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## Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Evaluation Report

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## *Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Evaluation Report*

### **A word from the evaluators**

*When preparations for the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly began, and later for the Assembly itself, one of the most frequently repeated facts was that this was the first such Assembly to be organized in the city, and, following the good practices of deliberative democracy, in the whole of Lithuania. This acted as an encouragement to ourselves and the participants – we are bringing a beneficial change; an apology to various stakeholders – when applying innovations, there are always problems; motivation for the city's residents and decision-makers – the first step towards a new standard of decision-making is being taken. When evaluating this Assembly, what we noticed most was the great enthusiasm and responsibility of all those involved. When interviewing almost 50 representatives of stakeholders, we received only one refusal to participate, and both the organizers and participants spent more than one hour sharing their expectations or reflecting on their experience in this process. This is not only the first assembly in Lithuania, but also its first evaluation, which, having gone through the entire process together with the organizers and participants of the Assembly, became a kind of challenge for us as well. When writing this report, we relied on evaluation criteria that meet international standards, good practices from other countries, and sought to show the widest possible variety of experiences, identifying specific directions for improving the process arising from these experiences. Even if the evaluation results and conclusions are critical from time to time, they are formulated with due respect for the time and work of those involved, and at the same time - with the expectation of contributing to the successful application of deliberative democracy practices in the future.*

*Having completed the assessment, we hope that it will not dampen enthusiasm, but on the contrary, inspire and reveal paths for improvement.*

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## Introduction

This report presents the results of an independent evaluation **of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly** (hereinafter referred to as the VMPA, the Assembly). The Assembly, which took place in September-December 2025, is a democratic innovation applied in the Vilnius City Municipality, during which city residents selected by lottery jointly formulated recommendations that would help *“ensure that Vilnius residents would choose public transport, walk or cycle more often – regardless of their place of residence”*. This Assembly was initiated **by the Vilnius City Municipality and implemented with the latter's participation in the cities programme of the international organisation DemocracyNext**, during which the organisation helped three competitively selected cities – Esch-sur-Alzette (Luxembourg), Vilnius (Lithuania) and Kerewan (Gambia) – to implement deliberative democracy initiatives that would contribute to the democratisation of urban planning.

Citizens' assemblies are a tool of deliberative democracy. Through lottery-based selection, they bring together a diverse group of citizens who learn from experts and stakeholders, engage in deliberations with the help of facilitators, and formulate recommendations to address various public policy issues.

<sup>1</sup> The deliberation part reflects an inclusive approach to decision-making, as during it, citizens' assembly participants present their informed and reasoned opinions, also hear the reasoned positions of other participants and engage in discussions leading to joint decision-making. **By strengthening citizens' democratic behavior skills, citizens' assemblies can also contribute to improving the quality of public policy decisions and increasing public support for them, reducing polarization decrease, dialogue between different groups in society and increased trust democracy, decision-makers and citizens' opportunities to influence decision-making.** <sup>2</sup>

Deliberative democracy practices, including citizens' assemblies, have been in place in various forms for decades. For example, in Eastern Belgium, an institutionalized two-tier deliberative democracy structure has been in place since 2019: a permanent Citizens' Council selects topics for discussion, which are examined and recommendations are formulated by temporarily formed citizens' assemblies. <sup>3</sup> In many Western countries have implemented individual citizens' assemblies that have addressed key local or national issues: as early as 2006, Dutch citizens discussed the country's electoral system; in 2013-2014, Irish citizens and decision-makers discussed the principles enshrined in the country's Constitution (electoral system, same-sex marriage, the role of women in society and politics, etc.); in 2025, French citizens made recommendations on assisted dying. It is noticeable that in recent years, **citizens' assemblies have become increasingly popular in the Central and Eastern European region, where they are most often organized locally.**

<sup>1</sup> Elstub, S. (2014). „Mini-publics: Issues and Cases“. In Elstub, S. & McLaverty, P. (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy: Issues and Cases*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; EBPO (2021). *Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes*. Nuoroda: [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/evaluation-guidelines-for-representative-deliberative-processes\\_10ccbfcb-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/evaluation-guidelines-for-representative-deliberative-processes_10ccbfcb-en.html).

<sup>2</sup> Fishkin, J., Siu, A., Diamond, L., Bradburn, N. (2021). Is Deliberation an Antidote to Extreme Partisan Polarization? Reflections on “America in One Room.” *American Political Science Review*, 115(4), 1464-1481. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000642>; Paulis, E., Pospieszna, P. (2025). Deliberative mini-publics as learning schools for democracy? Examining deliberation impact on dissatisfied and radical participants of a citizens' assembly in Poland. *Democratization*, 32(4), 888–911. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2024.2422508>

<sup>3</sup> Macq, H., Jacquet, V. (2023). Institutionalising participatory and deliberative procedures: The origins of the first permanent citizens' assembly. *European Journal of Political Research*, 62: 156-173. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12499>

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level, focusing on environmental, strategic planning and urban planning topics.

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VMPA also responds to these regional trends.

This is the first citizens' assembly organized in Vilnius and the first in Lithuania to use a lottery principle for the selection of participants. Although independent evaluation of a citizens' assembly is a common and, according to the OECD's (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) Evaluation Guidelines for Deliberative Democracy Processes<sup>5</sup>, recommended practice, it becomes even more significant in the context of the application of innovation. Independent evaluation is important for the trust of decision-makers, the public and other stakeholders **in the deliberative democracy process and its results, and** is closely related to trust in the recommendations generated during the assembly.

It also **ensures greater legitimacy of the citizens' assembly** by demonstrating the organizers' commitment to quality, transparency and neutrality. The analysis carried out during the evaluation also **provides a basis for learning from the experience gained and for improving citizens' assemblies in the future.**

The independent evaluation of the VMPA was initiated by the Vilnius City Municipality and the international organization DemocracyNext. Before the evaluation, the initiators approved the VMPA intervention logic<sup>6</sup> (Annex 2) and the evaluation matrix (Annex 1) prepared by the evaluators, which became the basis for this evaluation report. Based on the OECD guidelines, three evaluation dimensions were distinguished: **assembly design, deliberative democracy process and assembly impact**. It is important to note that this evaluation does not cover the content of specific recommendations developed during the VMPA and their implementation – this is the subject of reports prepared by Vilnius City Municipality.

**A combination of several methods** was used for the evaluation. During the evaluation, three surveys of VMPA participants were implemented (at the beginning, middle and end of the Assembly), two representative surveys of Vilnius city residents (before and after the Assembly), 48 semi-structured interviews with Assembly stakeholders (some of them were repeated, interviewing the same interviewees at the beginning and after the Assembly), and document analysis was performed. Relying on various data sources helps to ensure the reliability of the evaluation by combining information from different sources and covering various points of view and opinions for the assessment of a specific criterion. The evaluation covers the period from the summer of 2024, when Vilnius City Municipality entered the DemocracyNext cities program, to the spring of 2026, when the last interviews were conducted.

This report consists of **three parts and conclusions**. The first part provides an overview of the VMPA context. The second part presents the evaluation methods in more detail. The third part presents the evaluation results according to the three evaluation dimensions, answering the questions and evaluation criteria assigned to each of them. The report concludes with conclusions and recommendations for further institutionalization of deliberative democracy practices in Vilnius City Municipality and beyond. At the end of the report, appendices are provided – an evaluation matrix, intervention logic, and interview list.

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<sup>4</sup> Šesnuliaitytė, I. (2024). *Citizens' Assemblies: Democratic Responses to Authoritarian Challenges in Central and Eastern Europe*. DemocracyNext. [https://www.demnext.org/uploads/Citizens-Assemblies-Democratic-Responses-to-Authoritarian-Challenges-in-Central-and-Eastern-Europe\\_2024-11-20-110352\\_new.pdf](https://www.demnext.org/uploads/Citizens-Assemblies-Democratic-Responses-to-Authoritarian-Challenges-in-Central-and-Eastern-Europe_2024-11-20-110352_new.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> EPBO (2021).

<sup>6</sup> An intervention is considered to be a solution to a specific problem or fulfillment of a need, and the intervention logic is a tool that helps explain the different steps of an intervention and reveals the likely cause-and-effect relationships.

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### 1. Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly: Context

This section of the report provides a brief overview of the VMPA (more information about it is available on the Assembly's website<sup>7</sup> and in the report prepared by the Vilnius City Municipality<sup>8</sup>).

#### 1.1. Before the Assembly

The VMPA was implemented at the initiative of the Vilnius City Municipality. It was initiated **by the team of the Chief Architect's Office, after receiving the approval of the Vilnius City Mayor, in the winter of 2024. submitted an application to participate in the cities program of the international organization "DemocracyNext"**, which provides expert knowledge and financial assistance to cities seeking to democratize planning processes<sup>9</sup>.

In the summer of 2024, after the results of the competition were announced, it was learned that out of more than twenty cities in seventeen countries that submitted applications, Vilnius City Municipality was selected among the three cities participating in the program and preparatory work began. In the same year, after identifying the main stakeholders, representatives of the organization "DemocracyNext" arrived in Vilnius to present the planned citizens' assembly, and a little later, they organized a distance learning program on citizens' assemblies for participants in the cities program, which took place in October 2024 - January 2025.

*"The mayor agreed - he was interested in hearing about the innovation, he agreed that we need to experiment. It seems to me that everyone understands that we won't change anything if we don't change anything. So, since the idea and energy came from our side [the Chief Architect's Office, - author's note], and he only had to approve, he agreed."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 13, 2026.

Unlike some other states or cities organizing assemblies<sup>10</sup>, **Vilnius implemented this initiative mostly with internal resources**. This decision was made as part of the city program to strengthen deliberative democracy capacities within and outside the Vilnius City Municipality, and also taking into account limited financial resources and the fact that Lithuania lacks service providers related to deliberative democracy initiatives. Thus, processes such as the selection of participants, which are sometimes entrusted to external service providers, in the case of VMPA were carried out by the Vilnius City Municipality itself, in cooperation with the State Enterprise "Registrų centras", which, according to the organizers, required time, learning and certain legal changes to allow access to the necessary personal data and use them for sending invitation letters.

According to the interview data, the main organizational and coordination processes of the VMPA were carried out by Beatrijė Umbrasaitė, Chief Architect Advisor of Vilnius City Municipality, and Gabrielė Janilionytė, Project Manager of UAB "Vilniaus vystymo kompanija", in cooperation with other departments of Vilnius City Municipality and representatives of SE "Susisiekimo paslaugos" (JUDU). **In different**

<sup>7</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025). *Vilnius Citizens' Assembly 2025. Let's decide together!* <https://pasitarkime.vilnius.lt/lt-LT/folders/asambleja2025>

<sup>8</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025a). *Vilnius Citizens' Assembly. Recommendations and Process Report*. <https://vilnius.lt/rest/assets/3b5884eb-e243-4080-9ce6-280c42c43258.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> DemocracyNext (2025). *DemocracyNext Cities Programme*. <https://www.demnext.org/projects/citiesprogramme>

<sup>10</sup> Pz., Elstub, S., Farrell, D. M., Carrick, J., and Mockler, P. (2021). *Evaluation of Climate Assembly*. Newcastle: Newcastle University. <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/get-involved2/climate-assembly-uk/evaluation-of-climate-assembly-uk.pdf>; Suiter, J. et al. (2021)

Evaluation Citizens' Gender of the Irish Assembly on Equality, <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1041&context=aaschsslrep>

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**During the stages of organization of the VMPA, its planning and implementation structures were created** (a more detailed assessment of the management structure is provided in subsection 3.1.1):

- Advisory Group of Independent Experts, consisting of 9 subject matter experts, operating up to  
The beginning of the Assembly, which contributed to the review of the Assembly's question, the development of a learning program and the preparation of an information brochure for participants;
- A group of facilitators (consisting of 5 facilitators), who worked before and during the Assembly, was responsible for  
for the preparation and execution of the Assembly design and program;
- A volunteer group (consisting of 12 volunteers) that worked before and during the Assembly, contributing  
to the implementation of the Assembly program;
- Feedback group, formed by nine employees of Vilnius City Municipality and JUDU  
At the end of the assembly, after evaluating and providing comments on the first draft of recommendations.

Although this was not a pre-planned part of the preparation, **after noticing the facilitators' questions about the process, a training session for this group was organized by We Do Democracy in March 2025**, with other stakeholders invited to participate. The training presented the design stages of citizens' assemblies and provided practical tasks to help prepare for the VMPA.

In February-March 2025, in cooperation with JUDU representatives, the organizers **began to formulate the VMPA question**. This process took place in several stages: possible directions of the topics were discussed with the Mayor of Vilnius City Municipality, further developed with JUDU, linking them to the implemented and planned projects. The formulated assembly question was submitted to the comments of the advisory group of independent experts, adjusted accordingly and finally formulated in the summer of the same year (more about this in subsection 3.1.2). The VMPA question was approved: "How to ensure that Vilnius residents would choose public transport more often, walk or ride a bicycle - regardless of their place of residence?". Three accompanying questions were also identified in the slides presented at the evening of the assembly's introduction<sup>11</sup>

however, they were not integrated into the subsequent design of the Assembly.

Five **meetings with the advisory group of independent experts** were organised between May and July of the same year. During these meetings, it was discussed what topics should be presented during the VMPA learning sessions, who the experts could be, what input from stakeholders (e.g. cyclists, people with disabilities, young people) should be included in the programme. During these meetings, it was also discussed the preparation of an information leaflet for participants, covering the topics covered. Finally, although the leaflet itself was prepared by the organisers, representatives of the advisory group of independent experts were invited to familiarise themselves with and provide feedback on this document.

In August-September 2025, **the selection of VMPA participants was also implemented**, taking place in three stages.<sup>12</sup> The first  
During the first phase, letters were sent to 13,000 randomly selected addresses in Vilnius city with an invitation to participate in the assembly. The report submitted by Vilnius city municipality states that the invitations

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<sup>11</sup> Accompanying questions: What are the main obstacles preventing residents from choosing more convenient and healthier travel without a car? How to improve public transport so that it becomes a real alternative to the car? How to promote convenient movement in microdistricts – local areas without a car? Umbrasaitį, B. (2025). Vilnius Citizens' Assembly Opening Event. [https://pasitarkime.vilnius.lt/lt-LT/ideas/asamblejos-atidarymo-vakaras-2025-09-24?phase\\_context=3e781271-703d-47cb-88d7-94ea9b609c04](https://pasitarkime.vilnius.lt/lt-LT/ideas/asamblejos-atidarymo-vakaras-2025-09-24?phase_context=3e781271-703d-47cb-88d7-94ea9b609c04)

<sup>12</sup> A detailed description of the process is provided in Vilnius City Municipality (2025a).

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received by Vilnius residents living in various parts of the city, regardless of their socio-demographic characteristics<sup>13</sup>

however, during interviews with the organizers, it was mentioned that slightly more invitations were sent to microdistricts where citizens with poorer socio-economic status live (more on this in subsection 3.1.4).<sup>14</sup> Only addresses in Vilnius city (excluding Vilnius district municipality) participated in the selection. 731 residents (~ 5.6% of those invited) registered for the VMPA – this level of activity is similar to that observed in other European state assemblies.<sup>15</sup>

When registering by phone or by filling out an online questionnaire, citizens were asked to provide basic socio-demographic information and urban mobility preferences (“What mode of travel do you usually choose for daily trips?”). This information was used during the second selection stage, implementing a stratified selection based on six criteria that the Assembly organizers identified as most important for the mobility topic:

- gender;
- age;
- nationality;
- education;
- residential district;
- the most commonly chosen means of transport for daily trips.

Based on these criteria, 54 future VMPA participants were selected by lottery from among the registered citizens, thus forming a representative sample of Vilnius city residents. During the third selection stage, each of them was contacted by phone (September 10-12 and 15). **Of the 54 selected citizens,**

**43 people agreed to participate in the assembly, but later, an average of about 30 Vilnius residents participated in each VMPA session** (in the I session – 34, in the II – 31, in the III – 31, in the IV – 27 and, finally, in the V – in that – 28). The organizers had not prepared a “reserve” list that would allow filling the vacant places of VMPA participants, or provided other risk management measures related to participant dropout.

Participants were given a reward, understood as compensation for their time and work during the VMPA.

(more about the population represented by the VMPA - in subsection 3.1.4).

Finally, in the summer of 2025, a volunteer selection process was also implemented. As the Assembly approached, a meeting of volunteers was organized, and in a remote document they were encouraged to choose the jobs and activities they would least or most like to be involved in (e.g., participant registration, parking assistance). Volunteers interviewed noted that a very diverse group of volunteers contributed to the Assembly (in terms of age, profession, nationality; some volunteers emphasized that they chose this path because they did not receive an invitation to become Assembly participants)<sup>16</sup>.

Volunteers emphasized that they felt involved in the Assembly implementation processes and had the opportunity to provide feedback during the reflections held after each session. For example, after noticing that too many volunteers were participating in the Assembly at the same time, it was decided to divide the participation in the program into parts; previously, the volunteers had prepared for the program in the morning of the same day, and later

<sup>13</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025a), p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

<sup>15</sup> Elstob, S., Farrell, D. M., Carrick, J., and Mockler, P. (2021).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with volunteer no. 2, January 15, 2026, interview with volunteer no. 3, January 23, 2026, interview with volunteer no. 4, February 26, 2026.

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prepare for the session in the evening. Given the limited human resources, the help of volunteers was positively evaluated by the facilitators, and the volunteers who participated in the interviews themselves evaluated both the opportunity to learn about the process and expand their circle of acquaintances extremely positively.

*"We just got involved in the action itself, and I have to say that after each day, all the volunteers and moderators sat down together, and Beatrice was always there, and we all discussed a lot about what worked, what didn't, and what needed to be done differently. What is very important, for example, I personally never felt that I was some kind of helper, someone lower than the moderators, I really never felt that way."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly volunteer No. 3, January 23, 2026.

### 1.2. During the assembly

**The assembly program took place from September 24, 2025 to December 10, 2025.** It consisted of an opening event - an introductory evening, **five assembly sessions** and a closing event - celebration of the transfer of recommendations. The VMPA has chosen the classic structure of the citizens' assembly program: the first sessions (I-II sessions, part III session), intended for familiarization with the topic (learning), laid the foundation for the discussion and development of recommendations (part III session, IV session), their final formulation and voting on them (V session). Assembly sessions are organized on Saturdays (except for the opening and closing events), the program lasted a whole day and (except for one) took place in the premises of Vilnius City Municipality. The official program was accompanied by informal events – film screenings, discussions on deliberative democracy practices. A detailed description of the VMPA program and its progress are provided in the report published by Vilnius City Municipality.<sup>17</sup> This report provides a brief overview of the program below, providing context for the evaluation.

**Session 1: Learning (September 27, 2025).** During this session, an informational publication was presented to the VMPA participants, the main focus was on expert presentations. In the first part of the day, JUDU presented the presentation "How is Vilnius moving?" (current urban mobility structure, state of public transport, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, main problems and aspirations, future directions). In the second part of the day, time was allocated for presentations by five experts (topics: climate change, green infrastructure, sustainable public transport, social innovations for promoting sustainable mobility, history of street development). Participants were divided into groups - each group participant could participate in two presentations, after which time was allocated for a question-and-answer session.

**Session 2: Learning (October 4, 2025).** This session is for field trips – the program is organized At the Railway Museum and the Smoke Factory, participants were invited to try a train trip. While the first day of learning was more focused on expert knowledge, the second day of learning focused on the experiences of different social groups related to mobility. In the first half of the day, four presentations were presented summarizing the Vilnius City Municipality's polycentric city strategy, reflecting the experiences of the Balsiai community, Vilnius city elders and youth representatives.

In the second part of the program, participants heard four more presentations (from the New Vilnius Community, the Lithuanian Cyclists' Association, the Lithuanian Union of People with Disabilities, the Physical

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<sup>17</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025a).

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(medical and rehabilitation doctor), time was allocated for a conversation with the speakers. The day ended with the generation of a list of challenges presented in a playful way ("Bingo"), during which the groups identified and grouped the problems related to mobility in the city of Vilnius.

**Session 3: Learning and Recommendation Development (October 18, 2025).** The program of this session is divided into two parts: learning and reflection/start of recommendation development. The first part of the program will be devoted to the presentation of JUDU (Vilnius Mobility Vision until 2050: development of safer pedestrian and bicycle paths, striving for climate neutrality, possible integration of new public transport modes, improvement of city connections, creation of a more convenient and accessible public transport network). This presentation by the decision of the organizers, it was included in the program during the Assembly, taking into account the feedback of the participants, but also extending the previously planned two-day learning process and, accordingly, shortening the time allocated for developing recommendations (more on this in subsection 3.2.1). In the second part of the session, participants worked in groups to develop mobility visions for five territorial zones of Vilnius: the center, the Old Town, private housing blocks, apartment blocks and connections between parts of the city. Finally, the process of formulating recommendations was initiated according to the format provided by the organizers – 67 draft recommendations were created.

**Session 4: Developing Recommendations (November 8, 2025).** The recommendations developed during the previous session were reviewed individually, grouped in pairs, and further refined in groups of three. The work then moved to an open forum, where participants grouped the recommendations into green, yellow, and red based on clarity and level of consensus (the latter were rejected). At the end of the session, participants continued to work in groups: refined and refined recommendations, the final list of recommendations assigned to the green group was compiled and reviewed.

These **recommendations were submitted to the feedback group for review.** The group's work took place over two days, each of which reviewed half of the draft recommendations. First, each group member was invited to individually assess a few selected recommendations against pre-prepared assessment criteria (strategic relevance, legal and administrative feasibility, purposefulness and clarity of the recommendation). Then, they moved on to pair work, sharing the results of their individual assessment and exchanging comments. Finally, returning to the group, each recommendation and its assessment were discussed. All group discussions were recorded, and structured feedback was provided to the participants a few days before the final VMPA session.

*"In principle, I got the impression that it was not a pure copy-past, but that there was a normal reaction. That is already good. <...> The fact that not all [participants, - author's note] were equally familiar with it is a fact, because it really took a lot of time to read, delve into and understand what was written, and evaluate it from your own already formed vision. Plus, there were references to various existing documents, so you still need to look up what they are talking about there. It definitely took time, and it seemed to me that it was only two days - I could be wrong, but it seems to me that it really was two days [until the next session, - author's note]."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 2, January 30, 2026.

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**Session 5: Finalization of recommendations and voting (November 29, 2025).** The session program consisted of two parts: refinement of recommendations and voting. During the first part of the program, participants worked in groups and, guided by the comments provided by the feedback group, further refined the recommendations. Their final formulations were transferred to digital form with the help of facilitators and compiled in a document accessible to all. During the second part of the program, they returned to the forum: all recommendations were discussed one by one, inviting participants to express their position on each, using three-colored cards. Green cards meant that the recommendation was accepted without amendments, yellow cards meant that minimal amendments were needed to allow the recommendation to be accepted (they were made on the spot), red cards meant that the recommendation was rejected. During the voting, the majority of green cards was counted, i.e. the recommendation was accepted if more green cards were raised than red ones, regardless of the number of yellow cards. During the interviews, some VMPA participants expressed dissatisfaction with the voting process, which, in their opinion, simplified the adoption of recommendations.

