

Project: CRoLEV—Centre for the Rule of Law and European Values
Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence



Report on 'Citizen Participation: **CRoLEV** Sustainable Rule of Law and European Values in Europe Series', Academy on Participatory Democracy in Cyprus

28 November, 1-2 December 2023

Training and Focus Group

In partnership with the [Council of Europe, Directorate General II – Division of Elections and Participatory Democracy](#) and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Law Alternative and Innovative Methods (ICLAIM) <https://www.iclaimcentre.org/>

The poster features logos for the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) Cyprus, the Council of Europe, CRoLEV, the European Union, and ICLAIM. The main title is 'ACADEMY ON PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN CYPRUS'. It lists the dates: 28th November 2023 (10:00-13:00 CY time) (online/MS Teams), 1st December 2023 (14:00-19:00 CY time) (in person), and 2nd December 2023 (9:00-17:30 CY time) (in person). The venue is UCLan Cyprus campus in Pyla, Larnaca area. Registration is limited and contact is via email at crolev@uclan.ac.cy.

University of Central Lancashire UCLan Cyprus

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CRoLEV
Centre for the Rule of Law and European Values
Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence (2022-25)

Co-funded by the European Union

ICLAIM

Citizen Participation:
CRoLEV Sustainable Rule of Law and European Values in Europe Series

ACADEMY ON PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN CYPRUS

Jointly organised by **Council of Europe** and **Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence for the Rule of Law and European Values (CRoLEV)** School of Law, UCLan Cyprus

Facilitated by
Interdisciplinary Centre for Law, Alternative and Innovative Methods (ICLAIM)

REGISTRATION:
email crolev@uclan.ac.cy (places limited)

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VENUE
UCLan Cyprus campus in Pyla, Larnaca area

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Date

April 2024

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Introduction

On 28th November 2023, 1st and 2nd December 2023, the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence for the Rule of Law and European Values (CRoLEV) delivered the *Academy on Participatory Democracy in Cyprus* in partnership with the [Council of Europe, Directorate General II – Division of Elections and Participatory Democracy](#). The Academy took place under the framework of the “CRoLEV Sustainable Rule of Law and European Values in Europe Series” and was designed to introduce participants – policymakers, legal and paralegal professionals, academics, and civil society experts – to inclusive processes of civic engagement and public dialogue with the use of a Participatory Democracy (PD) toolkit. This was the second out of three training sessions under CROLEV, in collaboration with the Interdisciplinary Centre for Law, Alternative and Innovative Methods (ICLAIM). The first training took place in December 2022,¹ and the third, and last, session is expected in December 2024.

Participatory Democracy (PD) is the process of civil participation in political decision making, including various forms of public dialogue and by utilising technology and digital tools in recording the public’s responses. According to Della Porta (2019: 605), Participatory Democracy is enabled through the creation of “multiple opportunities for participation by involving citizens beyond elections”. In other words:

Participatory democracy is the participation of citizens in the democratic process, in a way that is representative of societal diversity, on multiple occasions and through a range of methods.

With the aim of introducing participants to the variety of available approaches for applying Participatory Democracy (PD) across diverse audiences and scenarios, the *Academy on Participatory Democracy in Cyprus* provided an introduction and overview of the following tools:

Code of good practice for civil participation in the decision-making process

Public Space Planning

Civil participation in decision-making toolkit (CPT)

Citizens' Assembly

School Participatory Budgeting Toolkit

U-CHANGE

CivicLab Toolkit for Development, Analysis and Forecasting Decision Options

The Academy introduced each tool by explaining their applicability and recommended context for each tool, with the use of case studies in which the tools were used. Participants had the opportunity to implement some of the tools in groups and apply the steps for topic selection, discussion, and response recording. In addition to the theoretical overview and practical application of the tools, the Academy participants had the opportunity to discuss and reflect on the tools’ usability within their own contexts through a facilitated focus group discussion. The latter enabled the group to identify possible risks and challenges to be considered when applying PD and identified an insightful connection between the PD toolkit and the tool of Social Mediation.

¹ https://crolev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Report_CRoLEV_ICLAIM_CSO-Training-and-Focus-Group_December-2022.pdf

This report presents an overview of the PD toolkit delivered under the Academy, highlights the focus group discussion’s findings, and provides recommendations for incorporating the Social Mediation tool in future PD work.

The Academy on Participatory Democracy

The Academy commenced with a training of all partners and facilitators in advance of the PD toolkit training that would take place with invited participants over the two days of 1 and 2 of December 2023. This allowed partners and facilitators to familiarise with the Council of Europe Participatory Democracy toolkit that was central to the Academy’s agenda and training.

Introductory Session

28 November 2023

The Academy kicked off with a half-day online introductory session, in which Council of Europe PD trainers, Anna Ditta and Dako Muradashvili introduced the [Code of Good Practice in Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process](#) and the nine principles of Participatory Democracy. Interestingly, the nine principles were presented interactively with the participants forming a circle, a symbolism to specify that the principles are not applied consecutively in a linear way but coexist and are interconnected.



