, heart and soul into their work that you can only be amazed.

So, what can we at European Capital of Democracy do to support them? First of all, we want to bring them together. For social workers, participation experts and "regular" city administration workers, international exchange is not a given. We create and, with the help of the European Union, co-finance these meetings, workshops and webinars. Second, we create a stage for their best practice to shine in the framework of the Democracy Years in title-holding cities: Barcelona in 2023/24, Vienna in 2024/25 and Cascais in 2026.

I want to thank everyone who believed in this idea and helped to bring it to life, Martina Füllrutter, the very first European City Network Manager and founding mother, together with Mathis Dippon - and, of course, Laura Thomas - the heroine behind the ECN's success.

If YOU need proof that Democracy IS our future, join us and experience it with us.



Stefan Sindelar
CEO
European Capital of Democracy

What a ride!

It has been a great privilege and pleasure to work with such a knowledgeable, dedicated, and dynamic group of city representatives and experts over the past year and a half. I have learnt that despite the varied locations, financial resources, and political contexts of the twenty-four cities in the network, the challenges they face are common. Every city, to a greater or lesser extent, faces the challenges of climate change, traffic congestion, integrating newcomers, and political engagement, to name a few. But their solutions to these challenges are both varied and innovative.

Throughout this project, city representatives have learnt from experts in their fields about the methods, tools, and approaches they have implemented when facing such challenges. They have also exchanged knowledge with their fellow network members about how their city has risen to such challenges, inspiring their peers to adapt these solutions to their local contexts.

Despite the demanding pace of this project, I have often felt like I have the best job in the world, visiting inspirational, surprising, and innovative projects in cities across Europe.

What makes this project so unique, is of course the hard-working people on the ground, who strive to create the best possible outcomes for their fellow citizens and for their cities! That is why this Yearbook is dedicated to them, as a record of a small fraction of the important work they do everyday.



Laura Thomas
City Network and Scientific Impact Manager
European Capital of Democracy



Introduction

The team behind the European City Network...

Meet the Team



Helfried Carl
Founder

Helfried is Founder of and Advisory Board Member at the ECoD initiative and a Board Member at the Innovation in Politics Institute. In his career as a diplomat, he has acted as Chief of Cabinet of the President of the Austrian Parliament and Austrian Ambassador to Slovakia.



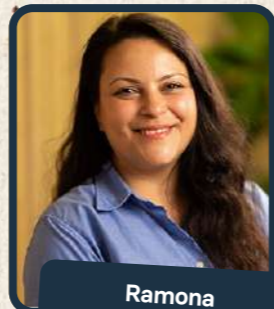
Stefan Sindelar
CEO

Stefan started his professional career in media and technology, entered politics for the launch of NEOS, serving as Director of the Parliamentary Group and Managing Director of the party. His work experience includes various settings: from NPOs and start-ups to companies and politics, with a strong focus on building, growing and developing disruptive products.



Laura Thomas
European City Network Manager

Laura leads the ECoD call for cities and manages the European City Network's meetings and events. In addition, she is an Innovation in Politics Awards Representative with a focus on Irish and British projects. Laura gained a Master's in Global Health from Copenhagen University which enabled her to view global issues through a multi-disciplinary lens. She has also worked as an English language teacher in Vienna.



Ramona Razaghmanesh
Communication Manager

Ramona combines a passion for social media and photography. She has worked as a Social Media Manager for different organisations. Earlier in her career, Ramona completed a degree in Communication Design, which has given her a diverse perspective on the creative field.

...and their colleagues at European Capital of Democracy.

Mathis Dippon
Democracy Year Manager

Mathis is responsible for the Democracy Year and all related activities and cooperations. He is an expert on civic participation on the local and regional level. He also manages an international network of mayors. He holds a master's degree in Public Professional Decision Making (University of Bremen) and a bachelor's degree in Politics and Public Administration (University of Constance).

Marta Frascetti
Junior Project Manager

Marta is pursuing a degree in Political, Legal, and Governmental studies at Central European University. Beginning her career as a project assistant in the European Capital of Democracy, Marta now focuses on community management and participant relations within the Innovation in Politics Awards.

Elene Gagnidze
Project Officer

Elene has a background of practical experience within the legal field. She has extended her academic horizons by attaining a second Master's degree in Human Rights in Vienna, gaining professional insights at the International Institute for Peace. Additionally, she directs her democracy research efforts toward Eastern Europe, the Balkans, as well as the South and North Caucasus.

Dunja Ganser
Compliance & Safeguarding Officer

Dunja is a versatile expert in project development and management. Bringing new ideas to life, acting as an experienced guide through this process and understanding each target group's hope and wishes are the main tasks she carried out in various fields – the arts world, policy-making & media projects.

Miriam Hargasova
Head of Awards & Events

Miriam has a background in political science and international relations, coupled with practical experience in public affairs and communication. She leads the annual Innovation in Politics Awards and manages the ACT NOW Mayors' Conference – initiatives dedicated to fostering collaboration and driving change.

Adela King
Intern

After obtaining her BA Degree in Culture, Politics, and Society from CEU, Adela is now pursuing a MSc in Comparative Politics and Conflict at the London School of Economics and Political Science. During her studies, Adela has interned with multiple organisations and is particularly interested in topics such as multiculturalism and social trust.

Tijana Zherajikj
Call & Fundraising Coordinator

Tijana has a background in International Relations and Public Policy, starting in Prague as a researcher focusing on EU foreign policy. She completed a Master's in International Public Affairs in Vienna, specializing in policy analysis, legal developments within the EU, human rights, and Balkan accession. She is responsible for EU projects and calls.

European City Network

The European City Network (ECN) is a strong group of twenty-four cities across fifteen European countries which foster participation and champion democracy across Europe. This network gives cities a platform to share successful projects which have a lasting impact on the wellbeing of citizens and the environment. City representatives come together regularly to share their expertise and best practices in democracy promotion at the municipal level.

There are three types of activities:

- Cities Teach** → 90-minute long webinars in which 3 member cities of the ECN present their best practices in the topic field to a wider audience. Outline: Introduction, best-practice presentations, breakout sessions (3 in parallel), and a summary with the whole group.
- Cities Learn** → 60-minute long webinars with external experts, proposed by the host city. Outline: Introduction, experts' input, followed by Q&A.
- Cities Meet** → 3-day long in-person meetings focused on the host city's field of expertise. They consist of an interactive mix of workshops, field trips, and exchange with local organisations and stakeholders, plus networking opportunities.



European Capital of Democracy

* Special Partnership

Consortium Team

 *Antwerp, Belgium*



Roel Camps

Participation Officer & Expert in Youth Participation Policy

Roel Camps is a Consultant at the City of Antwerp, specialised in policy participation and advisory boards. With a focus on youth policy, Roel coordinates projects that give young people a voice in policy. Roel has developed methodologies for bottom-up and top-down participation and works with stakeholders to involve young people in policymaking. Roel's expertise includes organizing advisory boards, coordinating participation projects and supporting policymakers. Roel played an important role in digital participation for the City of Antwerp, involved in the development of the digital participation tool OOR since 2010. This tool collects the opinions of young people and makes policy more inclusive and accessible.

> What do you love most about your city?

The diversity of the city charms me every day, especially the cultural and spatial diversity.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

Creating youth policy with products, various methods and opportunities for policy participation of young people in a structural, transparent and sustainable way.



Cheryl Horemans

Team and Project Manager for Communications & Participation Antwerp (Antwerpen Morgen)

For 10 years, Cheryl has been working for the Urban Development company of the City of Antwerp. This company is responsible for all major renovations, redevelopments, maintenance, and management of public space and mobility within the Antwerp area. My team, named Antwerp Tomorrow, handles communication and participation for these projects. Communication involves informing various target groups about the projects through different channels.

> What do you love most about your city?

Although Antwerp is a very compact city, you are surprised around every corner with nice squares, fine neighborhoods, and delicious restaurants.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

The participation in our public domain.



Eric Ankersmid

Communication & Participation Project Leader

Born and raised in the Netherlands, I lived and worked in Denmark for several years and have now been based in Antwerp, Belgium for over 22 years. This makes me feel truly European! Workwise, I dedicate myself to keeping the people of Antwerp informed about urban development projects. I also try to get them involved in the design process, by organising civil participation meetings. I strive to get this participatory thinking anchored in the design processes city-wide, in all urban development initiatives. I believe it is key to achieving broadly supported decisions and developments.

> What do you love most about your city?

It is a pocket-sized metropolis: everything you want in walking distance, in beautiful surroundings.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

The fact that we get people to listen to each other's opinions, and try to understand their different interests and needs.



Evi Valminck

Team and Project Manager for Communications & Participation Antwerp (Antwerpen Morgen)

After working as a childcare worker for eleven years, I took an internal exam for the city of Antwerp to advance. Then I started as a youth policy expert, where I also participate in two theme groups: participation and future. I find it very important that young people have their own voice and can express what is important to them. Within the future theme, I am committed to the ComPas, an initiative I fully support. This offers young people the opportunity to obtain a certificate in an alternative way and to show that a diploma is not always the most important thing. It's about gaining experience, self-development, working on competencies, and being able to name them.

> What do you love most about your city?

Diversity in the city and the large number of different youth work organizations.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

The ComPas passport is a nice initiative where all young people have the opportunity to learn to grow in their competencies and learn to recognise and acknowledge them.



Consortium Team

 *Antwerp, Belgium*



Jony Janse

Youth Infrastructure Expert

Jony Janse is an expert at the City of Antwerp, working in the TV-J-Centrale Youth Service. From the City of Antwerp, Jony coordinates projects aimed at improving our infrastructure for youth organisations. Using participation, she tries to provide a targeted experience for young people. In order to integrate the voice of young people in policy-making and heritage development, she integrates participation in her projects and works together with stakeholders. Jony plays a crucial role in Take Over projects, aimed at bottom-up participation, where young people engage directly with policymakers. An example is the 'Take Over – make room for girls!' where young people talk to aldermen about inclusive public sports spaces. Jony works together with city services and external partners to make these projects successful.

> What do you love most about your city?

The pleasant hustle and bustle in the city, where there is something to do on every street corner.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

Young people are important in our city, they are our future. That is why we are very committed to high-quality daytime activities for young people.

Isabelle Van Damme

Project Leader of ComPas

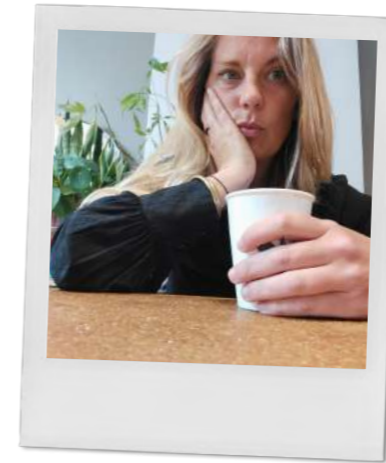
In her younger years, Isabelle was very active in various youth organisations, especially in the local youth center. There, she acquired many skills that she could effectively apply later in her career. Isabelle went on to study social work and, since 1998, she has been working at the youth service of the City of Antwerp. Since 2018, she has been in her current role, where she bridges the gap between the leisure sector and either the job market or the education sector. Developing and recognising soft skills in young people is central to this role.

> What do you love most about your city?

Antwerp is a city with many opportunities and diversity and working for the city council gives me the chance to have an impact on youngsters' development.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

With ComPas young people can develop and identify their soft skills, which provides them with significant support for their first steps into the job market or their participation in society.



Tine Van Dyck

Youth Policy Expert

Tine Van Dyck is an Expert at the City of Antwerp, working in the Youth Department. From Antwerp, Tine coordinates various projects focused on youth participation and policymaking. She works closely with various stakeholders to integrate the voice of young people into policy themes such as urban planning, talent development, public spaces, cultural participation, and sports. Tine has played an important role in the advisory boards, where she develops methods for low-threshold and location-oriented participation. She has played a crucial role in the advisory boards and sector consultations, where she has promoted cooperation between various stakeholders. Her commitment to participation projects, such as the Take Over projects, ensures that young people can directly engage in discussions with policymakers and influence the policy of the City of Antwerp. Tine's work contributes to a dynamic and inclusive youth policy in Antwerp.