The final vote on the adoption of the recommendations was held by phone or computer using the Slido tool. The voting result was immediately visible on the common screen. The voting went smoothly, but one of the recommendations was voted for more times than there were VMPA participants in the hall that day, so the vote on it was repeated. The recommendation was considered adopted if it was supported by at least 70% of the Assembly members who participated in the vote. A total of 24 recommendations were adopted, their percentage of support (the ratio between those who voted "for" and "against") ranged from 80% to 100%, the average support for one recommendation was 88.5%. Five recommendations were rejected.

*"I didn't really like the virtual voting, because we also discussed the different voting methods and whether or not we should do a secret ballot, and in the end it occurred to me that maybe the way the virtual voting was organized, there were moments after that where someone seemed to vote twice. Maybe somehow, if we had done that voting in an analogous way, such things wouldn't have happened, or maybe we needed to test the system more, because it gave me a feeling of not being completely reliable."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

In line with international best practices<sup>18</sup>, the Assembly also **provides for the possibility of observer participation**. It is noted that this role contributes to learning, ensuring transparency, trust in the results of the Assembly<sup>19</sup> or even better public awareness, and can therefore be understood as a certain form of communication and bringing the Assembly closer to the general public. Observers can participate in citizens' assemblies, but they are not allowed to get involved in the deliberations or exert any influence on the assembly participants. According to the organizers of the VMPA, clear criteria for inviting observers have not been formulated, but they are focused on those groups that

represent citizens, but cannot participate in the Assembly as participants. Representatives of non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and intergovernmental organizations are invited to observe the Assembly, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Social Security and Labor, Government Chancellery

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<sup>18</sup> This practice is often used in citizens' assemblies organized in the USA and the United Kingdom (e.g., the UK Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, <https://citizensassembly.co.uk/brexit/>).

<sup>19</sup> OECD (2021).

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employees, elders and elders, Vilnius City Municipality employees and politicians, academics. During the first sessions of the Assembly, the number of observers was not large, but over time it increased. Taking this into account, the organizers began to organize short remote meetings with observers before subsequent sessions of the Assembly, during which the etiquette of behavior was presented and questions were answered - the first such meeting was organized before the fourth session of the VMPA (more about this - in subsection 3.2.4).

It is noteworthy that interviewees representing various stakeholders emphasized **strong political support for the organization of the VMPA**, but at the same time reflected **a lack of political attention**.

According to the assembly organizers, no political opposition was encountered during the preparation of this process, but its absence is not so much due to support for the initiative as to low interest in it.

For example, in early 2025, a joint presentation by the Assembly organizers and DemocracyNext to the members of the Vilnius City Municipality Council did not attract much interest – although an invitation was sent to all council members, only a few joined. The Assembly organizers and facilitators also emphasized that not enough city politicians and decision-makers came to the event as observers. Finally, both Assembly participants and observers expressed disappointment **at the low interest of Vilnius City Municipality representatives in the prepared recommendations**, which were submitted to Vilnius City Vice-Mayor Andrius Grigonius in December 2025.

*"<...> political support, it was there, but in the end the mayor himself never came, for example, and very, very few of the Council members were there."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

*"<...> I heard one comment that Benkunskas is not there. It wasn't just my comment, I also heard one comment from a resident. I don't know how much people really thought about the fact that there is no mayor and how much the mayor is in all this, and maybe, I hope, the last, well, presentation of recommendations in the municipality, in the council hall, could have given them that much weight."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 3, February 11, 2026.

*"And I was really struck by, for example, that presentation, that final part, for example, do you remember? There was that last meeting. Then, when everyone was talking, there was this, that, and then we suddenly split into several groups and presented to each other what we ourselves had accepted. What, what was that 40 or 50 minutes of time wasted for? So, if those same people... I understand, if there were municipal employees here, 100 people came there to present to them, maybe. And there, [or, - author's note] a lot of people hear you and delve into those [things, - author's note] that you say. Here, now, we do the same thing to ourselves, at the same time."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

### **1.3. After the Assembly**

After the recommendations were handed over, the process of their implementation began. The Assembly members who participated in the interview. The organizers emphasized that this stage of the assembly was not consistently planned, as most of the focus was on time-consuming organizational issues. During the VMPA introduction evening

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It was announced that Vilnius City Municipality will prepare **three reports on the implementation of the recommendations** – three, nine and twelve months after the end of the Assembly, **but the second report was ultimately abandoned**. According to the organizers, given the broad scope of the recommendations, the strategic issues they raised and the time needed to address them, it was decided that progress made in just a few months between the last reports will not be large enough to merit a separate report.

*"It was only after that first assembly that I realized that we didn't talk at all about what would happen after that, what to do next, well, we just found out that there would be those reports. But what is the importance, especially now to bring that up, because I remember how the eyes of the same participants who finished - wow, we did it."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

According to the organizers, after the Assembly, all **recommendations were first presented to the Mayor of Vilnius City Municipality** – during the meeting held in December 2025, the further direction of implementation of the recommendations was approved. The recommendations were transferred to the municipal department responsible for strategic planning, which linked each recommendation to the Vilnius City Strategy for 2021-

The 2030 Strategic Development Plan, which is directly linked to budget planning, and the relevant departments were instructed by the mayor to assess the possibilities of implementing the recommendations or provide an explanation as to why they cannot be implemented. Taking into account the fact that the recommendations provided are horizontal and go beyond the boundaries of individual departments, **a working group was also established by order of the Director of the Vilnius City Municipality Administration to oversee the implementation of the recommendations**, consisting of about 11 Vilnius City Municipality and JUDU employees<sup>20</sup>. Some of the members of this working group also belonged to the feedback group during the Assembly. Although the structure for implementing the recommendations in Vilnius City Municipality has been formed, interview participants emphasize that the employees involved in it still need the help and guidance of the employees who organized the Assembly, both in terms of interpreting and implementing specific recommendations (more information about this in subsection 3.3.1). In April 2026, the first report on the implementation of the Assembly recommendations was published, which presented the assessment of the recommendations prepared by Vilnius City Municipality and JUDU. All 24 recommendations submitted by the VMPA were accepted, 9 of them partially, and the report also indicates what actions have already been taken or are planned to be taken to implement these recommendations.<sup>21</sup>

## **2. Assessment methods**

Four data collection methods were used for the evaluation: surveys of VMPA participants, surveys of Vilnius city residents, interviews with VMPA stakeholders and document analysis, summarized in the table below and described further in this chapter. The VMPA evaluation matrix (Annex 1) indicates the relationship between a specific evaluation dimension, question, evaluation

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<sup>20</sup> The composition of the working group is not publicly available, based on interview data. The recommendations assessment report indicates that the group consists of the following Representatives of Vilnius City Municipality departments and companies: Chief City Architect's Office, Architecture Department, Territorial Planning Department, Infrastructure Group, Urban Environment Department Landscape Architecture Sub-Department, Financial Management Group Strategic Planning Team, Youth Affairs and Informal Employment Department, Educational Environment Department, Sports and Wellness Department, Organization Development Group, Municipal Enterprise "Transportation Services" (JUDU). Vilnius City Municipality (2026). *Vilnius Citizens' Assembly. Recommendation Evaluation Report*. <https://vilnius.lt/rest/assets/b9ffd94e-4e87-4437-a529-b5073098e930.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2026).

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criteria and the methods chosen to assess them. Evaluators were also involved in all parts of the VMPA program, but monitoring was not used as a specific evaluation method.

**Table 1.** Overview of evaluation methods for the Vilnius Citizens' Assembly

|                               | Before the Assembly | Start of the assembly | Assembly proceedings | End of the assembly and after it |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| VMPA participant survey       |                     | X                     | X                    | X                                |
| Vilnius city residents survey | X                   |                       |                      | X                                |
| Interview                     |                     | X                     | X                    | X                                |
| Document analysis             | X                   | X                     | X                    | X                                |

### 2.1. Surveys of Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participants

During the VMPA, three surveys of assembly participants were conducted in order to both **record attitudes on specific evaluation questions and assess whether and, if so, to what extent the attitudes of VMPA participants are changing regarding sustainable mobility in Vilnius, trust in Vilnius City Municipality, one's civic power and other aspects.** A questionnaire was developed for each survey, adapted to a specific VMPA stage. When compiling these questionnaires, a sample questionnaire was developed by the Democracy Innovation Research Group at Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznan, Poland), which was adapted to the criteria identified in the VMPA evaluation matrix.

- **The first survey** was conducted during the first session of the VMPA (September 27, 2025), at the beginning of the event program. This aimed to capture the initial attitudes of the participants (N=38), not yet affected by the Assembly process;
- **The second survey** was conducted during the fourth session of the VMPA (November 8, 2025), at the beginning of the event program. The aim was to capture the participants' opinions on the learning part of the Assembly program and their first experience of deliberations (N=33);
- **The third survey** was conducted during the fifth session of the VMPA (November 29, 2025), at the end of the event program. The aim was to capture the opinions of the Assembly participants about the experience of the deliberations, the Assembly organization process, and their attitudes after all sessions (N=32).

Considering that the VMPA was attended by residents of Vilnius of various nationalities, all survey questionnaires were presented in Lithuanian, English and Russian, allowing participants to choose the language most convenient for them. In order to ensure convenience and accessibility for participants of different ages, the surveys were presented in printed format. By prior agreement with the Assembly organizers, **a special time was allocated in the program for completing the surveys.** Before conducting each survey, the evaluators briefly presented the assessment being conducted and informed that participation in the survey –

voluntary, reminded of the objectives of the evaluation and the conditions for data use. **All three times, all participants who came to the Assembly that day agreed to participate in the survey,** but in order to ensure the inclusion of all participants, the evaluators also provided an opportunity for respondents who were not present at the Assembly on the day of the survey to complete the survey and send it by e-mail or fill out another form of the program

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upon arrival at the event on the day. For this reason, the number of respondents to each of the surveys is greater than the number of participants in the VMPA session that day.

Survey participants were asked to indicate their unique number on the questionnaire, which was unknown to the researchers.

In this way, while protecting the privacy of the research participants, it was possible to observe general group trends and link individual assessments with the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

and **to capture the change in attitudes that occurs at the individual level, stimulated by the assembly.** With this in mind, this evaluation report presents the summarized results of the survey at the group level (general trend of responses) and at the individual level (trend of change in attitudes of individual participants). Please note that due to rounding of the percentages of the response distribution, in some cases the total percentage distribution of the responses when adding up the round numbers may be 99 or 101 percent.

### 2.2. Surveys of Vilnius city residents

In order to **assess the awareness of Vilnius city residents about the Citizens' Assembly and its impact on a wider audience of citizens**, two representative surveys of Vilnius city residents were conducted<sup>22</sup>. Both surveys used the same questionnaire, consisting of 12 closed questions linked to an evaluation matrix, related to residents' knowledge about the Citizens' Assembly, participation in civic activities, trust in Vilnius city municipality institutions, assessment of personal civic influence, and socio-demographic characteristics.

- **The first survey** was conducted early in the VMPA communication campaign (July 4-14, 2025), and its results were used as a baseline for monitoring changes in awareness and attitudes (N=1000);
- **The second survey** was conducted after the end of the VMPA program (January 27 - February 9, 2026), its results allowed us to record the impact of the assembly on the city's residents (N=1001).

The surveys were commissioned by Vilnius City Municipality and conducted by the international market research and survey data collection company Norstat, based on the technical specifications provided by the evaluators. Vilnius city residents participated in the surveys, selected using probability sampling (maintaining proportions by age, gender, neighborhood, etc.).

### 2.3. Semi-structured interviews

In order to **assess the VMPA process and its impact on stakeholders**, 48 semi-structured interviews were conducted (the list is provided in Annex 3). Some of the interviews with the same interviewees were conducted both before (or in the early stages of) the VMPA and after the Assembly, in order to capture their views on the VMPA and the policy changes it has affected. The interviewees included:

- **Assembly participants** (22 interviews: 5 at the beginning of the Assembly, 17 after the Assembly). When selecting interviewees, the aim was to ensure maximum diversity, taking into account the socio-demographic characteristics of the informants and characteristics relevant to the Assembly issue. The evaluators requested the participants' permission to invite them to participate in the interviews during the VMPA sessions;

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<sup>22</sup> The surveys were financed and implemented by Vilnius City Municipality based on the questions submitted by the evaluators.

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- **Organizers** (8 interviews: 4 before, 4 after the assembly). Interviews were conducted with all key VMPA organizers;
- **Members of the Advisory Group of Independent Experts** (1 interview conducted after the Assembly).  
When selecting interview participants, their active involvement in organizing the VMPA was taken into account;
- **Facilitators** (5 interviews: 2 during, 3 after the Assembly). Interviews were conducted with the majority of facilitators, and additional interviews with representatives of this group were not conducted after information overlap was noted;
- **Volunteers** (4 interviews: 1 during, 3 after the Assembly). When selecting interview participants, the aim was to ensure the principle of maximum diversity; if overlapping information was observed, additional interviews with representatives of this group were not conducted;
- **Observers** (3 interviews conducted after the Assembly). When selecting interviewees, the following were taken into account:  
active participation in VMPA sessions;
- **Decision-makers at the municipal and national levels** (5 interviews: 1 before, 1 during, 3 after the Assembly). When selecting interview participants, the relevance of deliberative democracy practices in their work activities, expert knowledge in this area and direct links to the VMPA were taken into account.  
organization, implementation of recommendations.

Individual questionnaires were developed for each of these groups, based on the assessment matrix. Interviews were conducted from September 25, 2025 to March 27, 2026. Taking into account the fact that the VMPA was attended by residents of Vilnius city of various nationalities, interviews were conducted in Lithuanian, English and Russian (with the help of a translator), an information sheet for the study participants and an informed consent form were also translated into these languages, which each interview participant was asked to familiarize themselves with and sign.

The duration of the interviews ranged from 26 min. to 1 h. 57 min., with the most common interview duration being 45-60 min. The interviews were conducted both in person and remotely (via MS Teams). With the consent of the interview participants, the interviews were recorded. Trained student assistants were used to conduct the interviews and prepare the transcriptions. The prepared transcriptions were analyzed according to the indicators specified in the evaluation matrix, also recording additional, not foreseen in the matrix, but arising from the data themes.

### 2.4. Document analysis

The evaluation included an analysis of publicly available and internal documents. This group of documents includes public and participant communication about the citizens' assembly (e.g., information leaflet for participants, information provided to the public about the assembly, recommendations generated during it, etc.).

During the evaluation, the organizers were also asked to share certain internal documents (e.g., governance structure, anonymized participant attendance information, information related to the Assembly budget). This material was used both as information for the evaluation and as additional guidance for formulating interview questions.

### 2.5. Research ethics

During the assessment, the assessment team included informants and respondents themselves – Assembly participants and other stakeholders – provided access to their personal data (contact information). During the interview, they also shared political or value beliefs that were considered sensitive

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information. Finally, the data collected during the evaluation may be used in the preparation of scientific publications. In this regard, the evaluation team received approval from the Research Ethics Compliance Committee of the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University (September 19, 2025, reg. no. (1.11 E) 270000-V-49) on the compliance of the planned study with research ethics.

The team of assessors will provide access to the maximally anonymized data after the assessment is completed and presented. survey data set (access to *omnibus* surveys can be provided by Vilnius City Municipality), since the opening of quantitative data that does not reveal personal data would not pose a risk to the Assembly participants and could contribute to its greater transparency and further analyses.

Considering the sensitivity of personal data and the balance between the benefits of opening the data and the risks posed by this action to interview participants, qualitative data (i.e. interview transcripts) will not be opened. Secondary uses of the collected data must be agreed in advance with the evaluators. team.

### 3. Evaluation of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly

#### 3.1. Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Design

- *The VMPA governance structure was based on good practices and partially adapted to the local context. It consisted of an initiator (formally – the Mayor of Vilnius City Municipality, informally – the Office of the Chief Architect), an implementer (UAB “Vilniaus vystymo kompanija”), an advisory group of independent experts and a team of facilitators, but no project team, monitoring and content groups were formed (the latter function was partially performed by independent experts). The fact that the VMPA was implemented by a few individuals, rather than by a broad consensus, resulted in a high workload for them, as well as a lower involvement of stakeholders in further implementation of the Assembly and its recommendations. in stages.*
- *The mandate of the Assembly (the expectations placed on it) was largely understood similarly by different stakeholders, associating it with a contribution to improving urban mobility policy, but the organizers and facilitators VMPA was also perceived as a tool for learning deliberative democracy, and by some participants, facilitators, and observers, as a way to legitimize decisions made by the Vilnius City Municipality.*
- *The VMPA issue was formulated with the involvement of various stakeholders, and its breadth and openness allowed for significant engagement of the Assembly participants, although the formulation process itself was long and hampered by a lack of coordination. The VMPA issue was described by some stakeholders as broad and complex, but this is more related to its consideration and the Assembly's design decisions chosen for it. Opinions on the suitability of a citizens' assembly to address mobility issues varied. Some of those involved agreed that it was an appropriate way to address complex challenges, while the majority of stakeholders tended to view assemblies as a method for decision-making in a broad sense.*
- *The duration of the Assembly's five sessions was chosen – appropriate, taking into account international practices, the scale of the issue and the number of participants. With the change in the balance of sessions dedicated to learning and the consideration and formulation of recommendations, the latter part was somewhat lacking in time. This was also contributed by the issue gaining additional levels during the Assembly, expanding the directions of deliberations and the number of recommendations that needed to be considered and the need for dedicated time.*

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- *The Assembly participants were selected by a democratic lottery, with six selection criteria introduced: gender, age, nationality, education, residential district, and the most common means of transport for daily trips. A total of 54 VMPA participants were selected, but their number decreased in several stages: some of the selected citizens refused to participate during registration, some dropped out during the course, sporadically participating in the Assembly sessions. After experiencing the first decrease in the number of participants (from 54 selected to 43 citizens who agreed to participate), the VMPA participant sample remained representative. As the Assembly decreased even further (on average, about 30 Vilnius residents participated in each session), the diversity of participants remained, but some social groups were less represented. In demographic terms, the Assembly lacked the representation of youth the most, and in discursive terms, the lack of involvement in discussions and self-representation in a sense, the voice of residents who use cars.*
- *VMPA participants received compensation, interpreters and catering services were provided. The organizers were ready to provide assistance to citizens who faced inconveniences due to participation in the Assembly (e.g. childcare, care for relatives), however, due to limited financial resources, this assistance was not publicly announced, but communicated as needed. Ultimately, it was not used, but no evidence was found that the reduced availability of assistance stopped citizens from participating in the Assembly.*

### 3.1.1. Assembly governance structure and mandate

#### Assembly governance structure

This subsection will analyse **the governance structure of the Assembly** (to what extent there was a clear division of responsibilities and a coordination mechanism between the parties involved) and **the understanding of the mandate given to the Assembly** (to what extent there was a common understanding of the mandate given to the Assembly among the stakeholders). In assessing these aspects, a document analysis and Results of interviews with VMPA stakeholders.

According to DemocracyNext guidelines, a typical assembly governance structure consists of<sup>23</sup>:

- **Initiator** (ensures that the assembly has a clear mandate and that its results are included in the decision-making process, provides the necessary resources for the operation of the assembly);
- **Executor** (helps to create the design of the assembly, selects its members by lottery, organizes the logistics of the sessions, prepares the final report of the assembly. It is noted that citizens' assemblies should be implemented either by an organization independent of the initiator or by an independent secretariat operating within the initiator);
- **Project team** (ensures that the assembly is successfully implemented, has a clear vision for the change path and would be carried out in accordance with OECD principles of good practice. Consisting of representatives of the initiator and the executor, it acts as an intermediate link between these actors);
- **Supervisory or expert advisory group** (ensures the independence of the assembly. The function can be performed by independent experts, as well as representatives of different political parties);
- **Content group** (responsible for preparing an information base that helps shape the discussions of the assembly members and informs the wider public. It may be formed with the assembly

<sup>23</sup> DemocracyNext (2025a). *Assembling an Assembly Guide*. <https://assemblyguide.demnext.org/before-the-assembly#governance-setting-up-the-team>

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experts and stakeholders related to the policy area under consideration, representing different perspectives and approaches).

- The involvement **of facilitators** (responsible for neutral moderation), **a communication group** and **independent evaluators** is also envisaged .

In the case of VMPA, the governance structure was partly adapted to the local context, the small size of the assembly (in terms of the number of participants) and the need to ensure organizational learning. For these reasons, the VMPA structure differed quite significantly from the typical model.

First, **in the context of the VMPA, the persons performing the functions of initiator and executor partly overlapped.** Although the report submitted by the Vilnius City Municipality indicates that the initiator of the Assembly is the Mayor of Vilnius City Valdas Benkunskas<sup>24</sup> . During interviews with the Assembly organizers and municipal decision-makers, it was emphasized that the VMPA initiative originated from the team of the Chief Architect's Office, which advocates for the inclusion of citizens in urban planning and applies various related practices.<sup>25</sup> The interviews also revealed that the VMPA organizers felt political support from decision-makers, and the decision-makers themselves indicated that they supported the idea of the Assembly, but support in this context is more related not to active involvement, but to the permission to implement granting.

The report submitted by Vilnius City Municipality also indicates that the VMPA was coordinated by Vilnius City Municipality Chief Architect Advisor B. Umbrasaitis, and organized by Vilnius Development Company, represented by Project Manager G. Janilionytis, **however, the organization and implementation their functions were not strictly separated in the process.** B. Umbrasaitis coordinated strategic issues (e.g., the Assembly question formulation process), mobilized political support for both the Assembly and the implementation of its recommendations (e.g., prepared VMPA presentations for Vilnius City Municipality Council members), took care of the resources necessary for the Assembly implementation (e.g., cooperated with the Vilnius City Municipality Communication Department on publicizing the Assembly). In addition to implementing these activities, it also performed some of the functions of an executor – implemented the VMPA participant selection process, prepared recommendations implementation reports, and contributed to the formation of the Assembly design. Although this was not a direct responsibility, according to the organizers and facilitators who participated in the interviews, the impact on the design arose due to the role of the mediator between the decision-makers, JUDU, and the team of facilitators. During the organization and implementation of the Assembly, the changing expectations of the decision-makers and JUDU led to the inclusion of certain design solutions even after the VMPA had begun (more –

in subsection 3.2.1).

*"Now we know that we can organize such a process, we can perhaps explain a little better internally what the process is, we know what it costs, but next time we would probably like that initiative to either come, or be stronger, from, well, those people who will work with the recommendation later. It's either from the political level or from the specialist level, it doesn't matter, but those who will implement it."*

*They should also care about that assembly and need it, but maybe that didn't quite happen now, because now it seemed like...*

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<sup>24</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025a), p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer No. 2, March 9, 2026, interview with politician or decision-maker No. 1, October 14, 2025.

