



## **Our Social Europe through Local Civic Participation**

### **Partnership**

- Ballymun Job Centre: Lead Partner
- Dublin Net: a Consortium of Local Area Partnerships in Dublin
- European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE), Belgium
- ADV Romania
- Consorzio Sociale Abele Lavoro, Italy

### **Project Description**

The project aims to:

1. Systematically increase civic engagement of citizens in urban disadvantaged areas with local level decision making to deepen the EU agenda for “Community Led Local Development”, and;
2. Achieve active input from this local citizen engagement with to EU level decision making.

The project will mobilise community groups at the local level in each partner city to develop upon existing “Public Participation Networks”, in structured dialogue with local authorities, to empower a process of active participative democracy, including through innovative ‘virtual town hall’ tools.

It will target disadvantaged groups of citizens who are less likely to engage in participative processes. This process of empowerment will also provide a structured voice in shaping local participative structures. The policy impact of the local level engagement processes on actual local authority planning will be achieved in each partner city through peer review. The project will link with EU policies on increasing participative civic engagement (“Europe 2020”) and on “Community Led Local Development” (Structural Fund Regulations). It will also link to the European Knowledge agenda through development of a Portal for active citizen engagement. At each stage, the project process will raise the awareness of citizens of the empowering role of European strategies for deepening civic participation and local democracy, and of the role of local civic participation in impacting on European level policy.

The project includes a dissemination strategy with three strands:

1. Exchanges between partners;
2. Dissemination events with a major European network (ENSIE), and
3. Submission of proposals to European Parliament and European Commission.

Outputs include: 1. The Portal mechanism and  
2. Recommendations to the EU level on strengthening mechanisms for civic participation, particularly of citizens from disadvantaged communities, on both local level and EU level policy processes.



## Context

The project will fulfil the “General objective” of the Programme “To foster European citizenship and to improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at Union level”. Each stage of developing structured voluntary civic participation at local level includes raising awareness of citizens of the empowering role of EU strategies on increasing participative civic engagement (“Europe 2020”) and on “Community Led Local Development” (Structural Fund Regulations). The project also links to the European Knowledge agenda through development of a Portal for active citizen engagement. The project follows a strategy for local civic participation to impact on European policy. Through its dissemination policy, project participants engage with European level civil society organisations through the role in the project of the European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE), forming proposals and recommendations for dialogue with the European level on transmitting learning and proposals from the local to the European level dialogue with NGOs on civic participation. The project will also engage and seek to develop structured channels of communication between active citizenship and the European Parliament.

The specific aim of the programme which this project aims to address is: “Encourage democratic and civic participation of citizens at Union level, by developing citizens' understanding of the Union policy making-process and promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering at Union level.”

Throughout the project, each stage of developing active civic participation locally by citizens from disadvantaged communities occurs within the framework of the empowering role of EU strategies (“Europe 2020” and “Community Led Local Development”). The participants will interact voluntarily in learning forums with citizens from other European cities, engaging with Union policy making processes, learning of culturally different engagement processes, enriching their own participation experiences, and learning of active volunteering opportunities at the European level. Project activities on the theme of volunteering for active Union citizenship form a specific module of the transnational meetings and the final dissemination event. As regards the “Annual priorities” of the Programme, this project addresses the themes “Citizens' participation in the democratic life of the EU” and “The future of Europe”.

The project fosters and actively monitors the impact of actual citizen participation in local level decision making processes, particularly of citizens from urban disadvantaged communities. This process takes place through raising awareness of the empowering role of implementing and building the local dimension of European strategies for active citizenship, community led local development and social cohesion. The transnational events of the project bring participants into involvement in intercultural dialogue with opposite numbers from other European urban environments, with European level NGOs and with dialogue processes influencing policy formation with the European Commission and European Parliament. While actively interacting with these processes, the participants in the project will engage with themes affecting the Future of Europe. In addition, the project is developing concrete measures and tools (Portal for a virtual “town hall”) towards the realisation of a democratic, participative, inclusive Europe.