> What do you love most about your city?

The mix of all the different people makes Antwerp a vibrant city where you can discover new things every week!

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

The youth advisory council!

Isabel Van de Velde

Youth Policy Expert

Isabel studied political sciences before she started her career at the City of Antwerp working for the municipal museums and heritage institutions. After 10 years, in 2016, she made a switch to youth policy. A great advocate for implementing a broad youth policy, she now focuses on inclusion. Main topics include (mental) wellbeing and poverty. She also has expertise in multi-actor collaborations and in organisational management.

> What do you love most about your city?

Antwerp has the perfect size: big enough to be a city, small enough to know every corner of it and it combines historical beauty with a modern creative vibe.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

The "reinvention" of our youth council – it is not easy to involve young people in local policies and to achieve a representation of all the young people in the community in this process.



Consortium Team

📍 Antwerp, Belgium



Jo Van de Velde

Communications Officer for Climate & Environment

Jo has been working for the City of Antwerp in various departments and projects since 2005. For example, he specialised in internal communication aimed at employees, but also in resident communication, participation methods, and setting up campaigns and associated websites. In recent years, he has focused very much on the Antwerp EcoHuis, a public center where residents can go with all their questions about housing quality, sustainable building and renovation, de-paving and greening, in short, living more ecologically. For that department, he uses both permanent communication channels and temporary activities.

> What do you love most about your city?

I really like the diversity and accessibility of Antwerp. To me, this is a big city on a human scale, with enough parks.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I am very proud of the fact that there are citizen budgets in Antwerp, in which the residents are allowed to decide on a part of the city budget every year.



Consortium Team

📍 Barcelona, Spain



Arnau Monterde

Director of Participation & Democratic Innovation

Arnau is responsible for decidim.barcelona and co-founder of Decidim.org. Head of the Canòdrom Center for Digital and Democratic Innovation. Former coordinator of Technopolitics at the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3-UOC). PhD in Information and Knowledge Society from the UOC.

> What do you love most about your city?

Its richness and its tradition in terms of social innovation, participatory governance, social movements and organisations, and digital rights and free open-source activists.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

Decidim, the free-open source citizen participation platform for organizations and public institutions.



Toñi Sanchez

Democratic Innovation Department

Antonia Sánchez Hernández is a senior management technician in Participation and Innovation for Democracy Department at Barcelona City Council. She coordinates different international projects related to participation and democratic innovation at the Barcelona City Council. She contributes significantly to the dissemination of a digital platform for citizens' participation: Decidim. She is dedicated to fostering democratic engagement and digital rights on a global scale.

> What do you love most about your city?

What I like most about my city is the life that the different districts have, that is, the way people interact with each other, how they create communities and how citizens participate in the public affairs.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

The democratic practice of which I am most proud is not one in particular, but any participatory process in which citizens are included from the beginning (co-designing) and can be part of it throughout the process being part of a decision making process.



Consortium Team

 *Barcelona, Spain*



Laura Copete Trujillo

Digital Inclusion Manager at Barcelona Activa

Policy analyst and development professional with extensive experience in advocacy, public policy, and project management. Her professional trajectory includes work with think tanks, NGOs, international organisations, and local government agencies, focusing on socioeconomic and digital inclusion. Her expertise spans gender, youth, and migration, with a strong emphasis on digital literacy, skills development, and STEAM education. Passionate about fostering inclusive growth, striving to bridge digital divides and create equitable opportunities through policy solutions that empower communities in an increasingly digital world.

> What do you love most about your city?

Having lived in several cities throughout my life, Barcelona is my chosen one due to its diverse and welcoming community, where people from all backgrounds come together, fostering a high quality of life built on cultural richness.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I am most proud of Decidim, Barcelona's open-source participatory democracy platform, which empowers citizens to propose, debate, and vote on policies, fostering transparency, inclusivity, and collective decision-making.



Laura Cabiscol

European Capital of Democracy Production Coordinator

Laura Cabiscol is a communication and cultural industries graduate (UB) with a deep interest in the intersection of art, culture, and technology. Throughout her career, she has explored how these domains influence and shape individual experiences and society. She has also worked on international projects in both the public and private sectors, fostering spaces for collaboration and exchange. She worked as the production coordinator for the European Capital of Democracy 2023-2024.

> What do you love most about your city?

I love the vibrant neighbourhood life – from the freshness of the new cultural projects the youth are kick-starting, to the different and innovative ways to preserve and reclaim heritage, to the way people interact in the local market.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

It is hard to pick just one, but I'm proud of seeing Barcelona's citizens organise and take to the streets demanding better housing conditions.



Ángela Precht

European Capital of Democracy General Coordinator

Angela Precht is a seasoned journalist working at the intersection of technology and social sciences with extensive experience in project and team management. Ángela has over 25 years' experience working in journalism, communication strategy, community building, and content design across different sectors, including media outlets, social entities, private and public sectors. She has led communication for Decidim.org platform, curator of the technological chapter for the Biennial of Thought 2022 and general coordinator of the European Capital of Democracy Barcelona 23/24. Engagement specialist at the Metropolitan Strategic Plan of Barcelona (PEMB).

> What do you love most about your city?

What I love most about Barcelona is its vibrant neighbourhood life but what truly stands out is its grassroots community culture – local initiatives, cultural projects, and a shared passion for preserving traditions while embracing creativity.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

While challenging to highlight a specific one, what has struck me as particularly relevant is the work that has been carried out for several years now by the public administration to promote inclusion and a gender perspective, aiming to dismantle toxic dynamics in shared spaces such as workplaces, schools, or public services.



Consortium Team

 *Bologna, Italy*



Miles Gualdi

Coordinator of the European & International Projects Unit

Miles Gualdi has a University Degree in International Political Sciences at the University of Milan and a Master's Degree in International Relations at the University of Bologna. He has worked for different Italian local authorities and currently is co-ordinator of the European and International Projects Unit of the Municipality of Bologna.

> What do you love most about your city?

What I love most about Bologna is its liveliness. The presence of a relevant University population and the tradition of civic participation create a fertile soil for social and cultural debate.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

The Council of Bologna, in 1257, approved the Liber Paradisus, containing the first law in Europe that made slavery illegal. Contextually, the City used public money to free 6,000 slaves. It's not a recent achievement, but I think it perfectly paints what Bologna has always stood for.



Eugenio Soldati

Health & Healthy Cities Specialist in the Health, Wellbeing & Personal Autonomy Sector of the Welfare and Community Wellbeing Promotion Department

Eugenio holds a degree in political science and a master's degree in welfare policy. He now works for the Municipality of Bologna's Welfare Department. In his daily work, he deals with health promotion projects and services, in particular for teenagers and young people.

> What do you love most about your city?

The porticoes – a symbol of community.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I'm most proud of Bologna's Citizen Assemblies.



Consortium Team

 *Braga, Portugal*



João Freitas Alcaide

Advisor to the Vice Mayor

João Freitas Alcaide was born and lives in Braga. In terms of academic background, he has a degree in Law from the University of Minho, with a postgraduate qualification in Administrative Law from the same University. Since 2018, he has been working for the Municipality of Braga in the legal services department. Since 2021, he has been an advisor to the Vice Mayor of Braga, who is responsible for the areas of Sport, Youth, Associations, Participation, and Municipal Administration. Along the way, he has been part of different youth associations, which has been very enriching.

> What do you love most about your city?

What I love most about my city is the perfect combination of its beauty and rich history, heritage, and culture with the energy, dynamism, and innovation of its youth.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I believe that Participatory Budgeting has been an excellent opportunity for the community, in its most varied contexts (the city in general, young people, and schools), to see much desired projects realised.



Maria João Silva

Head of the City Council's Youth Unit

Maria João Silva holds a master's degree in Educational Sciences, specialising in Reading Animation, and a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. She has worked at the Municipality of Vila Nova de Famalicão since 2004, coordinating the Educational and Cultural Service of the Municipal Library from 2007 to 2023. She stood out in organising projects to promote reading and culture. Since 2023, she has been part of the Municipality of Braga, assuming the leadership of the Youth Unit in February 2024. She has extensive experience in organising cultural events, managing libraries, and providing training in the fields of reading and education.

> What do you love most about your city?

What I love most about Braga is how the city manages to combine its rich historical tradition with the energy and modernity of being a young and dynamic city.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

The democratic practice I am most proud of in Braga is the city's commitment to giving everyone the opportunity and a voice through the various initiatives developed with and for the community.



Consortium Team

 *Braga, Portugal*



Filipe Silva Fernandes

Advisor to the Mayor of Braga

Filipe is an Advisor to the Mayor of Braga for Foreign Affairs. With an academic background in Political Science and International Relations, his tasks include representing the City of Braga abroad, whether in several international organisations or in bilateral relations with different local governments, establishing bridges and fostering closer relations between Braga and cities and organisations from around the world. He represents Braga in the Global Parliament of Mayors, Eurocities, CityNet, Strong Cities Network, Atlantic Cities, and many other organisations. Additionally, I also work as an urban expert for the European Urban Initiative.

> What do you love most about your city?

What I love most about Braga is its vibrant energy – from cultural festivals to lively street events, the city is full of life all year round.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I'm most proud of Braga's strong democratic ecosystem, promoting the existence of multiple municipal councils dedicated to key areas of the city and encouraging organisations from both public and private sector to collaborate on a regular basis.



Consortium Team

 *Brussels, Belgium*



François-Xavier Leurquin

Head of Department for Bruxelles Participation Service

François-Xavier has a degree in communication completed with a two-year complementary programme in civil and commercial mediation. He used to work for the City Planning Department of the City of Brussels, where he was mostly focused on the short-term rental problem caused by tourism and how it affects the city. He's now responsible for the unit for participatory processes in the city, which tries to involve citizens in the public decisions by organising public consultation, participatory budgets, neighbourhoods councils, and others.

> What do you love most about your city?

I love the diversity of people living here and the chaotic atmosphere of the City of Brussels.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I'm most proud of the culture of concession and conciliation in Belgian society.

Emmeline Everaert

Logistics & Project Coordination for Citizen participation

Emmeline specialises in projects that support social inclusion, sustainability, and community-driven decision-making. Having experience in event planning and communications, she strives to develop chances for meaningful public involvement that make democratic participation a reality.

> What do you love most about your city?

I love Brussels for its rich diversity and ability to combine history, culture, and innovation.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I'm particularly proud of Brussels' commitment to participatory democracy through initiatives like citizen consultations and participatory budgeting, which let citizens directly influence their urban environment and have an impact on policy decisions.



Consortium Team

 *Cascais, Portugal*



Cristina Teixeira

Director of the Department of Management Support

Cristina Teixeira is the Director of the Management Support Department at Cascais City Council. With extensive experience in public administration, she has played a strategic role in coordinating cross-departmental administrative processes, overseeing the transfer of competencies from the central government to the municipality, and managing concessions in the maritime public domain. Throughout her career, she has been actively involved in securing European funding and responding to emerging municipal challenges, such as the reception and integration of refugees. Her commitment to public sector efficiency and administrative innovation contributes to the implementation of strategic projects that strengthen Cascais' institutional position.

> What do you love most about your city?

Cascais is a small city that is home to around 80 different nationalities, creating a vibrant and multicultural community.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I am particularly proud of several democratic initiatives in Cascais, but one that stands out is the current housing project, whereby we transform old houses to provide affordable accommodation to students, teachers, police officers, and other professionals who want to live in Cascais.

Jenny Romero

Project Manager

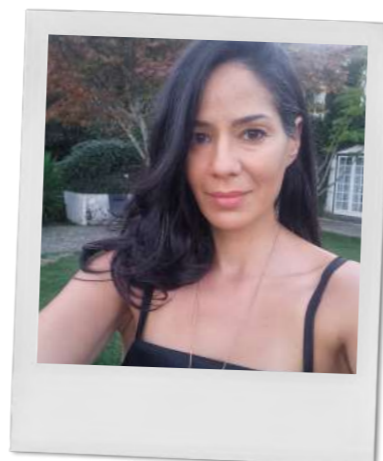
With a background in Theatre and over a decade of experience as an acting coach, Jenny brings a creative and human-centred approach to international project management and communication. Jenny promotes European cooperation and cultural democracy by identifying good public policy practices and suggesting strategic institutional networks for Cascais to join as a partner. Her work focuses on building bridges between local innovation and international collaboration.

