



## **BOOSTING SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SEE: POLICY HACKATHON FOR MUNICIPALITIES**

Online via Zoom

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### **CEI Local Dimension**

#### **Good governance as a necessary condition for European Integration**

by Ugo Poli, CEI Project Manager

Today is the UN International Day for Democracy. It was established in 2007 and along the years it focused on many aspects of relevance for your studies like Youth, CSOs, SDGs, and in 2019 Participation whereas the subject for today anniversary is Media freedom ( <https://www.un.org/en/observances/democracy-day> )

In fact all these subjects are connected.

The growing concern on the turnout of citizens to the basic dimension of democracy that are the elections as a free, pluralistic and fair competition for governing the societal evolution, fed several studies and initiatives up to the recent exercise of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

There is evidence of the multilevel character of this issue, but it is largely accepted that the roots of the relationship between citizens and elected institutions remain in the local dimension of the governance.

The CEI is keen to do more for effective actions to reinforce people empowerment, not only for women and youth. The ability of citizens and local actors, both public like Municipalities and Towns and private like Civil Society Organizations, is largely depending on the existence of official bodies and proceedings to participate into consultations with the institutional decision makers. A smooth participatory approach shapes the playground for a standing contribution to an inclusive and effective process of strengthening local democracy as stated by the CEI PoA 2021 – 2023 and the new CEI Local Dimension.

There is no doubt that in recent years, many Local Authorities tried and opened new channels of participation with citizens, either voluntarily or because pushed to do so. Those have notably included a lot of innovative elements of deliberative and

digital democracy, frequently echoed from the tools experimented by the European institutions and from the documents issued by prominent actors both in terms of policy papers and as the outcome of surveys or projects practice.

Core of this presentation is to recall the main contributions you can refer to in the view of implementing also the specific feature and added value of the CEI Local Dimension that seems to be the linkage between the Parliamentary Dimension of the CEI promoting the initiative, the LG national and transnational Associations directly addressed by the CEI Secretariat and the intergovernmental character of the Central European Initiative itself.

### **Council of Europe (CoE)**

The “Code of good practice for civil participation in the decision-making process – Revised” was adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 30 October 2019 as an updating of the same document originally issued in 2009.

The Code offers a repertoire of good practices outlined in a ‘toolkit’. It does not have a mandatory character, does not prescribe rules, or require enforcement mechanisms. It offers all actors in the democratic process guidelines stemming from concrete practical experience of dialogue, and co-operation between NGOs and public authorities. It aims to enhance citizens’ empowerment and participation in the democratic process at local, regional, and national level.

Two interconnected dimensions of this process are highlighted:

1. Levels of participation are sorted in order of increasing intensity, from simple supply of information to consultation, dialogue, and finally, partnership between NGOs and the public authorities.
2. Steps in the political decision-making process are outlined, namely the seven steps the public authorities can adopt, from input, agenda setting, drafting, decision, through to implementation, monitoring and reformulation.

### **Committee of the Regions and Local Authorities (CoR)**

By positioning in view of the Conference on Future of Europe the CoR issued a study titled “Putting Local and Regional Authorities at the Heart of European Democratic renewal”. The starting point of the report is that any functioning multi-level system needs to pay attention to and empower the local level.

Final considerations devise that the crisis of EU democracy is really a crisis of European democracy, and that it makes sense to see Local and Regional Authorities as being “part of the problem” or anyway affected by the same problem as national and EU level democracies. Therefore, the narrative that would present Local and Regional Authorities as a “source of inspiration” for resolving the current crisis of

democracy in Europe would be object of some skepticism and disbelief. Instead, the study recommends that the justification for Local and Regional Authorities' willingness to be further involved with the Conference and the search for a solution to the crisis of democracy in Europe, focuses on the fact that they are also broadly affected by it. A solution will thus be far more effective if, instead of trying to tackle it separately, different levels of governance – notably European, regional, and local – try to address it together for the greater good of citizens and to achieve better synergies and multi-level complementarity and communication.

The Report on the Final Outcomes of the Conference on the Future of Europe provides some follow-up in the Annex on European Citizens Panel 2 focused on “European democracy / Values and rights, rule of law, security” under Stream 5 “Strengthening citizens’ participation” (page 137 & followings), where the prevailing European dimension of the recommendations is but shaping a general thinking for the need of a proactive commitment of the elective institutions, also at national and local level, to the facilitation of citizens’ participation to the decision making processes.

Full paper is available here: <https://futureu.europa.eu/pages/reporting?locale=en>

### **European Commission (EC)**

The EC Communication “On the European democracy action plan” delivered in December 2020 [COM (2020) 790 final] bears a chapter (2.4) on “Promoting democratic engagement and active participation beyond elections”.

The goal is to further promote participatory and deliberative democracy by supporting civil society capacities at both national and local level and involve CSOs in the partnership with the different levels of public administration.

To achieve substantial results the EC calls for the use of EU structural and investment funds, IPA III and other instruments of the neighbourhood policy, Horizon Europe and the new Creative Europe programmes, EU Youth Strategy, and the equality agenda. ESIF and IPA III in particular should address funding to civil society and building capacity and institutional / administrative infrastructure for deliberative civic engagement and political participation. The recovery of the “small projects” approach in the regulations 2021 – 2027 will substantially help.

