

## IFD 21 Contribution to the Draft guidelines on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs

Participation in public affairs is an important part of any society, consisting of multiple approaches and multiple practical applications. Participation incorporates much more than once-in-a-few-years effective elections or silent approval of the people governing the country. Deputy democracy or other political arrangements are certainly functional concepts, but it does not mean, that people should be granted none or a single option in a year or less to express their opinion. Participation could benefit all countries, no matter the political arrangement they follow.

We, the Institute for Democracy 21, warmly welcome the adoption of the resolution 33/22, and are proud to present our small contribution to the preparation of concise and action-oriented guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs.

Each country is different and needs its own way to embark on the journey of participation. Nevertheless, participation in public affairs is an interesting concept that each country should seize, according to its own specificities.

This Contribution is designed to create a global mind-map of practical modern participation concepts and provide the audience with a solid base on which they will be able to build when thinking about their own countries.

Participation offers great possibilities for the country, and therefore, the countries should try to utilize it as much as possible. Participate, participation. Those words have become very modern during the last couple of years. It is trendy to use them, it is "in" to talk about them. But what does it really mean? To participate? According to the Oxford dictionary, to participate means to be involved, to take part. Ok, but how would you do that? By voting in an election? By according the right to participate in these to all the citizens in regular and fair elections, and granting real possibilities of participation to all, men and women, people with special needs... Well, in the past, maybe. But the idea of participation for the 21st century is much broader.

From the point of view of deciders and public servants, participation is a step taken towards the citizens, a step by which they concede part of their power to the public. And the people should understand it that way. They should understand, that it is a commitment given by the officials to the normal citizens, it is an investment. An investment that allows deciders to make better decisions, based on the "field problems knowledge" of the citizens, which are often the best experts in local issues.

If the participation works well, it is a win-win situation for both. The country and its people.

### Technology in participation

Even though it might not seem clear at the first sight, participation has been greatly influenced by the progress in technology. Public meetings with many participants, when the people express their feelings and their ideas, now only belong to one of the many possibilities, which participation offers and they can be very easily enhanced by the use of ICT. ICT provide us better possibilities how to ask questions to citizens and how to find out, what they think, what they like and what they want.

During the past few years, the situation changed dramatically. Thanks to the ICT, new fields were discovered, which provide both – a challenge and also an opportunity to the countries. Now, countries and cities have to focus on better communication – on social networks, using online and offline channels, they have to be smart when thinking how to distribute info. They have also great possibility to collect data effectively and with ease from people who are living in the community. They can also use digital technologies to gain efficiency in decision-making and adopt digital election methods such as e-voting.

### Purpose-specific surveys

One participatory concept, which was profoundly changed by the ICT, is purpose-specific surveys. It is a great example, where effective collection of data can save country or city not only time, but also incredible sums of money. Ad hoc surveys can be used in various ways, but they should always result in a clear response to the asked question plus a collection of data about the voters. Even though the survey is anonymous, cities are able to extract powerful information about the participants.

### Consultative referendum

Consultative referendum, at least at local level where often no expertise is needed, offers a great way, how to get a feedback. Deciders are elected usually once in couple of years, in between, they do not receive any feedback on their work. It is a great way, how to find out, whether they are doing the job right and avoid trouble to public order. Even though the deciders try to do their best, they might lose touch with the public while coping with their every-day tasks. They might slip away from their initial ideas along the way, become, to a certain extent cut off from the reality on the street, without noticing. Consultative referendum offers a great help how to ask questions to citizens, to express their feelings about planned projects and decisions, to gain a reassurance that people are happy with the work.

### Urbanistic strategic planning

Many cities invite experts and city officials to create new plans for city's urbanism. Problem is, that people's factor is often missing from the plans. However, the citizens

have to be incorporated into the planning, should the project be successful. This is now becoming a trend and architects themselves pay more attention to participation and meeting with public before building. That is great, but, urban planning does not end with the public meetings. People participation and modern technologies should be used also in urban planning in order to build cost efficiently and guarantee people's satisfaction.

### Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a process of democratic deliberation and decision-making, and a type of participatory democracy, in which ordinary people decide how to allocate a small part of a municipal or public budget. Since its beginning in Brazil in 1989 the concept spread all over the world, more than 3000 municipalities are using PB now. PB concept is not uniform, there are different methods and approaches with regard to specific local political and economic conditions, by community life. Also, a legal framework and specific social and cultural context play an important role in the process. PB can take place at different levels: municipalities, cities, counties, regions. It is a great way how to do something for a country/city, how to guarantee some level of participation to the citizens without risk of overriding major strategic decisions and how to build trust between citizens and the deciders.

### School participation

Children and students are usually underestimated as subjects of public participation. However, they are great observers, they have formed opinion and most importantly - they will become the citizens of your country. Therefore, it is essential to start educating them from the beginning, getting them used to decision processes. Moreover, the children's perspective is very important piece, which is sometimes missing from the ideas of deciders. Surveys in schools can help the deciders to plan better and to implement policies, which would make sense. Applying participation in schools can easily be described as the most exciting part of modern participation concepts. The educational aspect of participation is mind-blowing. It does not have to entirely substitute classical theory-based civic education but it can be a great enhancement and achieve astounding results in a comparatively short period of time. Last but not least, children have oftentimes proved to be wonderful and very effective teachers. They can transmit the entire experience to their parents and thus make it much easier to improve participation on the city level.

### Participatory Budgeting (PB) in schools

After the elections, PB is overall the most popular participation process in the world, providing people with a possibility to influence environment in their very own proximity. PB can be applicable also in schools, where the process is much easier, more time-effective, less costly and less complicated. Benefits of the PB are on the

other hand quite immense. The whole process of the participatory budgeting is funny, motivational and students can realize their potential and ideas within its rules and borders. PB teaches children responsibility, debating and financial literacy. Students gain experience and start to be interested in the governance and municipal processes as a result and what is most important, they see consequences of their own actions and initiatives. They are part of the process and they learn, that their activity, effort and preference is taken into account and leads to a specific solution.

These concepts are just some among many modern participatory concepts that could be applied by United Nations Member States. We strongly believe that, as the goal of these guidelines is to be action-oriented and help States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs, at least some of these should be included in the guidelines, in order to create a mind-map of practical modern participation concepts States can use in their efforts to fulfill the resolution on right to participate in public affairs.

Furthermore, we would be glad to offer our help with measuring the level of participation in different member state, as we have developed an Index of participation at city level that could be used worldwide and be adapted also to countries.

Finally, we would be glad to propose a modern ICT solution for the consultation about the resolution 33/22, which could be deployed in all Member States and include in the consultation all key stakeholders in all Member States. Do not hesitate to contact us and our D21 voting platform is at your service.

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