Training Session

1 & 2 December 2023

Over the two-day in-person training session, held at UCLan Cyprus, trainers and participants engaged in a series of interactive activities introducing each of the training tools mentioned above. The discussion culminated in a Focus Group session, where participants had the opportunity to share their views, ideas and concerns over the practical application of the tools presented. Brief summaries of each tool and insights from the Focus Group session are presented below.

TOOL 1: [Civil Participation in Decision-Making Toolkit \(CPT\)](#)

CPT was introduced as a guidebook for community and municipality representatives: it is recommended for smaller community cohorts, but it may not be as easy to apply on a national level.

To apply CPT, a first step is to see what we want to "participate" about, so the community identifies a topic to be discussed. The Academy participants raised the following topics:

- Animal Welfare
- Women's Empowerment
- Transportation
- Well-being
- Youth Engagement

A key purpose of CPT is to engage individuals to increase trust. As one participant noted, "many individuals don't want to participate, but they criticize decision-makers; the key goal is to convince them to choose participation". For this to be achieved, CPT should be applied circularly (accountability): we cannot ask citizens to participate and then give up, offering no follow-up and transparency.

Who gets to participate in CPT? Participants should represent the separate social groups within the community implementing the tool (ie. The local municipality). Additionally, as another participant highlighted, "it is important to identify direct stakeholders to any topic/challenge and engage them, otherwise the same group of people will be providing feedback to the discussion".

CPT identifies four levels of participation:

- Social Capital
- Economic Capital
- Human Capital
- Political Capital

These four categories provide the structure for the community evaluation process. By following the evaluation factsheet of CPT, each of the four forms of capital receives a separate score when the evaluation is completed. When applying CTP, there are no true or false assumptions. CPT enables different groups to complete their separate community evaluation through the template provided.

Academy participants had the opportunity to put the tool in practice in groups. Three groups were formed, each examining one of the topics of (1) Women's empowerment, (2) Animal Welfare, and (3) Youth Engagement. Trainers clarified that community evaluations can take up to a month to complete, so the Academy's practice activity was "just a teaser".

A key outcome from the exercise was that some stakeholders may have a conflict of interest, for example a desire to contribute to animal welfare may clash with economic factors.

When Community Evaluation is completed, the next step in CPT is Stakeholder Identification and Evaluation. For example, on the topic of Women's empowerment, I cannot call all women to a meeting, but I can identify representation of three key groups: **(1) Institutional Actors, (2) Civil Society, and (3) Private Actors.**

Insights on representation and PD culture: it is often easy to engage someone you know personally, but what happens when you show an open invitation to an institution? What if the institution sends an employee and they don't have the capacity to make political decisions? Coming across such challenges is an indication of the lack of participatory democracy culture, in other words institution representatives and decision-makers don't see its value to truly commit to it.

Insights on accountability: there have been cases when the CPT process was concluded, but the input and positions were never transferred back to the institution, and the institution could not hold an official stance on the completed report in the end. This is why stakeholder identification is important for the process to be effectively completed. We choose very concrete stakeholders on each topic and identify individuals within each of the three categories: Institutional Actors - Civil Society - Private Actors.

Using CPT for a specific topic the community wishes to examine:

Step 1: Community Evaluation on four categories of capital for the specific topic examined. This is completed through CPT template on community evaluation.

Step 2: Stakeholder Identification under three types of stakeholders for the specific topic examined. This is followed by the stakeholders' evaluation of capacity (relevance) and willingness to engage (interest). A CPT template (separate from the community evaluation one) is available for stakeholder evaluation and one template is completed for each stakeholder.

Step 3: Stakeholders evaluated are automatically categorized on a table that identifies their potential (Stakeholders Plotting)

Usability of the CPT process: to decide in which Phase of Policy Making and on what Level of Participation we can effectively engage each community stakeholder.

TOOL 2: [Citizen's Assemblies](#)

This method is based on deliberative democracy and has been identified as particularly useful to both activists and civil servants. Whereas like other approaches the method is a form of citizen's engagement, assemblies differ from public meetings, by always concluding in a vote, following extensive deliberation on a given topic by those attending the assembly.

Training materials on how to organise a Citizen's Assembly have been already developed by the Center for Blue Democracy, in Poland, who have developed the following guiding principles:

1. Democracy is for everyone.
2. In a democracy, the people are the sovereign.
3. Each person is worthy by the virtue of their innate dignity.
4. The aim of democracy is to contribute to a good quality of life.
5. The process is conducted in a fair and credible way
6. The purpose of a Citizens' Assembly is to achieve high quality, well thought-out decisions.
7. Joy is the measuring stick of success.²

A useful four-step guide was presented during the training, based on the Deliberative Café approach:

Step 1: Formation of a coordination team

This team will be guiding the process and the discussion.