> What do you love most about your city?

What I love most about Cascais is the way nature and community come together, from the Atlantic coast to the Sintra mountains, there's a real sense of place and belonging.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I'm proud of how Cascais invests in participatory democracy, especially through meaningful youth engagement and citizen-led projects that truly shape local policies.



Carla Semedo

City Councillor

Carla Nunes Semedo is a City Councillor at Cascais Municipality, where she leads initiatives in social cohesion, urban development, and inclusive public policies. With a focus on fostering collaborative governance and innovative solutions to complex social challenges, her work includes spearheading key programmes, such as Communities in Action. Her expertise spans strategic planning, community engagement, and sustainable development, aiming to create equitable opportunities for all.

> What do you love most about your city?

What I love most about Cascais is the sea – it brings a renewed sense of hope and serenity every day, reflecting the vibrant and dynamic spirit of our city.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I am particularly proud of the Territorial Enhancement Network, an initiative that strengthens social cohesion and urban regeneration and empowers residents from critical urban areas by actively involving them in decision-making processes, ensuring that they have a voice in shaping the future of our city.



Cities Teach

Wednesday 23 December 2023

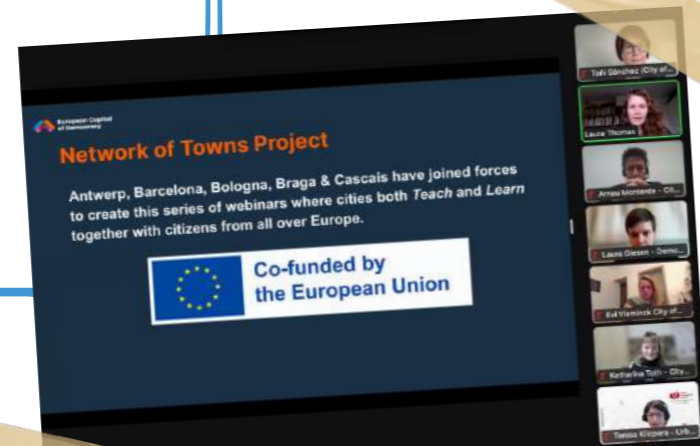
Digital Transformation & Democracy in the City

Hosted by the City of Barcelona, with contributions from the City of Bologna

The first edition of the European City Network's series of webinars focuses on digital transformation and democracy in the city. The City of Barcelona will give us an insight into their ground-breaking digital citizen-participation platform, Decidim, and the City of Bologna will illustrate the use and impact of two city-specific applications as well as their Mobility Management System.

Agenda

11.00 – 11.10	Welcome & Introduction
11.10 – 11.30	Best-Practice Presentation 1: City of Barcelona
11.30 – 11.50	Best Practice Presentation 2: City of Bologna
11.50 – 12:20	Break-Out Sessions
12:20 – 12:30	Summary and Feedback



Speakers



Arnau Monterde

Director of Participation & Democratic Innovation, Barcelona

Arnau is responsible for decidim.barcelona and co-founder of Decidim.org. Head of the Canòdrom Center for Digital and Democratic Innovation. Former coordinator of Technopolitics at the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3-UOC). PhD in Information and Knowledge Society from the UOC.



Giovanni Farneti

Engineer & Project Manager, Bologna

Giovanni is a project manager of regional and European projects and IT expert at the Municipality of Bologna. He is responsible for Action 2.3.1 "Open Laboratories" and Action 6.7.2 of the POR-FESR Axis 6 project. He is the head of the Special Projects of the Municipality of Bologna in the field of digital transformation at a European, national, regional and intersectoral level. He graduated in Electronic Engineering at the University of Bologna and holds a Master's in Management of Technological Innovation for the Public Administration from the University of Bologna.

Insights

[Arnau Monterde, Director of Democratic Innovation Department of Barcelona City Council, presented the Decidim platform](#), which is a free, open-source platform for citizen participation. This platform was developed by the Democratic Innovation Department of Barcelona City Council and works at the city, technical, and community levels to further the development of democratic technological innovation. Decidim is now a global platform for digital democracy, as it has been implemented in 30 countries by 300 public organisations, engaging 3 million participants. The platform facilitates participation spaces, public debates, and participatory budgets, among other forms of digital democracy.

[Giovanni Farneti of Agenda Digitale presented the Municipality of Bologna's Zerodiciotto App, the Mobility Management System, and the Portici App](#). The Zerodiciotto App facilitates communication between parents and Municipal Schools, to report absences and receive real-time notifications from the schools. The Mobility Management System allows two-way communication between the Municipality and residents about how mobility is managed within the city, with efficient communication and distribution of questionnaires and surveys, and subsequent collation and dissemination of the collected data. Lastly, the Portici App monitors the city's porticos with an interactive dashboard that facilitates residents' participation.



Thursday 22 February 2024

Sweating to Make Data-Driven Policies a Reality

Hosted by the City of Barcelona, with guest expert Pau Balcells, Programme Manager of the Municipal Data Office

Our goal is to share with other cities our experience in transitioning to a data-driven public organisation. This includes ideas on where to start the process, strategies for demonstrating the effectiveness of data to those who are sceptical or resistant to change, and identifying potential roadblocks that should not block progress.

We wish to emphasise that while technology is a crucial enabler, it is not the only focus of data projects. We advocate the establishment of new roles to effectively harness the power of data within the organisation.

Finally, we highlight the need to distinguish between a business intelligence tool and a data analytics project. It is important to recognise that data initiatives go beyond the creation of dashboards – they involve a holistic approach to gain meaningful insights that contribute to informed decision making.

Agenda

11:00 – 11:15	Welcome & Introduction
11:15 – 11:40	Presentation
11:40 – 11:50	Questions and Answers
11:50 – 11:55	Summary and Feedback
11:55 – 12:00	Outlook and Overview of Webinar Series



Speakers



Pau Balcells

Programme Manager, Municipal Data Office

Pau Balcells is Program Officer at the Barcelona City Council Data Office, devoted to data governance & to promote data driven policies, acting as liaison officer with the national & international data ecosystem (public & private stakeholders). As main milestones in his role must be mentioned the "Government Measure for Ethical Data Management" which marks a milestone with Data Office creation at the City Hall and the EC funded project "DECODE". He is involved in research & innovation for nearly the last 20 years, currently in the digital economy working on developing data science for better policy making and programs evaluation but, formerly working in health research centres, linked to genomics, epidemics & vaccines (including the first WHO recommended malaria vaccine).

> What do you love most about your city?

Barcelona is a city which has always fought for being a unique place where the sense of community has a leading role.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

Neighbourhood councils are a practice which is really valuable for us as citizens in order to ensure all voices are heard. I do love walking around the old part of town and end the walk in the sea frontline especially in winter time.

Insights

[Pau Balcells, Programme Manager of the Municipal Data Office of the City of Barcelona, presented the challenges and opportunities of using data to drive municipal policies.](#) As technology continues to advance rapidly, politicians struggle to use data to enhance democratic processes. But data can be used as a rich growth medium for policies, as well as to evaluate their efficacy and to focus services based on citizens' needs. One important factor is to have a robust Data Governance Model in order to safely and transparently manage data while making it both usable and available. It's also prudent to remember that perfection is the enemy of progress and that an agile approach which delivers short-term results helps to prove the usefulness of data when developing or evaluating policies.



Cities Meet

Monday 25 - Wednesday 27 March 2024

Tackling Social & Climate Challenges with Brussels' Solutions

Impressions

Members of the European City Network gathered together in the City of Brussels to discuss, learn, and exchange with a focus on "tackling social and climate challenges with Brussels' solutions". This time, we were joined by representatives from Antwerp, Barcelona, Bologna, Bratislava, Cascais, Gdańsk, Kyiv, Rzeszów, Tirana, Valongo, and Vienna.

The meeting began as all meetings in Brussels begin, on a beautiful sunny day! As participants began to arrive and gathered on the 8th floor of the new Brucity (Brussels City Council) building, we admired the view over the rooftops of the city. After kicking off the meeting in Brussels with a warm welcome and comprehensive introduction to the meeting's focus points, it was off to the rooftop for an obligatory windswept group photograph!

The next day was dedicated to immersive visits around Brussels, showcasing sustainable initiatives that underscore "Climate, Green City and Participation". The day began with a tour of Tivoli GreenCity, a pioneering eco-district that harmoniously combines innovative living spaces with sustainability. Emphasising green construction and energy efficiency, it fosters active community involvement and encourages citizen participation in its development. This district is also home to Greenbizz, a hub which offers a dynamic environment for sustainable businesses to grow, strengthening the local economy while creating jobs. Here, entrepreneurs can innovate as they strive to contribute to a greener economy and a more sustainable society. The group were able to gain a deeper understanding of some of the sustainable businesses which began in the Greenbizz hub:



- Snappies introduces a practical solution which drastically cuts disposable nappy waste by providing nurseries with an efficient, cost-effective alternative. This initiative aims to significantly reduce the environmental impact of child care, by providing a nappy-washing service that enables municipal nurseries to use reusable nappies instead of disposable options.
- The FabLab is a hub for digital manufacturing innovation, offering public access to computer-controlled fabrication tools. Here, any citizen can learn digital design and fabrication, as the team empowers individuals to bring their ideas to life, fostering civic creativity.

A short stroll over the road took us to the BE-HERE Business Centre where we were able to learn about the Babbeir cargo bike, which has revolutionised public interaction in Brussels. This versatile cargo bike enables vibrant policy discussions and community activities to be hosted across the city, fostering face-to-face dialogues with citizens from all walks of life.

Following lunch, the group split into two groups, with one group going on a guided walk of the L28 Park with visits to Permafungi, the Gare Maritime, and a CyCLO bike repair shop. The other group returned to Brucity for presentations on the GoodMove Pentagone mobility initiative, the city's heat-network initiative, as well as the Troc&Brol project.

The ECoD City Network's meeting in Brussels was concluded on the following morning with insightful presentations on Brussels' approach to climate challenges at the Old City Hall. These presentations provided an overview of the Citizens' Assemblies of both the City and Region of Brussels, followed by a guided tour of the historic Brussels City Hall. As several member cities are also currently planning and conducting citizens' assemblies, these presentations provided useful and detailed insights into how Brussels overcame some of the challenges associated with citizens' assemblies. We learnt about how methods of citizen engagement were developed based on thorough evaluation of citizens' experiences.

With European cities being at the forefront of today's social, climate, and environmental challenges, the ECoD City Network's visit provided our members with insights into Brussels' innovative and ambitious initiatives which face these challenges. These groundbreaking solutions have been developed by public authorities, entrepreneurs, and civic society. City specialists from across Europe were able to explore how Brussels formulates its public policies through close consultation with citizens and stakeholders across various sectors. Using real-life examples, Brussels' stakeholders illustrated the tools and strategies used to transform the city while engaging both its citizens and other city-users.

We want to thank our colleagues from Brussels for hosting us, presenting their projects, and helping to make the meeting happen.



Thursday 14 March 2024

Climate Assemblies, Green Cities & Biodiversity

Hosted by the City of Brussels with contributions from the Municipality of Valongo and the City of Vienna

As climate change continues to shape our society, many municipalities are developing tools to guide their actions in reducing their carbon footprint. During this session, we will explore case studies proposed by three different cities to better understand the nature and increasing importance of these Climate Plans, as well as how the governance of these plans influences their design and implementation.

