Cities as Arenas of Political Innovation in the Strengthening of Deliberative and Participatory Democracy

Reporting

Project Information

EUARENAS

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Periodic Reporting for period 2 - EUARENAS (Cities as Arenas of Political Innovation in the Strengthening of Deliberative and Participatory Democracy)

**Reporting period:** 2022-01-01 to 2022-12-31

### Summary of the context and overall objectives of the project

The EUARENAS project focuses on participatory and deliberative practice in urban settings in Europe. As different forms of citizen participation have started to transform governance cultures, cities have emerged as vital political arenas and laboratories for the development of European political life. This in turn has moved the public sphere towards more societal inclusion, a greater degree of social engagement, active citizenship. Cities have in fact emerged as promoters of social agendas neglected or marginalized by national and international politics. The assumption that guides EUARENAS is therefore that the role of cities will increase in significance as a locus of pluralistic democratic cultures on the one hand and as agenda-setters in addressing pressing socio-economic and environmental issues on the other. Moreover, given the challenges that democratic cultures in Europe and elsewhere are facing, cities are proving to be important sites of resistance to populism and illiberalism.

Against this background and departing from a bottom-up and practice-oriented perspective on political innovation, the Horizon 2020 project EUARENAS (Project Number 959420) investigates the ways in which local-level experiments create momentum for political change that include more inclusive and participatory forms of governance. While multiple case studies from many parts of Europe will focus on experiences of innovative governance, our four pilot locations (Budapest, Gdansk, Reggio Emilia and Voru) will actually implement innovative experiments as part EUARENA’s interlinked research activities. One important objective is to understand how informal modes of change, for example as expressed by social movements and activism, interact with more formal government and governance in produce innovation. The knowledge gained and lessons learned from the project, particularly on concrete practices to strengthen participative and deliberative democracy in urban settings, will help to address the increasingly apparent and widening gap between political decision-making processes and citizens in the EU and beyond.
This Periodic Report provides an overview of the second year of the work accomplished by the EUARENAS project. The period of PR2 has seen a focus on urban perspectives and the incorporation of the theoretical and methodological models that were investigated during the first year of the project. The project has shifted to empirical work as part of the Case Studies and Piloting (WP3 & WP4) and as well as foresight research regarding participatory and deliberative practices (WP5), while still maintaining and developing further its theoretical and methodological base (WP1 & WP2). The period of PR2 has also seen the commencement of the Policy work package (WP7) where recommendations for policymakers and practitioners are made. Critical to all of these is the Impact work Package (WP8) which during the period of PR2 continued to focus on the overall benefits of the project provided to the sphere of participatory governance.

EUARENAS is contributing in several ways to progress beyond the state of the art. The major form this is taking place is in the reduction of barriers to integrating different fields of expertise that contribute to understanding the workings of representative and deliberative governance at the local level. This is being achieved through an iterative process of theorisation and conceptual development that is informed by available practical knowledge and new empirical evidence. In this way, the project is generating knowledge and tools for improving participatory and deliberative governance. For example, the project has initiated processes of knowledge transfer between case study insights and co-developed initiatives (pilot projects in four locations). Indeed, in all phases of the analytical work close interaction with stakeholders, either as consortium members, cooperation partners or other stakeholder groups, is planned.

Another major impact of EUARENAS beyond the state of the art is the development of a systemic approach to linking deliberative with representative democracy. This approach is by far the most popular one and all dimensions of the EUARENAS project – conceptual, methodological, empirical and practical – reflect this. By identifying best practices and locating them within well-designed, broader systemic context (be it both for every piloting activity, and in general for the cities as innovative arenas of deliberation and participation), we fit into what was programmed in the systemic turn - understanding the 'division of labour' between its different parts (deliberative and non-deliberative), and also creating mechanisms of assessing its effectiveness. However, the concept of the systemic turn in deliberative theory – while broadly accepted – has been rarely empirically tested and discussed in order to identify its strengths and weaknesses. Based on this a major outcome of the project will be to elaborate policy options for strengthening inclusive governance and for bridging discrepancies and trade-offs between participative and deliberative governance modes.

General expected results and impacts:

The societal impact of EUARENAS is targeted at increasing the knowledge based regarding drivers
and constraints of democratic governance and social development processes in European cities. Through the establishment of Communities of Practice and working relationships between universities, civil society, advocacy groups, practitioners, EU-level actors and cities themselves we aim to achieve long-term impacts beyond the lifetime of the project. Other expected results and impacts that can be mentioned include:

1. contributing to new conceptual and comparative frameworks of participative-deliberative democracy focused on the role of locale and place as vital socio-spatial settings for citizen participation and activism
2. generating new empirical knowledge on the most promising strategies and practices for improving inclusion, visibility and positive identification with deliberative and participatory decision-making processes
3. indicating good practices and interactive methods for innovative governance strategy development
4. maximizing inclusion and integrating the voices and needs of different groups and communities, including the most disadvantaged groups
5. providing sound empirically tested policy insights for better synergies between local actions and national and European policy frameworks that target inclusion, urban development and social justice objectives
6. testing and piloting relationships and compatibilities between participatory models (such as participatory budgets) and deliberative mechanisms (such as Civic Panels)
7. testing digital platforms and social media as promoters of local public spheres, assessing processes of horizontal learning the involve different stakeholders and citizen and community groups (living labs)

Reggio Emilia, Urban Climate Justice Day

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