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*that we need it simply to understand what the process is, to try it as a tool for engagement and discussion, rather than to actually solve something."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

As the representative of the project implementer, G. Janilionytė was **responsible for resolving logistical issues**. (e.g. communication with Assembly participants, organization of catering and infrastructure, volunteers) group coordination). However, it is important to mention that **in addition to organizational work, she was entrusted with two other functions – coordinator of facilitators** and, if one of the intended facilitators refused to participate, **facilitator**. Part of the responsibilities – for example, coordinating the volunteer group – were helped by a student who started her internship at Vilnius City Municipality, but according to the facilitators who participated in the interview, the impact of the heavy workload was felt in their activities.<sup>26</sup>

The fact that **neither a project team nor a monitoring group was established meant that all issues related to the VMPA essentially became the responsibility of the two organizers**. Although intensive consultations were held with colleagues who had organized citizens' assemblies in other Baltic countries, the support provided by the organization We Do Democracy, and especially DemocracyNext, was more advisory in nature, presenting possible options and their impacts, therefore

The responsibility for making the final decision rested with the organizers. <sup>27</sup> The decision not to gather

The project teams and oversight groups were based on the small size of the Assembly and the aim of making decisions faster, reducing the bureaucratic burden, but in the Lithuanian context, these structures

The establishment of a monitoring group could have been beneficial for several reasons. First, the establishment of a monitoring group could encourage **more active involvement of politicians in the assembly from its early stages**, contributing to a better understanding of the process and its credibility. This group should be formed with a proportional representation of various political forces, thus avoiding the risk of bias. One of the politicians from the Vilnius city municipality who observed the Assembly revealed during an interview that participation in the Assembly partially reduced his skepticism, so it is likely that consistent involvement could have an even greater impact.

*"Sometimes, it is precisely the inclusion of the same politicians, especially opposing ones, in a certain process that can reduce skepticism, so here I admit that, for example, my skepticism in this regard [the risk of biased participant selection, - author's note] has definitely decreased. <...> I have shrunk from such a very ardent skeptic to a constructive critic."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 2, October 28, 2025.

Second, the project team could be significant **in expanding the circle of "owners" of the Assembly from a few representatives of the initiator and implementer to a wider audience** and involving representatives of key stakeholders (e.g. relevant Vilnius City Municipality departments, JUDU) in joint decision-making. During the implementation of VMPA, insufficiently smooth communication with JUDU was observed – although it positively assessed the idea of the Assembly, the company faced challenges in finding an internal coordinator for the issue, and VMPA supported the organizers' efforts more than taking the lead themselves during the organization of the Assembly.<sup>28</sup> Third, people belonging to the project team would both strengthen their skills

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with facilitator no. 2, March 27, 2026, interview with facilitator no. 3, February 11, 2026.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with organizer no. 1, January 30, 2026, interview with facilitator no. 2, March 27, 2026.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with organizer no. 4., October 24, 2025, interview with organizer no. 2, September 30, 2025, interview with organizer no. 3, February 17, 2026, interview with volunteer no. 1, October 1, 2025.

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in the field of deliberative democracy, thus creating expertise that remains in Vilnius City Municipality and ensuring its institutional sustainability, so that they would be better acquainted with the specific Assembly and **could more easily get involved in the implementation of its recommendations**. As mentioned in Section 1.3, in the case of VMPA, the implementation phase of the recommendations was not consistently thought out in advance and even after the end of the Assembly requires unplanned time and leadership from one of the organizers.

*"In larger assemblies, sometimes there is also something like a management group, an oversight group in addition. And we thought about whether it was necessary in this case or not, because the Assembly is not very large and there are already many different groups that need to be moderated and coordinated. <...> We decided to do this on the example of Birmingham, one group that would include both citizen participation experts and more thematic experts, and their mandate was not only to simply discuss the issue, but they could also raise questions about the wording of the question and so on, and a whole information package was prepared for them about the planned composition, dates and everything else."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025.

*"Next time, the municipality should immediately assemble a working team from the municipality and municipal business groups on that topic, and it would participate throughout the entire process, meaning that such an advisory group with the organizers would be permanent. Because that feedback group that existed, it worked, but it was formed too late. It means that it would bear responsibility from the very beginning to the end, when the recommendations have already been created and are already on its way to being implemented. Then there would be not one person, but at least five people, which means that the constancy will not be interrupted. <...> the municipality itself is the initiator and it should not be like an observer, that I come and watch the spectacle."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

*"Naturally, the person who, or the people who will receive our recommendations, they may look at our recommendations completely differently. They didn't hear our discussions, they didn't hear what we said, what we advocated. The one who decides, how to say it, still decides, and the one who participated, it seems, didn't hear much of what we said. <...> you know, certain people's experiences or stories motivate or perhaps substantiate that idea more, <...> I think that would have been worth hearing for those people who received those recommendations."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 8, January 30, 2026.

An advisory group of independent experts also operated within the context of the VMPA, which essentially also performed the functions of a content group. Clear criteria for the formation of this group were not published and communicated –

The recommendations of JUDU and Vilnius City Municipality were followed. As mentioned in section 1.1, an important contribution of this group is the review of the Assembly issue, the experts participated in the meetings during which the VMPA learning program was prepared, and also reviewed the information publication intended for the Assembly participants. The opportunity was provided for the participation of a representative of the facilitators in the expert group meetings. It is worth noting that not all experts were involved to the same extent - some of them participated in only one or several meetings, therefore the number of experts actively advising was smaller than the initial composition of the group. This can be attributed to the fact that **the experts did not receive remuneration for their work**. In view of this, some of their work was also transferred to the organizers - for example,

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The information leaflet for the Assembly participants was prepared by one of the Assembly organizers, with the help of an intern. This further increased the responsibilities of the organizers. Although neither the experts nor the participants noticed any manifestations of bias in the information leaflet, such a division of responsibilities can create the appearance of bias and reduce trust in the information provided.

Finally, when assessing **the relationship between organizers and facilitators, a divergence of expectations is noticeable**. Some of the facilitators who participated in the interviews emphasized that they were included in the VMPA quite early (during the first training, which took place in March 2025)<sup>29</sup>, but the commitment was formalized only in August of the same year. Although the facilitators began their preparations on the basis of trust even before the signing of the contract, according to some of them, this caused uncertainty regarding the process and responsibilities. Moreover, the approach to the work of the facilitators also differed. The VMPA organizers saw the facilitators as creators and implementers of the Assembly design<sup>30</sup>, while some facilitators believed that their responsibility was only to facilitate the process according to the already created design<sup>31</sup>. The time allocated for the work and, accordingly, the remuneration were assessed according to this assumption, **which was later, according to both the organizers and the facilitators, identified as significantly too low compared to the workload**<sup>32</sup>.

According to the facilitators who participated in the interviews, several critical points emerged during the design of the VMPA. Firstly, the facilitators did not have experience working together, their approaches to facilitation, methods used, and level of experience differed, which sometimes made decision-making difficult. Secondly, none of the facilitators had experience organizing citizen assemblies, so they lacked experience and knowledge about design. The assembly program was formed as it took place, thus adapting to the needs of citizens, but at the same time this created a certain time pressure and urgency. Thirdly, certain strategic content decisions (e.g., the second presentation of JUDU, the division of recommendations into residential areas) were made already during the VMPA, changing existing agreements and "dropping" them from above, without involving the facilitators responsible for the design of the Assembly in the general decision.

Although this caused some tension between the organizers and facilitators, the interview data reveal that the latter **strongly prioritized the well-being of VMPA participants and the potential impact of the Assembly on them**, and therefore tried to formulate the highest quality program and empowering experience possible.

*"I have research that shows that if residents participate in such processes and remain disappointed because they see neither changes nor further actions, then they tend to withdraw more from such movements and even possibly from voting in the future. With that in mind, I thought, here we need to do everything super carefully so that both the residents feel valued and, when telling their family members about all this, they see the meaning of their presence or their actions and ultimately see that the municipality is not doing all this for some PR or something like that, but really wants to involve residents in decision-making."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 3, February 11, 2026.

*"The facilitators took all that work very seriously, as they should, and they really understood that the way they structured the whole process really has a huge impact on the outcome, the recommendations, and*

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with facilitator no. 2, March 27, 2026, interview with facilitator no. 3, February 11, 2026.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with organizer no. 1, January 30, 2026, interview with organizer no. 3, February 17, 2026.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with facilitator no. 2, March 27, 2026, interview with facilitator no. 3, February 11, 2026.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with organizer no. 3, February 17, 2026, interview with facilitator no. 2, March 27, 2026, interview with facilitator no. 3, March 27, 2026 February 11th

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*"On the other hand, it may have made their work a little more difficult, because the assembly is a bit of an experimental, evolving thing, where you innovate, you try, you adapt to each different society, how it could happen here according to a different issue, there is no one very clear standard, how all this should happen and there should be a bit of innovation, freedom and experimentation in it."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

### Assembly mandate

In this assessment, the concept of mandate is linked to the expectations of different stakeholders for the VMPA. In the official communication of Vilnius City Municipality, the purpose of the Assembly is most often associated with the contribution to decision-making: "<...> it is an opportunity for everyone – not just politicians or experts – to decide together how Vilnius can achieve its goals of being a climate-neutral and livable city, regardless of where one lives"<sup>33</sup> (it is worth noting that this goal differs from the Assembly's question; more on this in subsection 3.1.2). According to the survey conducted during the fourth VMPA session, participants stated that the Assembly's goals were clear to them: 97 percent rated the clarity as good or very good, 3 percent as average. However, although understood as clear, the goals could be interpreted differently.

The survey and interview data reveal that the Assembly's **mandate is perceived as multifaceted, and therefore expectations for it differed somewhat**. When answering why they decided to participate in the VMPA, the majority of respondents indicated the **importance of city-related issues** (87% of participants considered this reason to be rather important or important) and the **desire for local authorities to take their opinion into account when making decisions related to the city** (84%).<sup>34</sup> However, when asked about expectations, participants were cautious about the possibilities of influencing city decision-making (only about half of VMPA participants expressed such an expectation), and most of all they hoped to experience something new and participate in an interesting discussion (90% each), and to broaden their horizons (84%).

Most often, during the interviews, the organizers and decision-makers of the VMPA emphasized the need to democratize the urban planning processes, **to involve citizens in a quality discussion** that would allow hearing the arguments of both sides. Nevertheless, **this discussion is associated with political priorities and established strategic directions**<sup>35</sup>. Although it was emphasized during the interviews that citizens may disagree with the existing urban policy and provide opposing recommendations to which decision-makers will respond equally, the expressed expectation somewhat limits the co-creation process – residents are introduced to the urban strategy, hoping that the recommendations will be focused on *how* it should be implemented, and not on *what* strategic direction should be chosen. Such an expectation **does not in itself mean politicization of the Assembly, but rather refers to the specific definition of its mandate** and the needs of decision-makers, thus actualizing the recommendations provided, but it was understood by some participants as

<sup>33</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025b). *Information about the assembly theme – mobility*. <https://pasitarkime.vilnius.lt/lt-LT/projects/pilieciu-asambleja-2025>

<sup>34</sup> Also significant reasons were the desire to expand one's knowledge and skills (79%), curiosity (71.1%), and the importance of participation for local democracy. (71 percent). The least motivated city dwellers were the desire to meet others and exchange ideas (57.8 percent), and especially – financial reward (20.1 percent).

<sup>35</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2021). *Vilnius City Strategic Development Plan 2021-2030*. <https://vilnius.lt/rest/assets/8e6f2771-a1ae-45e1-bb49-edfe0099e671>

Three tasks are envisaged in the mobility direction: Multimodality – an integral principle of travel in the city of Vilnius; The most frequently chosen mode of travel – health-promoting movement on foot or by non-motorized vehicles; The public transport system allows Vilnius residents to move quickly, smoothly and comfortably.

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political direction. Several Assembly participants also stated that they felt that the VMPA addressed technical and managerial issues that prevented the full potential of the chosen method and participants from being fully utilized.<sup>36</sup>

*"And it is very important for the city administration to receive recommendations, also because there are so many sensitive topics, such as public transport, for example, and there are so many alternatives to public transport."  
Metro, tram, metrobus, and each one has its own advantages and disadvantages, so to say without consulting them: "and now we will build a metro" is such a blatant Lukashenko method, which we really want to avoid, and we want the initiative that is best suited for the city of Vilnius to come precisely "from below", from the residents themselves, who, seeing all the advantages and disadvantages, technical characteristics, would recommend certain solutions themselves."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, October 14, 2025.

*"The goal of the current Assembly is to really discuss the topic of mobility with the citizens, not at the level of Facebook comments, but at the level of a quality process and to hear people's recommendations, but at the same time to say what the city is striving for and to agree on certain directions so that the strategic plan that exists becomes more implementable. Now, a very large part of those decisions are not being implemented due to some anticipated or feared resistance from the people. It's as if people are afraid to put that pressure on cars, because there is a feeling that there are the most cars in the city and that's why we are afraid to make those uncomfortable decisions in the Council. <...> But when the Assembly says that the pollution zone can be larger, that lane A can be taken away from cars and given to buses, then all political parties have that greater argument to do so."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

*"Probably more to understand the society, what they expect, what they want <...>. Still, the city, no matter how it ends, will adhere to that strategy [Vilnius City Strategic Development Plan 2021-2030, - author's note], it's just that perhaps there are further formats for communicating with the community <...>."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 4, October 24, 2025.

Politicization is associated with the application of specific means of directing and forming opinions during the assembly. Some interview participants emphasized that organizing assemblies constantly involves the risk of politicization, while others emphasized that they believe that in the case of the VMPA, **the process of deliberative democracy was used to legitimize already prepared public policy decisions.**

*"The entire assembly can be used to use the people's voice, to simply support some of your pre-determined decisions that are planned. Because you can form an opinion during a meeting, so it was interesting for me to look at it from that perspective as well: are people really randomly selected (or at least do they have their own opinions), and another thing is whether they are being influenced."  
during those meetings, so that later we would supposedly collectively come to one conclusion or another."*

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 20, March 7, 2026.

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Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 2, October 28, 2025.

*"I think that the goal of the municipality here was simply, as they say, a PR issue, that's number one in this entire Assembly. To put certain checkmarks, that we are progressive, that we are making progress, that we are listening to the opinions of citizens, and so on. <...> Both the municipality and the city architect provided certain details - they were laying the groundwork, and the breadcrumbs were already piled up towards the end." I'm not saying that it [the Assembly, - author's note] was all very purposeful and pushed in some direction, but there were certain moments where it was present."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 20, March 7, 2026.

On the other hand, as already mentioned, a significant number of participants agreed that **the Assembly is expected to provide recommendations for improving urban mobility**. During the interviews, Assembly participants emphasized that they believe that decision-makers are aware of the mobility problem in the city and expect advice from the community, while some emphasized that they come to participate with specific recommendations or hope for solutions to specific problems (e.g., banning car traffic in Vingis Park).<sup>37</sup> Some participants linked their expectations to the implementation of the recommendations prepared during the VMPA: They are lofty, yet realistic.<sup>38</sup>

During the interviews, it was mentioned that the process of implementing the recommendations takes a long time, the recommendations will likely not be responded to directly, but will rather dictate the general direction of the policy, but it is hoped that the opinion of citizens will be heard, at least some of the recommendations will be implemented, and their choice will not be selective (i.e., only proposals that meet the expectations of decision-makers will be implemented).

*"I think it was gathered to get ideas from people in Vilnius, what people see and how people see solutions. Namely, how it can be improved and that public transport, bicycles would be more included and traffic jams would be reduced. <...> I also believe that just the first step, that they received funding to organize such an event, means that they really want to hear people's opinions. I think that funds would not be allocated for such events anyway, so I want to believe that the proposals will be taken into account."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 5, September 30, 2025.

*"If attention is paid to what people say, and those people are really heard, and those ideas are really at least read somehow, so that someone who actually makes decisions reads them. And not that we just bring them to what we need and write down exactly what we need. But if we do it just for the sake of a checkmark, that the second, fifth or tenth [assembly, - author's note] was held there, and still the ideas remain with the municipality, then it's not worth messing around with."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

A secondary expectation for the Assembly can be to **test the deliberative democracy process**, thus adding to the "toolbox" of public participation in decision-making. According to the city politicians and decision-makers who participated in the interviews, this tool has contributed to the city of Vilnius

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 5, 2025 September 30, Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 13, 2026 February 24, 2026, Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 8, January 30, 2026.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

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the municipality's efforts towards a more inclusive decision-making process (this effort was also highlighted by VMPA observers<sup>39</sup>). Some interview participants stated that they noticed a strong focus of the organizers on the process, the implementation of the Assembly itself as an end in itself, without paying enough attention to its long-term impact in the field of both public transport policy and citizen engagement.

*"I think the municipality wants this to be a successful process. This is the first attempt to hold such an assembly, to fully test the program, the way assemblies should be held, to know whether this is at all a way that could be done in Lithuania or not. At least, that's what I feel the expectations are."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 1, September 29, 2025.

*"I think more people were focused on the process of organizing a democratic meeting rather than on achieving the goal. <...> I think the problem with the Assembly was that it was very focused on implementing the practice for the first time, but less focused on actually changing something in the policy areas discussed."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, February 4, 2026.

### 3.1.2. Wording of the Assembly Question

This subsection will analyze **the formulation of the Assembly's question**. The following criteria will be used to assess this aspect: the extent to which different stakeholders were involved in the formulation of the question, the extent to which there was a common understanding of the problem being addressed, the extent to which the question allowed participants to meaningfully engage in solving the problem, and whether the actors involved perceive the Citizens' Assembly as an appropriate way to address the chosen problem. This part of the assessment was based on interviews with VMPA stakeholders and the results of surveys of VMPA participants.

#### *Formulating the question and understanding the problem being solved*

The Assembly's question was **formulated quite openly, involving key stakeholders**. This process was led by the representative of the Assembly initiator, the question was coordinated with key city decision-makers and representatives of JUDU. The representative of the VMPA implementer, representatives of the organization "DemocracyNext" were also involved in this process, and the prepared question formulation was discussed with an advisory group of independent experts. Although some facilitators expressed their desire and had suggestions for the question formulation, they were not included in this process.<sup>40</sup> In the absence of a joint decision-making group, the representative of the VMPA initiator had an additional burden of coordinating the question formulation separately with both JUDU and Vilnius City Municipality representatives, and the process itself was prolonged in time.

Given that the Assembly was organized in Vilnius for the first time, **the formulation of its question became a certain challenge, in order to ensure that the question would both respond to a problem relevant to the city's decision-makers, thereby increasing the usefulness and applicability of the recommendations,**

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Observer No. 3, March 4, 2026; Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Observer No. 1, 2026 February 26th

<sup>40</sup> Interview with facilitator no. 2, 2026. March 27. It is important to mention that another part of the facilitators did not think that they should get involved in the review of the assembly issue. According to them, they were already entrusted with a large responsibility, which constitutes a corresponding workload, therefore, while preserving personal time and energy, priority should be given to the implementation of core functions. Interview with facilitator no. 1, 2025. September 29.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025.

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**both would create conditions for meaningful citizen engagement.** According to the Assembly organizers who participated in the interview, several topic proposals were submitted to the Mayor of Vilnius: the Šiaurinės Street project, the formation of the identity of city districts, parking options in the city's sleeping areas, and a more general topic about urban mobility, which was selected for further work. This topic direction was further explored with JUDU, linking it to specific projects planned to be implemented: railway integration into public transport, development of bicycle storage facilities, "Park and Ride"

system.<sup>42</sup> However, when this option was presented to the advisory group of independent experts, there was criticism that the Assembly's project-oriented questioning limits participants' ability to raise issues of concern to them, requires more technical expertise than citizen insights, and isolates a certain segment of society (e.g., non-car users may find it difficult and less relevant to discuss bicycle storage). Similar criticism was expressed by the facilitators, who emphasized that organizing the Assembly on topics that already have solutions would diminish the meaning of citizen input (and the Assembly).

*"I remember that our opinion as experts differed greatly from the opinion of the municipality, from the organizers. And the first few meetings were quite heated, because we were actually changing the entire concept, even the approach. They were prepared for very small questions, and we had to go from a completely different direction. Especially since there were questions, for example, about finances, which residents really cannot decide and do not even have such competence. <...> One of the questions, I remember very clearly, was whether Vilnius needs trams? Well, neither competence fits, and their opinion is that it is necessary or not. <...> We tried to avoid such specific questions and give residents a wider choice."*

Interview with expert No. 1 of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly, January 28, 2026.

*"<...> there was talk that we would have to talk about where bicycle storage facilities should be built, and this is where I got completely confused, because then I remember I just opened some Vilnius plan on my own, I don't remember which one, and it was already marked there where it was planned to build bicycle storage facilities by 2027."*

*"Then I was also confused, what are we going to talk about with the residents now, if it's already written and plus, there are a lot of clear points where it's possible to build, based on the number of residents, distance from the stations, in short, everything is very regulated. So how will the residents decide where to build those storage facilities now?"*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 3, February 11, 2026.

Taking into account the feedback received, the wording of the question was adjusted and made more open to consideration - it was decided to stick to the main question, focusing on travel by different modes of transport, which would allow the recommendations received to be applied to projects implemented by JUDU.

The final version of the Assembly question was as follows: **"how to ensure that Vilnius residents choose public transport, walk or cycle more often - regardless of place of residence?"** According to the assembly organizers, the feedback received

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer no. 1, 2025 September 25, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly volunteer no. 1, 2025 October 1

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The connection was useful in the process of formulating the question, helping to look at it from the outside and see possible interpretations and limitations that the organizers themselves had not thought of.<sup>43</sup>

This issue and topic **were perceived as important by the Assembly participants, but the interpretations of the issue differed somewhat.** According to the survey data of the VMPA participants, **the importance of the topic was assessed the same at the beginning and end of the Assembly – 9.1 points** (on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means “not at all important” and 10 means “extremely important”). When assessing the understanding of the problem being solved, several participants emphasized that they joined the VMPA expecting to discuss urban mobility problems in general (e.g., urban infrastructure), with less attention paid to specific means of transport.<sup>44</sup> Such an expectation may have arisen due to the difference in the messages communicated. For example, as mentioned in subsection 3.1.1, the information provided on the Vilnius City Municipality website emphasizes the aspect of climate neutrality rather than mobility.<sup>45</sup> The invitation letter addressed to Vilnius City residents also

was specified somewhat differently than the final wording of the question: “How to achieve that you would choose to travel in the city as often as possible in as many different ways as possible, including public transport, walking or cycling, regardless of your place of residence?”. Although there are no essential differences, the latter wording is somewhat more open (“*you would choose to travel in as many different ways as possible*”) than the final version of the question, which distinguishes between city dwellers who do not use the named means of transport. This was also emphasized in one of the responses to the open-ended questions of the participants’ survey: “the choice of topic is wrong – one large group of road users [*driving cars, – author’s note*] remained completely *ignored*.” On the other hand, the final

The wording of the question corresponds to the mandate given to the VMPA: as mentioned in subsection 3.1.1, **the Assembly was seen as an auxiliary tool in finding the best and most acceptable ways for citizens to achieve the strategic goals of the city of Vilnius.**

*“Because the question is still formulated in such a way that, well, it’s pretty obvious anyway that we want to move towards fewer cars. He’s so sincere. Because we also considered whether the question should not reveal that there is some kind of priority here for sustainable travel, but on the other hand, well, it would be almost like an attempt to attract people who are maybe, I don’t know, some kind of climate critics, but... And then you will attract them to the Assembly, but still we know that Vilnius is striving for exactly that with its plans and so on.”*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025.