Step 2: Topic Selection

This needs to be accurate enough to clearly guide the discussion. If a topic is unclear, then one or more workshops can be organised in advance of the final deliberation, in order to clarify the scope of the topic or the problem to be discussed.

Step 3: Determination of ideal composition of the assembly

Depending on the topic, the coordination team has the responsibility to determine the selection criteria, on who and how will be invited to join the assembly. The primary aim is to ensure that all stakeholders with an interest in the particular topic are represented. An easy way to achieve this, is through carefully selecting representative demographic criteria.

Step 4: Invitations and random selection (Two rounds selection)

Once the criteria for participation are determined, the coordination team shall proceed with inviting participants. Ideally, invitations should be personalised, and an effort should be made into making the invitation attractive visually and in substance. Some form of remuneration (monetary, vouchers, coupons etc) may be allocated to participants, to ensure broad participation. Whereas targeted invitations are appropriate, random selection is also desirable, by instance, by sending out invitations on the basis of the electoral register or a list of households with a specific characteristic.

² <https://bluedemocracy.pl/what-is-a-citizens-assembly/>

This presentation triggered a number of comments by participants, in particular regarding the funding for logistical purposes and the remuneration of participants. Concerns were raised on the basis that specific funders may have specific interests in the outcome of a deliberative process. Another concern was the fact authorities or other interest group may not always have access to enough data in order to benefit from a broad pool of data that will allow representative or random selection. These are all factors that need to be taken into account in the process of designing the Citizens' Assembly.

Lastly, equally important to the selection of participants, is the selection of Facilitators, Stakeholders and Experts who will give their own input during the discussion. These need to be speakers with a talent to engage participants in the conversation, and if needed, to also design and facilitate activities which will result in optimum results.

TOOL 3: [CivicLab Toolkit](#)

The CivicLab Toolkit, is a **public consultation** tool for developing, analysing and forecasting options in the decision-making process, developed and promoted by the Council of Europe. It has a broad applicability, since it can be easily adapted to an online or offline context, and can cover a broad geographical scope, locally, regionally and even, internationally.

The Council of Europe has developed a detailed booklet on this methodology,³ and a spreadsheet-based **digital matrix tool**, where participants can gather and disseminate concrete ideas in an organised manner. Ahead of the event, the organisers of the public consultation need to build a **Digital Passport**. This is the source of all information for the event, for both participants and facilitators. It needs to contain all relevant information, and it will form the basis for the administrator, who is in charge of amending the template in a manner that would make it most useful for the topic in question.

Once this preparatory phase is complete, participants in the public consultation shall be distributed into groups, under the **Traffic Light Method**. To achieve this, the administrator and the facilitators need to be familiar with the background of the participants, in order to ensure that an equal number of representatives from each stakeholder group participate in each of the traffic-light groups. If this is an in-person meeting, then participants will be separated into different rooms, with access to a computer where they will be able to add their input on the matrix. The aim of the process is to reach consensus on concrete proposals for the resolution of the problems discussed.

³ <https://rm.coe.int/civicl原因-a4-web/1680a729a1>

Each of the groups need to participate in the following phases and fill in the digital matrix. Each phase is timed, to achieve efficiency. The data and ideas collected are then discussed in plenary. The whole process can be described in 5 Phases as follows:

Phase 1: Identify problems and challenges on the consultation topic

Phase 2: Brainstorm on ideas that could potentially solve the problems identified

Phase 3: Develop concrete proposals, based on the ideas suggested

Phase 4: Evaluate the proposals against realistic implementation

Factors to consider include: Time, Power/Authority, Resources available

Phase 5: Develop a time-scale for implementation

The above process through the digital template was tested with enthusiasm by the participants. The structured approach was helpful to ensure efficiency, but at the same time the strict time constraints proved a challenge. Each group participant had 1 minute to express their idea during the brainstorming, and the fact that no direct discussion on that idea was allowed required considerable discipline on behalf of the participants to not drift into lengthy discussions and waste time. Evaluation was only possible once participants reached Phase 4. This proved the significance of the role of the facilitator who was ultimately tasked with adding information on the digital matrix and ensuring that participants followed the timer.

TOOL 4: [Public Space Planning](#)

This was an online presentation by Ms. Natalya Chernogub, concerning an urban planning consultation process which have been implemented in Ukraine. It was presented as a case study for the facilitation of consultations concerning public spaces.

The following step-by-step process was suggested:

Step 1: (Preparation) Identify the appropriate people, questions, methods, time and feedback one needs to receive input from the public. Methods include input in written, through workshops, or roundtable discussions, among others.

Step 2: Identify stakeholders. Useful questions include who is directly/ indirectly/ potentially impacted by the decision to be taken. Whose help will be needed in bringing the project through.

Step 3: Hold a public consultation, based on the points identified above, for at least 45 days.