## Activities

### 1. Working methods applying within implementation of the project.

The project will consist of each partner engaging local community groups in pilot disadvantaged areas of their cities in learning groups to learn of the European agenda for active citizenship, participative democracy and community led local development. On this basis they will engage with the participative structures of the local authority to seek to impact on local authority city development plans to benefit citizen engagement and community development with specific proposals. The methodology of engagement will be shared at European transnational events and a peer review tool used to enable participants compare and contrast culturally different approaches to local citizen engagement. The approaches used will focus in particular on the methodology of developing citizen engagement through a portal creating a “virtual town hall” for dialogue with local authorities. The role of voluntary representative organisation and engagement will in particular be cultivated. European learning events will engage local agendas with EU level NGOs that interact with Union structures to impact on citizen engagement and participation policies and seek to advance the methodology of social dialogue with civic NGOs at European level. The learning in agenda formation and participative engagement at local level shared at EU level will be formed into a set of recommendations which the dissemination events will concretise in the form of engagement with Union policy bodies.

### 2. Appropriateness of the activities foreseen to reach the project's needs and objectives.

The methodologies employed will empower participants to engage in a structured way both locally and at the EU level by developing awareness of policies and concrete tools for engagement such as the “town hall” portal and the policy impact monitoring system. The activities of the project will disseminate awareness of European strategies for civic engagement as tools for local engagement and strengthen the developing commitment of the local level to engage with and impact on policy development processes at Union level. The project actively engages and involves local citizens from disadvantaged areas, through their community groups, in active citizenship both locally and at the European level. Through each of these processes, the above objectives set out will be met.

### 3. European dimension of the project.

The European dimension infuses each level and stage of the project, not least in the grounding of all actions in the active citizenship and social inclusion aims of Europe 2020 and the structured enlargement through the projects’ “Public Participation Networks” of methods to achieve the Union aim of Community Led Local Development. The transnational exchanges, peer reviews, dissemination actions and proposal formation process, as well as the direct engagement of the project at Union level, through NGO volunteering and policy formation, and through the dialogue process with Union bodies (Commission and Parliament) complete the integration of the European dimension of the project.



## Dissemination

### 1. Dissemination plan to enable an effective transfer and exchange of results.

The dissemination plan involves several stages. Initial desk research will establish the parameters and potential of evolving local civic participation structures and of the civic participation infrastructure at Union level. On this basis training of participants at the local level will highlight the empowering potential of Union strategy on civic engagement and community led local development. Local seminars in each partner city will involve local citizens' groups (community groups) and local authorities in a process of engagement aimed at exerting influence on city development plans. Learning from these processes in each city will be exchanged at European level meetings. At these meetings the local and European civic participation agendas will meet and be shared through the input of European NGOs engaged in citizen participation strategy at Union level. These transfers will enable a synergy of diverging local approaches in informing and strengthening the Union level civic participation agenda. In each participating city, local community group participation will develop strategies for inputting and engaging with local authority representative structures through a portal enabled "virtual town hall" process. The outcomes of these engagements will be shared and peer reviewed at European level among partners. Further European level meetings will involve active engagement with a participation agenda with European bodies (Commission and Parliament) following equivalent engagements with MEPs and Commission representatives at local/national level. The final dissemination event involves the presentation and debate of the project recommendations on civic engagement at local and Union level with an audience composed of a range of engaged interests, from community groups, local authorities and European level NGOs.

### 2. How the project will create a multiplier effect among a wider audience beyond those directly involved in the project activities

The project will leave behind active community groups trained and skilled in knowledge of European strategies for active citizenship and participative democracy, engaging in a structured way with local authorities and the European level policy formation processes. It will also be the creation of a portal for civic participation ("virtual town hall") which will be housed on a sustainable basis as a window for civic engagement with local authorities. Through the engagement pioneered in the project, a methodology will be established for continued citizen participation with local planning processes, European links and ongoing engagement. Local communities will link with European NGOs in the European level policy engagement process which will continue and grow beyond the lifetime of the project. These aspects of the project all involve a legacy of knowledge, methodology and mechanisms creating multiplier effects engaging increasing circles of communities in civic engagement far beyond the completion of the project. The impact of the project on European NGOs will strengthen their civic engagement processes and agendas, and reinforce their dialogue with Community institutions.



