
CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION - FROM CONSULTATION TO CO-CREATION

I grew up in Bremen in Germany, and was a student during the 70s and 80s.

These decades were highly political times, with citizens' movements emerging in the wake of 68,

slide anti-nuclear demo

And you may remember - or have heard of - the large anti nuclear demonstrations in the 70s and 80s. There was clearly a desire by people to express their opinions more directly.

And, no - I'm not going to tell you if I am in that picture ...

Then later I moved to Berlin to study and did my master in environmental sociology on traffic calming. I was working on the interesting situation of two citizens' initiatives on traffic calming measures in a residential area - one for, one against. What both sides valued, even if they weren't fighting for the same cause, was the willingness of the local administration to hear them out and to facilitate between them, which at the time was still rather exceptional.

Now - 30 years on -

slide citizens participation

public participation is embedded in the way most cities communicate with their citizens - through consultation workshops, participatory

budgeting meetings, citizens youth councils.

So we have already come a long way, but what is changing?

I'd like to start by looking at an example from Gdansk in Poland.

slide Gdansk

The city of **Gdansk** is successfully working with a public consultation platform which they use to connect residents and officials directly - real people, no trolls - and that supports the large scale public consultation on their urban development plan 'Gdansk 2030 plus'.

The mayor was very active in involving citizens and regularly goes out to meet with all age groups, realising that the people who are kids and youngsters now will be adults in 2030.

slide co-creation

Moving **beyond the consultation process** to what we call **co-creation**
I'd like to show you two examples of very different cities in very different situations and how they work with their citizens.

Austerity measures and Greece's economic crisis have significantly reduced the operational capacity of **Athens's** city government. At the same time, a lot of outdated regulations hindered necessary reforms and so trust between citizens and government suffered severely.

slide Athens

Citizens started taking things into their own hands - to make ends meet - but resulting in a really vibrant civil society.

Now, obviously nobody wants an economic crisis situation in order to reactivate civil solidarity. What I want to show here is how a local authority is capable of innovating even in difficult times.

Imagine everything you have heard about Greek administration and realise the mountain of distrust local government had to overcome.

Amalia Zepou was a documentary film maker at the time, but could see the need to act and work with her fellow citizens.

She was the driving force behind the award winning citizens' online platform **synAthina**, which engages members of the community in problem solving and reform. Citizens can submit ideas and are then connected to the relevant government officials and organisations as well as private businesses that can support their efforts.

Where outdated regulations stop these ideas from being realized the synAthina team works with the city administration to overcome them.

Here an extract of a workshop between citizens and officials in an effort to build trust and work on ideas together.

run film

As you can see that was about breaking down bureaucratic walls in communicating about ideas. Amalia is now vice mayor for civil society and municipal decentralisation.

Now to **Ghent** - the city has already been investing a long time in promoting co-creation as a way of citizen engagement and they are leading in the use of online tools for public engagement. They have successfully run an online initiative 'Ruimtevoor.gent - Space for Ghent', where they have been collecting ideas from citizens for changing public space in the city.

Ghent is now in the follow up phase where the project ideas rated highest by a vote from citizens and experts will be discussed directly between the city planners, experts and the citizens that put forward the idea.

Another idea from Ghent that I find really fascinating are

slide living streets

the '**living streets**' where the inhabitants of a street close it off for a certain length of time, and put in street furniture, sandboxes, open bars - anything they like. This is real experimenting by the people that live there. If it works - great - the city will help put in place more permanent measures. If it doesn't, everything can go back to what it was before.

But there is one challenge local authorities always face - how to get in touch with the so-called '**silent majority**', the people that are not naturally active and interested or don't feel comfortable expressing their opinions in public.

My example from **Utrecht** in the Netherlands shows a local authority

willing to try new approaches.

slide Utrecht

The city wanted to draw up a new energy plan with very ambitious goals. They were convinced that for this to work, the plan needed a deeply based democratic legitimacy. And they wanted to also reach beyond the people who usually come forward in participatory projects.

So they approached people in a random selection process, asking them to participate on three Saturdays in full day workshops and discussions. Participants were offered financial compensation, either through vouchers worth 600 euro for energy reduction measures, or gift certificates worth 300 euros.

In the end, 165 people participated and the resulting energy plan was full of new ideas. Residents had really added value by bringing in fresh views. Many of them at the end decided to swap the initially chosen gift vouchers for the energy reduction vouchers. And as participants learned and understood better the goals of the energy plan, they themselves have become a kind of ambassador helping change behavior.

slide EUROCITIES animated

So many more stories to tell, but one thing is sure - cities all over Europe are taking steps towards these new ways of citizen relations. A clear shift is happening. Cities are adapting, moving, changing. Cities are what their people make them - and that is what matters.

closing slide