Step 4: Analyse all input received by organising a workshop guided by SWOT Analysis.

→ *Strengths*

→ *Weaknesses*

→ *Opportunities*

→ *Threats*

Step 5: Produce a Consultation Report. This needs to be as short as possible, in a format and language that is accessible to citizens. A visual interpretation of results is usually most helpful.

TOOL 5: [U-CHANGE Game](#)

This tool, developed by the Council of Europe, envisages to teach the fundamentals of public participation through a game format, following the “learning through action” principle, and it serves as the education component of **CivicLab**, already mentioned above. The game is modelled across three interactive fields: (i) City, (ii) Country and (iii) the Dream School, and it is therefore, adaptable to the specific audience. It is available both in a classic gameboard format, and in a digital format. Like other tools, the game too consists of a *preparatory – deliberation – publication of results* phases.⁴ More concretely:

⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/prems-005722-gbr-2541-uchange-web-bat-a4/1680a86b61> p. 37-39

Stage 1: Preparation of the game

Define the topic, aims and tasks for the game, including the selection of the appropriate playing field. A stakeholder assessment and mapping, as per the CPT tool, already mentioned above, is desirable, whereas participants shall be selected according to the CivicLab methodology.

Stage 2: Playing the game

Separate groups of players shall play on a different playing field. The game gives the opportunity to prepare a full project and advocacy plan, according to the consultation topic at hand.

Stage 3: Identifying results of the game

Results of the game are presented and discussed by all players, giving them the opportunity to negotiate and analyse their results, as well as predicting potential consequences.

Stage 4: Preparation and publication of analytical report on the results

This requires the preparation of individual group reports, and a final consolidated analytical report with concrete recommendations.

TOOL 6: [School Participatory Budgeting Toolkit](#)

This is a tool also developed by the Council of Europe, with the purpose to engage schoolchildren and students in decision-making process, as a means to cultivate the significance of a culture of citizen-based decision-making from an early age, and encourage dialogue with society's youngest members. The Council of Europe toolkit contains case studies from Portugal, Poland, France, Lithuania, Italy and Ukraine. Contrary to the previous tools presented, School Participatory Budgeting does not only recommend a sequence of steps for effective public consultation. It generally seen as a 'comprehensive and continuous process of learning and building' a series of practical skills and competencies, through teaching students to build and implement projects, and learn the significance of direct democracy.⁵ These skills and competencies include:

- i. The ability to create and discuss new ideas, draft documents, communicate and work in teams
- ii. To critically reflect on and assess one's own position within a project
- iii. The ability to study and draft budgets
- iv. To build a sense of belonging and empowerment as a child with a voice
- v. To develop arguments and responses for a public presentation
- vi. To build skills related to participation in debates, voting, direct democracy and self-confidence.

Due to time constrains, training participants did not have the opportunity to engage in depth and test the last two tools. However, it was clear from the presentations that there is a plethora of

⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/school-participatory-budgeting-toolkit/1680a09535> p. 25

possibilities to undertake effective consultations, which are tailored to the needs of the problem at hand, the participants of the consultation, and the stakeholders involved.

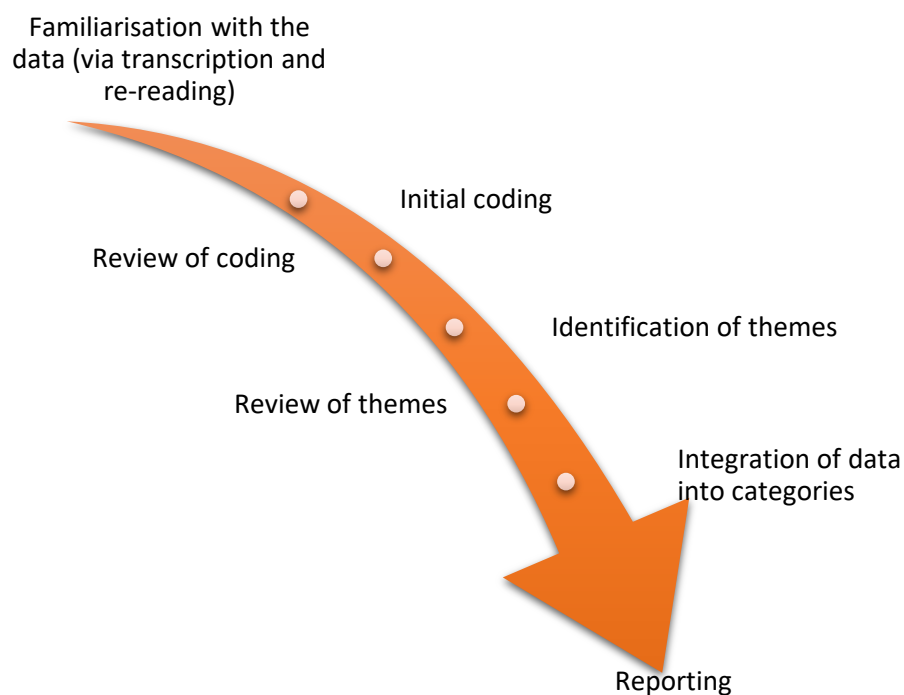
Focus Group and Findings

Methodology

The focus group took place as an open, unstructured conversation between participants and moderators, over a one-hour period. The focus group was audio and video recorded via MS Teams. Upon its completion, the recording of the focus group was transcribed, anonymised, and analysed in a process depicted in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