Agenda

- 14:00 – 14:05 **Arrival & Welcome**
- 14:05 – 14:10 **Introduction to Climate Assemblies, Green Cities & Biodiversity**
- 14:10 – 14:25 **Best-Practice Presentation 1: Cities in Transition, City of Brussels**
- 14:25 – 14:40 **Best Practice Presentation 2: BiodiverCities, Municipality of Valongo**
- 14:40 – 14:55 **Best-Practice Presentation 3: Climate Team, City of Vienna**
- 14:55 – 15:15 **Break-Out Sessions: deep-dive into each best-practice example**
- 15:15 – 15:25 **Summary & Feedback Round**
- 15:25 – 15:30 **Outlook**



Speakers



Marion Julien

Coordinator for the Climate and Cities in Transition Team – City of Brussels

Marion Julien has a strong interest in sustainability and climate-related initiatives, as evidenced by her engagement with Belfius' sustainability team, and a focus on environmental and social governance within the financial sector.

Insights

Marion Julien highlighted the importance of on-the-ground citizen engagement. She presented the City of Brussels' use of a cargo bike to reach citizens where they are, thus lowering the threshold for engagement. She also reflected on the challenge of motivating and adequately compensating participants for the long-term engagement required to co-create Climate Plans.



Tiago Koch

Biologist and Ecosystems Specialist, Environment Division – Municipality of Valongo

In his role, Tiago Koch contributes to the municipality's environmental policies and sustainability initiatives. His involvement in the SHARED GREEN DEAL project reflects his commitment to promoting sustainable practices and enhancing environmental governance at the local level.

Tiago Koch presented the BiodiverCities project which aims to tackle the urban heat-island effect and promote and support biodiversity. Project activities include creating green city walks and BIOteca biodiverse book-exchange stations, implementing invasive-species control measures, and creating pollinator gardens and bug hotels. Citizen participants are involved in an on-going data-collection process to evaluate and improve engagement activities.



Katharina Toth

Vienna Climate Team Consultant, Department for Energy Planning – City of Vienna

Katharina Toth actively contributes to the development and implementation of sustainable energy strategies and climate initiatives for the city. Her work focuses on integrating participatory approaches to enhance local climate action and urban sustainability. Previously, Toth served as a scientific researcher and doctoral candidate at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) in Vienna.

Katharina Toth gave us an overview of the Vienna Climate Team process, focussing on the Citizens' Jury. The Citizens' Jury is made up of a group of residents from a district, who are randomly selected while taking into account socio-demographic factors. The Vienna Climate Mosaic game helps jury members understand the complex interactions of various climate actions, with decisions made using a three-tier rating system.



Thursday 16 April 2024

Citizens' Assemblies - How and Why?

Hosted by the City of Brussels with guest experts Dimitri Lemaire and Louise Humblet from Particitiz

Citizens' assemblies are a key tool for involving a diversity of citizens directly in matters of public interest. They embody an inclusive approach to governance, giving everyone an equal voice in the decision-making process. As citizens' assemblies can take a variety of forms, the aim of this webinar is to familiarise participants with these processes and answer the questions that arise when setting up a citizens' assembly.

Agenda

15:00 – 15:15	Welcome & Introduction
15:15 – 15:40	Presentation
15:40 – 15:50	Questions and Answers
15:50 – 15:55	Summary and Feedback
15:55 – 16:00	Overview and Outlook



Speakers



Dimitri Lemaire

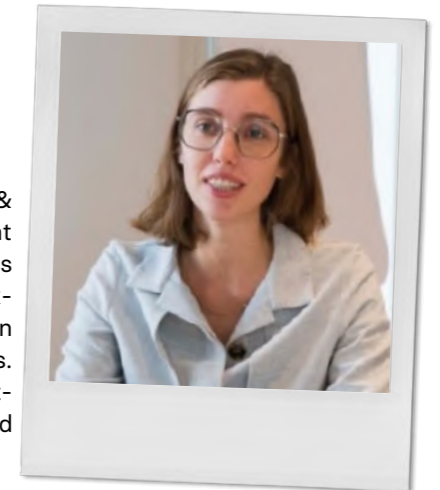
Director of Particitiz

Dimitri Lemaire, Belgo-British, founded Particitiz in 2015, with the objective to enhance the development of public policies by making them more inclusive and equitable. To achieve this, the organisation leverages sortition, collective intelligence methodologies, and a strong culture of deliberation. Over the past decade, the Particitiz' team has designed and facilitated numerous citizens' panels, structured dialogue processes, neighbourhood councils, and participatory budgets at local, regional, national, European, and international levels.

Louise Humblet

Senior Consultant at Particitiz

Louise Humblet is a professional engaged with Particitiz – Participation & Citizenship, an organization dedicated to fostering democratic engagement and civic participation. Based in Brussels, Belgium, she is involved in initiatives that promote citizen involvement in democratic processes. Her academic background includes studies at Universiteit Gent. Louise actively participates in international conferences focused on democracy and deliberative practices. For instance, she attended the annual conference of the Democracy R&D network in Copenhagen, where the Particitiz team engaged in discussions and debates on democratic innovation.



Insights

[Dimitri Lemaire and Louise Humblet from Particitiz walked us through how Citizens' Assemblies are successfully implemented.](#) These basic conditions are required before you begin such a process, and some of the most common challenges faced along the way. Their presentation covered the five steps of implementation:

1. Ensuring there's genuine political support and will to implement the outcomes;
2. Setting the agenda, with an open question defining the focal topic;
3. Selecting the right experts to present the information in a transparent and accessible way;
4. Designing the recruitment, methods, and follow-up procedures;
5. Thorough evaluation to ensure future processes improve based on participants' experiences.

They also highlighted the value in implementing Citizens Assemblies – citizens are experts in the field of their own experiences, which are invaluable to capture and explore when it comes to effective policy making.



Cities Meet

Tuesday 14 - Thursday 16 May 2024

Showcasing the City of Antwerp's Youth Participation projects and initiatives

Impressions

The Belgian sun shone on us once again, as representatives from 13 European countries came together in the City of Antwerp for the 7th European Capital of Democracy's City Network Meeting. We met at the Central Station to pick up our bikes at the beginning of a three-day programme which focused on showcasing the City of Antwerp's Youth Participation projects and initiatives. As the group prepared to cycle through the busy city centre, some of us thought back to the last time we rode a bike... for a few of us that was a very long time ago!

First stop was MAS (Museum Aan de Stroom), a groundbreaking museum about global connections between people. Here we got to know each other a little better and received a warm welcome from the Alderman for Education, Youth and Integration, Jinnih Beels. We also learnt more about the City of Antwerp's Youth Participation Policy, with an insightful presentation on the ComPas programme. After a short Flemish Break, we got stuck into an interactive workshop on how to motivate adolescents using the ABC model. Later that evening, we were back on our bikes and cycling through some of Antwerp's luscious Garden Streets, which were designed through a participative process involving the residents.



Our destination – Betonne Jeugd (Concrete Youth), an organisation for young people in poverty who unite and emancipate themselves through leisure activities. It offers a safe home-base, a warm nest where they can come and chill, play football, cook together, and be young. We experienced one of the offers young people visiting this organisation enjoy – live pizza bakery and a delicious dinner! The following day was not the picture of sunshine we were getting used to, but the damp weather didn't dampen the mood as we arrived at StampMedia, Flanders' first youth media agency amplifying the voice of young people. We saw the impressive range of facilities, equipment, and knowledgeable mentors available to all young people who have an interest in journalism or sharing their own stories. A quick hop across the alleyway and we were in the Permeke Youth Library – created in collaboration with adolescents, this is a space they can call their own and use to explore writing and art, or use as a social meeting place.

A short bike ride took us to SPRK, where we admired the multifunctional space made available for young people to explore urban sports and culture. We then made our way to STORMKOP, an impressive organisation located in the city's old dry docks (Droogdokken) which is an

out-of-the-ordinary free state for young and not-so-young adventurers immersed in a world of art, philosophy, science, sustainability, and adventure. After a lunch break, we explored the site with an audio guide outlining the substantial redevelopment plans for the site.

The sun started to peek through the clouds, as we set off on our bikes once again to explore some of the results of the City of Antwerp's Play Web Policy in situ. The City of Antwerp has been committed to child-friendliness and greening in urban development for years, and have undertaken 17 different studies into play-space webs. As we cycled through these areas, our colleagues from Antwerp explained how it was converted into effective play space, with reflections on the various challenges and difficulties. Some of the group went back to the hotel for a rest, while the rest went exploring a little further, visiting the pedestrian and cyclist tunnel that goes under the River Scheldt, returning on the electric ferry!

On the last evening, we made our way to TRIX Youth Centre, a music venue and centre for aspiring artists, with several stages, workshop spaces, and practice rooms hosting a network of artists, music lovers, as well as art and youth organisations. These alliances stimulate creativity and discov-

ery and bring in a diverse audience. Here, after a tour of the impressive facilities, we enjoyed dinner backstage before we got the chance to shake off the drizzle from our bike ride and move to the beats created by international artists performing at the venue.

Thankfully we all made it home in one piece, and we mustered the courage to face a very rainy last morning in Antwerp. Dropping off the bikes first thing, we walked to the EcoHuis (Eco House), a centre Antwerp's residents can visit for inspiration, information, advice, and financial support. Here we learnt about the range of initiatives taking place to depave the city, turning grey into green, with green facades, streets, and roofs, as well as growing garlands. We also discovered how school playgrounds are being transformed into more natural, green environments that invite intuitive and healthy play.

Last but not least, we took a short walk to Jes Youth Centre, where we heard about the inspiring ways in which the young people of the city can be reached, brought together, and supported to overcome difficulties they and their communities face. Here, as with every organisation we visited, we were greeted and shown around by people who were undeniably passionate about their vocation and the work that they do. Throughout our stay in Antwerp, the group was inspired by the unique places that have been transformed into spaces which not only welcome the city's youth, but were, more often than not, built up and designed by them too! Thank you to all the organisations who hosted us and to our fantastic colleagues in the City of Antwerp, for the work that they do, day-in day-out, and the inspiring programme they put together!



Tuesday 16 July 2024

Youth Participation

Hosted by the City of Antwerp with contributions from the City of Barcelona

Four experts in their respective fields will share insights into how their city works to make public spaces more friendly to the youngest inhabitants, as well as how young people are involved in democratic city development. They will share their practical knowledge of implementing such initiatives, and will also discuss the challenges they faced and how these were overcome. Following the presentations, breakout sessions provide an opportunity for the audience to dive deeper into each example of youth participation.

Agenda

10:30-10:40	Welcome & Introduction
10:40-10:55	Best-Practice Presentation 1: City of Antwerp
10:55-11:10	Best Practice Presentation 2: City of Barcelona
11:10-11:25	Best-Practice Presentations 3 & 4: City of Barcelona
11:25-11:45	Break-Out Sessions
11:45-11:55	Summary & Feedback Round
11:55-12:00	Overview & Outlook

Insights

Laia Pined shared the City of Barcelona's experience of implementing the "Children Have Their Say" project. Barcelona takes a rights-based approach to youth participation – children have the right to be heard and it's important that the City understands children's wellbeing from their own perspective. Interactive workshops with over 2000 children resulted in the Children's Agenda. One major challenge is ensuring adequate representation of the group of children involved in developing the agenda, which can be partly mitigated by encouraging peer-to-peer communication about the initiative and what it means for the children of the city.

Wim Seghers gave us an introduction to the "playspace web" method and how it's developed in his presentation "how to create a child-friendly network in your city". His presentation highlighted the importance of taking children seriously as experts of their own neighbourhoods. They know the best and the worst places in the area and can also provide useful data on which routes they take to move around the city and by which modes of transport. The City of Antwerp introduces play features that allow children to jump on/off, follow and interact with the built environment. Often these features also fit with the City's plans to green the urban environment and make it more climate resilient, for example with play fountains cooling down the youngsters on hot summers' days.

Speakers



Wim Seghers

Play Space Expert at the City of Antwerp's Youth Department

Wim has worked for more than 15 years as an expert on play space policy for the city of Antwerp. He has retrained himself as a socio-cultural worker to the themes of play-space, child-friendly public-space planning, and sustainable mobility. He guides the nine districts within the city on their play-space policy and has advised dozens of designs of playgrounds and guided more than 10 playspace-web plans.