*“So, the question was about how to encourage people to use public transport more, walk more, etc. But where are the representatives of opposing ideas? I really want to hear the opinion of people who use a car and can defend and represent their opinion. Ok, we gathered here, we are familiar with the topic, but maybe there are citizens who do not support it, so after receiving the letter they simply did not participate in the Assembly because they do not want this topic to become a reality. If this was the reason for their non-participation, it would be quite sad.”*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 6, December 17, 2025.

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 11, February 10, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, 2026 March 4th

<sup>45</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025b).

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*"I was a little interested, I registered and I probably didn't read the title because I understood that it would be about movement in Vilnius in general <...>. Now, because of that, they kept repeating that the attractiveness of public transport, that it should be there... Well, it turns out that it's almost forced, that all people would use that public transport <...>. But I didn't expect that there would be a focus on bicycle paths, for example. Or those micro-mobility measures that scare everyone, but no one admits to this. Well, for example, I was hoping that we would talk about roads, about possibilities, what can be arranged, for example, to adjust traffic lights, to add turning lanes for acceleration, so-called. I don't know, maybe the status of roads should be changed somewhere. <...> But I'm saying, well, maybe I'm influenced by the fact that I drive around the city the most by car."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

Finally, while some participants understood the mobility issue in a very broad way, others linked it to specific problems of their own or the community they represented, seeing the Assembly as a way to voice them and find a faster solution. This may have contributed to certain tensions during the formulation of recommendations: **some participants proposed measures that were not directly related to mobility but could have an impact on it, while others focused on very specific problems that could be solved "here and now"**<sup>46</sup>.

*The potential of the question to empower participants*

According to the VMPA participants, **the Assembly issue provided opportunities to significantly contribute to its solution**. At the beginning of the Assembly, 58 percent of the participants assessed *their* opportunities to significantly contribute positively, and by the end of the Assembly, this share had increased: 72 percent of the participants were convinced that they personally significantly contributed to finding a solution(s) to the issue raised during the Assembly. When assessing *the o* The participants were even more positive about the possibilities of the participants to make a significant contribution to the resolution of the issue raised. At the beginning of the Assembly, 68% of the participants positively assessed such possibilities, and at the end of it – as many as 81% (see Table 2). However, this change should be assessed with caution. Looking at the individual level, the change in attitudes induced by the Assembly process was not unidirectional: 30% of the participants assessed their possibilities to make a significant contribution more positively at the end of the Assembly than at the beginning, but the same number (30%) assessed them more negatively, and another 40% did not change their opinion. Thus, although **about three quarters of the participants believed that they could significantly contribute to the resolution of the Assembly issue, the positive change is more likely to be associated with the reduced sample size and omitted answers to the question**. At the individual level, the negative change may be associated with the perceived breadth of the issue and the facilitation process, during which the complexity of the VMPA issue was not fully managed (more on this later in this section and in subsection 3.2.2).

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 24, 2026 February 24, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 5, 2025 September 30th.

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**Table 2.** Participants' perceived opportunity to contribute significantly to the resolution of the Assembly issue, proc.

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                     |                                                                                      |                     |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
|                               | I believe that in finding a solution/s to the problem raised during the Assembly - how to ensure that Vilnius residents choose public transport, walk or cycle more often, regardless of where in the city they live... |                     |                                                                                      |                     |
|                               | ...I personally can make a <b>significant difference</b> contribute.                                                                                                                                                    |                     | ...other people gathered in the Assembly can make a <b>significant</b> contribution. |                     |
|                               | Start of the assembly                                                                                                                                                                                                   | End of the assembly | Start of the assembly                                                                | End of the assembly |
| I completely disagree.        | ,0                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | ,0                  | 0                                                                                    | 0                   |
| I rather disagree.            | 5,3                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | ,0                  | 5,3                                                                                  | 3,1                 |
| I neither agree nor disagree. | 28,9                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 28,1                | 23,7                                                                                 | 15,6                |
| I agree                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                     |                                                                                      |                     |
| I agree more quickly.         | 34,2                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 59,4                | 50,0                                                                                 | 59,4                |
| I completely agree.           | 23,7                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 12,5                | 18,4                                                                                 | 21,9                |
| Didn't answer                 | 7,9                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | ,0                  | 2,6                                                                                  | ,0                  |
| I agree (generally)           | 57,9                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 71,9                | 68,4                                                                                 | 81,3                |
| I agree (general change)      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 14,0                |                                                                                      | 12,8                |
| Disagree (generally)          | 5,3                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0,0                 | 5,3                                                                                  | 3,1                 |
| Disagree (general change)     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | -5,3                |                                                                                      | -2,1                |

Source: First (N=38) and third (N=32) survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators.

The possibility of making a significant contribution to the resolution of the Assembly issue is related to its openness, which creates opportunities for various types of recommendations. While, on the one hand, this can be considered **a strength, reducing the control of decision-makers** and more empowering citizens<sup>47</sup>, on the other hand, such an issue **requires greater efforts from facilitators and an appropriate Assembly design, which allows for structuring citizens' contributions**. This dilemma between specifying the issue, potentially directing participants, and opening up the issue, potentially obtaining a less structured result, was emphasized both during the interviews and in response to open-ended questions in the survey of VMPA participants: one participant mentioned the need "not to impose narrow boundaries when choosing a topic and preparing recommendations", while another emphasized the need for "more clearly formulated goals and criteria"<sup>48</sup>. For example, one interviewee of the Assembly

saw the question as too closed in narrow, managerial thinking and accordingly not allowing

It is more meaningful for assembly participants to contribute to the formation of city policy:

*"And now the question concerns the economic management of the city, not the management, but the economic management of the city, or not. This – an important matter for life, everything is very fine, but it is not at all, it is not about politics, it is about the economy, about city management, about the use of city resources and so on, and so on. And, if we*

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

<sup>48</sup> The second survey of Assembly participants, response to the open question "If you have additional thoughts or suggestions regarding the organization of the Assembly, please write them down"; the third survey of Assembly participants, response to the open question "If you have additional observations about the Assembly, its organizational process, the results achieved and your experience in the Assembly – we invite you to share them here."

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*"We go to that kind of management moment, then that forum [Assembly, - author's note] is, you know, like a meeting about nothing."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

However, according to other interviews, the initiators' expectations during the design of the Assembly were to address a wide range of mobility-related issues<sup>49</sup>, and additional levels of the question were introduced in the process (e.g., urban territorial zoning categories). According to some participants, they allowed for a more focused formulation of recommendations, while others, on the contrary, introduced even more complexity in order to consider mobility issues in different categories. The division of the question was viewed with skepticism by various stakeholders, emphasizing that given the limited time of the Assembly program, many topics arose that participants should focus on, which, in turn, contributed to the abundance of recommendations and, according to one organizer, their superficiality<sup>50</sup>.

*"Next time, I think we should use a less broad topic. This would be a very good tool for addressing specific issues and coordinating with residents, hearing opinions and suggestions."*

Interview with the organizer of Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 4, February 6, 2026.

*"Maybe not the question for me, but more the different dimensions of the question, because I remember at some point <institution> suggested that recommendations be formed according to different elements of the city - 'The center, residential areas, something else. Then there were others there too: mobility, mobility, these are the dimensions, I think, based on which specific recommendations were then formed, maybe they were chosen a little broadly. I would say so, because the question, I think, was still quite narrow, but we look at that question from several angles, it was quite broad.'"*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

*"I think it could be narrower, because we also discussed with the participants that this whole issue is quite broad, because it is quite like the spine, but there is much more than just ribs coming out of the spine, but also hands and fingers, and through this prism of public transport, a lot of questions can be expanded. This was evident during the Assembly itself, that the questions were related to the main issue of the Assembly through some prism. But if you really dig deeper, you understand that it's not really about that. <...> I would say that in the future it could still be narrower, if there are more assemblies."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

### *The suitability of a citizens' assembly to solve the problem*

Opinions on the suitability of a citizens' assembly to address mobility issues were divided: some participants saw it **as a suitable tool for addressing a problem with a wide range of stakeholders**, while others **doubted whether the participants had sufficient expertise to make decisions and maintain independence**. Participants also stressed that their final assessment would depend on the **extent to which the responses formulated by the VMPA were received**.

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with facilitator no. 2, March 27, 2026.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, February 27, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer No. 3, February 17, 2026.

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**recommendations.** In general, opinions differed not so much on the suitability of the Assembly as a tool for solving a specific problem, but rather on the level of evaluation of citizens' assemblies as a method.

During the interviews, VMPA participants who assessed the Assembly as suitable for addressing sustainable mobility issues emphasized their support for the method itself, regardless of the problem being addressed. Some even emphasized that assemblies could be organized on essentially **any topic where community opinion and consensus are significant**. According to the results of the third VMPA participant survey, this was supported by the majority of those who participated in the Assembly – as many as **97 percent. respondents agreed that assemblies should be organized not only on mobility, but also on other topics.**

Participants who positively assessed the suitability of the Citizens' Assembly for addressing mobility issues also emphasized the element of awareness and learning, which reduces resistance to the chosen policy, which is extremely important when addressing controversial issues. The achievement of different groups in society was also emphasized, and in the case of mobility in particular, the possibility of reconciling the interests of different stakeholders in order to adopt solutions that best meet the needs of all of them.<sup>51</sup> The absolute majority of Assembly participants after all sessions agreed that this method can **help people better understand complex social problems** (97%) and, to a lesser extent, **reduce conflicts and social tensions** (75%). It is interesting to note that, despite the positive attitude towards the method, several participants emphasized that its application could be

to be improved.

*"I believe that people, if they are given information and choices, can make decisions, even if they have no prior knowledge of a particular topic. That is why I think this process should work, in principle, regardless of the topic that is being discussed. Any topic can be chosen for such an activity. What color paint should we use if we want to paint, I don't know, a municipality, a central station? How wide should the roads be? Yes, it is based on engineering calculations, I understand. But in principle, I think any topic could be discussed like this. Of course, the discussion itself could be organized differently."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 6, December 17, 2025.

*"I'm in favor all the time. Everywhere, everything boils down to the fact that there are communities, there are groups of people, and they need to know first so that all issues related to the municipality can be easily resolved. Here, the format is good, the idea is good - I'm in favor and as much as possible."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 13, February 24, 2026.

*"We have a society, don't we, and that society, in my eyes, is so two-faced. Part of it is organized – these are all kinds of gatherings, organizations, and the other part is less organized groups of society. It seems to me that the assembly as an instrument perhaps better targets that less organized part of society and we have that involvement in decision-making instead. Then we can discuss, whether those solutions are better there or not, but as an instrument, I don't know, it seems to me that this is a good thing. <...> whether the hay is for the cow or the cow is for the hay. So here, it seems to me, that hay*

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 12, February 12, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, 2026 February 4th.

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*comes to the cow in the example of an assembly instrument, for me it is fundamentally innovative and therefore - positive."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 4, March 18, 2026.

On the other hand, according to several interviewees, citizens' assemblies are not the most appropriate method for decision-making in general. The main criticism is related to the unclear purpose of the assemblies - if expert advice is needed, it is better to turn directly to experts in a specific field, and if the opinion of the population is needed, it is better to use representative population surveys. In other words, **the contribution of the population is somewhat skeptical due to the lack of expertise and, taking this into account, the greater impact of the ideas presented during the assembly's learning**, which poses a certain risk of politicization. Several participants also emphasized that the issues discussed in the VMPA were somewhat more technical in nature, requiring the involvement and knowledge of experts, so in order to properly reveal the potential of citizens, it would make more sense to organize the assemblies **on broader, more strategic-level issues**.

<sup>52</sup> As mentioned earlier, this Assembly question was indeed more focused on strategy implementation than on its development.

*"I don't know how valuable the opinion of random residents is, because I like that allegory when a sinking ship has 30 people on a raft, for example, and only four know how to navigate, but the others try to come in with their advice, so you usually end up in the wrong place at some point. You just need to listen to those four - let them argue, the others might participate a little, but if you do a vote, we might lose that expertise. <...> I don't know, I would move on to some kind of mini-referendums, votes, and so on. But then, if not 50 random people voted, but thousands, and again there is an instrument for that, there are surveys, which are also a legally established instrument <...>."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 2, October 28, 2025.

*"I think this is an interesting, but at the same time very responsible tool that requires special attention and appropriate resources to implement, especially in a society where people do not trust each other in principle and where there is a very high level of distrust in government institutions."*

*I think it is necessary to properly consider how to implement assemblies in a context where there is a high level of political corruption and bureaucracy, because this tool can be used quite easily to achieve specific, albeit institutional, goals <...>. This does not mean that the city of Vilnius or those people who organized the Assembly did anything wrong - no, I just see it as a challenge, as a risk."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Observer No. 1, February 26, 2026.

On the other hand, stakeholders emphasized that the purpose of the Assembly is not to provide expert knowledge – it can be acquired, while the VMPA should convey citizens' opinions and feelings in the city.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, according to the survey data, **the Assembly experience positively changed the opinion of a significant number of participants about the awareness of people participating in citizens' assemblies**,

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 20, March 7, 2026.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 12, February 12, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly facilitator No. 3, February 17, 2026.

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### competence, selflessness, and their ability to make fair and honest decisions.

As shown in the table below, by the end of the Assembly, about half (53%) of its participants agreed that people participating in citizens' assemblies are sufficiently informed and competent to contribute to policy-making – this belief strengthened during the Assembly (an increase of 11 percentage points). A significant majority of VMPA participants also agreed that in formats such as citizens' assemblies people can make fair and honest decisions (88%) – an indicator that also grew strongly during the Assembly (an increase of 11 percentage points in the group). Finally, demonstrating increased trust in the selflessness of other people, by the end of the Assembly, 41% of participants disagreed that people participating in citizens' assemblies consider their personal interests more important than the general goals of the city. Accordingly, the number of those who were suspicious was almost twice as low, 22%.

**Table 3.** Participants' opinion about people participating in citizens' assemblies, percentage.

|                               | People randomly selected to participate in citizens' assemblies, such as the Vilnius Citizens' Assembly... |      |                                                            |      |                                                                                      |      |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
|                               | ...is enough<br>inform and<br>competent to contribute to policy<br>formation                               |      | ...can make fair and honest<br>decisions<br>on city issues |      | ...keeps their personal<br>interests more important than<br>the city's overall goals |      |
|                               | W1                                                                                                         | W3   | W1                                                         | W3   | W1                                                                                   | W3   |
| I completely disagree.        | ,0                                                                                                         | ,0   | ,0                                                         | ,0   | 5,3                                                                                  | 3,1  |
| I rather disagree.            | 13,2                                                                                                       | 6,3  | ,0                                                         | 3,1  | 23,7                                                                                 | 37,5 |
| I neither agree nor disagree. | 42,1                                                                                                       | 40,6 | 21,1                                                       | 9,4  | 42,1                                                                                 | 37,5 |
| I agree                       | 39,5                                                                                                       | 37,5 | 57,9                                                       | 68,8 | 21,1                                                                                 | 15,6 |
| I agree more quickly.         | 2,6                                                                                                        | 15,6 | 18,4                                                       | 18,8 | 5,3                                                                                  | 6,3  |
| I completely agree.           | 2,6                                                                                                        | ,0   | 2,6                                                        | ,0   | 2,6                                                                                  | ,0   |
| Didn't answer                 | 42,1                                                                                                       | 53,1 | 76,3                                                       | 87,5 | 26,3                                                                                 | 21,9 |
| I agree (generally)           |                                                                                                            | 11,0 |                                                            | 11,2 |                                                                                      | -4,4 |
| I agree (general change)      | 13,2                                                                                                       | 6,3  | 0,0                                                        | 3,1  | 28,9                                                                                 | 40,6 |
| Disagree (generally)          |                                                                                                            | -6,9 |                                                            | 3,1  |                                                                                      | 11,7 |
| Disagree (general change)     |                                                                                                            |      |                                                            |      |                                                                                      |      |

Source: First (N=38) and third (N=32) survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators. Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about people participating in citizens' assemblies?"

Looking at these changes at the individual level, it can be seen that in all three aspects, the majority of participants did not change their opinions during the Assembly (71% of participants in the case of the assessment of the ability to make fair and honest decisions, followed by 42% of participants in the cases of the assessment of awareness and competence and the assessment of interest orientation). However, among those who changed their opinions, a higher (and

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significant) part of the participants changed their opinion in a positive direction.<sup>54</sup> **These data reveal that the citizens feel prepared and trust the abilities of others to make decisions that are beneficial to the city.**

Finally, several Assembly participants emphasized **that they support listening to the citizens' voice, but they will make a final decision on the appropriateness of the method only after they are familiar with the implementation of the results.**

*"If those recommendations are taken into account quite strongly, then I think the right way is to hear the voice of the citizens. <...> And for us, since this is happening for the first time, as I said, it's... Well, I don't even know if it's appropriate at all... Well, appropriate, let's say, but I think that maybe the municipality itself should, let's say, more so... And according to our recommendations, there should be a person who would already then oversee it from his side and go in the direction that we wanted. And then, I think, that cooperation would be, then it would be completely appropriate and fulfilled."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

*"No, I would say that this is a very good way and, as I'll repeat, it could be more often, how more often - I don't know, but depending on the needs, such things could definitely take place: meetings and decisions. I think that a lot of things would be resolved - more, deeper, there is a really good option here. <...> Of course, it depends on the municipality how they will implement it, how they will delve into all of us, as I say, I repeat, into all of our wishes, all of the wishes that we have expressed."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 14, February 24, 2026.

### 3.1.3. Duration of the Assembly

This subsection will analyze **the duration of the Assembly and its sufficiency to address the issue** (to what extent is there a general consensus that the duration of the Assembly was optimal and that sufficient time was allocated to each of its parts, which activities are perceived as lacking time and what are the reasons for this). The assessment of these aspects was based on interviews with VMPA stakeholders and the results of a survey of Assembly participants.

According to OECD good practices for the application of deliberative democracy processes, the minimum recommended duration of citizens' assemblies is four full days.<sup>55</sup> The duration of the program depends on the context of the assembly - the complexity of the issue under discussion, the number of participants involved. Smaller, local-level assemblies often have a program lasting around 6-10 days, while larger, national-level assemblies may require 15-25 days of engagement.<sup>56</sup> **The VMPA lasted slightly more than the minimum recommended duration of five sessions** (each 8 hours long), two of which were to be learning sessions and three of which were to be deliberative sessions, but as mentioned in section 1.2, this balance changed during the Assembly's organization to two and a half days for both sessions.

<sup>54</sup> 39% of the Assembly participants assessed the adequacy of the awareness and competence of the citizens' assembly participants more positively at the end of the Assembly than at the beginning (19% - more negatively). Trust in the selfless orientation of the citizens' assembly participants increased by 36% of the Assembly participants (23% - on the contrary, decreased). Regarding the ability of people in the citizens' assemblies to make fair and honest decisions on city issues, 19% of the participants assessed such an opportunity more positively at the end of the Assembly than at the beginning of the Assembly (10% - on the contrary, more negatively).

<sup>55</sup> EBPO (2022). *Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making*. <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/topics/policy-issue-focus/innovative-citizen-participation/good-practice-principles-for-deliberative-processes-for-public-decision-making.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> DemocracyNext (2025a).

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*"According to the OECD criteria, according to which we try to organize everything here, a minimum of four days is needed for the Assembly to be truly meaningful, to be considered deliberative and of high quality, and to have enough time. <...> Here, it's five, with a few more evenings, or even a little more. According to international experience and the number of people, there should be enough time. <...> In practice, two days are dedicated to learning. This is really a good time, a lot of time. <...> But those three full days for those recommendations, all that discussion and formulation, well, that should be enough. Well, that's the optimal number chosen."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025.

According to the results of the VMPA participant survey, **the total duration of the Assembly program is usually was assessed as optimal**. In the third survey, participants were asked to assess the number of days allocated to the Assembly. More than half of all respondents (63%) assessed the duration as optimal, choosing the middle answer "As much time as needed", another third (28%) chose the answer "too little" (another 3% – "very little"), 3% each indicated that the time allocated was "too much" or "very much". Participants also positively assessed the dates of the Assembly meetings. 91% of respondents assessed the convenience of the Assembly dates as good or very good, 9% – average.

Some participants drew attention to the arrangement of the Assembly program days during the interviews, but this was more of an individual opinion than a general trend. According to one VMPA participant, active involvement throughout the day was tiring, but the decision to allocate a full day was more convenient than, for example, dividing the program into several half-days.<sup>57</sup> Several other participants noted that the breaks between Assembly sessions, which ranged from a week to three weeks, did not allow focusing on the issue at hand, and progress was often forgotten during them. However, the majority of Assembly participants **considered the duration of breaks between Assembly sessions to be appropriate**: in the survey, the duration of the time allocated for breaks was assessed as optimal by 72 percent of respondents. Among the remaining respondents, there were more people who assessed the breaks as slightly too long (18 percent) than those who assessed the time allocated for breaks as slightly too short (3 percent).

Finally, there is a certain contrast between the expectations of the Assembly facilitators and the participants. The VMPA facilitators prioritized the quality of the process – some of them emphasized during the interviews that they wanted to spend more time on getting to know the participants, building mutual connections, and deeper reflection.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, some of the Assembly participants emphasized that they had expected a faster, more focused and effective program, which would be more focused on the result, rather than the process.<sup>59</sup>

*"<...> I would really like to have a joint meeting to hear their criticism, because I would like to hear and see in one room how everyone felt differently, or maybe the same thing together, because everyone participated together, but everyone still received the information differently. Well, I really missed one more thing - purely reflections for everyone together. <...> Well, for me at least, when we moved on to the second stage, to the development of recommendations, maybe we didn't go back to those first ideas too much and didn't work with them, it wasn't*

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with facilitator no. 1, September 29, 2025, interview with facilitator no. 3, February 17, 2026.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, 2026 March 4, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, 2026 March 3

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*"There's still room for people to do the last lap. What topics weren't touched on? What else is in this room that we haven't touched on that you'd like to bring out?"*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

*"The program had too many icebreakers and too few reflections and discussions. <...> "repeat what you've learned" - I don't think that was necessary at this stage. Yes, the advantages of a car - you can go anywhere, the disadvantages - you have to pay for it. We spend time doing something obvious, something that each of us knows."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, February 4, 2026.