The Data Analysis Process



In performing the initial coding of the data, the researcher used a combination of *in vivo*, process, and concept coding for the purposes of capturing the meanings inherent to participants' opinions and experiences. Descriptive coding was also employed for the purposes of categorising the data in larger themes and for aiding the mapping of the ways in which categories are related. After the initial stage of coding, codes were reviewed as to ensure that:

- i. the language used by the researcher best described participants' opinions and experiences;
- ii. all the data contained in a code was indeed pertinent to the respective code (rather than better fit elsewhere); and

- iii. there was no overlap between any two (or more) codes.

Once the use of language and categorisation of data into codes were reviewed, the researcher commenced the identification of themes – or categories of “connected” codes. The themes were then reviewed, as shown in Figure 1 above, ensuring the precision of the language used and that no two themes intersected or overlaid to a significant extent. The resulting themes were then inductively organised in abstract categories, on the basis of the relationships between them.

Findings

Two distinctive categories emerged from the data: i. *obstacles to participatory democracy* and ii. *solutions for encouraging participatory democracy*. The two categories, their associated themes, and codes, are depicted in Figures 2 and 3 (below) respectively. For the purposes of this analysis, it should be noted that:

- i. citizenry is conceptualised as a group comprising of all the citizens of a place, where the place could be an area or the whole of a country, district, municipality, or village;
- ii. political class is conceptualised as a group of individuals who:
 - a. can be elected or appointed;
 - b. hold political functions;
 - c. have formal participation in authority;
 - d. make decisions; and
 - e. manage authority resources⁶.

Obstacles to Participatory Democracy

The first category encompasses what participants in the focus group identified as obstacles to participatory democracy. These include hindrances present within:

- i. the citizenry;
- ii. the political class; and
- iii. the state apparatus.

⁶ Please see Manolov (2013).

Figure 2

An Overview of Category 1: Obstacles to Public Participation (and Associated Themes and Codes)