Even if most of these regulations and programmes quotes very slightly both Regional and Local Authorities it is to be assumed that LRA as CSOs are major players in their implementation.

According with the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 “on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds” “the partners should include public authorities, economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society,

including environmental partners, community-based and voluntary organisations, which can significantly influence or be significantly affected by implementation of the Partnership Agreement and programmes.” (Consideranda 4) and Art. 3 identifies “regional authorities, national representatives of local authorities and local authorities representing the largest cities and urban areas, whose competences are related to the planned use of the ESI Funds” as relevant partners.

“The principle of partnership is a key feature in the implementation of the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund, building on the multi-level governance approach and ensuring the involvement of regional, local, urban and other public authorities, civil society, economic and social partners and, where appropriate, research organisations and universities.” (ERDF Reg. (EU) 2021/1058 of 24 June 2021 – Consideranda 8) and Art. 3 – point e) states that “a Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives (PO 5)” is a specific objective of ERDF and Cohesion Fund.

The policy framework and general principles of IPA III (Art. 6 of Reg. (EU) 2021/1529 of 15 September 2021) states LRA are to be “duly consulted and have timely access to relevant information to allow them to play a meaningful role during the design and implementation of programmes and related monitoring processes.” to ensure “an appropriate balance between central, regional and local governments” (“2021 Communication on EU Enlargement policy” COM (2021) 644 final).

To engage citizens and civil society in the INTERREG is a specific task of the INTERACT Secretariat. The genuine and meaningful involvement of citizens and civil society’s organizations into the CBC programmes is a clear example of how INTERREG not only works for the people, by encouraging regions and countries to tackle challenges together, but also with the people.

This cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions can be strongly supported and promoted through different fields of actions in the new Interreg-specific objective “A better cooperation governance”.

A meeting held on past 11<sup>th</sup> March aimed to highlight good practices from both cohesion policy and INTERREG programmes, by showing

- the DG Regio initiatives;
- the OECD research and studies;
- the two pilots of Interreg programmes that already started developing tools and/or participation processes; and
- direct experience of citizens and civil society organisations involved in Interreg/EU funded programmes

I strongly recommend you to access all reports and the proceedings of the meeting that are available at

<https://www.interact-eu.net/events/engaging-citizens-and-civil-society-interreg>

### **NALAS (Network of Associations of Local Authorities of SEE)**

In June 2019 NALAS issued the users guide of the “Regional Decentralization Observatory Index for SEE” an impressive survey and elaboration on four dimensions of local governance: D1 Autonomy of Local Governments D2 Quality of Local Services D3 Participation and Responsiveness and D4 Local Governments Associations (LGAs) involvement in the Policy Dialogue.

The Observatory was implemented by NALAS, OSCE and LGAs experts. It provides indicators and indexes of performance to a huge number of classified items of LA status and operations.

For D3 Participation and Responsiveness the Observatory classifies records pertaining to four categories relevant to the subject, largely in consistency with the Code of the CoE mentioned above. They are D3.1 Participation, D3.2 Responsiveness, D 3.3 Transparency and D3.4 Accountability.

Further details are filed according with the following table on indexes, sub-indexes and indicators thus providing a very impressive catalogue of ongoing models and their features in the twelve realities represented by the fourteen LGAs associated to NALAS.

#	Code	Name of the Dimension/Index/Sub-index/Indicator	
<b>D3</b>		<b>PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSIVENESS</b>	<b>19,49</b>
<b>D31</b>		<b>Participation</b>	<b>6,34</b>
	D3101	Inclusive public participation in local decision-making processes ensured	
	D3102	Participatory budgeting	
	D3103	Local community is involved in bringing local policies into practice	
<b>D32</b>		<b>Responsiveness</b>	<b>4.33</b>
	D3201	Access to information for all citizens groups is provided by LG - Free Access to Information of Public Importance	
	D3202	LG is responsive to citizens proposals/ recommendations/ requests	
<b>D33</b>		<b>Transparency</b>	<b>4.64</b>
	D3301	Access to information on budget spending - Budget Transparency (citizens' involvement and perspective)	
	D3302	Access to internal working procedures of LG	
	D3303	Access to decisions of local legislative and executive bodies	
<b>D34</b>		<b>Accountability</b>	<b>4.18</b>
	D3401	The Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Local Officials and municipal administration is applied.	
	D3402	A reporting system for the public is in place in the LG	

D3403 LG has established mechanisms for citizens to monitor and evaluate the work of LG – Community based Monitoring and Evaluation.

### **D-LAP (Danube Local Actors Platform)**

In the framework of the activities of the Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” of the EUSDR, the targets of the D-LAP for the Danube region are:

- Further the participative governance and place-based strategies at the local, regional, national and macro-regional tiers;
- Adapt funding matching the needs of Civil Society and Local Actors;
- Identify areas where support to civil society is needed;
- Build on best practices that are carried out at national level suitable for applicability at the transnational level of EUSDR;
- Generate new projects and initiatives to be mutually developed by CSOs in the Danube Region.