## Proposed Impact

### 1. Expected medium/long-term effects produced by the project.

The project will develop a methodology for engaging the civic participation of citizens from disadvantaged areas of cities in influencing the city development plans of their local authorities through a structured methodology of civic participation based on European strategies (Europe 2020, Community Led Local Development). This will strengthen the evolving “Public Participation Networks” being developed to engage participative democracy. In this way, the project will both kick-start local community involvement from disadvantaged areas in civic participation in their local authorities and European dialogue and also be instrumental in shaping the structures and agendas of the emerging structures for participative democracy in local authorities or dialoguing with them. In addition, the project will add new dimensions to the agenda for e-citizenship, notably by integrating a participative portal for “virtual town hall” engagement. Through the activities of the project, direct links will be forged from local communities to the Union level civic engagement processes, promoting active voluntary involvement in European level NGO engagement with the Union and their policies. The process will help the evolution of civic engagement methodologies of these NGOs themselves as well as of the Union level civic engagement process. These are sustainable medium to long term impacts of the project.

### 2. How the participants will be involved in the proposed activities.

Different groups of participants will be engaged through local community groups firstly in targeted initial training events and policy awareness raising processes, policy development processes, dialogue with local authorities, engagement with citizens from other European cities at the project’s transnational events, voluntary engagement with Union level NGOs promoting active citizenship and, through this, involvement in European policy development processes through dialogue with the European Commission and Parliament. The active participants of the project will all be a wide range of citizens from the target communities of the project.

### 3. Percentage of participants not involved in NGOs/Institutional or social activities before their involvement in the project.

It is the aim of the project to mobilise citizens who have mostly not previously involved NGOs/Institutional or social activities. It is estimated that citizens not previously in the sense of structured civic participation at local or European level will compose at least 50% of project participants.



## Outputs

### 1. Kick Off meeting

A Kick off meeting where EU partners will meet over two days to clarify project objectives, identify needs in partner countries, build relationships, engage in a half day study visit of best practices in Italy and using a Peer review methodology, identify the best practice aspects which will inform the project and development of a model of practice. Participants from all partner countries will participate.

Results:

- Clear objectives and agreed plan of project activities.
- Initial understanding of the challenges and good practices in partner countries, identification of potential transferable practices.
- Development of partnership approach to the project implementation.
- Understanding of peer review approach.

Status: Achieved

### 2. Preparatory Desk Research

Baseline research in each country on evolving participation networks (where have they been established, how they developed, the current context within partner countries and how active citizen participation will contribute towards city development).

Identification of best practice models: what constitutes excellent public participation networks.

Development of preparatory training for Public Participation Networks (PPN): identify existing preparatory training modules/develop 1 day training.

Results:

- Research report for each partner country and partnership synthesis providing a baseline for the development of the project.
- Research findings will be presented in a user friendly format so as to ensure their accessibility to the potential public participant networks.
- The report will also provide an insight to current best practice and highlight components relevant to best practice models.
- A 1 day training course will be developed based on research findings and will be piloted at the local seminars.

Status: Achieved



### 3. Local Seminar 1

Initial meeting with invited participants (approx. 20) in each partner country. Participants will be provided with an overview of the project and will participate in an introductory session to the preparatory training. Participants will also input on the planning of local seminars, will review best practices in each country and discuss the current situation/challenges/opportunities in their own country. Much emphasis will be placed on developing a culture of empowerment and active citizenship.

Results:

- Each country will have established a local pilot PPN, consisting of a group of participants, committed to the project and to the development a sustainable model of participation.
- The introduction to the 1 day training aims to empower participants and reinforce their commitment to the project.
- It is anticipated that participants will remain involved for the lifetime of the project in each partner country and act as champions of active citizenship.