Laia Pineda

Childhood and Adolescence Institute Barcelona

Laia Pineda is a sociologist with a postgraduate degree in local and regional development. She has subsequently trained in leadership and social innovation in non-governmental organisations and, more recently, in children's rights at the Global Human Rights Education and Training Centre and in child and youth policies at the School of Government of the Complutense University of Madrid. She is currently the director of the Institut Infància i Adolescència de Barcelona, a specialised unit promoted by the Barcelona City Council whose mission is to support the City Council in its role of guaranteeing the rights of children and adolescents and in transforming the city into a friendly place for children and adolescents to grow up and live.



Konstantina Chysostomou

Activist at the Estel Coop, Barcelona

Social architect and shareholder-employee at Estel Coop, based in Spain and working on projects across the country and Europe. My approach to urban strategies, public space design, and citizen cooperation is shaped by diverse experiences and a passion for creating inclusive public spaces. I'm dedicated to empowering civic engagement and democratizing urban environments, whether in local neighbourhoods or regional contexts. Specialising in social analysis of urban spaces, I focus on addressing inequality, segregation, and displacement, proposing cooperative frameworks that foster resilience and inclusivity. Through intercultural, intergenerational, and gendered perspectives, I work to co-create environments that reflect community needs. My tools include maps, infographics, and visual storytelling to document and transform urban life collaboratively.



Insights

Konstantina Chysostomou presented the "Volem Decidir!" (We want to decide!) process which took place in the City of Barcelona. This process empowers children and young people to participate in city life in a way that they find fulfilling. Like the "Children Have Their Say" project, children of eight years and older took part in the process, which also consisted of workshops which aimed to find out more about the children's community, topics of interest, and ideas about participation. Broken into two age groups (8-11 year old and 12 to 17 years old), each group had different priorities and topics of interest. The youngest children focused on bullying, poverty, and protecting animals, while the older group were interested in well-being, public spaces, and housing.



Wednesday 31 July 2024

Democratic, Social & Digital Inclusion

Hosted by ECoD NPO with contributions from the City of Linz and the City of Kyiv

This webinar is hosted by ECoD with contributions from the City of Linz and the City of Kyiv. Both these cities strive to involve their citizens at a local level using innovative participation methods. In this way they improve democratic and social inclusion of their citizens. Following these two presentations there will be a Q&A session.

Agenda

10:30-10:40	Welcome & Introduction
10:40-10:55	Best-Practice Presentation 1: City of Linz
10:55-11:10	Best Practice Presentation 2: City of Kyiv
11:10-11:30	Break-Out Sessions
11:30-11:40	Summary & Feedback Round
11:40-11:55	Sneak-Peek into the call for the next ECoD 2026!
11:55-12:00	Overview & Outlook

Insights

Silvia Hackl presented the Create Your City initiative. This project came about as a positive response to a brief period of civil unrest in 2022 where, predominantly young people, rioted in the streets of Linz.

Victoriaia Itskovych presented the city's experience of implementing Citizen-Driven Democracy. The on-going conflict in Ukraine has brought into sharp focus how digital tools are particularly agile and useful in the face of a rapidly changing security situation. An app which had previously facilitated "ordinary" citizen life (parking passes, public transport tickets, petitions, etc.) has quickly been adapted into a life-saving tool which alerts citizens to air raids and maps the city's bomb shelters.

Speakers



Victoriaia Itskovych

Chief Information Officer of the City of Kyiv City

Victoriaia Itskovych is the Chief Information Officer (CIO) of Kyiv City, where she oversees the city's IT Department and leads the development of digital services. Specializing in Smart City planning and IoT technologies, she is dedicated to integrating data-driven solutions to enhance urban infrastructure and public services. Under her leadership, Kyiv has made significant strides in digital transformation, cybersecurity, and international collaboration for sustainable urban development.

> What do you love most about your city?

I love Kyiv's resilience and its people, who continuously adapt and innovate, even in the face of challenges.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I am most proud of our city's open and transparent governance, which empowers citizens to actively participate in shaping the future of Kyiv through digital services and e-governance initiatives.



Silvia Hackl

Head of Innovation & Participation in the Department for Economy, Innovation, Climate Protection & the EU of the City of Linz

Before I started at the City of Linz in the Department of Economy, Innovation, Climate Protection and EU in the area of innovation and participation, I gained a lot of experience in the advertising industry and in marketing.

> What do you love most about your city?

The city of Linz has a very good innovation ecosystem – as the third largest city in Austria, it is just big enough to have excellent educational institutions, industrial and commercial enterprises on site and just small enough to have a good overview of the network.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

Our participation platform at the "Innovationshauptplatz" utilises Go Vocal's expertise in digital participation where the people of Linz can use it around the clock to make suggestions for the development of the city and better coexistence in the city.



Thursday 12 September 2024

Sociocracy - Democracy as it could be

Hosted by ECoD NPO with guest expert Barbara Strauch

Democracy means rule by the people, while Sociocracy means governance by the associates – we decide together. The core values of Sociocracy include self-determination, togetherness, and self-organisation. In this webinar, we learn about Gerard Endenburg's Sociocratic Circle Organisation Method (SCM) - the practice of Sociocracy - and the four basic principles on which it was developed: consent decision-making, circles as organisational structure, double linking, and open elections.

Agenda

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 11:00 - 11:15 | Welcome & Introduction |
| 11:15 - 11:35 | Sociocracy examples from 4 European Cities; |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbourhood-based Youth Council of the Municipality of Thermy, Greece • Nachbarschaftsrat (Neighbourhood Council) in the City of Vienna's Sonnwend-Viertel, Austria • SONEC Sociocratic Neighbourhood Circle "Am Bogen" in Augsburg, Germany • Citizen participation and consent-decisions in the City Council of Utrechtse-Heuvelrug, the Netherlands |
| 11:35 - 11:55 | Questions and Answers |
| 11:55 - 12:00 | Summary and Outlook |

Speakers



Barbara Strauch

Certified Sociocracy Expert CSE and Auditor for Educational Programmes in the Association of German-speaking Sociocracy Centers

Barbara Strauch is co-founder of the Sociocracy Center Austria and has set up training for sociocracy experts for the German-speaking region. Since 2012, she has personally participated in more than 50 sociocracy introduction processes and is the author of the standard book "Sociocracy".

> What do you love most about your city?

I am very grateful for what politicians have organised together in our city over the last decades, despite the difficult majority system and fights between parties.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

For me, shared decision making with consent, provided as a toolset in Sociocracy, is the future of democracy.

Naya Tselepi

Researcher & Lecturer at the University of Thessaly, CSE, Elliniko Kentro Sociokratias

Naya Tselepi is a Postdoctoral researcher and trainer with a PhD in Human Geography. She has collaborated in various research projects of Universities in Greece and Europe with main areas of interest in (educational) commons, collaborative governance, participatory planning, migration, mapping and research methodologies.

> What do you love most about your city?

I love the spontaneous collective actions of citizens of all ages who try to make their neighbourhood & livelihood better.

Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I am proud of the Youth Council of the Municipality of Thermi because it is the first Youth Council in Europe following the Sociocratic Circle Method that promotes inclusion and consent.



Pia Haertinger

City Councillor in Augsburg & Chairwomen of Sociocracy Centre Augsburg

Since 2014, Pia has been a City councillor in Augsburg initiating the sociocratically-moderated Round Table Jobcentre with executives of the city administration of the City of Augsburg.

> What do you love most about your city?

I love that Augsburg is a multicultural, beautiful city with the title "City of Peace". Thus there are many activities and programmes to strengthen social cohesion on the basis of a close cooperation between the City administration, politics, religious groups, educational institutions and civil society.

Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I am most proud that we have a liberal democracy with fundamental human rights, free speech and the right of participation.



Thursday 12 September 2024



Florian Bauernfeind

Consultant and Facilitator for Participation, CSE, CEO of Sociocracy Center Austria

Florian Bauernfeind is a Vienna-based facilitator and consultant with over a decade of experience in urban and organisational contexts. He has supported numerous cooperatives, community organisations, and enterprises in developing participatory governance structures and facilitating deliberative decision-making processes. As the founder of the Sociocracy Center Austria,

> What do you love most about your city?

What I love most about my city is the emerging culture of civic engagement and community-driven initiatives. Vienna is also a city that is both relatively safe and welcoming to a diverse population. The well-functioning administration and high-quality public services—such as childcare, education, social housing, and healthcare—make it an inclusive and livable city for all.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I am most proud of the implementation of sociocratic decision-making in various community and cooperative projects. Enabling inclusive, structured, and dynamic participation ensures that diverse voices are heard and that collective decisions are made effectively. In particular, the Sociocratic Neighbourhood Council in Vienna has been a great example of how democratic participation can strengthen local communities and enhance governance.

Rita Mayrhofer

Senior Researcher, Boku University (ILAP, Vienna) and Chairwomen of Sociocracy Center Austria

Rita Mayrhofer, DI Dr. is a senior researcher at the Institute of Landscape Planning at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna.

> What do you love most about your city?

What I love about the city of Vienna, besides the many other things that make it the most liveable city in the world, is its housing policy: strict rent controls, high levels of investment in housing construction and the promotion of social diversity ensure affordable housing and prevent gentrification.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

Even if not everything succeeds and some ideas have so far only been set out in strategy papers, Vienna's planning departments are endeavouring to combine social, ecological and economic planning in order to create a liveable, future-oriented city and Vienna has proven to be less susceptible to neoliberal promises than in many other cities.



Insights

Barbara Strauch, Certified Sociocracy Expert CSE and Auditor for Educational Programmes in the Association of German-speaking Sociocracy Centers, gave us an introduction to Sociocracy and its four founding principles:

- 1- Consent principle – decision-making with consent
- 2- Circle principle – semi-autonomous circles
- 3- Double linking – circles are always connected by two people
- 4- Open elections – elect people for tasks and roles by consent

She then handed over to the four guest speakers who gave us in insight into their experiences of sociocracy in practice:

Naya Tselepi, Researcher & Lecturer at the University of Thessaly, CSE, Elliniko Kentro Sociokratias, spoke about the first sociocracy-based Youth Council. Also borrowing from the Indian concept of "neighbourocracy", the Youth Council managed to reinvigorate the local youth community to engage in local activities and actions.

– Florian Bauernfeind, Consultant and Facilitator for Participation, CSE, CEO of Sociocracy Center Austria, gave us an insight into how the Sonnwend District in Vienna is empowering its residents to take meaningful action to address local issues by implementing a sociocratic neighbourhood council.

– Pia Haertinger, Dr.Phil., City Councillor in the City of Augsburg and Chairwomen of Sociocracy Center Augsburg, presented the regeneration of a neglected area into a playground guided by sociocratic practitioners. A key learning from this process is that patience, persistence and creativity builds a community from the ground up.

– Rita Mayrhofer, Dr.DI Senior Researcher, Boku University (ILAP, Vienna) and Chairwomen of Sociocracy Center Austria, spoke about a group of villages who implemented sociocratic decision-making at the local council level. This process resulted in greater levels of trust in political representatives and generally more political engagement.



Cities Meet

Tuesday 15 - Thursday 17 October 2024

Senior & Intergenerational Participation in Braga

Impressions

On a mid-Autumn's day 38 European City Network members, from 13 European counties, gathered at [Braga's Educational Farm](#). Here we were welcomed by **Filipe Fernandes**, Advisor to the Mayor, who told us how school children and the elderly volunteer at the Quinta, which provides food for local care homes and schools alike. In this way, the Quinta engages people across the generations as the elderly share their knowledge about traditional farming practices, while the youngsters enthusiastically harvest and process the produce.

Following this warm welcome address, **Joaquim Castro de Freitas** gave us an introduction to Braga's intergenerational policies, addressing both the challenges the city faces in terms of multicultural integration across religions and generations. We also learnt about the City of Braga's progress in terms of becoming a certified Child-Friendly City. After a short walk around the farm the group regathered for a traditional Portuguese evening meal.

The next day, we walked to [Braga's Youth Centre](#), which doubles up as a Youth Hostel. This not only facilitates engagement with people of all generations from around the world, but also means the Centre is financially self-sustaining.