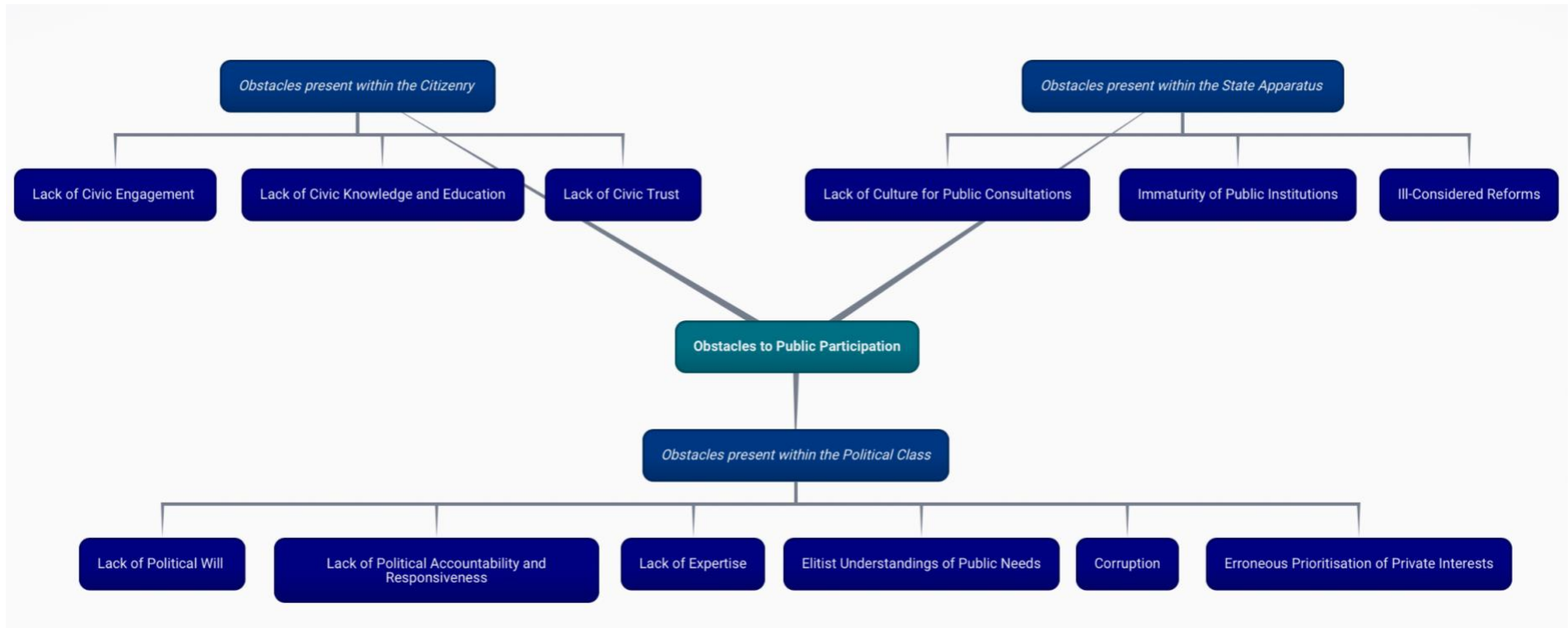
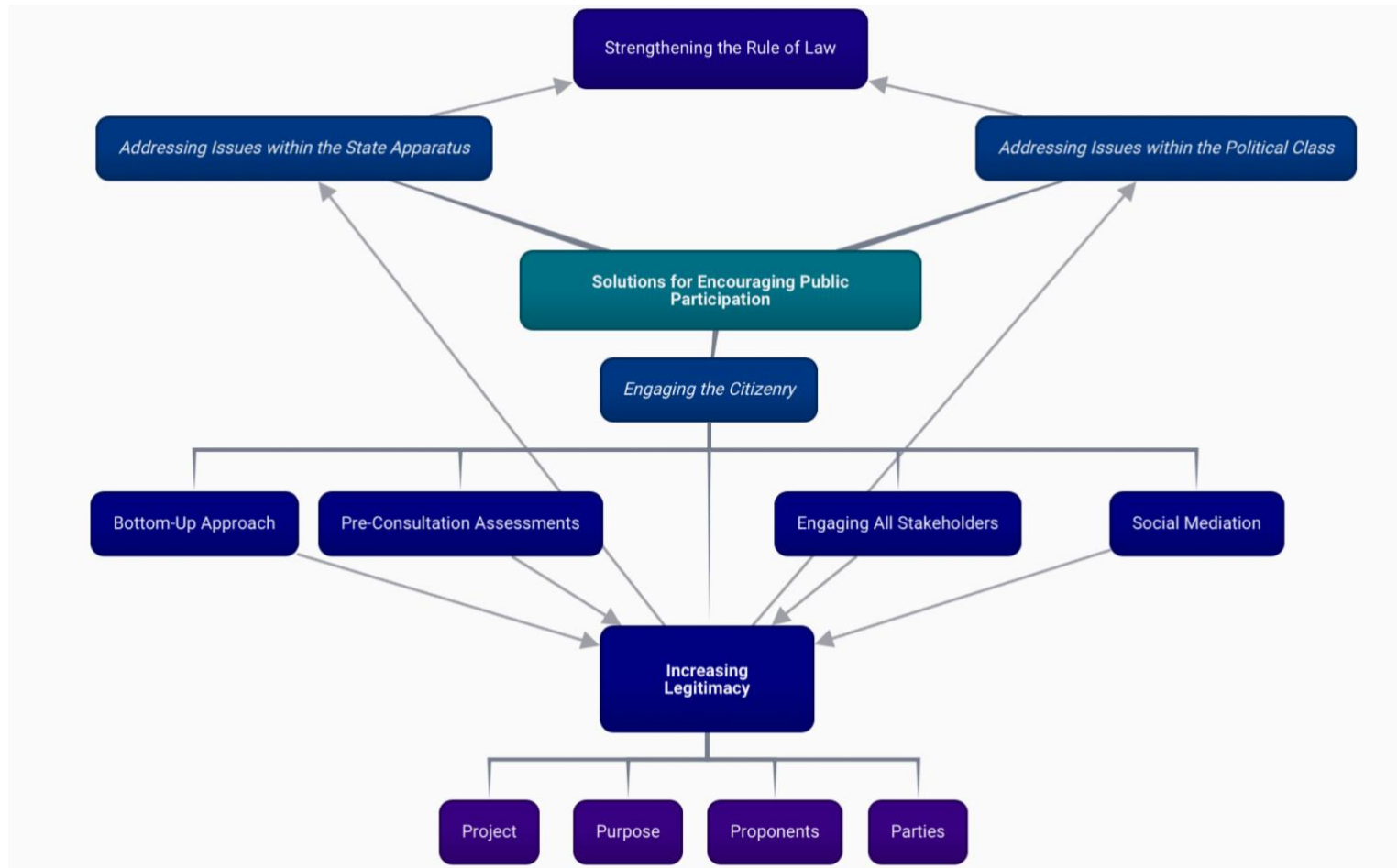


Figure 3

An Overview of Category 2: Solutions for Encouraging Public Participation (and Associated Themes and Codes)



Obstacles Present within the Citizenry

Participants noted that oftentimes, one of the main impediments to public engagement is proponents' perception that there is a lack of civic interest in such actions. Nevertheless, respondents agreed that this is oftentimes a mere stereotype, which stems from a combination of lack of civic knowledge and education, lack of civic trust, and mis-communication between the proponents of a participatory democracy project and its intended beneficiaries.