Status: Achieved

### 4. 2<sup>nd</sup> EU Partnership Meeting

Partners from the three other countries will participate in a study visit of best practices and utilise the peer review approach in identifying the common elements which may be transferable across the partnership. Partners will also undertake a review of the pilot preparatory training and outline who it will be implemented in each country. Using the research findings partners will review the planning of local seminar activities and the portal development.

Results:

- Identified best practices from Romania,
- Identified elements common to all partner countries, Amendments to preparatory training and sharing of materials to be used.
- Common approach to local seminar activities identified.
- A proposed structure for the portal will be agreed and planning regarding its development.

Status: Achieved



## 5. Local Seminar 2

Local participants will come together to pilot the preparatory training in each partner country. The objective of developing a culture of active citizenship will be assessed through a discussion group and key findings will be recorded. Participation through relationship building and trust development will also be discussed. Time for networking will be incorporated into the day so as to ensure relationship building is established.

Results:

- A piloted preparatory training course with feedback from participants and facilitators in each partner country.
- Committed and empowered participants, motivated to be involved in the establishment of more formalised public participation networks and to become champions for active citizen participation.

Status: Achieved

## 6. 3rd EU Partnership Meeting

Study visit of best practices along with partner peer review. PPN development in partner countries reviewed post preparatory training and challenges/strengths identified. Partners will utilise lessons learnt to date to plan further local seminar activities & to inform the development of a best practice PPN model. Utilising the Portal to support PPN development will be planned. Dissemination of the project & associated active citizen participation information will be discussed.

Results:

- Identified best practices and identified elements common to all partner countries.
- Further developed PPN model incorporating best practices reviewed to date.
- Action plan for portal advancement particularly in relation to strategic dissemination.

Status: Achieved



### 7. Local Seminar 3

Further development of the PPN in each partner country and formalised agreements regarding its sustainability (including the development and acceptance of relevant tools/materials to enable this). Identification of how and where it can be positioned and sustained in each partner country, and at a European level. Communication between PPNs at local seminars in partner countries via skype/other appropriate technologies. Pilot of the PPN Citizens Portal.

Expected Results:

- More formalised PPNs in each partner country with clear agreements regarding sustainability.
- Communication between PPNs and discussion regarding the PPN model, learning during project, challenges etc.
- Pilot of the Citizens portal with feedback from PPN of its use/improvements.

### 8. Citizens Portal Development

A 'virtual town hall': participants at local and national levels will be invited to participate in the development of the portal and its sustainability. The portal will be developed by partners taking into consideration their own specific national needs while also providing a European perspective. This space aims to inform local citizens of local seminars while also disseminating general information regarding active citizen participation and current practice in partner countries.

Expected Results:

- An interactive portal with up to date information on each local site, outcomes of local seminars, area for local people to 'sign up' to participate.
- The portal will also provide a gateway to more general information on Active Citizen participation with links to relevant websites, information regarding similar projects and best practices.
- All partners will aim to inform 100 people in each partner country and encourage them to access the portal.



## 9. Local Seminar 4

Local Seminar 4/final country conference: Each partner will hold a local conference, presenting their experiences, learning outcomes for participants, impact in the community, sustainability at local levels, and transferability to other regions. Partners will also aim to develop a sustainability plan with relevant stakeholders and if possible influence at a policy level.

Expected Results:

- Four country conferences sharing best practices and transferability potential. Relevant national stakeholders will be invited to attend.
- The portal will be presented and utilised at the conference to encourage transferability to other towns/cities.
- Partners will have well developed sustainability plans outlining how the networks will continue after the lifetime of the project.

## 10. Final EU Partnership meeting

Final Study Visit and Peer review. Partners will bring together all best practices identified at study visits and present on the portal. A Final dissemination conference, with key invited stakeholders, will showcase the work of the project and highlight the PPN model which can be transferred to other areas and countries. Partners will also review project outcomes and plan for sustainability across countries.

Expected Results:

- A final conference disseminating the work of the project at national and EU levels.
- Potential for transferability identified.
- Sustainability plans for all countries established.
- Use of the portal to disseminate.
- A successful final meeting where all project activities are complete.