When assessing the time allocated to each part of the Assembly (learning, deliberation, formulation of recommendations), the VMPA participants who responded to the survey indicated that **there was only a slight shortage of time for deliberation and formulation of recommendations**. The time allocated to the learning part of the Assembly was assessed as optimal by 63 percent of participants, the time allocated to the deliberation part was considered optimal by 50 percent of participants, and the duration of the time allocated to the formulation of recommendations was assessed as "as much as necessary" by 44 percent of respondents. These results are largely confirmed by the insights of the interview participants. These results are largely confirmed by the insights of the interview participants. First, although the duration of the learning sessions was assessed as essentially optimal, some of the experts and Assembly participants who participated in the interviews mentioned that their

There was not enough time for discussions and questions during the presentation – this was especially noticeable after the first JUDU presentation (more on this in subsection 3.2.1).<sup>60</sup> Secondly, as mentioned in subsection 3.1.2, the additional dimensions introduced to the question expanded its scope and at the same time led to a greater number of recommendations.

Although the facilitators developed the Assembly design during the process and had considered several scenarios for refining the recommendations, none of them was suitable for considering the extremely large number of recommendations classified as green (especially due to the reduced time allocated for formulating recommendations due to the second JUDU presentation). For this reason, a process with somewhat less discussion had to be chosen<sup>61</sup>, and VMPA participants shared during interviews that they felt a sense of urgency at this stage of the Assembly, therefore an extended recommendation formulation process at the expense of learning sessions was seen as a more suitable alternative.

*"In terms of the mechanics of how it should have happened, I would be inclined to do what I think would be the most optimal option, which is... Since we actually had two and a half years of learning*

*"A weekend and two and a half hours of creating recommendations, you should do two hours of learning and three hours of creating."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 11, February 10, 2026.

*"In my opinion, there was too little time for this topic [formulation of recommendations, - author's note]. In the sense that when we went through the whole algorithm they invented, well, everything was okay, everything was fine there, but it often happened that there was simply not enough time to think about and discuss something. There really was not enough time, and then you did it just to do it. <...> So, imagine what happens: in one episode you just write something because you don't have time, then that something written after two or three stages*

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly expert No. 1, 2026 January 28, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, 2026 March 4th

<sup>61</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer no. 2, March 9, 2026

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*"It goes to completely different people who read it and they run out of time again, and they write something else because they're running out of time, so in the end, if the idea itself was good, it gets washed away."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 2, January 30, 2026.

### 3.1.4. Residents of Vilnius city are represented in the Assembly

This subsection will discuss **the diversity of Vilnius city residents represented in the Assembly**.

When assessing it, three indicators are taken into account: **participant selection criteria and creation of conditions for participation** (to what extent did the selection criteria cover social groups important to the Assembly's topic, whether the selection process took into account the representation of various social groups, and measures were taken to include difficult-to-reach social groups), **demographic representation** (how diverse and to what extent did the group of Assembly participants meet the selection criteria, which social groups were underrepresented or, conversely, overrepresented) and **discursive representation** (to what extent was there a divergence of positions observed during the discussions, representation of different opinions). The assessment of these aspects was based on the results of document analysis, interviews with VMPA stakeholders and a survey of Assembly participants.

#### *Participant selection criteria and creation of conditions favorable to participation*

As mentioned in section 1.1, six criteria were chosen for the selection of VMPA participants: gender, age, nationality, education, residential district, and the most common means of transport for daily trips. Most of these criteria are traditional, applicable to citizens' assemblies organized on various topics, in order to ensure the diversity and representativeness of the participants, and in particular, VMPA chose a more specific criterion related to the most common mode of movement in the city. Although, as mentioned in subsection 3.1.2, the Assembly's question itself dictated the strategic direction towards sustainable mobility, according to the organizers, it was important for them to ensure that **citizens using various means of transport contributed to the formation of this direction and agreed on it**.

*"And then there was a question about where the final criterion is, how people use transportation every day, and that's it, and anyway, for the community of the democracy under consideration, it's quite a debate whether such attitudinal issues should be included, because the thinking is that if you already form that representative group, it should probably already reflect that diversity of travel. <...> It was ultimately decided <...> that, well, you need to know how people travel to really ensure that there will be people in the Assembly who travel by car, and not that they will see that issue and decide: "well, it's still here, everyone will want to talk me out of it, I won't participate."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025.

The participation of less numerous social groups (e.g., people with disabilities) that are significant to the Assembly's topic was ensured, in line with international practices, not by including this characteristic as a selection criterion, but by providing an opportunity to express their position during the training.

*"<...> the speech of the representative of the disabled made such an impression that his topic then dominated. He conveyed the message so well, so clearly! How well his message was received, that it then dominated all the proposals,*

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*"in the discussions - 'let's not forget the disabled, let's not forget the disabled' - the meaning was very precisely emphasized, the message was very precisely spread."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

When selecting participants in the VMPA, additional measures were taken to encourage participation from groups of society that are less likely to engage in civic activities. For example, taking into account that people with lower education and poorer economic status are typically less active in civic activities.

groups<sup>62</sup>, during the first stage of the VMPA selection, more invitation letters were sent to microdistricts where lower population activity was expected due to the prevailing socio-economic situation. Such measures were not applied to other groups.

It is important to note that **only Vilnius city residents were included in the selection of participants**. However, VMPA participants who participated in the interview emphasized that the involvement of Vilnius district residents is also important for the resolution of the Assembly issue, since a significant part of them travels to the city territory every day. Although the organizers acknowledge the complexity of the issue, according to them, such an expansion of the Assembly would have been complicated by the need to obtain access to Vilnius district municipality resident data.<sup>63</sup>

*"The district and the city are homogeneous, everything in common, because let's evaluate a very simple thing - you look in the morning, stand at the entrance to the city and see how many people live in the countryside. Here the whole issue is not happening in the city, but outside the city, because all the pulsations merge."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 13, February 24, 2026.

In addition to the measures applied during the selection process, the Assembly organizers also applied **targeted measures for groups of society that experience certain inconveniences due to participation** (e.g. young fathers and mothers, people with disabilities, citizens caring for relatives). However, it is important to note that **this assistance was offered more reactively than proactively** (i.e., information about it was not made public, but residents were asked whether they needed assistance related to participation). Thus, although the opportunity was created, some participants may not have understood the nature and limits of the assistance offered, or, ultimately, did not dare to ask for this assistance due to a lack of certainty about its provision. For example, according to one Assembly participant, she did not know that she could apply for assistance with childcare, and the opportunities for participation in the VMPA consisted of family support.<sup>64</sup> Several participants were offered assistance (e.g., care for relatives by a social worker) during telephone calls, but it was refused<sup>65</sup>, so in the end, this type of service was not used.

*"The selection form itself, which was filled out by people who wanted to participate, even included text that said, if you have a disability, or need some kind of help, or some other criteria that prevent you from participating, or make it difficult for you to participate, then tell us and we will try to provide you with all the necessary assistance so that you can participate."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

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<sup>62</sup> For example, Civil Society Institute (2025). Lithuanian Society Civic Power Index 2025. Study. <https://www.civitas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/PGI2025-www.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 5, September 30, 2025.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, October 2, 2025.

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*"A lot of people asked those questions when they called on the phone - they asked those rare things and <...> I told them that there would be help, that if necessary, with a wheelchair, it would be possible, conditions would be created, we had instructed them all so that if they asked, they would tell us."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

Considering that representatives of non-Lithuanian nationality also participated in the Assembly, **the assistance of interpreters was used for their effective involvement.** This decision also changed during the Assembly –

First of all, it was decided to use volunteers who speak English and Russian to translate the Assembly, assistance. However, after the opening event, it was realized that such a solution was not appropriate – the volunteers did not have the necessary professional skills, translation required a lot of energy and strength, and also – a special dictionary that responds to the topic of the VMPA. The Assembly facilitators also advocated professional translation<sup>66</sup>. For these reasons, the organizers contacted the Vilnius City Municipality Department of Foreign Affairs, which ordered the services of translators for the remaining sessions of the Assembly<sup>67</sup>. When translators were involved in the process, the best ways of their inclusion were also sought - first of all, they sat next to the participants and accompanied them throughout the process, but due to the additional noise, this solution caused some discomfort for both other participants and facilitators, so a technical solution was finally found, where the translators sat at the back of the hall for most of the program, and the translation was transmitted to the participants through headphones. This solution was positively evaluated by all interested parties.

Overall, VMPA participants **agreed that the organizers ensured equal access to information for participants from ethnic minority groups** – 88 percent of respondents in the second survey somewhat or completely agreed with this statement. When asked whether assemblies should be organized in more than one language in order to more effectively involve ethnic minority representatives, respondents were more skeptical, but opinions were divided: slightly fewer respondents supported this idea (39 percent) than did not support it (42 percent).

*"I really enjoyed the organizational part of thinking about the Assembly participants <...>. Of course, I still can't participate to the same extent as the locals [due to insufficient language skills, - author's note], but I feel like I have more support than at some other events where foreigners are not given any help."*

Interview with a participant of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly, informant anonymized

*"Since they translated directly, maybe even a little bit, well, not very much, but they translated through headphones, through a microphone, I think everything was fine, this part was really well done, at least the translation from Lithuanian into other languages. <...> But we tried to communicate in groups in a language they understood or to speak our native language and they adapted, so to speak, because there were still some basic words that they also... I think they learned a lot of new words throughout the Assembly and others are perhaps international ones, where it is clear what they are talking about. <...> So, as I think, this whole group of translators really did a good job of translating and those translators really didn't get in the way."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2025, interview with the facilitator of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly (-e) No. 2, 2026 March 27

<sup>67</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

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Accordingly, taking into account the diversity of participants, **various registration options were created, available to representatives of various groups of society** - this could be done both electronically and by phone. However, there were several cases when citizens arrived at the Assembly after receiving an invitation letter in the first selection stage, but were not selected or did not register during the subsequent selection stages.

In this case, citizens were not admitted to the Assembly, and the organizers themselves reflected on the need for additional registration during the live meeting. Moreover, according to one of the organizers, a weak part of the selection process is that no screening of participants was carried out during it, taking into account their possible connections with the organizers of the VMPA or interest groups relevant to the topic.<sup>68</sup>

Although no related challenges arose during the Assembly, the appearance of a conflict of interest could have undermined the legitimacy of the VMPA, therefore minimal screening and/or a question about potential conflicts of interest included in the participant questionnaire could help mitigate this risk.

*"It was very unpleasant. I'm telling you, I had two cases like that, but they said there was a third one, where people who were really old came with those letters and wanted to participate in the Assembly, but couldn't. This is the thing that, although it seems like there's already so much information... I don't know how else it could have been - there was all sorts of information being communicated."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly volunteer No. 2, January 23, 2026.

*"People who received a letter could come to the eldership with a letter and have the eldership help them register, because there was a case where a person came thinking that they had received a letter and could participate, but they couldn't register because they didn't have a phone at home or anyone to help them register, so there was no way they could call the group that didn't have a computer."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

Finally, in line with OECD good practices<sup>69</sup>, all participants were provided with **a compensation of EUR 50 for their participation in each session of the Assembly**. In addition to the financial incentive, all participants were also provided with the opportunity to park their car free of charge in the Vilnius City Municipality parking lot, and train tickets were covered on the day of departure. Meals were also provided during the event. VMPA participants assessed these efforts positively: according to VMPA participants who responded to the second survey, **the Assembly organizers created favorable conditions for participation for all residents of Vilnius**. More than half of the respondents (61%) rated the conditions for participation as favorable with the maximum score (on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means "conditions created for participation only for certain groups" and 7 means "conditions created for participation for everyone"), and the average score was extremely high at 6.5. No participant gave a score lower than 4, which shows that all Assembly participants generally assessed the conditions positively.

## *Diversity and representation of assembly participants*

As mentioned in subsection 1.1, out of 54 selected citizens, 43 individuals agreed to participate in the assembly. According to the information provided in the Vilnius City Municipality report<sup>70</sup>, **this group of participants**

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, October 2, 2025.

<sup>69</sup> EBPO (2020). *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions. Catching the Deliberative Wave.*  
[https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions\\_339306da-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions_339306da-en.html)

<sup>70</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025a), pp. 41-42.

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**fairly accurately reflected the distribution of Vilnius city residents according to the selected selection criteria.** Based on these data, deviations from Vilnius city indicators are observed only in two categories: **place of residence** (6 percent of Vilnius city residents live in Fabijoniškys, but this microdistrict was represented by only 2 percent of participants, 2 percent of residents live in Viršuliškys, but representatives of this microdistrict did not participate in the Assembly) and **education** (28 percent of Vilnius city residents have only completed secondary education, while this group was represented in the Assembly by 19 percent of participants. The proportion of participants with higher education was relatively higher – 45 percent of Vilnius city residents and 53 percent of

Assembly participants). Considering the possibility mentioned in the previous sections that the chosen wording of the question will discourage citizens who travel mostly by car from participating, it is important to note that they constituted a significant share of VMPA participants (51%), proportional to Vilnius residents who choose this mode of transport (50%). Thus, on the one hand, it is likely that the wording of the question did not become a determining factor in participation, and on the other hand, it is important to note that citizens who use cars do not necessarily fundamentally support the goals of sustainable mobility.

Several Assembly participants joined this process in place of their relatives who received an invitation but were unable or unwilling to participate in the VMPA (the data provided by Vilnius City Municipality reflects the actual characteristics of the participants, not those invited). This can be seen as a certain example of self-selection, when more civically active residents join the Assembly.

*"I have a different situation with whiskey, because one person received it, another came, but they filled it out right away in my name." <...> She's been around for a long time, she said, I'm not going, don't bother me. She says, you go, you have time, so go ahead. It filled me up, that's how I got in."*

Interview with a participant of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly, informant anonymized

*"Not exactly, the letter itself, from the municipality, where thirteen, I think, thousands of those letters were sent, my mother received the letter."*

Interview with a participant of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly, informant anonymized

It is interesting to note that **due to the self-selection element, citizens** participated in the Assembly in a more civically active manner (compared to the Lithuanian society<sup>71</sup>). For example, according to a survey of Assembly participants, 38 percentage points more of them than in the general population indicated that they had donated in recent years (87 percent of VMPA participants), 31 percentage points more volunteered (44 percent of participants), 14 percentage points more participated in demonstrations, support actions, rallies, pickets or strikes (26 percent of participants), 13 percentage points more participated in public consultations, working groups or similar activities initiated by state or municipal institutions (16 percent of participants), etc. Assembly participants were also characterized by higher political activity: in 2023-2024. The percentage of VMPA participants who voted in the municipal council and mayoral elections, the Presidential elections, the European Parliament elections and the Seimas elections is higher than the percentage of electoral participation in the whole country (82-87 percent of the Assembly participants stated that they participated in the elections). This should not be considered a shortcoming, but it indicates that **despite the diversity of participants according to the selection criteria, the organizers had a harder time attracting representatives of less frequently involved groups of society.**

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<sup>71</sup> Civil Society Institute (2025), *ibid.*

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It is important to emphasize that **the actual number of participants in the Assembly sessions was ultimately lower than the selected number of participants, averaging 30**. Some participants dropped out during the registration phase. According to the Assembly organizers, after seeing the first dropout (from 54 to 43), **the possibility of attracting additional participants was considered, but the lack of time and human resources got in the way**.

Since, as mentioned in section 1.1, the last registration stage took place a couple of weeks before the start of the Assembly, the priority was already given to organizational work at that time. The fact that additional selection of participants was not implemented can also be attributed to the management structure described in subsection 3.1.1 and the heavy workload and responsibilities of the organizers, which, under time pressure, did not allow for flexible adaptation and reorientation to solve an unexpectedly arising problem. Moreover, when the first ten participants dropped out, this was accepted as a certain failure to meet expectations, but not a critical problem - the Assembly was still seen as representing different groups in society.

*"<...> I don't see any big problems with that either, because different groups of society are still fairly well represented. Well, such things are natural here anyway. And that group is quite large. If we had planned, for example, a group of thirty-thirty-five people and it had already shrunk to less than thirty, then it would really be bad."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025.

**Table 4.** Number of VMPA participants in each session

| Session | Session | III session | IV session | In session |
|---------|---------|-------------|------------|------------|
| I 34    | II 31   | 31          | 27         | 28         |

Source: Data from VMPA organizers and evaluators.

In the subsequent stages of the Assembly, the number of its participants decreased even more. Not all selected citizens attended the sessions regularly, some justified their absences with various personal reasons, and one participant expressed a desire to leave due to disappointment with the process (more on this in subsection 3.2.3).

Since the number of participants did not decrease steadily, but constantly fluctuated (different participants did not participate in individual sessions), it is difficult to measure what specific impact this had on the representativeness of the Assembly. Although there is no information about which groups of citizens participated in a greater or lesser part of the sessions, it can be stated that when **the number of participants in each Assembly session decreased by about ten or more participants, certain groups of society were underrepresented or not represented at all**. This was noticeable both by Assembly observers and by organizers and facilitators, who felt that the smaller than planned number of participants could negatively affect the legitimacy of the Assembly. However, it was already too late to take any measures during the Assembly: the organizers who participated in the interviews mentioned that various scenarios of participant dropout (during registration, after registering and not showing up, during the Assembly sessions) were not prepared in advance – they were not foreseen as a possible risk, which

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After the Assembly, the organizers named one of its main lessons.<sup>72</sup> Some of the VMPA participants reflected that, as the number of participants decreased, the responsibility of the remaining participants and the importance of their voice increased.

*"If we had had a larger group, maybe there would have been even better dynamics, maybe it would have been more diverse, more complex, but it would have carried that weight of complexity and then it would not have had that factual error, because when the Assemblies said at the end that there was a representative Vilnius group here... It doesn't exist anymore, it doesn't exist anymore, so there simply wouldn't have been factual errors."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 3, February 11, 2026.

*"<...> I learned that there are fewer than there should have been. That is, the number of participants is decreasing, although, in that sense, there was a budget and people were paid for it, and still some of them did not come. If it was planned that 50 people, for example, then it would be good if it were 50: someone refuses, but they are still recruited instead."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 2, October 28, 2025.

*"It seemed to me that it would probably take convincing from others, because even those who came from the municipality somehow kept mentioning that "Oh, it seems like there are not many participants." That was probably one of the main drawbacks for me, that there were too few, that there weren't 50 and we probably didn't estimate it, we had to somehow immediately expect that we needed to invite 80 or we needed to invite 90 and hope that 50 would come."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

*"It's automatic that when at least 10 participants leave the general decision-making circle, it's wrong, especially since there were only a few of us left after that. <...> for example, on the last day, in a sense, the fifth Saturday, when recommendations were being developed, the two of us sat at three recommendations. There should have been four of us, one participant was absent, one participant said, 'you two decide everything.'"*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 11, February 10, 2026.

The participants of the VMPA **assessed the representation of different social groups in the Assembly positively, but emphasized the insufficient representation of certain groups.** 88 percent of the VMPA participants more or less agreed with the statement that representatives of different social groups participate in the Assembly. A smaller part of the participants (69 percent) more or less agreed with the fact that representatives of different social groups were represented evenly (i.e., there were no groups with too many or too few representatives compared to the residents of Vilnius city) (Figure 1). The interview participants also emphasized that they were positively surprised by the diversity of the participants and the fact that instead of including segments that usually participate more actively, a "mini Vilnius" model was truly created.<sup>73</sup>

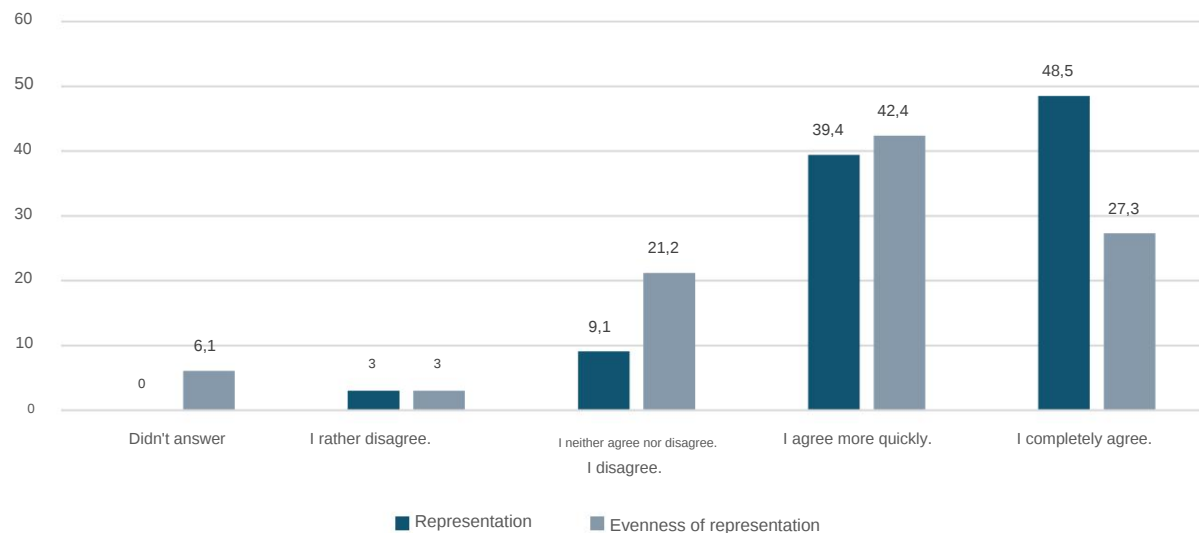
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<sup>72</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, 2026. March 9, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly (-e) No. 1, 30 January 2026.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, 2026. February 27, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, 2026 March 3 d.

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**Figure 1.** Opinion of VMPA participants about the representation of different social groups and its uniformity, proc.



Source: Second survey of VMPA participants (N=33) conducted by evaluators. Question to measure representation: "Do you think that representatives of different social groups participate in the Assembly?" Question to measure evenness of representation: "Do you think that representatives of different social groups are evenly represented in the Assembly?"

However, according to the interviewees and survey respondents of the VMPA, **young people were underrepresented in the Assembly**. According to the data provided by the Vilnius City Municipality, 12 percent of the Assembly participants were young people (18-29 years old), which reflected the general trends in Vilnius city<sup>74</sup>. In other words, out of 43 citizens who agreed to participate in the Assembly, five represented the youth group – this number is relatively small, therefore it is likely that as the attendance of representatives of this group fluctuated during the Assembly, their lack became particularly noticeable. Six respondents (out of 33) of the second VMPA participant survey, in response to an open question about groups underrepresented in the Assembly, mentioned young people, and the same number of respondents mentioned young people as being represented insufficiently evenly compared to the residents of Vilnius city.

*"The point here is probably the question of legitimacy, whether we see that the diversity of those people and those opinions, and that which was ultimately in the room, is sufficient to constitute the representative legitimacy of society. It seems to me that that diversity was perhaps sufficient. It just seems to me that maybe*

<sup>74</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025a), p. 41.