To achieve its results D-LAP refers to different partners and donors.

It may be a conference in Sofia to feed the 5th Danube Participation Day in 2018 in view of the Annual Forum of the Danube Strategy, where the focus was on “Expanding Civic Space in the Danube Region”, organised by the Citizen Participation Forum, the umbrella association of the Bulgarian NGOs; the Danube Civil Society Forum and the Foster Europe Foundation leading D-LAP, with the support of the CEI Cooperation Fund and the EUSDR Priority Area 10. Or it is the BACID II as the second phase of the programme “Building Administrative Capacity in the Danube Region and Western Balkans (2018-2021)”, funded by the Austrian Development Agency and implemented by the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns and the KDZ - Centre for Public Administration Research.

The BACID programme deserves particular interest as a multiannual tool to unlocking the benefits of public participation in decision-making and assessing the added value of the public participation when embedded in the decision-making process. It works on three main pillars that are: a BACID Fund as a small grants programme for exchanging knowledge between partners from Austria and Western Balkans & Moldova to strengthen governance; the Danube Governance Hub with a Regional Quality Center for the Public Sector supporting the reform of Public Administration; and the support to the Regional Decentralisation Observatory and Budget Transparency that are preparing the local level for EU-integration and deliver recommendations on how to help Western Balkans public participation in achieving better regulations and infrastructure.

### **CEI Local Dimension opportunities**

To feed the trust of local communities (LGs, CSOs, loose associations) into the impact of their contribution to the multi-level decision making process (potentially up to the follow-up mechanics of the Conference on the Future of Europe) there is the need of improving structured proceedings for the bottom-up participation of civic stakeholders.

Long lasting relay with the CSOs in the CEI constituency like in the case of the WB Summit in 2017 and many CEI Cooperation Activities funded along the years likewise the success stories of cooperation and institutional ties experienced by the CEI Secretariat with associations of local and regional authorities, pave the way for action.

Taking stock of the existing repositories and knowledge on the participatory experience of local actors into national and transnational consultations (e. g. within macro-regional strategies), it seems useful and on-time to elaborate on the current provisos for the inclusion of local authorities and citizens into the institutional process of decision making and the management of common goods, in view of drafting a benchmark for innovative democracy measures.

Such an exercise could prompt the comparison of the state of the art by Country and the benchmark to feed the elaboration of recommendations and guidelines or the adoption of new regulations on strengthening the institutional landscape of participatory bodies in the CEI constituency. Leveraging also on the Protocols of CoE that are focused on the rights of Municipalities and Towns, that already in the past rooted innovative solutions for the benefit of LRAs, proposals suitable of European implementation could be delivered.

Moreover, to disseminate existing models and ongoing good practices a mechanism of light twinning between CEI EU and non-EU Member States could be set up for the support of the administrative staff in the involved local governments to cope with the challenging commitment required for the rejuvenation of citizens' trust in a participatory, transparent and effective democracy.

## Bibliography

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Plan of Action 2021 - 2023

[www.cei.int/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/CEI%20Plan%20of%20Action%20DIGITAL%20ESEC%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.cei.int/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/CEI%20Plan%20of%20Action%20DIGITAL%20ESEC%20FINAL.pdf)

### Council of Europe (CoE)

“Code of good practice for civil participation in the decision-making process – Revised”

[www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/civil-participation](http://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/civil-participation) and  
<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016802eed5c>

### Committee of the Regions and Local Authorities (CoR)

“Putting Local and Regional Authorities at the Heart of European Democratic renewal”

<https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/The%20Conference%20on%20the%20Future%20of%20Europe%20-%20Putting%20Local%20and%20Regional%20Authorities%20at%20the%20Heart%20of%20European%20Democratic%20Renewal/conference-future-of-europe-putting-local-regional-authorities-heart-european-democratic-renewal.pdf>

### European Commission (EC)

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<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32014R0240>

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<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1058>



Reg. (EU) 2021/1529 of 15 September 201 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III)

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1529>

2021 Communication on EU Enlargement [COM (2021) 644 final]

[https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/2021-communication-eu-enlargement-policy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/2021-communication-eu-enlargement-policy_en)

### **Network of Associations of Local Authorities of SEE (NALAS)**

“Regional Decentralization Observatory Index for SEE – User Guide RDO Methodology”

[https://www.bacid.eu/NALAS\\_Regional\\_Decentralisation\\_Observatory](https://www.bacid.eu/NALAS_Regional_Decentralisation_Observatory)

<http://www.nalas.eu/search?q=Regional%20Decentralization%20Observatory%20Index%20for%20SEE%20%E2%80%93%20User%20Guide%20RDO%20Methodology>

### **Danube Local Actors Platform (D-LAP)**

Annual Danube Participation Day of the EUSDR

<https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/danube-local-actors-platform-d-lap/>  
<https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/events/8th-danube-participation-day/>

BACID II “Building Administrative Capacity in the Danube Region and Western Balkans (2018-2021)”

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