Here we also took the opportunity to use their dynamic living room space for a workshop in which our member cities could take a deeper dive into some of the common challenges they face in terms of Senior & Intergenerational Participation. Using the Personas methodology, we focused on 3 common challenges: the culture of aging; public spaces for all generations; and, digital participation and integration.

After lunch and a short coffee break, we visited the [Human Power Hub](#). Here, **Carlos de Sousa Santos**, co-founder of the Human Power Hub, presented Braga's Social Innovation Centre's experience of running intergenerational programmes. This Social Innovation Centre establishes a hybrid model of social innovation which combines the strengths of civil society, the public, private and educational sectors, and citizens in a disruptive way. We were given a tour of the facilities, and even allowed to play with their lego!

We then learnt more about the current projects to come out of the Innovation Centre, namely ACT 0 to 100 and UM novo lar (A New Home). The former project looks to combat social exclusion and loneliness, with a particular focus on the Roma com-

munity. By promoting interconnection between different generations and fostering empowerment and autonomy throughout a person's life, ACT 0 to 100 reinforces social and intergenerational cohesion. Weheras Um novo lar promotes an intergenerational living experience through the sharing of accommodation between a senior person and a university student.

After a long day of intensive workshops and presentations, the group enjoyed a networking drinks reception. A short break allowed participants to explore a little of Braga's historic city center before we gathered again for an evening meal.

On the final day, we once again strolled together through Braga's streets and into the Municipal Market, which is host to [Braga's Senior Academy](#). Here we were treated to a fantastic performance of traditional music, singing and dancing by some of Braga's oldest residents. It was a wonderfully heartwarming end to a fantastic few days learning more about how to engage citizens of all generations. We rounded up the visit with a Reflection Round where we gathered personal and professional highlights, as well as feedback on how to improve the experience for next time.

It only remains for me to extend our thanks once again to the team in Braga for a very memorable experience which left us all inspired by the wonderful people we met!



Cities Learn

Wednesday 30 October 2024

Intergenerational Approach of Braga's Entrepreneurial Impact

Hosted by the City of Braga with guest expert Carlos de Sousa Santos

In this Webinar, hosted by the City of Braga, we will learn how social entrepreneurs can benefit from social entrepreneurship acceleration programmes that join different generations in co-creation spaces. Carlos de Sousa Santos, co-founder of the Human Power Hub – Braga's Social Innovation Center, presents his experience of running intergenerational programmes. The Human Power Hub Social Innovation Center establishes a hybrid model of social innovation which combines the strengths of civil society, the public, private and educational sectors, and citizens in a disruptive way.

Speakers



Carlos de Sousa Santos

Co-Founder and Acceleration Programmes Manager of the Human Power Hub

Carlos de Sousa Santos is a specialist in Service Design, Design Thinking and LEGO® Serious Play®, having developed several, Strategic Papers, Integrated Action Plans, URBACT Networks, as well as in the field of Youth, such as the Municipal Youth Plan of Santarém and the Municipal Youth Plan of Gaia 2.0 and the Porto Metropolitan Area Youth Strategic position in recent years. Carlos de Sousa Santos is a co-author of the European Quality Label for Youth-Friendly Cities | 100% Youth City and its methodology, as well as the Youth Policy Innovation Laboratory of AMP and its methodology.

What do you love most about your city?

The Holistic perspective towards Urban Innovation.

Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

Assembleia de Moradores and Viva o Bairro Innovation.

Agenda

10:00 - 10:10	Welcome & Introduction
10:10 - 10:30	Presentation
10:30 - 10:50	Questions and Answers
10:50 - 11:00	Summary and Outlook



Insights

Carlos de Sousa Santos, Co-Founder and Acceleration Programmes Manager of the Human Power Hub, spoke to us about Braga's intergenerational approach to entrepreneurship, which is fostered and supported by various programmes coming out of the Human Power Hub – the City of Braga's Social Innovation Centre. Carlos presented his experience of running intergenerational programmes and discussed how the "Quadruple Helix" model is used to further integrate collaborative approaches to policy development. The Quadruple Helix is a hybrid model of social innovation which combines the strengths of civil society, the public, private and educational sectors, and citizens in a disruptive way.



Wednesday 20 November 2024

Three best-practice examples of Senior & Intergenerational Participation

Hosted by ECoD NPO with contributions from the City of Antwerp, the City of Barcelona and the City of Bratislava

The City of Antwerp collaborates with DUO for a JOB to present their intergenerational approach to tackling the issue of unemployment. DUO for a JOB is a partner organisation sponsored by the Antwerp's City Council which has over 10 years of experience organising intergenerational and intercultural mentoring in Antwerp and other European cities. By connecting job seekers from migrant backgrounds with experienced mentors over 50, the organisation aims to promote labour equality while valuing the expertise of seniors.

The City of Barcelona presents the Cibernarium Digital-Skill Test – an intersectional and data-driven approach to fostering digital inclusion. This innovative online tool helps citizens assess their digital skills and offers personalized recommendations for Cibernarium's free, citywide online training activities. Moreover, by factoring in socio-economic factors such as age, income, immigration status, and education level; the aggregated results provide a detailed overview of Barcelona's digital literacy landscape, allowing for tailored policies and programmes to address unique local needs and barriers.

The City of Bratislava gives an overview of their project "Support for Active Ageing and Participation of Seniors". Their presentation covers the activities and measures taken as part of this project, including the Council of Seniors for the Rights of Elderly Citizens, the Summer Senior University, and the subsidy programme "Bratislava for All" which offers financial support to NGOs which focus on intergenerational solidarity and the improvement of quality of life for senior residents in Bratislava.

Agenda

10:30 - 10:35	Arrival & Welcome
10:35 - 10:40	Introduction
10:40 - 10:55	Best-Practice Presentation 1: City of Antwerp
10:55 - 11:10	Best Practice Presentation 2: City of Barcelona
11:10 - 11:25	Best-Practice Presentation 3: City of Bratislava
11:25 - 11:50	Break-Out Sessions
11:50 - 11:55	Summary and Feedback
11:55 - 12:00	Overview and Outlook

Speakers



Andrea Bardyn

Deputy Branch Director at Duo for a Job

Background in diversity and inclusion policy design and deputy director at DUO for a JOB, a European non-profit organization with over ten years of expertise in intergenerational and intercultural mentorship.



Eva Surovková

Head of Department of Social Support for Seniors and People with Disabilities for the City of Bratislava

Eva Surovková is a trained social worker and psychologist. She works for the City of Bratislava, leading a team focused on providing social support and assistance to people with disabilities.



Laura Copete

Digital Inclusion Manager at Barcelona Activa

Policy analyst and development professional with extensive experience in advocacy, public policy, and project management. Her professional trajectory includes work with think tanks, NGOs, international organizations, and local government agencies, focusing on socioeconomic and digital inclusion.

Insights

[Andrea Bardyn, Deputy Branch Director at Duo for a Job and Marije Plantinga, Project Leader for Youth Unemployment for the City of Antwerp](#), described how the city works with DUO for a JOB to tackle the issue of unemployment using an intergenerational and intercultural approach to mentoring. By connecting young job seekers from migrant backgrounds with experienced mentors over 50, the organisation aims to promote labour equality while valuing the expertise of seniors. The results speak for themselves, with over 70% of mentees finding employment within 12 months, while also reporting improved language skills and an expanded network.

[Laura Copete Digital Inclusion Manager at Barcelona Activa](#), gave us an overview of the Cibernarium Digital-Skill Test. This innovative online tool helps citizens assess their digital skills and offers personalised recommendations for Cibernarium's free, citywide online training activities. Moreover, by factoring in socio-economic factors such as age, income, immigration status, and education level; the aggregated results provide a detailed overview of Barcelona's digital literacy landscape, allowing for tailored policies and programmes to address unique local needs and barriers.

[Eva Surovková, Head of Department of Social Support for Seniors and People with Disabilities for the City of Bratislava, and Ingrid Tomešová, Support for Active Ageing and Prevention of Loneliness at the Department of Social Support for Seniors and People with Disabilities for the City of Bratislava](#), presented the "Support for Active Ageing and Participation of Seniors" project, including the "Council of Seniors for the Rights of Elderly Citizens" and the subsidy programme "Bratislava for All" which offers financial support to NGOs which focus on intergenerational solidarity and the improvement of quality of life for senior residents in Bratislava.



Ingrid Tomešová

Support for Active Ageing and Prevention of Loneliness at the Department of Social Support for Seniors and People with Disabilities for the City of Bratislava

Ingrid Tomešová graduated from the Faculty of Law and has experience working in the private sector and NGOs. Since 2021, she has been working for the city of Bratislava in the Department of Social Support, where she covers the topic of active aging.



Thursday 12 December 2024

Disinformation in the City

Hosted by ECoD NPO with guest experts Paul Costello and Ika Trijsburg

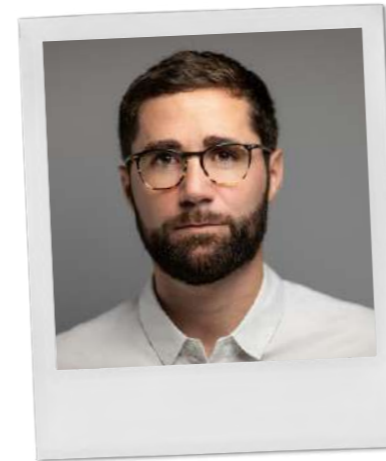
In extraordinary times of rapid information production and sharing, distrust and disruption, disinformation is having an increasing impact on cities. And cities are, therefore, on the front line of disinformation response strategies.

Local authorities are the closest level of government to the people, and they are tasked with leading communities through ever more complex societal and global challenges that affect residents locally. This presentation will focus on the recently-launched Disinformation in the City Response Playbook developed by the University of Melbourne and German Marshall Fund of the United States with cities and sector experts to guide disinformation response in the unique city context.

Agenda

10:00 – 10:10	Welcome & Introduction
10:10 – 10:30	Presentation
10:30 – 10:50	Questions and Answers
10:50 – 11:00	Summary and Outlook

Speakers



Paul Costello

Senior Programme Manager for the German Marshall Fund's Cities Programme

Paul Costello leads the Cities Programme's work on city international engagement, migration, and democracy projects. Paul has a background in public policy and prior work experience in sustainability and public diplomacy work. He is fluent in English, French, Spanish, Catalan, and an intermediate level of German.

> What do you love most about your city?

That the public space is available to be used for all sorts of things.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

Initiatives like "My City, My Vote" (La Meva Ciuat, El Meu Vot) that help expand the demos and contribute to the city's democratic system being more inclusive.

Ika Trijsburg

Head of Democracy and Diplomacy, Municipal Association of Victoria; Director Urban Analytics, Institute for Infrastructure in Society, Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University

Ika Trijsburg holds appointments in academia, government and civil society focused on local democracy and diplomacy. She leads the Disinformation in the City collaborative research and capacity-building project across The Australian National University, Monash University, Deakin University, Victoria University and The University of Melbourne in partnership with the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

> What do you love most about your city?

Melbourne is multi-cultural in so many ways – our diversity is reflected in the physical spaces we create, food we eat, art, sport, and the ways we interact.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

Well-considered participatory processes that can bring together diverse knowledge forms and sectors and create vibrant innovation in public policy.



Insights

Jessica (Ika) Trijsburg, Head of Democracy and Diplomacy, Municipal Association of Victoria; Director Urban Analytics, Institute for Infrastructure in Society, Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University; Visiting Fellow, German Marshall Fund of the United States, presented the findings of a collaborative research project she led, looking into how cities connect and collaborate to address shared and complex challenges, in this case, disinformation.

Paul Costello, Senior Programme Manager for the German Marshall Fund's Cities Programme, reviewed the 10 principles that resulted from the collaborative research project. He also highlighted the importance of the four spheres of trust – trusted institutions, information, people and places – and that building trust goes hand-in-hand with building community.