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*"There was a lack of youth voices for that already representative legitimacy, but apart from the youth, it seems to me that there were really very diverse voices in the room and those recommendations also reflect that."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

The lower representation of youth was identified as a deficiency due to the Assembly's orientation towards future decisions, which will most affect today's youth. Therefore, **the voice of young people was identified as extremely significant both because of the new perspectives and ideas they bring, and because of them as direct beneficiaries of the decisions currently being made.**

<sup>75</sup> Some VMPA participants even suggested review the selection principles, including the possibility of representing minor participants or forming a sample of participants not entirely proportional to the existing structure of the city's society, with a stronger representation of the youth voice. Inquiring about the reasons why youth representatives could be more passively involved in the Assembly, several participants even emphasized the need for youth representatives to quickly see tangible results of their work, while in the case of VMPA, achieving these results may take time or be less directly felt (e.g., recommendations may lead to regulatory changes).<sup>76</sup>

*"<...> What I would say is that regarding the inclusion of minors - well, not that minors, but perhaps their parents, because you really can't put children, I don't know, in an assembly of five-year-olds, but I would say that this really should be done. Because they are the ones who will live in Vilnius in twenty, thirty years, when those decisions have to be made, they look to the future, and often, if an 80-year-old participates there, well, God grant that all this would be relevant to him in another 20 years, but..."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 11, February 10, 2026.

*"The problem is that young people do not want to participate in such activities. But another problem with youth involvement is that too few young people have been involved in general. The Assembly should not be a perfect representation of today's society. It should represent the society of the future, the people who will benefit from the results of the Assembly."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, February 3, 2026.

*"<...> I missed the youngest group of people a little bit. They were beginners, maybe students, let's call them, who were maybe about twenty years old. There was probably only one person who really looked so young, and everyone else, it seems to me, was at least a decade older and up."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

It is also interesting to note that **the narrative of participants as beneficiaries** was also used by some VMPA participants when commenting on the involvement of residents from abroad. For example, one Assembly participant emphasized the aspect of transience: can residents temporarily staying in the city make decisions that will have an impact on the wider society, based on their short-term experience of living in Vilnius?<sup>77</sup> This view was not dominant: some VMPA participants, on the contrary, emphasized the

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, 2026 February 4th.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, 2025 September 29th

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

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Vilnius residents who came from abroad brought to the discussion the experience of other countries, as well as enthusiasm and a desire to contribute to the development of the city.<sup>78</sup> The opportunities created for involvement were also positively assessed by Vilnius residents who came from abroad.

*"I am not usually active in political life - as a foreigner, you are usually not involved in such activities. For this reason, when I received the invitation, I also initially thought that I would not be able to participate, because as a foreigner you usually feel that no one cares about your opinion, and you also face language challenges. <...> I feel more than welcome at this Assembly: the representatives of the municipality always ask how I am doing, if everything is okay, or if I need an interpreter -*

*appropriate? In this respect – compliments to the municipality."*

Interview with a participant of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly, informant anonymized

Finally, during the survey and interviews, VMPA stakeholders also identified **several other groups of society that they considered to be underrepresented, but these were more isolated opinions than a general trend**. Two survey participants highlighted the lack of people with mobility disabilities in the Assembly (the choice not to include this criterion in the selection is explained above). One observer noted that the Assembly lacked *white collar* workers.<sup>79</sup> Finally, according to one Assembly participant, VMPA lacked citizens who used cars as their main means of transport.<sup>80</sup> However, given the nominal number of car drivers present, this may be more related to the representation of this group during the deliberations – a topic discussed further in this subsection.

The interview and survey data **do not reveal any clear trends related to over-represented groups in the Assembly**. Three out of 33 survey participants, in response to an open-ended question, identified seniors as an over-represented group, and two more respondents indicated that seniors are more represented in the VMPA than in Vilnius city residents. Compared to the proportion in Vilnius city (22%), seniors (aged 65 and over) selected to participate in the Assembly actually made up a slightly larger share of participants – 26% (or 11 people).<sup>81</sup> Given the observation made in the survey that seniors were more committed to the Assembly process and missed fewer of its sessions, it is likely that their consistent representation created an image of this group's excess over other, more volatile,

in the context of groups. This shows that **in order to ensure diversity and representation of participants, not only a correct selection procedure is important, but also the commitment of participants to the process** (more on this in subsection 3.2.3).

#### *Diversity and representation of opinions among assembly participants*

While the previous part of this subsection focused more on demographic representation (i.e., the question of *who is in the room?*), this part focuses on discursive representation (i.e., *how actively do participants representing different groups of society express their opinions and engage in discussions?*). In the second survey, the participants of the VMPA who expressed their opinions **assessed discursive representation**

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 13, 2026. February 24, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 20, 2026 March 7th

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Observer No. 1, February 26, 2026.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 4, October 2, 2025.

<sup>81</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025a), p. 41.

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**positively** – the statement that the voices of all participating different groups of society are heard equally in the Assembly was more or less agreed with by 75 percent of respondents (Figure 2). During the interviews, the participants emphasized that engagement took place at different levels – some expressed their position more actively, some were less involved in the deliberations, but this was not perceived as a systemic problem, but rather as a result of the diversity of the participants and their forms of communication. A change in the situation over time is also noticeable –

The assembly was seen as strengthening the skill of participation: helping participants change their prejudices, get to know the topic and other participants better, listen to their arguments, and more courageously engage in deliberations themselves.

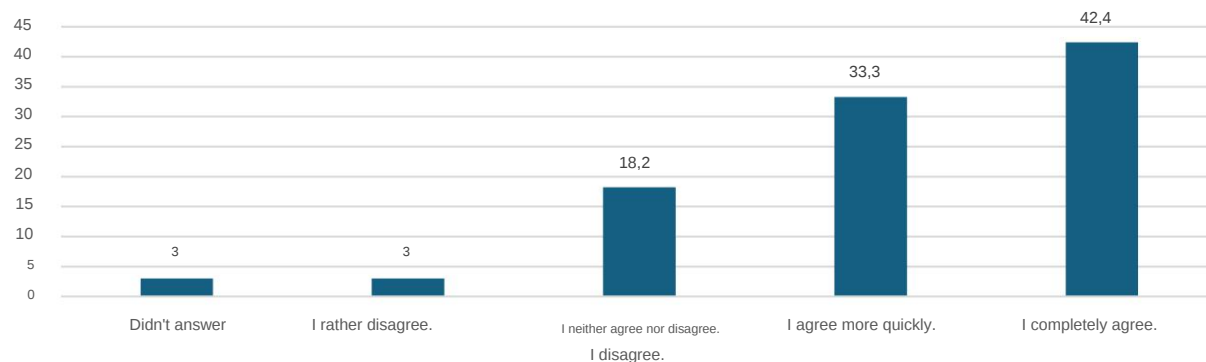
<sup>82</sup> The role of facilitators was seen more as that of supervisors by participants in the VMPA.

did not feel forced to speak up, interrupted, or unable to do so (more on this – in subsection 3.2.2).

*"The most interesting thing for me at the Assembly was observing, as I mentioned, the people, the changes in the way people communicate with each other and with a wider audience on the first day, the first few times. The first days, when eyes are wide open, it's scary to say something and express your opinion to a wider group of people, not just in your kitchen, but on the last day, the last few times, the expressions of opinions are so much bolder, like these mini-friendships."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 20, March 7, 2026.

**Figure 2.** Opinion of VMPA participants about the discursive representation of social groups, percentage



Source: Second survey of VMPA participants (N=33) conducted by evaluators. Question: "Do you think that the voices of all different groups of society participating in the Assembly are heard equally well?"

Although representatives of various social groups actively spoke during the Assembly, according to various stakeholders, **their positions on the issues discussed by the Assembly did not differ significantly, and some missed deeper, more intense discussions**, especially when assessing the opposition between car travel and supporters of sustainable mobility at the city level. This could be explained by several reasons. First, **participants who identified the car as their main means of transport did not necessarily oppose the ideas of sustainable mobility**. More than one participant of the Assembly who drives a car noted that they choose this mode of travel out of necessity, in the absence of other acceptable alternatives that meet mobility needs, and would gladly change their habits if they appeared<sup>83</sup>.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, March 27, 2026.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, 2026 January 28, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, 2026 March 2, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, 2026 March 3, etc.

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Secondly, as mentioned in subsection 3.1.2, the Assembly question itself responded to the strategic direction of sustainable mobility, and facilitation measures were also selected to formulate recommendations on this topic, so it can be assumed that, focusing on results, the Assembly participants questioned the choice of the strategic direction less and sought to provide specific proposals for its implementation. Thus, **although the approaches to mobility issues differed, the Assembly question did not so much provoke discussions on this topic as called for consideration of measures to ensure sustainable mobility.**

*"Somehow, I missed those different opinions in the Assembly, somehow everyone agreed too easily."*

*Now that I think about it, maybe we somehow didn't open up that conflict, actually, I don't know why it didn't open up, or if it really doesn't exist in the city, because there are definitely people who drive cars, and we even selected those, the majority, to be those who drive cars, but in the Assembly it seemed so simple and no one argued, and everyone decided from the very first day that it was so."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

*"I didn't hear many participants during the Assembly defending the idea that we need private cars. No one, I believe absolutely no one during all these sessions said: 'Okay, guys, I disagree with all of you. I want to use my private car.' I didn't hear that opinion. Every participant seemed to be defending and protecting the idea of the Assembly itself and what we want to propose during it."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 6, December 17, 2025.

Third, the strong divergence of opinions could have been contained by the chosen design of the Assembly. Based on frequent work in groups, the members of which were constantly changing, it did not allow for the formation of a strong representation of the interests of their group. According to one of the organizers, the fact that the participants were divided into different groups from the very first sessions of the Assembly did not allow for the strengthening of their group identity (e.g. residents using cars or bicycles), which, in turn, led to a weaker representation of this group's position in the subsequent stages of the Assembly.<sup>84</sup> Once in a group dominated by Assembly participants supporting sustainable mobility, **citizens who were less supportive of this idea could feel pressured or, conversely, change their opinion, taking into account the arguments put forward by their colleagues.**

*"To be honest, I was very surprised by the very good atmosphere created. <...> At the first meeting, there were even sharper remarks, saying that I don't like something or that something else should be done, and then they somehow leveled off and the atmosphere became very good. <...> They leveled off so much that almost everyone agreed with it."*

*"the message that something needs to be done to ensure sustainable mobility."*

Interview with expert No. 1 of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly, January 28, 2026.

*"I didn't see any huge tensions. I saw that there were perhaps tensions arising because people represented different needs. It's, let's say, someone who drives a car, someone who walks on foot and the topic itself is sensitive. <...> People who drive a car, or rather one person, I experienced that they felt, not so much pressure, but such indignation - why do I have to get out of that car here. Then, of course, of course, you just have to observe that and I, it seems to me, and I said:*

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

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*"You don't have to have a different opinion, your opinion is important because you have a different opinion, it's also valuable that you're in the room." It helps others feel a little bit - it's not like everyone is going to agree with everything."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 1, September 29, 2025.

The opinions of the interviewees differed somewhat when assessing **the representation of seniors**: some believed that seniors were actively involved in the activities, but others stated that older people were somewhat more passive, more enjoying the process than being significantly involved in decision-making. This was also noted by the Assembly organizers, who stated that, given the complexity of the tasks and the high pace, some parts of the sessions could have been more difficult for seniors, thus somewhat limiting their opportunities for involvement.<sup>85</sup> During the interviews, older VMPA participants did not identify any specific challenges they had encountered and had no complaints about the process, but did make suggestions for improving the Assembly design (e.g., introducing more moderated discussions).

*"The youth, everything is in order, the high school there - everything is in order, everyone there is more or less, we are already moving around, and there are not enough older people here. It was also noticeable that the women who came there didn't really fit in or they were like, "You just do it, I'll do some small thing". Well, in this place, we need to participate a little more actively."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 13, February 24, 2026.

*"Because the seniors participated at all, participated in a completely unusual way and expressed their opinions. So I think they were involved. Yes, of course, there were not so brave people, and, let's say, among the seniors, and among the same young people, and among the middle-aged. That's all there is to it. Well, some people, more, as they say, express their opinions and try to occupy the airwaves, let's call it, others maybe a little less. But one way or another, I think everyone really had their own opinion and voice."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

Finally, the results of the participant survey reveal that **the organizers created appropriate conditions for expressing various opinions during the Assembly**. When assessing the change in participants' attitudes between the first and last sessions of the VMPA, it is noticeable that **during the Assembly, the participants' belief that randomly selected people participating in citizens' assemblies can freely express different opinions on local issues strengthened**. At the beginning of the Assembly, 84% of participants trusted this possibility, and at the end of the Assembly, 91%, while the share of those who did not have a clear opinion decreased by 10 percentage points (from 16% to 6%). At the individual level, a more positive change is also noticeable in this aspect: 34% of participants at the end of the Assembly assessed the opportunities of persons participating in assemblies to freely express different opinions on local issues more positively than at the beginning. 13%, on the contrary, changed their opinion on this issue to a more skeptical side, and 53% did not change their opinion.

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, 2026. March 9, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly (-e) No. 3, February 17, 2025.

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### 3.2. The deliberative democracy process that took place during the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly

- *The learning process at the Assembly took place in various formats, leaving a very positive impression on most participants: in general, the information provided was assessed as understandable, valuable both for personal development and in the further Assembly process. True, there were also comments regarding the relevance of not all the information received in subsequent work - it is likely that the participants' observed lower relevance of the first presentations to the recommendations formulated later was also determined by the additional question directions introduced during the Assembly. The participants assessed the material prepared for the Assembly participants, the quality of the selected expert reports, their expertise and reliability very positively. Although there were a number of proposals, the majority of participants found the diversity of approaches represented in the learning process and the balance between the positions presented to be sufficient. It is true that the strange program during the Assembly process (the inclusion of a second JUDU presentation) not only demonstrated the organizers' responsiveness to the participants' wishes, but also raised the risks of poorly controlled (without more thorough prior preparation) biases that could skew the presentation.*
- *During the VMPA deliberations and formulation of recommendations, various facilitation methods were applied, an optimal balance was achieved between work in the general group and in smaller groups, and the process itself ended with a clear result – a general agreement of the group and jointly prepared recommendations, which the majority of the Assembly participants accepted as “their own”. The process was ensured to have legitimacy. The facilitators consistently emphasized the role of the participants, transferred responsibility for the Assembly results to them, and created a trust-based, safe space for discussions.*  
*The process of deliberations and formulation of recommendations was assessed by various stakeholders as highly inclusive (without coercion), and the atmosphere created enabled different, sometimes opposing groups to discuss freely, equally and respectfully. The facilitators were assessed by the majority as objective and impartial, responsive and attentive, although some tension was felt between the facilitators' orientation towards the quality of the process through inclusion and the responsibility transferred to the participants, and the expectations of some participants for greater efficiency and orientation towards results.*
- *Despite the overall very positive assessment, several weaker points in the Assembly's deliberation and recommendation formulation process were also identified. First, although the individual tasks were clear to the participants, they lacked some clarity of the overall process, linking the individual stages and tasks to the whole (probably due to the program developed and revised in the process). For example, it was unclear to the participants when new ideas could no longer be proposed for deliberation, when and how an alternative opinion should be presented. Second, a number of participants regretted that some initial ideas considered valuable were “lost” during the process. Most of them linked this to the methods used, for example, the groups that changed to formulate individual recommendations, which lacked communicators, “guides”, who were left with the text when the groups changed. Third, due to the additional time allocated to the learning component, there was little time to formulate recommendations, and the complex formulation of the question and the large number of ideas resulted in a compromise between quantity and depth, which caused some stakeholders to feel both the process was viscous and superficial.*
- *During the Assembly, communication with participants was assessed very positively – both with the whole group and individually. Participants particularly emphasized the accessibility of the organizers, the completeness, regularity, timeliness of communication, the various channels and languages used, as well as the perceived attention and care. However, participants felt somewhat less informed about the steps after the Assembly. This is also due to the fact that the organizer responsible for communication left her job immediately after*

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*Assembly, internal communication was disrupted. At the same time, some participants expressed a desire to continue to be informed and involved, but at the time of the evaluation, this need had not yet been sufficiently met.*

- *The largest dropout rate of participants was recorded before the beginning of the Assembly – among the selected individuals who ultimately did not confirm their participation or who confirmed but did not attend the Assembly sessions. Those who dropped out argued for such a decision by unfavorable life circumstances, excessive required commitment, or insufficient opportunities. At later stages, the dropout rate was lower, although the majority of participants missed at least one session, and less than half managed to attend all of them. The participants' involvement was strengthened by a sense of responsibility and commitment, to which the high-quality organization of the process and the attention shown by the organizers significantly contributed. Although the financial reward paid to the participants was not identified as the main motive for participation, it was viewed as fair compensation for the time spent and possibly contributed to a greater diversity of participants, creating more opportunities for economically disadvantaged and less active citizens to get involved. The evaluation also showed that at the end of the Assembly, the need for such compensation was viewed more favorably by the participants than at the beginning. The organizers had also planned additional measures to reduce barriers to participation (for example, the services of a nanny or social worker), but due to limited financial resources, they were communicated about only in a very limited and targeted manner, and ultimately, the participants did not use them.*
- *Communication with the public was most intensively carried out in the initial stage of the Assembly - an information campaign coordinated by the Vilnius City Municipality Communication Department, which started together with the first stage of participant selection, spread the word about the upcoming VMPA through various channels and invited Vilnius residents to register. After the Assembly began, external communication slowed down due to the organizers' conscious choice to limit the amount of information transmitted to the outside during the Assembly, in order to protect participants from external pressure. Although these restrictions were lifted after the Assembly sessions, it was not possible to attract greater media attention: various parties associated with the Assembly assessed the communication after the event as insufficient, not reflecting the scale, importance and depth of experiences of the process that took place. Publicly available information about the Assembly is assessed as sufficiently detailed, detailed and open.*

### 3.2.1. Learning process

In this subsection, when analyzing the **Assembly learning process**, an attempt is made to assess the extent and manner in which the Assembly participants' diverse learning was ensured during the process. When assessing this aspect, it is taken into account whether the information was presented to the Assembly participants in an understandable, objective manner, in optimal quantities, and in different forms, whether the participants and facilitators agree that the information provided helped them to form a position and engage in the deliberations in a reasoned manner, whether the organizers can name the principles on which the selection of speakers was based, whether the participants recognize the expertise and reliability of the selected speakers, whether the information provided and the views represented were diverse, or whether the balance of the presentation of different positions was maintained and the attention given to them was perceived by the participants as equal, whether positions that remained insufficiently represented were not discernible, whether stakeholders were given the opportunity to propose speakers and the content of the information presented, and finally, to what extent impartiality was ensured. The analysis presented is mainly based on interviews with the Assembly organizers, facilitators, observers, participants and experts, as well as the results of surveys of the Assembly participants.

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### Forms and scope of information provision

**The learning process during the Assembly took place in various formats** – as already recorded in 1.2

In the section, the Assembly participants listened to various **expert reports, both more general**, contextual (discussing climate change, green infrastructure, the idea of sustainable public transport, social innovations for promoting sustainable mobility, the history of street development), **and more specifically presenting the mobility situation in Vilnius** (problems, municipal actions, plans and aspirations). During the Assembly sessions, they independently and on several tasks, studied a comprehensive **set of materials prepared specifically for them on the Assembly topic – an information publication<sup>86</sup>**, listened to and had the opportunity to communicate with various **interested parties** (elders, remote microdistrict communities, youth, cyclists, people with disabilities, representatives of the physical medicine and rehabilitation professional community). Learning also took place **during interactive question-and-answer sessions**, during **the sharing of impressions and discussions** and **sharing of their personal experiences with each other**, with some participants intensively searching for related additional information and **independently**. The trip to New Vilnius during the second Assembly session can also be seen as **learning through experience**, when participants were invited to travel together by train or independently by express bus (those who have not tried it – to try it, those who have used it for a long time – to remember such ways of travel), and the meeting place for the afternoon was the "Smoke Factory" – a revived former industrial complex (scythe factory) transformed into a cultural space for events, which has also become one of the symbols of New Vilnius' recent identity reconstruction initiative (here one could see a connection with the idea of a polycentric city presented to the Assembly participants that morning).

This **set of information and its presentation forms left a positive impression on many participants** - in the second survey of participants, in response to an open question, many positive responses were directed specifically at aspects related to learning and acquired knowledge (Table 5), while no negative aspects related to the learning process were highlighted (only a few language errors noticed in the slides were mentioned).

**Table 5.** In the second survey of VMPA participants, the aspects of the Assembly related to the learning process that they liked the most so far were identified

| What have you liked most about the Assembly so far? (open question)                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Work in various groups, discussions, field trip day, opportunity to meet interesting people                 |
| The quality of preparation of most questions                                                                |
| Expert reports, group communication                                                                         |
| Expert presentations, discussions, departure day                                                            |
| Expert presentations. Presentations by JUDU representatives                                                 |
| Information received, communication, knowledge sharing                                                      |
| Diversity and abundance of information. Opportunity to listen to different people and their positions       |
| Infrastructure development history, change and planning of different versions of infrastructure development |
| Information provided on all mobility issues                                                                 |
| Knowledge                                                                                                   |

<sup>86</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025b). *Vilnius Citizens' Assembly. Information leaflet for participants. Let's decide together! How will we move around the city?* <https://pasitarkime.vilnius.lt/lt-LT/projects/pilieciu-asambleja-2025>

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|                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| A look at the city of the future, ecology and sustainability |
| Speakers, facilitators, food                                 |
| Presentation of development plans, sessions with experts     |
| People met, knowledge gained, awareness expanded             |

Source: survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators.

It is likely that **the learning process, which was assessed mostly positively, was also enabled by the participants' extremely smooth organization.** The organizational preparation for the Assembly was assessed very favorably by the participants in various aspects, including the technical preparation for the Assembly meetings, which was particularly relevant in the learning sessions (presentation slides, materials and tools on the tables, task sheets, etc.).

The latter was rated very well by 67 percent of participants, good by 27 percent, and averagely and poorly by 3 percent, so we see that **technical preparation**, in general, was indeed rated highly, as creating favorable conditions for concentrating on the learning or discussion process.

According to the survey of VMPA participants, **absolutely all respondents considered the information provided to be understandable** – 64 percent of them completely agreed with the statement that the information was provided in an understandable manner, while the other 36 percent more likely agreed with this statement. However, during the interview, participants considered that **perhaps not all** participants were **comfortable** with the provided material (especially printed or visible on the screen). familiarize themselves with the material – as an example, visually impaired and elderly participants were mentioned, who, as noted by other Assembly participants, sometimes found it difficult to read the text. This is also related to the fact that some of them **were not sufficiently familiar with the material due to accessibility challenges.**

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*"The organizers tried their best, bringing information to all different people, in different ways, in different environments. True, some came without reading it anyway - that was the impression. It might have been more difficult for older people - a lot of text, it might be difficult for an older person to sit and read. An abbreviated version would also be needed. Maybe some have poor eyesight. It turned out that it was difficult for older people to read the text."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

It should be noted here that during the Assembly, the organizers made efforts to present all the material as conveniently as possible, for example, the information leaflet, some other material – presentation slides, additional documents – was available in printed form during the Assembly, and participants were informed about new printed material from time to time. However, it seems that participants did not always notice the relevant material in time, and some presentation slides were not provided to the organizers in advance (therefore, they remained unprinted), so **in the future it would be useful to identify those with reading difficulties early and maintain continuous efforts to offer the material in a more convenient format for them** (in some cases, in an abbreviated form). As one of the facilitators noted, there were no participants with **special needs** – blind, deaf, neurodiverse and other groups – at the VMPA, so the appropriate preparation of the material was not relevant, but when planning future assemblies it is necessary to prepare for these cases in advance.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, March 27, 2026.