Participants noted that individuals may be interested in matters of participatory democracy, but relevant information may either be unavailable or inaccessible to them, thus often deterring citizens from engaging in participatory democratic processes and actions. This also has an additional effect of rendering individuals to react disparagingly when presented with prospects for participatory democracy, as a result of the lack of (or mis-)understanding of such processes. In a participant's words, "[c]itizens, they need education. I mean, they don't have information about participation. That's why they don't participate". As such, "[when] somebody does not know anything about civil participation, they criticise you".

Nevertheless, participants noted that mere exposure or access to information may be necessary for encouraging participatory democracy – but they are not sufficient. Rather, individuals must also be educated in basic notions of civics. In the absence of adequate civic education, individuals are less likely to grasp the importance of, or understand the appropriate means for individual and collective action.

Participants also noted a general lack of civic trust, which permeates relationships between members of the community; between members of the community and proponents of participatory democratic projects; and between members of the community and political representatives and leaders (the latter of which will be explored in section 2.1.2). The lack of civic trust leads citizens to act suspiciously, be less open to engage in dialogue with each other, and be less likely to show willingness in both identifying a common goal and in cooperating towards its achievement.

Obstacles Present within the Political Class

Participants agreed that the political class often has an elitist (and erroneous) view of the needs of the community, which often crosses the line between mere "lack of awareness" and "malice". Indeed, research shows that since legislatures are comprised of individuals who share socio-economic characteristics that are positioned towards the higher end of income distribution, then citizens who share similar characteristics are – at least descriptively – better represented. In a participant's words, "politicians...do things according to their own agreements, not to what the citizens want". Even in those circumstances where the elected are committed to representing the least affluent (which would generally make up for the majority in a given community), they often lack an accurate understanding of the needs and interests of those whom they represent.

Yet the skewed perception of needs also emerges from "a culture of...relying on the feedback that lobbyists provide", since those who engage in lobbying rarely "represent the community". Since

lobbyists are oftentimes economic elites who have little in common with the members of the community due to their material advantage, their priorities are likely to reflect “private interests” centred on “gain[ing] money, gain[ing] square meters of investment”, rather than matters of public interest. Participants appreciate that “private interests” also extend beyond lobbying and often “have an impact on voting among local authorities”. Indeed, research undertaken by Giger et al. (2012), Peters and Ensink (2015), and Bartels (2017) in European democracies found that governments exhibited a differential responsiveness to their citizens’ preferences depending on their economic class. They found that governments’ responsiveness to citizen preferences was observed only on those occasions when the requests were made by the economic elites – irrespective of the type of political culture, electoral institutions, national wealth, and the extent of democratic consolidation and economic (in)equality in a nation state.

Participants in the focus group further noted their concern vis-à-vis political corruption, which they regarded as a symptom of an overarching “failure of the rule of law and [political] culture” and as a primary threat to participatory democracy.

Participants noted that oftentimes, attempts at participatory democracy are squashed by a “lack of political will for action”, which stems from an avoidance of “the responsibility to decide” and of accepting “accountability” for one’s actions. In a participant’s words: “we see decision-makers not willing to act upon specific phenomena that require action”. This becomes even more likely when issues at play are perceived as “controversial”. The result is a “failure of implementation of plans”, which reinforces civic distrust in the political class, making citizens less likely to be open to cooperation and active engagement. Even when, at the local level, representatives are both willing and committed to action, the “expertise at the local authority level” may be “lacking”. Further, participants acknowledged that the relationships between the central and the local authority are oftentimes asymmetrical, leaving very little “under control of local communities”.

Obstacles Present within the State Apparatus

Participants noted that Cyprus lacks a democratic culture which facilitates public consultations. In particular, they highlighted the “immaturity of public institutions” which “can also have a fundamental [negative] impact” on the success of participatory democracy. Additionally, participants noted that ill-considered reforms (such as the upcoming municipal reform, which “appears complicated with multifaceted election phases and various levels of local governance”) pose practical challenges for the implementation of participatory democracy tools, since they are ridden with “uncertainties and questions nobody answers”.

Solutions for Encouraging Participatory Democracy

The second category encompasses what participants in the focus group identified as means of addressing the obstacles explored above (at all levels) and encourage participatory democracy.

Engaging the Citizenry

A first step in engaging the citizenry in tools of participatory democracy is, in participants' opinions, addressing the lack of civic knowledge. One participant noted that "many citizens are interested in how each of these matters is approached, but without necessarily having the answers right away, [and thus] providing information and clarification is important". Participants also agree that attempts to address the lack of civic knowledge (and to cement civic education) should start "from a very early age".