Wednesday 18 December 2024

Disinformation in the City 2.0

Hosted by ECoD NPO with guest experts Paul Costello, Graham Wetherall-Grujić and Mathis Dippon

Three experts in the field of disinformation will share their experiences, thoughts and ideas on the topic. Paul Costello will present the recently-launched Disinformation in the City Response Playbook developed by the University of Melbourne and German Marshall Fund of the United States with cities and sector experts to guide disinformation response in the unique city context.

Graham Wetherall-Grujić will discuss a notorious example of misinformation against green energy in Germany, which illustrates how complicated identifying and diffusing disinformation can be, and why fact checking alone is not enough.

Mathis Dippon will present Truth, Lies & Democracy, a key format in the European Capital of Democracy's Democracy Year events. He will give an overview of what went down at the game jam in Barcelona this year and an insight into what's planned for this event in Vienna 2025.

Agenda

15:00 – 15:10	Welcome & Introduction
15:10 – 15:20	Paul Costello presents the Disinformation in the City Response Playbook
15:20 – 15:30	Graham Wetherall-Grujić presents Disinformation against Green Energy: an example from Germany
15:30 – 15:40	Mathis Dippon presents Truth, Lies & Democracy game-jam
15:40 – 15:55	Questions and Answers
15:55 – 16:00	Summary and Outlook

Speakers



Paul Costello

Senior Programme Manager for the German Marshall Fund's Cities Programme

Paul Costello leads the Cities Programme's work on city international engagement, migration, and democracy projects. Paul has a background in public policy and prior work experience in sustainability and public diplomacy work.

Graham Wetherall-Grujić

Lead Expert for Democracy Technologies at the Innovation in Politics Institute

He is based in Berlin. After getting his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Warwick, he worked as an editor and translator in the fields of politics, human sciences, and music.

> What do you love most about your city?

Berlin brings together a lot of people from different walks of life & from all over the world – I learn something new every time I meet someone.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I think deliberative democracy is particularly important – anything that makes us sit down and talk in depth with people who are different to us is always a big gain for our society.



Mathis Dippon

Democracy Year Manager at European Capital of Democracy NPO

He holds a master's degree in Public Professional Decision Making (University of Bremen) and a bachelor's degree in Politics and Public Administration (University of Constance).

> What do you love most about your city?

Vienna ticks all the boxes: culture, gastronomy, green spaces, public transport, social infrastructure, affordable housing, and great places to relax, such as the Danube Canal.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I am impressed by the City of Vienna's innovative and methodologically compelling participatory projects, particularly those that address people who are usually not heard, such as the Vienna Climate Teams or the Participatory Children and Youth Million.

Insights

Graham Wetherall-Grujić, Lead Expert for Democracy Technologies at the Innovation in Politics Institute, discussed a notorious example of misinformation against green energy in Germany, which illustrates how complicated identifying and diffusing disinformation can be, and why fact checking alone is not enough.

Mathis Dippon, Democracy Year Manager at European Capital of Democracy NPO, presented Truth, Lies & Democracy – a key format in the European Capital of Democracy's Democracy Year events.



Tuesday 11 January 2025

Communities in Action

Hosted by the City of Cascais with guest expert Councillor Carla Semedo

The Communities in Action programme addresses critical challenges in urban and social cohesion, particularly in areas affected by poverty, exclusion, and structural vulnerabilities. It promotes integrated and collaborative approaches that bring together local government, civil society, and public entities across sectors, including culture, employment, education, health, and social security.

The initiative's primary goal is to foster urban regeneration and social inclusion in vulnerable areas through synchronised, community-driven solutions. By reversing persistent patterns of social fracture, it creates meaningful and lasting impacts in fragile communities.

This work is part of a broader multimodal ecosystem, involving partnerships with social agents, academia, and health actors, all working intersectorally to promote equity, urban cohesion, and social inclusion. It exemplifies Cascais' commitment to sustainable and inclusive urban development through a collaborative Local Social State Network.

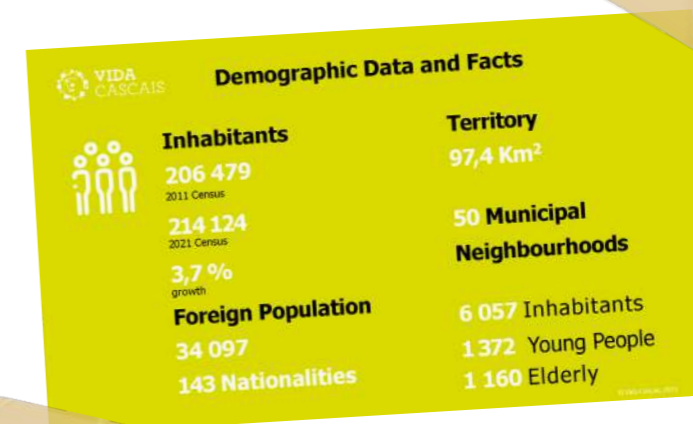
Speakers



Carla Nunes Semedo

Executive Councillor for Health, Social Affairs and Human Rights, City of Cascais

Carla Nunes Semedo is a City Councillor at Cascais Municipality, where she leads initiatives in social cohesion, urban development, and inclusive public policies. With a focus on fostering collaborative governance and innovative solutions to complex social challenges, her work includes spearheading key programmes, such as Communities in Action. Her expertise spans strategic planning, community engagement, and sustainable development, aiming to create equitable opportunities for all.



Insights

Carla Nunes Semedo, City Councillor for Social Cohesion, Urban Development & Inclusive Public Policies at Cascais Municipality, gave us an insight into the Communities in Action programme. This initiative fosters urban regeneration and social inclusion in vulnerable areas through synchronised, community-driven solutions. Carla spoke about how reversing persistent patterns of social fracture can create meaningful and lasting impacts in fragile communities.

Agenda

11:00 - 11:10	Welcome & Introduction
11:10 - 11:30	Presentation
11:30 - 11:50	Questions & Answers
11:50 - 12:00	Summary & Outlook



Cities Meet

Wednesday 26 – Friday 28 February, 2025

Inclusive Social City Development in Cascais

Impressions

The European City Network gathered together for our first meeting of 2025 in the beautiful seaside city of Cascais, Portugal. Representatives from thirteen countries in our network meet up at the hotel before taking a bus to Quinta do Pisão in the mountains above the city. After a short walk and a brief welcome presentation, we stepped out into the dappled sunshine under the trees. There we found the rhythm as a group and together created a soundscape of democracy. The group then enjoyed an interactive presentation about the City of Cascais' work in the topic field of Inclusive Social City Development. Following a short break we made our way to the restaurant for dinner, meandering through the cobbled streets of the city centre before enjoying pizza and sangria!

The next day we set off to the Vida Cascais Social Innovation Station where we learnt about how the city integrates essential services to tackle social challenges, providing access to healthcare, housing support, employment initiatives, social assistance, and youth programmes, all within a single location. The station serves as a one-stop access point for services, exemplifying Cascais' holistic approach to equity, social cohesion, and community well-being.



We then crossed the road to Espaço S – Youth Wellbeing Hub where our network members gave short best-practice presentations from their own cities on the focus topic.

After lunch, we visited the Community Centre of the Parish of Carcavelos. This Private Social Solidarity Institution includes a senior university, childcare facility, impressive homeless service, as well as a social supermarket with reduced prices for essential goods. Here we tucked ourselves away in a room for the second workshop of the day, during which we learnt more about each other's job roles and how they support Inclusive Social City Development. After a packed day of learning and exchange, the group was looking forward to the networking drinks reception and dinner at the Cascais Cultural Centre, which didn't disappoint!

On the final day of our trip, we headed to the Santa Maria do Mar Monastery to learn more about the successful Terras de Cascais Programme, a community-driven urban agriculture programme that transforms underutilised spaces into productive green areas, fostering social inclusion, sustainability, and local food security. After a brief presentation and a

well-deserved coffee break, we explored the regenerative vineyards and community gardens, as well as the student accommodation. A final Reflection Round helped us take stock of what we had learned and the new and familiar people we had met over the past days.

A final lunch overlooking the Atlantic was the perfect way to round off a wonderful few days. Thank you to the dedicated team in Cascais for putting together such an informative programme... we look forward to seeing more of you in Cascais' Democracy Year in 2026!



Tuesday 25 March, 2025

Inclusive, Social City Development

Hosted by the City of Cascais with contributions from the City of Kraków

The City of Cascais' presentation will explore the role of Social Innovation Clusters as drivers of sustainable development and social cohesion. It will highlight strategies for creating and strengthening these clusters, with a focus on collaborative approaches involving organisations, communities, and both public and private sectors.

The City of Kraków presents their infrastructure and support for participation within the city. The presentation will focus on initiatives related to civic engagement and community development in Krakow, highlighting successful projects that foster collaboration between citizens and local authorities.

Agenda

10:30 - 10:40	Welcome & Introduction
10:40 - 11:00	Best-Practice Presentation 1: City of Cascais
11:00 - 11:20	Best Practice Presentation 2: City of Kraków
11:20 - 11:40	Break-Out Sessions
11:40 - 11:50	Summary & Feedback
11:50 - 12:00	Overview & Outlook



Speakers



Tiago Leitão

President of Aproximar – Social Innovation Cooperative

Tiago has 22 years professional experience working as a social worker, consultant and developer in the field of criminal justice systems, management consultancy, social entrepreneurship, innovation and reintegration, and knowledge transference. More recently, he has been connecting policy and strategy in the field of prison work and education, social reintegration and economy, education, training, mentoring, and volunteering.

> What do you love most about your city?

Walking, driving or cycling from Carcavelos to Guincho alongside the Ocean.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

The participatory budget for youth, following the exceptional success of the general participatory budget which has been implemented since 2011.

Insights

Tiago Leitão, President of Aproximar – Social Innovation Cooperative's presentation highlighted the City of Cascais' strategies for creating and strengthening Social Innovation Clusters as drivers of sustainable development and social cohesion. He went into detail about the collaborative approaches used in order to engage organisations, communities, and both the public and private sectors.

Mateusz Płoskonka, Deputy Director, Department of Dialogue, Consultations & Citizen Contact for the City of Krakow Office, presented the City of Kraków's impressive infrastructure put in place to support participation within the city. His presentation focused on initiatives related to civic engagement and community development in Kraków, highlighting successful projects that foster collaboration between citizens and local authorities.

Mateusz Płoskonka

Deputy Director, Department of Dialogue, Consultations & Citizen Contact for the City of Krakow Office

Mateusz is a seasoned professional with extensive experience in public administration. He has been working at the City of Krakow Office since 2002 and currently serves as the Deputy Director of the Department of Dialogue, Consultations and Citizen Contact as well as as the Deputy Director in the Social Policy and Health Department. Mr. Płoskonka is certified as a local government animator for co-operation with the third sector.

> What do you love most about your city?

For me, Krakow is a city that combines a rich history with modernity and openness to the world. It is a place where tradition and innovation go hand in hand. I particularly value Krakow's multiculturalism, which creates a unique atmosphere of tolerance and intercultural cooperation.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I am proud of the participatory democracy practices in Krakow, which allow residents to actively participate in the life of the city. Initiatives such as the participatory budget allow citizens to influence decisions regarding the development of the city, from neighborhoods to entire districts.



Cities Meet

Tuesday 15 - Thursday 17 April, 2025

Diversity & Inclusion - Bologna style

Impressions

We began this European City Network meeting on Bologna's beautiful Piazza Maggiore, where representatives from cities across Europe made their way into the Salla della Musica, marveling at the welcoming library and decorated wooden ceiling. Vice Mayor Emily Mation Clancy (Equal Opportunity, Gender Politics, LGBTIQ+ Rights, & Anti-Discrimination) and Deputy Mayor Anna Lisa Boni (International Relations & Climate Neutrality) opened the meeting with a welcome address, before we met Diversity Manager Daro Sakho, one of five volunteers who have been appointed by the Mayor to support the City Government on issues such as integration, disability, and inclusivity.

The next morning we made our way to LGBTIQ+ Centre Cassero, where the General Co-operation Pact between the Municipality of Bologna and 36 local LGBTQ associations was presented. The group enjoyed exploring the space, a former salt cellar, which has become a hub and safe space for members of the LGBTIQ+ community. Guided by two enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers from the centre, we learnt about how the space is also open to the wider community through disco nights, which offer a low-threshold and inclusive way of supporting and participating in the centre's activities.