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**In the case of foreigners**, live interpreters helped to understand the material, but it was noted that this did not always help. Foreigners who participated in the assembly mentioned that it would have been **more convenient if the slides on the screen were multilingual**. As an alternative to this solution, slides **translated in advance** and provided to non-native speakers (on paper or electronically) could be considered, which (especially in the case of slides with more information, data, etc.) would allow them to follow the idea of the presentation in a timely manner and delve deeper into the material.

The aspect of convenience also emerges from another angle in the analysis. Some Assembly **participants critically assessed the method of listening to presentations in five smaller groups and subsequently discussing them together during the first session as inconvenient and inappropriate**. Since each participant could choose only two presentations, the content of the remaining three could only be learned from the reflections of other participants during the Assembly session or later viewed a video recording uploaded to the website (at the time of writing the report, in the spring of 2026, 3 out of 5 recordings were publicly available). First, not all participants understood that the recordings could be reviewed later.<sup>89</sup> Second, this practice created a feeling in some participants **that they were “behind in knowledge”**, losing the opportunity to get acquainted with all the information and, accordingly, look at the issue from different angles – the general discussion in small groups did not compensate for this feeling.<sup>90</sup> Finally, some participants saw the fact that different Assembly participants **acquired a different knowledge base** as a disadvantage rather than an advantage – in their opinion, in order to form a common understanding for the formulation of recommendations, all participants should have been provided with the same information.<sup>91</sup> The logistics of the exercise itself (moving from the usual auditorium, finding the necessary rooms on different floors of the municipal building) were also assessed ambiguously. Although the organizers saw this as an action that brought more dynamics and liveliness, demonstrated a certain level of trust in the participants, and attempted to create a sense of “individuality” for the building, it received not only positive but also negative feedback from some participants due to **the inconvenience** in the generally positive assessment of the Assembly's organization.

As already mentioned in subsection 3.1.3, based on the survey results, **the majority of Assembly participants assessed the time allocated to the learning part as optimal**: 63 percent of the participants who completed the survey described the time allocated to this part as “as much as needed”. The rest more often stated that there was too little time (19 percent) or significantly too little time (3 percent), and only 6 percent thought that too much time was allocated to the learning part (9 percent did not answer the question). Although Assembly observers

were concerned that **the amount of information provided (handouts, reports) was excessive even for someone professionally interested in the topic**, and the information itself was very detailed, so it might be too much information for those who had not previously been interested in the topic **in depth**<sup>92</sup>, **according to the majority of participants, The amount of information provided for learning was neither clearly too much nor clearly too little.**

In the survey, 46 percent of Assembly participants agreed that there was more or less too much information, while 39 percent indicated that there was more or less too little information. Only 12 percent of participants assessed the amount of information provided during the Assembly in a clearly critical manner – as too much or too little (Table 6).

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 11, February 10, 2026.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, September 29, 2025.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, March 18, 2026.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, February 27, 2026.

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**Table 6.** Assessment of the volume of information provided, percent.

|                               | The information provided was too much. | The information provided was too little. |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| I completely disagree.        | 9,1                                    | 18,2                                     |
| I rather disagree.            | 36,4                                   | 21,2                                     |
| I neither agree nor disagree. | 36,4                                   | 39,4                                     |
| I agree more quickly.         | 6,1                                    | 3,0                                      |
| I completely agree.           | 6,1                                    | 9,1                                      |
| Didn't answer                 | 6,1                                    | 9,1                                      |

Source: survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators (N=33).

The interview material reveals that more comments were made not so much about the amount of information provided during the Assembly in general, but about the specific, (un)expected, (un)targeted amount of information assessed therein. After the Assembly, some facilitators reflected that **the information provided on the first day of training was too broad, starting from a context that was too distant**, and therefore not entirely targeted, **making the subsequent facilitation process more difficult** (although, as will be discussed later in this chapter, not all participants found this objectionable – some accepted it very positively, as a well-founded point of reference, general broadening of horizons, and self-development). This was partly attributed to the program review mechanism that did not fully function, which corresponds to the division of responsibilities discussed in subsection 3.1.1.

challenges.

*"Looking at the entire Assembly, it felt like we had deviated, we wanted to bite off something more, preparing for that first day of learning. There was too much attention there to climate change, to greenery, when in essence it was necessary to get down to earth a little more and feel that the pulse is somewhere else and then not complicate that learning process so much. <...> it seems to me that in some places those seminars were put there for nothing and then I don't know, the residents could have received something more related to the same mobility, planning and the like, which they then finally said that they lacked both on the first and second day and in the end they even wanted JUDU consultations later. So if we had paid more attention to that on the first day, maybe we would have avoided that thirst and maybe even a little dissatisfaction of some participants that they didn't have enough of those, let's call them JUDU expertise.*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 3, February 11, 2026.

Participants who lacked knowledge (as already mentioned, there were not many of them) also spoke about the fact that, in general, there was a lot of information, but in their opinion, there could have been more specific knowledge that would be **more specifically related to the recommendations that were developed later** (and, accordingly, the time allocated to them). There were also cases in the interviews when some reports were assessed as **redundant, appealing too much to personal choices** that should not be relevant in the context of the Assembly (e.g., one participant criticized the inclusion of a report by a physical medicine and rehabilitation doctor).

*"We all lacked knowledge, the kind of knowledge that we need to rely on when making decisions, deciding, and considering something. Because, of course, everyone has their own experience, education, and everything else, but this is too*

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

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*narrow, no matter what. And you need, you know, for such things you need much broader knowledge and that training, it was too short. In my opinion, it should have been longer, it should have been given more attention <...> because it was really too little, because we don't know much. For example, I'm neither an engineer nor an architect, and so I lacked knowledge. And in general, now that I understand this, I just lacked some knowledge in making decisions, for me personally."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

The question of the purposefulness of all the presentations delivered during the Assembly was also raised by observers, who considered that a more useful option would have been to have **fewer but more purposeful presentations, with more time devoted to discussion and debate** after the presentations in small groups with the speakers – as was the case after the second JUDU presentation. It was noted that such a more intimate method, **also applied in the Assembly** (the presentations of the second session at the "Smoke Factory", the second JUDU presentation), **creates a safer, more fun space in which the topics can be explored in more depth**<sup>94</sup>. It is likely that these impressions about the excessively wide variety of presentations, not always useful in the final direction of formulating recommendations, most likely related to the somewhat strange scope and direction of the issue after the VMPA sessions had already begun (more on this in subsection 3.1.2).

*The importance of information provided during learning when answering the Assembly question*

The aspect of (in)sufficient attention paid to individual topics discussed above is largely related to the general relevance and importance of the information provided in answering the Assembly question. First of all, it is worth noting that **after the learning part of the Assembly, the participants assessed their knowledge about mobility much better**. The data from the first survey show that the participants arriving at the Assembly assessed their level of knowledge about mobility (various types of travel – by car, public transport, bicycle, walking) and its organization in Vilnius in different ways. Although 47% already assessed their level of knowledge as good or very good at the beginning of the Assembly, the remaining 40% considered it average or satisfactory, and 3% – very poor (11% did not assess their level of knowledge in the first survey). **After the learning part of the Assembly, this level of knowledge, based on the participants' self-assessment, increased significantly** – 76% assessed it as good or very good.

The share of Assembly participants who assessed their level of knowledge about mobility in Vilnius as average or satisfactory decreased by almost half (to 24%), while there were no participants who assessed it as very poor. Looking at the change at the individual level, 72% of participants did not change their assessment of their level of knowledge, but the remaining 28% of participants assessed the level of knowledge after the Assembly learning part as one, two or even three categories better than before the Assembly. This **can be seen as the result of a successful learning process that took place during the Assembly**.

**Table 7.** Assembly participants' self-assessment of their knowledge about the Assembly topic before and after the learning part, percentage

|  |                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                 |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
|  | How would you describe your level of knowledge about mobility (various types of travel – by car, public transport, bicycle, on foot) and its organization in Vilnius city? |                                                 |
|  | Start of the assembly                                                                                                                                                      | After the learning part of the Assembly is over |

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, February 27, 2026.

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|                        |      |      |
|------------------------|------|------|
| Very good              | 13,2 | 21,2 |
| Okay                   | 34,2 | 54,5 |
| Average / Satisfactory | 39,5 | 24,2 |
| Very bad               | 2,6  | ,0   |
| Didn't answer          | 10,5 | ,0   |

Source: First (N=38) and second (N=33) survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators.

As for the individual main learning resources – the information booklet for Assembly participants and the expert presentations – they were assessed as useful by the majority of participants. As already mentioned in 3.1.1

In the subsection, the preparation of the publication itself **posed challenges** – although the organizers expected that this material would be prepared by experts on the subject, **payment to the experts for the preparation of such a package of information materials was not envisaged**. Therefore, considering the fact that the experts devoted their time to the preparatory work of the Assembly on a voluntary basis during the summer, they were not taken to print them and the publication was ultimately prepared by one of the organizers of the Assembly, together with an intern, under the advice of the same advisory group of independent experts. Although the result was ultimately achieved, taking into account the large unplanned workload that the organizers had during the preparation, **it is worth considering in the future to foresee additional resources (financial or human) for the creation of the information publication**

– delving into the topic, searching for material, summarizing and presenting it in an understandable form, necessary for the preparation of a quality publication, takes time and requires appropriate skills. In the case of VMPA, although difficult to achieve, the result nevertheless justified expectations – **the absolute majority, 91 percent, of the participants in the survey completely or rather agreed that this publication was useful to them**, 52 percent of them were “completely” convinced of this (6 percent of the participants neither agreed nor disagreed about such usefulness, 3 percent were not inclined to consider it useful).

As for **the information provided by experts**, a somewhat smaller, but still **dominant, share of Assembly participants – 84% – assessed it as both personally and for others useful** in discussions and formulation of recommendations (Table 8). 6%, when assessing personal experience and 13%, when thinking about others, still had doubts about the usefulness of expert presentations, while 9% (personal benefit) and 3% (benefit to others) of respondents had a strictly opposite view.

**Table 8.** Opinion of assembly participants on the usefulness of the information provided by experts during discussions and in formulating recommendations, percentage

|                               | The information provided by the experts was personally useful to me in the discussion and formulation of recommendations. | The information provided by experts at the Assembly was useful to all Assembly participants in the discussion and formulation of recommendations. |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I completely disagree.        | 9,4                                                                                                                       | 3,1                                                                                                                                               |
| I rather disagree.            | 0                                                                                                                         | 0                                                                                                                                                 |
| I neither agree nor disagree. | 6,3                                                                                                                       | 12,5                                                                                                                                              |
| I agree more quickly.         | 34,4                                                                                                                      | 37,5                                                                                                                                              |
| I completely agree.           | 50,0                                                                                                                      | 46,9                                                                                                                                              |
| I agree (generally)           | 84,4                                                                                                                      | 84,4                                                                                                                                              |
| Disagree (generally)          | 9,4                                                                                                                       | 3,1                                                                                                                                               |

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Source: survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators (N=33).

When assessing all the information provided during the learning sessions and additionally, the Assembly participants also tended to positively assess its usefulness in forming a personal position. When answering whether the information provided during the learning process helped them formulate their position, **the absolute majority of respondents completely agreed (46 percent) or rather agreed (42 percent) that all the information provided helped them form their position on the Assembly issue.** 12 percent of the participants, indicating the ambiguity of the assessment of the usefulness of the information provided by the experts, neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. The participants who positively assessed the material provided to them referred to it as **clear starting points**, providing both **knowledge** and **a realistic framework** for possible proposals<sup>95</sup>, helping **broadening one's horizons**, also providing a sense of **personal growth**. The opportunity to see **a broader perspective**, **providing context** for their **personal experiences**, **was particularly emphasized**. The latter the importance of a broader contextualizing perspective (only as insufficiently answered) This was also emphasized by those participants who found the material lacking in this aspect<sup>96</sup>.

*"The guests who presented various topics, the context formation, until it was accessible to decisions and the like - it was perfect, I really sincerely say, it was great. Except for the fact that it was about nothing, well, so rudely rude. Here I apologize very much. This cannot be underestimated so much, my dear, but [I think that the Assembly question was not well formulated and accordingly did not allow achieving significant results, - author's note] <...> Wonderful [the first day's reports, - author's note]. And there was, and one report by the professor, about nature, climate change <...> it was the best that could have been, the meeting was so interesting! <...> I even looked at the recordings of the other lectures afterwards, in that sense, wow, their kindness, kindness exceeded... Let's just say, the value for such broad knowledge, personal knowledge, development was much greater than the benefit to the forum itself. <...> Wonderful [the reports of the second session, - author's note], exactly the same. First of all, look, we immediately return to compliments to the organizers: how beautifully everything was thought out. It means, so to speak, first of all, everything starts with the location, then the format, then the elders from the neighborhoods come, meaning, there were representatives of the communities, they spoke about one thing or another, then we went to Naujėja Vilnia, we tried the train... Those who haven't been there or haven't been there for a long time - they were impressed. Then they also found space there, that factory Dėmė or not, there were also disabled people... <...> In other words, it was a very impressive day there too. <...> Yes, such meetings are extremely valuable. And they really clearly gave very, well, how to say it here, good indications for such further discussion, proposals, and similar things.*

*For the process – yes. For the result... I think that, well, and besides that, it was possible to reach the same [Assembly, – aut. post.] result."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

*"I think I would evaluate this matter [the reports, - author's note]. It was and is true, I also participated in all the reports, it left a good impression and allowed me to better orient myself to what the situation really is. So to speak, no, not as I think, but, let's say, as it is according to the available data, according to the studies conducted by researchers, that is, studies. It was, I would think, positive here, it was correct."*

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

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Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 12, February 12, 2026.

As can be seen, some participants **viewed the learning part as being of extremely high quality, preparing** the group well for further work, but at the same time they regretted that this preparation, this "investment" remained unused due to a flawed question, which in their opinion did not allow them to significantly contribute to solving the problem (more about the dilemmas of the Assembly's question formulation - in subsection 3.1.2).

Responding to the facilitators' earlier point about the overly broad, contextual first

During the session program, during interviews, it was precisely **this day's presentations that were mentioned among the most memorable, most interesting, and most personally stimulating** presentations. However, the presentations from the second day of learning and meetings with stakeholders – for example, representatives of communities and people with disabilities – **that emerged most in the discussions and were most useful during them.** It was highlighted that some stakeholders were able to convey their message very successfully, which was accepted by the Assembly participants and represented in subsequent deliberations.<sup>97</sup>

The interview material also reveals that where participants felt that there were information gaps after the expert presentations or identified too little connection between the presentations and the issues being addressed, they were greatly **helped by group discussion and debate**, as well as **independent information search and sharing**. It is worth noting that the Assembly issue was discussed and solutions were sought not only during the program, but **also during coffee breaks, on their own initiative**.

*"Expert reports - of course, useful. Ordinary people come, they understand little. And for 30-40 minutes they tell us very important things. Very important. But they are incomprehensible to us, completely. Everyone listens, it's great, but did it help? No. Another thing helped us - we sat, read, discussed what information everyone had heard. Especially curious people looked on the Internet - we had quite a few of them. Another country checked how things were going there, neighboring countries. Over coffee during breaks, we discussed not just our lives, but what we had heard, read and how it could be applied to Vilnius."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

The participants' experiences also revealed the need for **more material, preparation and training on how to formulate recommendations**. One of the open-ended questions in the second survey suggested: "There should be more time to train participants that objectives, ideas should be precise, measurable, specific, e.g. SMART training or the like." Although the proposed structure for developing recommendations (title, context/justification, main objective, implementation measures/directions, additional conditions/exceptions, related initiatives, priority/level of support) was presented several times in the facilitators' slides during the Assembly, the criteria (e.g. the criteria for formulating the recommendation statement) brevity, clarity) and examples of recommendations formulated during Assemblies held abroad, it seems that this information was not sufficient for all participants. It is likely that **at least a short training of participants or a section dedicated to the formulation of recommendations in the Assembly information publication could strengthen** the participants' preparation and the skills needed later in the Assembly deliberations (to introduce those who have not encountered it, to remind those who know).

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, 2026 March 2, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, 2026 March 3

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Summing up the importance of the information provided during the learning process for answering the Assembly question, it can be stated that the learning part was assessed very favorably by the majority of Assembly participants, seen as valuable, educational, providing knowledge, and broadening their horizons. Most of them also saw it as useful for the subsequent deliberation process. True, although, according to the participants' self-assessment, the level of their knowledge mobility on the topic increased, external observers who were more critical and tended to trust expert knowledge tended to consider this level of knowledge insufficient for solving problems of this type (this was also emphasized in subsection 3.1.2). In addition, they also saw the possibility of manipulating participants. This encourages further discussion of the selection of speakers, the expertise, diversity, balance, and impartiality of the information provided.

*"As much as I sometimes stood at the boards and tried to listen, I found their [expert opinions, – author's note] was often sorely lacking, and this was already the third day out of four. So, I see that people are still fantasizing, which is not bad, but not in brainstorming. <...> I still tend to think that sometimes experts can form an opinion and then they [participants, - author's note] say, well, that's reasonable. Yes, in the sense that when you are not an expert yourself, you agree more easily - all psychology textbooks write about that <...> He is an expert, he is trustworthy, he can tell you how you want, if you put on some other uniform and so on. Well, he is an expert, so how can we not listen to him, I don't understand anything. He is so easily exploited here, there may be manipulation here.*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 2, October 28, 2025.

### *Principles governing the selection of rapporteurs*

The learning part of the VMPA included presentations by both experts – subject specialists who shared their professional knowledge (during the first session), and experts – representatives of interested parties who revealed the experiences of the groups they represented in their presentations (during the second session), as well as – representatives of the municipality and JUDU, who provided information about the processes taking place in the field of mobility and future plans (during the second and first and third sessions, respectively). As for the first two groups, the Assembly organizers revealed during the interview the logic of forming the list of these speakers and the selection criteria. First of all, when it comes to the reports of experts-specialists, attention was paid to academics as the most **trustworthy**. When looking for who specifically could speak on the topic of the Assembly, the perspective of the potential speaker was also assessed - **efforts were made to avoid too similar** views of the speakers. Diversity was also ensured **by covering different topics** - an expert was found for each of them, which was highlighted as important. In order to identify **key specialists**, the municipality and DemocracyNext turned to JUDU for help, as the ones who know the topic best -

It was JUDU that proposed a list of people who, to their knowledge, work mainly in the field of sustainable mobility. The municipality representatives began inviting the latter, adding other experts they had heard of and known from their work to the list.<sup>98</sup>

Regarding the experts-representatives of interested parties who read the reports, the organizers reflected that they immediately saw their participation as a necessity. First, they separately thought about possible interest groups in the Assembly issue – for which **groups mobility in Vilnius is important**

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer no. 2, 2025 September 30.

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**The topic, which they face various challenges** in this area and, depending on the question, **represent different modes of movement and experiences in the city.**

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The list of invitees was also discussed with the advisory group of independent experts and, taking into account that the field of experts is relatively small and they are familiar with each other, **the experience of previous encounters with experts also became important during the selection process.** For example, in one case, an expert was invited because of a presentation he had heard by one of the organizers, in another case, it was decided to decline a potential speaker in order to avoid conflict situations and controversies. However, it was emphasized that in the latter case, the entire organization represented was not declined - attempts were made to contact other colleagues from the same organization in order to represent the group's interests.

Representatives of the municipality and JUDU, as internal experts, were included in the Assembly program without selection, with their reports aiming to accurately reveal the current state of mobility, strategic direction and more specific plans in the city of Vilnius. JUDU representatives were invited not only for their expertise on the topic. Like the municipality itself, JUDU was intended as one of the main "owners" of the Assembly, it was projected that the absolute majority of recommendations would be applicable in its area of responsibility, so accordingly, its representatives were entrusted with reading the report, highlighting the current situation, identifying challenges where the Assembly's contribution could be most relevant.

**The selection of external experts raised questions within the wider team** – at least for some of the facilitators.

**At the beginning of the Assembly,** it was not entirely clear what was the basis for the final list of experts invited to present their positions, or whether they were all truly independent.<sup>100</sup> Some experts confirmed that they had indeed "worked with the municipality more than once", but they did not know either the organizers of the Assembly or They attributed their "name prominence" on the list of experts to their achievements and reputation in the Assembly's thematic area.<sup>101</sup>

**Structurally, the VMPA did not provide separate specific conditions, opportunities for interested parties to offer** to read reports, represent their views in the Assembly (for example, in the form of a public invitation or the like). Those who participated in the advisory group of independent experts had more such opportunities, but here, only a representative of the Vilnius Union of Community Organizations participated, not from the subject experts-academics, experts-professionals and state or municipal institutions. In this regard, trust was placed on the division of the topic into subtopics, the separation of interested parties carried out by the organizers and members of the advisory group, while retaining the initiative to find and invite representatives of the identified interested groups in the relevant subtopics themselves.

Thus, the VMPA **organizers** identified the main principles for the selection of experts presenting papers at the Assembly: representativeness of subtopics, diversity of perspectives, reliability and expertise, and representation of relevant stakeholder groups. **However, these principles and their adherence were not clearly communicated to the wider team, and the final process of selecting experts remained relatively closed,** thus creating the conditions for unintentional bias, determined by institutional memory and convenience.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer no. 1, 2025 September 25.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, September 29, 2025.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with expert No. 1 of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly, January 28, 2026.

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The diversity, balance and impartiality of the positions presented will be discussed in more detail later in this subsection.

### Expertise and credibility of speakers

**The quality, expertise and credibility of the selected expert presentations**, continuing the already presented above prevailing positive impression of the participants, **were assessed very positively by the Assembly participants**. In the second survey of participants, when asked how they assessed the quality of the presentations of experts and stakeholders (communities, associations), the majority of respondents (88%) assessed them as good or very good (Table 9). The remaining 12% assessed the quality of the presentations as average, while there were no participants who assessed the quality of the presentations as poor or very poor. The presentations of stakeholders were assessed particularly positively – they were given the highest rating by 52% of the Assembly participants (for expert-specialist speeches – 39%). It is likely that this difference can also be associated with the perceived greater usefulness and relevance of stakeholder presentations to the Assembly's decision-making process, discussed earlier in this subsection, and with the more critical attitude of some participants towards the expert (treated as specialist) JUDU presentation, which will be discussed further in this subsection.

**Table 9.** Opinion of assembly participants on the quality of presentations by experts and stakeholders, percentage

|            | Quality of expert presentations                 | Quality of presentations and speeches by stakeholders<br>(communities, associations) |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|            | After the learning part of the Assembly is over |                                                                                      |
| Very bad   | 0                                               | 0                                                                                    |
| Poorly     | 0                                               | 0                                                                                    |
| On average | 12,1                                            | 12,1                                                                                 |
| Okay       | 48,5                                            | 36,4                                                                                 |
| Very good  | 39,4                                            | 51,5                                                                                 |

Source: Second survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators (N=33).