In this sense, it was noted that children should, as part of their primary education, "learn about the whole process [of participatory democracy], how to achieve the goal [of the community], [and] how to solve the problems [in the community]" through play. Over time, such civic learning would further help establish a culture of public participation, which had been identified by participants as lacking in Cyprus. Encouraging children to engage in participatory democracy collectively would also foster civic trust. In the long term, research shows that social trust improves the performance of democratic institutions and, as a result, overall satisfaction with democracy (see Putnam et al., 1994). Mere engagement in democratic dialogue with peers would also have a beneficial effect – in a participant's words, "feeling you are heard is another important aspect of building trust and civic engagement".

As a means of addressing the effects of civic distrust which is directed towards the political class, participants noted that a "bottom-up approach" should be adopted, whereby the proponents of a participatory democracy action prioritise the voices, experiences, and needs of those in the community. This should start with a concentrated effort to "understand the community, who is living there, what people do", what their priorities are in both the long- and short-term, and "what their needs are; what their needs can be". Such efforts should be underpinned by a commitment to inclusiveness, accounting for ways "to include all the people living there". In particular, the engagement of individuals deemed vulnerable (because of their old age, precarious economic position, or disability) and individuals who may otherwise be discriminated against was deemed as especially important.

Participants proposed that this can be done through a pre-consultation assessment, via a survey aimed at grasping diverse needs, priorities, and goals. This would not only legitimise the outcomes of the public consultation – given that it is intrinsically founded upon voices from the community – but will also provide the proponents of the participatory democratic action with an increase in public involvement and support. Participants note that such efforts should also extend in the engagement with stakeholders and experts.

With an acknowledgement that individuals in any one community will have diverse identities, yet be equally entitled to benefit from participatory democracy, participants noted that disagreements in the process of consultation should be dealt with via social mediation. Social mediation would allow (groups of) individuals "on opposite sides to explore options of common ground" when "public consultations with divergent opinions...reach a deadlock". The engagement in social mediation would also contribute positively to further building social trust by encouraging collective empathy, compromise, and a common search for mutually-beneficial solutions.

Addressing Issues within the Political Class

Participants noted that, in addressing the issues extant in the political class, one should focus on mapping out “the weaknesses and challenges in Cyprus in terms of rule of law and political culture” and engage in a concerted effort to address them in the long term. In the short term, participants agreed that public consultations should be binding as a means of removing the potential for private interference, political corruption, and political indecisiveness and lack of responsiveness to citizen demands.

Addressing Issues within the State Apparatus

Participants denoted that an overall strengthening of the rule of law is crucial in addressing the existing liabilities of democratic institution, encouraging a beneficial democratic relationship between citizens and representatives, and addressing the imbalance in the prioritisation of private interests in lieu of the public good.

Conclusion

The Academy of Participatory Democracy was an eye-opening experience for everyone involved, regarding the plethora of tools that have already been developed to encourage democratic participation and empower citizens to participate in decision-making processes. Useful toolkits which include a step-by-step guidance make consultation processes accessible across all levels of society. Furthermore, new and innovative tools, which aim to promote citizen consultation through gamification or digital matrixes make the process more structured and enjoyable, as well as more efficient.

The presentation and interactive of a collection of tools over a very short period of time was especially beneficial to help identify significant factors across all tools presented, upon which the success of a consultation process is dependent:

- (i) **Preparation** is of significance to both traditional methods of consultation and more modern game-based approaches.
- (ii) **Methodology** or methodologies followed have a direct impact on the success of any consultation process. All alternatives need to be considered carefully in the preparatory stage, during designing the process.
- (iii) **Knowing your crowd** is fundamental for ensuring a successful process. Both targeted and random selection – depending on the topic and the objectives of the process – are fundamental to ensure that a representative sample of citizens are genuinely interested in the topic, and are eager, willing and able to provide their input. The same applies in the selection of stakeholders, facilitators and/or experts invited to join the process.
- (iv) **Topic selection** is not to be taken lightly. On the contrary, regardless of the nature of the problem a consultation process seeks to address, the exact topic needs to be in a format that makes it accessible and understood by all participants. It is of vital important to dedicate enough time and resources, through a workshop or otherwise, to deconstruct highly controversial and complicated topics.

- (v) **Resources**, in terms of logistics, funds and human participation are a fundamental issue and potentially a major challenge, if they are not readily available. A friendly environment (or user-friendly digital platform), enough funding, and engaged facilitators and participants all contribute positively to lively, informative and constructive discussions.
- (vi) **Reporting** that is both accurate and informative is significant, both in terms of organising follow up actions, but also in order to ensure that the dialogue continues after the consultation. In **rule of law** terms, responsible and transparent reporting is also fundamental for accountability purposes, if the need to allocate responsibility arises.
- (vii) **Culture of Participatory Democracy** is potentially the fundamental ingredient for the successful implementation of any process that seeks to engage citizens.

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