A short bus ride took us to Centro Interculturale Zonarelli, Bologna's Intercultural Centre, which is home to over 150 associations representing migrant communities. This space serves two main functions: providing a space for local Bolognese residents to meet immigrants, as well as being a place of intercultural integration and dialogue. The Centre hosts language courses (both Italian and mother tongue) as well as a multitude of cultural and religious festivals and events. Thus, the centre provides an important channel of communication between the municipality and various communities and cultural associations.

Moving a bit further away from the centre of town, we travelled to SALUS Space, an innovative social housing project. After a delicious home-cooked Syrian lunch, we learnt more about the project, which began in 2021. The idea was to provide affordable housing and job opportunities for a mixed community of residents – 15 different nationalities of all ages and backgrounds.

Beautifying a previously neglected site and creating a restaurant, workshop spaces and community garden with a monthly farmers market, have transformed the attitudes of the residents from surrounding areas. Those who were previously sceptical about having a social housing project in their neighbourhood, now value and use this space.

On the final morning of the visit, we returned to the Salla della Musica to learn about Bologna's efforts in terms of preventing gender-based violence. Anna Clora Borghesi and Beatrice Collina from the Rights & Equal Opportunities Office told us about Bologna's Gender Atlas for a Feminist City, the new safe-spaces that have been created (Tutta mia la città), as well as a Map to Stop Violence. Following which we learnt about SENZA Violenza's behavioural-change programme which engages with men who use violence against women and children, which was presented by Giuditta Creazzo and Francesco Corona.

Throughout our stay in Bologna we were struck by the way the Municipality, community and associations work together to make the city the progressive, inclusive and diverse place that it is. Many thanks to our wonderful hosts and all the people we met over the past days!



Wednesday 30 April, 2025

Diversity & Inclusion

Hosted by the City of Bologna with contributions from the City of Antwerp and City of Rotterdam

In 2024, the Municipality of Bologna's Rights, International cooperation and New Citizenship Unit worked on an innovative model of participatory process aimed at co-reviewing municipal services. The pilot was developed in the framework of the European Project UNITES, with a focus on the educational services and three main goals: to specifically reach and involve people with migrant background; to make the educational services of the Municipality more accessible and inclusive; to define a model to be employed and replicated even in other contexts. In this webinar, Beatrice will show all the phases of this process and its results, emphasising in particular the work of the Audit Panel which was coordinated by the Office.

The City of Antwerp's presentation will focus on accessible leisure activities for children and youngsters with special-care needs. We organise, for example, a training programme for organisations, which includes classroom training, intervision, and on-the-job support. Additionally, we provide subsidies to a number of recognised youth centers to reach a specific target group.

The City of Rotterdam's presentation will lay-out their approach to gender-related violence, with an extra focus on tackling honour-related violence. It will cover how Rotterdam works together with key people in neighbourhoods and with survivors of domestic violence, who are experts by experience.

Agenda

10:30 - 10:40	Welcome & Introduction
10:40 - 10:55	Best-Practice Presentation 1: City of Bologna
10:55 - 11:10	Best Practice Presentation 2: City of Antwerp
11:10 - 11:25	Best Practice Presentation 3: City of Rotterdam
11:25 - 11:50	Break-Out Sessions
11:50 - 11:55	Summary & Feedback
11:55 - 12:00	Overview & Outlook



Beatrice Collina

Project Manager at the Rights, International Cooperation & New Citizenship Unit of the Municipality of Bologna

Beatrice completed the PhD Programme in Science, Cognition and Technology at the University of Bologna in 2016. From 2016 to 2018 she collaborated with local institutions and schools in the field of Human Rights. In 2018, she started working at the Municipality of Bologna. Since 2020 she has worked at Rights, international cooperation and new citizenship Unit, dealing in particular with European and national projects on the topic of anti-racism and antidiscrimination.

> What do you love most about your city?

Historically, the presence of the University makes Bologna a young, vibrant and progressivist City. Citizens are very active in the civil society and the high number of associations confirms that. The constant and mutual exchange between civil society and institutions is a feature of our City and makes the local context particularly welcoming for everyone who lives here.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

The Open Administration which is strongly encouraged by the Municipality, also through a new regulation. This allows a number of participative processes in collaboration with citizens and local associations.

Shantie Singh

Senior Policy Advisor on Domestic, Gender-Based & Honour-Related Violence for the City of Rotterdam

Shantie works as a senior policy advisor at the Municipality of Rotterdam. Here she deals with the approach to domestic violence, gender-related violence and honour-related violence. She has a passion for improving the position of vulnerable people in the city and has always found it important in her work that as many Rotterdam residents as possible are seen and heard. She is a storyteller and story listener; in many forms, she sees this as added value for the public sector.

> What do you love most about your city?

Rotterdam is a hyperdiverse city where everyone can feel at home. It is also a unique city with special architecture and an underground energy where new forms of art and stories often emerge. Rotterdam is very different from the other big cities in the Netherlands and follows its own course. I feel at home in that energy. Rotterdam is my muse and always knows how to inspire me.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

The local neighbourhood councils inspire me because they have brought so many more people into the democratic process. These neighbourhood councils have given many more people than ever before the feeling that their voice matters and that they too can make a difference.



Speakers



Karen Milants

Youth Leisure-Time Policy Officer for the City of Antwerp

Karen started working for the Youth Department three years ago after transferring from the Cultural Department. Over the last three years, she has supported youth cultural organisations and worked on the broader subject of youth culture. Recently, she took on a new role with a focus on leisure time for youngsters in general.

> What do you love most about your city?

I really love the diversity of Antwerp: there are so many (cultural) places, so much food, shops, so many different initiatives and events – all within cycling distance.

> Which democratic practice are you most proud of?

I love how more and more city departments and other organisations involve youngsters in their decision-making processes, right from the start.



Cities Learn

Tuesday 20 May 2025

Data Feminism

Hosted by the City of Bologna with guest expert Giulia Sudano

This webinar will illustrate how gender-disaggregated data and gender impact assessment are fundamental tools when building more equitable public policies. We will look at practical examples in the fields of mobility, public housing, and gender procurement. Finally, there will be a discussion about how data feminism could support the development of fairer AI systems, especially for public administrations.

Agenda

10:30 – 10:40	Welcome & Introduction
10:40 – 11:30	Data Feminism
11:30 – 11:50	Q&A
11:50 – 12:00	Summary & Outlook

Speaker

Giulia Sudano

President and Co-Founder of Period Think Tank

Giulia cofounded Period Think Tank, an association that promotes gender equity through a feminist approach to data. In the last four years she has been coordinating the campaign #datatocount, aimed at requesting public institutions at the local, regional, and national level, to collect and open gender-disaggregated data to have a baseline on which to apply the gender impact-assessment methodology to public policies. She has also been part of national campaigns and networks to advocate for women's, LGBTQIA+ and human digital rights.



Cities Learn

Tuesday 10 June 2025

Impact Garden Methodology

Hosted by ECoD NPO with guest experts Laila Martins and Jannik Kaiser

In this webinar we will learn how the Impact Garden Methodology can be applied in the context of cities, using examples from the current European Capital of Democracy (ECoD), the City of Vienna, and the former ECoD – the City of Barcelona. Rooted in a regenerative approach to measurement and evaluation, Unity Effect's Impact Garden model draws on the metaphor of living systems and nature. Rather than counting apples, the model seeks to understand the soil and ecosystem in which the apple trees grow, and how additional resources might support their cycle of growing healthy and tasty fruits over a sustained period.

Agenda

10:30 – 10:40	Welcome & Introduction
10:40 – 10:50	Introduction to the Impact Garden Methodology
10:50 – 11:05	Example from the European City Network: Barcelona
11:05 – 11:20	Example from the European City Network: Vienna
11:20 – 11:40	Q&A
11:40 – 12:00	Summary & Outlook

Speakers



Jannik Kaiser

Co-Founder & CEO of Unity Effect

Jeannik leads regenerative measurement and evaluation, business development and partnerships at Unity Effect. He also facilitates peer learning in organisations and impact evaluation processes.

Laila Martins

Expert at Unity Effect

Laila is an expert in guiding processes and solutions from sustainability to regeneration. She facilitates workshops, mentoring and coaching on inner development, sustainability, intercultural/migrant innovation and organisational development.



Barcelona - Vienna Declaration

Past, present and future European Capitals of Democracy cities - Barcelona in 2023/24, Vienna in 2024/25 and Cascais in 2026 - play a pivotal role within the European City Network, and in guiding and supporting the ECoD initiative together with international organisations and European Institutions.

Together, they form the ECoD Consortium, a high-level advisory body providing strategic guidance, expertise, and support to the ECoD initiative. Members contribute to shaping the direction of ECoD, fostering collaborations within the ECN, and promoting democratic values across Europe. The Consortium facilitates knowledge exchange, joint initiatives, and advocacy efforts to strengthen urban democracy.

Thus, this yearbook closes with the joint declaration of the City of Vienna and the City of Barcelona from November 2024, enshrining the ideal of transnational collaboration on the local and regional level to innovate and strengthen our democracies.

The next chapter (and yearbook) are already in the works.

Thank YOU for supporting democracy!





Barcelona and Vienna – A Joint Statement: Safeguarding the Future of Democratic Innovation in Europe

As Barcelona passes the baton to Vienna as the European Capital of Democracy 2024/25, we celebrate our shared commitment to democratic values and the role cities play in fostering civic engagement. This moment marks not only a transfer of responsibilities but a reaffirmation of our dedication to nurturing and safeguarding democracy at the local level.

"As the second European Capital of Democracy, the City of Vienna wants to contribute to strengthen democracy in Europe. We are proud of the responsibility entrusted to us as a pioneer of democratic innovations. We invite all Europeans to support our joint initiative and visit Vienna in the Democracy Year 2024/25. I would like to thank Barcelona for its pioneering work and the very fruitful cooperation. Together, we want to send a clear message to Europe with our declaration: Let us not stop upholding our democratic values and defending our open and democratic society against authoritarian and populist attacks. We are convinced that only democracies can guarantee broad prosperity, freedom and security for all," said Executive City Councillor Jürgen Czernohorszky.

Cities as Beacons of Democracy

Cities are the heart of democracy, uniquely positioned to understand and respond to the needs of their citizens. They serve as vibrant platforms, where diverse communities can come together and connect across all cultures and backgrounds, acting as bulwarks against the current populist wave. Barcelona's year as inaugural European Capital of Democracy has demonstrated how a city can radiate democratic ideals, enhancing democratic participation and empowering citizens to shape their own future. Barcelona has served as democratic stronghold on an international scale.

Fostering Democratic Innovation

The dynamic environments of cities provide fertile ground for creativity and experimentation in democratic practices. Both Barcelona and Vienna, along with the entire ECoD City Network, have showcased a plethora of best practices that encourage innovation and can inspire other cities. Our cities exemplify how local experimentation can lead to meaningful advancements in democracy. By cultivating spaces where new ideas can flourish, we pave the way for more responsive and inclusive governance.

City-to-City Collaboration

To further advance democracy, it is vital that cities maintain a close exchange of ideas and best practices. We invite all citizens, politicians, members of the municipal administration, business leaders, academics, young changemakers and civil society representatives to join us in Vienna for the upcoming Democracy Year. A wide range of activities will create an engaging space to share expertise, draw inspiration from one another, and strengthen bonds within the international democratic community.

We also encourage other cities to apply for the title of European Capital of Democracy 2026, ensuring a continued focus on democratic values across Europe at <https://capitalofdemocracy.eu>

Together, let us embrace this moment to reinvigorate our commitment to democracy and work hand in hand towards a brighter, more inclusive future.

Lluís Rabell

Councillor for the Neighborhood Plan,
Education, Seniors and Participation
City of Barcelona

Jürgen Czernohorszky

Executive City Councillor for Climate,
Environment, Democracy and Personnel
City of Vienna



See you in 2026!