The fact that the speakers who delivered the reports at the Assembly have the necessary expert knowledge convinced almost all (91%) of the Assembly participants (Table 10). The remaining 9% tended to neither agree nor disagree with this statement, and there were no people who disagreed with it at all. Credibility of experts (the extent to which they inspire trust) was assessed similarly, only somewhat more skeptically: 79 percent of the surveyed Assembly participants indicated that the selected speakers (their totality) inspired confidence in them, 21 percent were not so sure (they neither agreed nor disagreed with the respective statement).

**Table 10.** Assessment of the expertise and credibility of the speakers in the eyes of the Assembly participants, percent.

|                               | The selected speakers have the necessary expertise | The selected speakers inspire confidence |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
|                               | After the learning part of the Assembly is over    |                                          |
| I completely disagree.        | 0                                                  | 0                                        |
| I rather disagree.            | 0                                                  | 0                                        |
| I neither agree nor disagree. | 9,1                                                | 21,2                                     |

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|                       |      |      |
|-----------------------|------|------|
| I agree more quickly. | 51,5 | 39,4 |
| I completely agree.   | 39,4 | 39,4 |

Source: Second survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators (N=33).

During the interviews, it became clear that **the participants were more critical of the JUDU presentations - especially the first one.** In terms of credibility, some participants found the presentation to be **too positive, unself-critical, and** insufficiently reflective of the problems that participants face in their daily lives. Some of the future plans discussed at JUDU were also **assessed as insufficiently thought out and taking into account the current context**, unrealistic, and therefore not trustworthy.

It seems that not all questions were answered during the meeting, and the information provided was not enough to reduce the skepticism of those with critical views.

*"[About the first presentation of JUDU, – author's note] It came to brag, well, to me it sounded like this, because they did this, we do that, we do that, we do that by changing this, and where do you see all that you are doing? Well, it's nowhere to be seen. Even I hear that new trolleybuses are being bought and, well, all winter I see only old scraps. So I don't know, is this in some distant future? <...> that was just bragging to me, because it doesn't correspond to reality"; "<...> that talk about the tram - it seriously scares me, and about the metro, I'm afraid at all, because if they destroy another half of Vilnius while building it, then well, then well, it's scary. Well, for me, for example, it's scary because of such actions. Some ideas taken out of context, but we implement it. And how do we implement it? For what money do we implement it? You can't build a new bridge in Vilnius <...> I haven't heard anything good from them, to be honest <...> That's exactly what we need healthy ideas, normal ideas, and not some taken out of context. What about the tram? Where will the tram be placed? In the air? If there is a shortage, there is even a real shortage of lanes, A lanes for buses, for example, there is a shortage of space on the roads for public transport. So where is the tram?"*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

The detailed information provided by other participants – **presentations of plans – was understood as presenting boundaries that were no longer open to change**, while also creating a sense of **futility** for the entire Assembly . In this case The participants' presentations **lacked highlighting of problems**, reasons for choosing one or another solution, and **a clear definition of a space in which JUDU would see the useful contribution of residents:**

*"At least for now, it doesn't seem like there's any real intention to change anything. It's more like, 'Here's what we're doing, let's meet, sit in a circle and have fun.' So, at least for now, I don't see any point. 'Okay, we already have plans until 2050 and here's what we're telling you, what we've decided, and, let's say, okay, you have some presentations.' But, for example, the JUDU presentation provides information about what they've done and what they plan to do, but there's no reason - it's not even thought about [saying, - author's note] that these are our goals, what we've achieved and what we plan to achieve. But no <...> It's just general information, like advertising that okay, we'll reduce, we'll add three more lines. Where, why, how will this improve the situation? <...> I like specificity without watered-down."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, September 29, 2025.

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The avoidance of certain problematic, **uncomfortable topics** in JUDU presentations was also noticed by others, attributing this to the specifics of JUDU as a municipal enterprise. Some participants accordingly felt a sense of miscommunication, a certain avoidance of the municipality's (*in corpore*) responsibility. Even those who liked the presentations themselves as creating a good context, a starting point, at the same time **regretted that the presentations were for decision-makers, not decision-makers with the power to decide.**

*"There are some uncomfortable topics that they didn't want to discuss, that's how budget officials work, everything is fine. <...> I asked a simple question, but I didn't get an answer from JUDU. <...> It was very uncomfortable for them, they tried to avoid it."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

*"I personally found JUDU very representative. The problem with JUDU, you know, is that it is a municipal company. In other words, if I explain that idea more broadly, it means that they are dependent on the decisions of the municipality. They are not an independent organization, they operate as they are defined. They are executors. The executor told me how they operate or how they try to operate. It sounds convincing, nice people, great, sincere stories. But, well, how to say it, it's like asking, I don't know, an electrician about electricity supply, that an electrician inevitably helps connect electrical wires, but he is not electricity himself. That's the same here - they don't make decisions and a conversation with them... They can only answer the question, but they cannot decide. That's what I would say, and the general context of their performance was also great. I say it sincerely."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

Thus, the reports read during the learning part of the Assembly were assessed by the majority of participants as high-quality, based on expert knowledge and reliable, with more criticism being directed only at JUDU reports. The dominant leitmotif of criticism here was the participants' perceived silence on uncomfortable topics and problems, thus reducing the reliability of the reports, as well as not creating opportunities for participants to clearly see the place of their possible meaningful contribution. It was believed that this was determined by JUDU's position as decision-makers – without decision-making power, it was difficult for them to clearly respond to relevant expectations (e.g., openly identifiable failures, the solutions to which would invite focus). It is also informative that during the interviews with the organizers it was repeatedly mentioned that the content of the JUDU report had to be coordinated with the political leadership in the municipality.

### *The diversity and impartiality of the information provided and the views represented therein*

The material presented during the Assembly and **the diversity of views represented appeared sufficient and convincing to the majority of participants.** When the participants were asked in the survey whether, in their opinion, there were such positions, opinion groups and/or experts representing them that were not sufficiently represented when presenting the topic, 46 percent of the Assembly participants confidently indicated that they were not. Another 36 percent chose the answer "I don't know", which may indicate a somewhat lower level of confidence in their own ability to decide, to name whose other knowledge or experiences could be important, but remained unheard at the Assembly. Finally, **18 percent indicated that they saw examples of insufficient representation.** However, it should be noted that even after naming a group that was underrepresented and whose approach could further strengthen diversity and supplement the set of materials and positions, the impression of some participants about the whole still remained positive:

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*"I think that it was quite broad [a sufficiently diverse range of opinions was covered, - author's note], because... Now I'm wondering who didn't speak up here? Maybe... I wasn't at one of the Assembly, I didn't participate once, <...> it's hard to say, maybe I missed something, but it seems to me that there wasn't a single senior citizen who spoke up, like, for example, how to get to the clinic for those who don't drive, or something like that. Because of this, there were some, like that. And all the other groups, more or less, I think, were answered the same way, because there were two young ones, they were still students, I think, I'm afraid to lie now. These are students, and the disabled, cyclists, and there was also a representative from Balsiai, which is also a bit of a suburb, let's say, although now I don't even know... a block of private residential buildings. Well, that's more or less, I think, I think, I think, it was answered."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

Among the positions and opinion groups presented at the Assembly, the participants **first missed the presence of driver representatives** - among the missing positions identified, this was the most common answer option.

The open-ended survey question included the answers "Active car drivers", "Car drivers were left behind", and "There was no representation as to why people choose cars over public transport".

Similar to the case of the missing senior representative mentioned in the quote above, it can be seen that groups that are abundantly represented by the Assembly participants themselves are identified as insufficiently responded to.

Thus, it is important to highlight that **(abundant) representation**, based on the responses of the Assembly participants, **is not sufficient in itself – the position should be given equal attention “on stage”**, creating conditions for a wider dissemination of the group's position and arguments. In the case of drivers, it was noted that, for example, the position of public transport drivers could also have been relevant<sup>102</sup>.

Among other **underrepresented** positions, opinion groups or experts, the Assembly participants mentioned **“government representatives, civil servants”** in the survey – it can be seen that although some Assembly participants equated the JUDU presentation with the position of the municipality, others lacked the statements of those with more decision-making power. On the other hand, they also wanted to hear **“more professionals in the field of transport”**

opinions (practical approach, presentation of experience of other countries <...>), implementing infrastructure development programs of other cities in the world" (answer to an open question in the second Assembly survey).

It was mentioned that although the JUDU presentation covered a wide range of topics, some participants still

There was a lack of representatives **of Lithuanian Railways** and the presentation of their plans.<sup>103</sup> **Business and community representatives** were also briefly mentioned (in an open-ended survey question).

It is true that both some of those who were dissatisfied with certain positions and, in general, **the absolute majority of all Assembly participants** (94%) tended to agree that the Assembly **had created conditions for requesting additional information and/or insights from external experts** (the majority of them – 55% – were firmly convinced of this, “fully agreed”), 3% neither agreed nor disagreed with such a statement, and another 3% tended to rather disagree. Thus, the above-mentioned sufficiently underrepresented opinions were nevertheless given the opportunity to be heard, but rather lacked either the importance attributed to them or the broader self-organization of the participants to express their respective wishes.

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

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The case when **the request for an additional presentation was expressed and heard was the second JUDU presentation** in the third session of the Assembly, after the planned part of the Assembly dedicated to learning. As mentioned in subsection 3.1.3, after the first presentation, the participants did not have enough time to ask questions, which was assessed very critically (*"First meeting with JUDU: quickly, quietly and quickly, no time for questions, it was not like that at all."* 104), so the participants liked the return of JUDU as an opportunity to hear both a repetition and more useful information about the plans in the municipality. Such adjustment of the program during the course, taking into account the expectations heard, should be assessed as **an example of the Assembly organizers' responsiveness to the participants' wishes**. However, it should be noted that this specific, relatively quick correction not only extended the overall duration of the learning process, leaving

less time for formulating recommendations that were already so extensive (adding additional levels of complexity to the issue) (more on this in subsection 3.1.3). It was also difficult to manage the risks to the Assembly that were more responsive to the overall initial plan – it was the second JUDU presentation that became the epicenter of criticism of the Assembly for bias.

*"When we were at the "Smoke Factory" and then returned, we didn't know that there would be another JUDU presentation. We thought that discussions and deliberations would immediately take place, but as I understood, the participants wanted more opportunities to talk to JUDU, because during the first presentation they didn't have time to ask questions and, I think, everything was OK, because people's opinions were still taken into account, but it seemed to me that there was a lot of information, there was a whole hour of very detailed things that perhaps suggested some new things, even sometimes framing that there could be such a recommendation here, there could be such a recommendation. <...> I thought that element was hastily included, not fully qualitatively and left perhaps not the most positive impression."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

In addition to diversity, as a basis for versatile, non-directive learning, the balance and impartiality of the positions presented are also important. As an observer of the Assembly noted in an interview, there are indeed many opportunities in the learning process to present biased information and to tilt participants in the direction of thinking desired by the organizers or clients.

*"I think that in general, the whole program and that tool are actually a very big exercise in trust, because it is clear that it can raise questions, such as why certain experts are chosen, how these experts are able to manage potential interests, why they say what they say, and if you trust that they are truly experts in their field and want the best - it is great, but if you want to doubt and think that there is probably a certain agenda, for example, the agenda of JUDU, there is an organization or company run by the municipality, which, in one way or another, I understand, contributed to the choice of the topic. Or the agenda of the city of Vilnius, then such an opportunity could very easily arise in such a program."*

*"You could very clearly and purposefully present certain things and certain directions in which we should think, ponder, and move forward."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Observer No. 1, February 26, 2026.

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

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Overall, when assessing the balance and impartiality of the positions presented in more detail, after the Assembly learning sessions, **the majority of participants were of the opinion that equal attention was paid to the presentation of different positions in this process: 76 percent of participants** in the survey agreed with the corresponding statement (42 percent of them – completely, 33 percent – rather). A much smaller proportion – 6 percent –

The opposite impression was formed (with the statement that equal attention was given to presenting different positions, they rather disagreed). 15 percent found it difficult to unambiguously assess the balance of attention given to different positions (they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement). A very similar proportion of participants (**73 percent**) in the same survey also agreed that **information was presented in the Assembly objectively and impartially** – 42 percent completely agreed with this statement, 30 percent tended to agree more, 3 percent thought the opposite (they rather disagreed), and 21 percent found it difficult to unambiguously assess (another 3 percent did not answer the question).

When asked more specifically about the neutrality and balance of the information provided by the experts, in the third survey at the end of the Assembly, a similar proportion of participants – **75 per cent** – were inclined to completely (38 per cent) and somewhat (the remaining half) **agree that the information provided by the experts was neutral and balanced**. The opposite position was held by 16 per cent of the Assembly participants (3 per cent completely disagreed with the neutrality and balance of the information provided by the experts), 9 per cent found it difficult to answer the question unequivocally.

Thus, we can see that, viewed from various angles, the balance and impartiality of the information provided during the Assembly did not raise any questions for 3 out of 4 Assembly participants. Regarding the change in such an assessment, two things should be discussed. First, the impression formed in the group after the learning part of the Assembly remained until the end of the Assembly (the share of three-quarters of those who gave a positive assessment in the second and third surveys was very similar). Second, however, **the changes that took place during the Assembly as a whole were more diverse** - they are helped to reveal by the further discussion of one of the worrying dimensions before

Evaluation of the Assembly and the overall process after the Assembly.

**At the beginning of the Assembly, there were few concerns about the impartiality of the information provided by the experts or the imbalance of positions:** 13% had such concerns, 53% thought the opposite (Table 11). After the Assembly, again, only 13% of participants agreed that the information provided by the experts was generally biased and unbalanced, thus making the discussions in the Assembly unreliable. Even more than before the Assembly, 72% of participants disagreed with this statement, while another 16% had no clear opinion<sup>105</sup>. However, **at the individual level, experiences appeared to be much more diverse. 39% of participants' concerns about the impartiality of the information provided during the Assembly were not justified** (the experience was assessed more positively than the concerns).

in advance), another **39% of pre-conceived notions were consistent with the Assembly experience**, and **23% of experts assessed the bias of the information provided by the end of the Assembly as greater than they had expected**. As the assembly begins.

**Table 11.** *Assembly participants' concerns about expert bias at the beginning of the Assembly and their experience of the Assembly at its end, percent.*

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<sup>105</sup> Please note that due to rounding of percentages, the total percentage distribution of responses may differ slightly in some cases. from 100 percent (e.g., make 101 percent).

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|                               | I'm worried that... the discussion will be unreliable - experts will provide biased information | Overall, the information provided by the experts was biased and unbalanced, making the discussions in the Assembly unreliable. |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                               | Beginning of the assembly (N=38)                                                                | At the end of the Assembly (N=32)                                                                                              |
| I completely disagree.        | 23,7                                                                                            | 28,1                                                                                                                           |
| I rather disagree.            | 28,9                                                                                            | 43,8                                                                                                                           |
| I neither agree nor disagree. | 31,6                                                                                            | 15,6                                                                                                                           |
| I agree more quickly.         | 10,5                                                                                            | 9,4                                                                                                                            |
| I completely agree.           | 2,6                                                                                             | 3,1                                                                                                                            |
| Didn't answer                 | 2,6                                                                                             | ,0                                                                                                                             |
| I agree (generally)           | 13,2                                                                                            | 12,5                                                                                                                           |
| Disagree (generally) Source:  | 52,6                                                                                            | 71,9                                                                                                                           |

Surveys of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators.

In the overall positive context of the assessment of impartiality, looking **in more detail at the critical remarks**, it is worth noting that **the manifestations of bias observed by representatives of various groups who joined the Assembly in different roles in the Assembly were related to two moments: the second JUDU presentation (mainly) and the presentation of the feedback group's comments**. As for the second JUDU presentation, it was noted that it too clearly proposed specific solutions, distinguishing them from other alternatives - this could have biased the participants' thinking in a specific direction, forming the participants' favorability for certain directions of recommendations.

*"I'll repeat myself - the slides themselves were even prepared in such a way that several solutions were pushed [this is about the second JUDU presentation, - author's note]. I showed one on the slides, and if there are more slides, I will show you again, that when it comes to some kind of rapid transport, all the others and the proposed tram are very clearly pushed aside."*

Interview with a Vilnius city politician or other decision-maker No. 2, October 28, 2025.

It is true that it was noticed that **the bias here mainly arose from the hasty change of the program in response to the wishes of the Assembly participants, which also corresponded to the municipality's interest in discussing** the prospects of a new rail vehicle in more detail. On the one hand, due to the haste, it was not possible to remind the speakers in time and once again emphasize the principles of neutrality of the Assembly presentations. In this regard, a clear contrast was felt with the presentations of the first days, when the speakers were more prepared, trained as neutrally as possible, without bias in presenting their topic. Secondly, as the program was changed in the process, it also became more difficult to respond adequately and learn about the municipality's interest, which had already intensified during the Assembly process, and to discuss the prospects of a new rail vehicle in more detail. It was noticed that this issue could have become the main topic of the Assembly in general, clearly devoting all attention to it. However, by inserting the question only during one of the presentations, later in the program, when the arguments "in favor" were presented in detail, a certain impression of bias was created, an expectation that the idea would be noticed and presented as one's own by the Assembly.

<sup>106</sup> JUDU representatives themselves saw the emphasis on relevant alternatives as a choice of the most efficient transport options that would bring the greatest change, based on objective calculations. highlighting the measures.

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The negative effect of urgency is evident. Thus, although the organizers' responsiveness to participants' requests for more information and responsiveness should be assessed as a positive feature of the VMPA, nevertheless (most likely due to the Assembly sessions being spaced sufficiently close together) responding to requests and adapting quickly resulted in less successful management of impartiality risks.

*"I understand that this [is] a lot of information being provided, suggesting specific new things as well." recommendations, - author's note] was done in order to help, to express some kind of point of view, but it seems to me that maybe for this particular time, maybe those presenters were not very prepared, they perhaps did not fully understand how they should speak to the Assembly participants, because, for example, all those on the second day of the Assembly, not even the second, the first day, where that speed-dating took place, and so on, they were still quite widely informed about how they should speak, present that information there neutrally, not offer any recommendations and it felt like they understood their role, but that presentation in the morning alone, which we did not even know about, it seemed to me that it did not necessarily adhere to the neutrality of all those recommendations to the end and maybe set a tone a little. I do not think that in the end it somehow negatively affected the Assembly itself, because anyway they really told a lot of things there, they did not really point it out somewhere, but <...>.*

### **Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.**

*"<...> there was too much there and, let's say, there was already pressure there to a certain extent that the topic had to be included <...>. It was already here, let's say, an extra mile was taken, where it was no longer necessary to MOVE, because others really saw it. <...> because the topic about the metro, tram was hanging in the air and whether the polls show that the mayor himself is not ready to come out with this topic, [because, - author's note] he still thinks that people are not ready, that they will immediately reject it very abruptly, so he saw, maybe let's say <...> that the Assembly is a great way to hear the opinion, what they [Vilnius residents, - author's note] think, so the topic needs to be brought up, but I don't know. <...> How to say, it was already post factum, the facilitators said - no, we're not doing it, because the train has already left. <...> I would probably say that the issue was raised at a very inappropriate time. Why didn't it go from the very beginning with him? Or at all, why couldn't the assemblies do something about it and be very clear about it."*

### **Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.**

The second moment during the Assembly, when impartiality is again somewhat lacking, was recorded in the formulation of recommendations. During the VMPA session, when presenting the feedback group's observations on the initial recommendations of the Assembly, a slight highlighting of a couple of topics (primarily the polycentric city) that the municipality supports and is moving towards was also noted. It is likely that, again, this was not planned, targeted pressure from the municipality - it is more like concentrating the speech on the priorities that are believed in, but in the general context of the Assembly, this speech stood out somewhat as suggesting, highlighting certain accents. The organizing team itself noticed that in this case the risk of bias and bias was more controlled, with other team members immediately clearly emphasizing that it is not mandatory for the Assembly participants to take the feedback into account.

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Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 3, February 11, 2026.

*"Maybe I didn't really like the presentation of the feedback a bit when <...> she was presenting that feedback, it seemed to me that she was very strongly suggesting some one element, emphasizing that polycentric city, which is very important to her. So I really emphasized <...> before presenting that feedback, so that it would be emphasized that this is optional feedback, that this is only for people, if they want, they can pay attention, but if they don't want, they don't have to. It seems to me that it was communicated properly in the end."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

*"[about the broadcast message to participants, - author's note] Because that's exactly the same - this is additional information for you, and you can do whatever you want with it. You can ignore it, you can integrate something."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, March 27, 2026.

Looking at the impact of these more problematic cases in terms of impartiality, it should still be said that it is not possible to assess it as having an unambiguous direct impact. **The assembly participants, even noticing that certain proposals were more highlighted in the presentations, treated them more as information about the municipality's preferences,** indicating certain real possibilities, but **at the same time they felt quite free to object.** Trust in the group's common opinion and ability to resist the manipulative influence of the messages was also shaped by the participants' **trust in each other and recognition of the group's internal competencies.**

*"All topics help. Maybe it was possible to see from a very high perspective [presented in the presentations, - author's note] the outlines of a certain solution, an answer. But that gave the limits of reality. And we could have not answered as they expected, so it was not manipulation. And in the end, the audience that gathered would not have allowed it - even during the vote, everyone tried to argue with each other. Maybe it was JUDU's dreams to manipulate us, but everyone came with their own thoughts, desires, experiences... There were even people related to roads, to transport, someone was an engineer - [so, - author's note] there was a technical representation in the picture, not that it was very simple. I don't think there could have been manipulation."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

Other interested parties of the Assembly, responding to the classical laws of political psychology, also emphasized the limited direct impact of more biased presentations or speeches - the information heard is combined with the knowledge and experiences that "dilute" the direct influence, so the freedom to disagree becomes more important here. On the other hand, it was noted that the impact can be precisely in the presentation of new ideas, possible solutions, variations from which decisions are formed. In other words, combining with the comments of some participants above, it can be concluded that **from the aspect of impartiality it is more important to present a broad, balanced initial set of opinions and positions,** largely forming the set of solutions discussed in the recommendations. As we have seen above, the latter balance **was largely met by the VMPA,** although there were more observations/requests.

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*"Because most of the time, those residents reflect what they hear. They just hear the information, process it, and then say whether they like it or not. And that's something new very rarely happens, [unless, - author's note] they've just been thinking about something for a long time that maybe should be implemented and presented."*

Interview with expert No. 1 of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly, January 28, 2026.

### 3.2.2. Facilitation process

This subsection analyses **the Assembly facilitation process** – the extent to which the facilitation methods used and the work of the facilitators contributed to the quality of the Assembly deliberations. This assessment takes into account the balance of different methods used in the Assembly, the perceived objectivity of the facilitators, the inclusiveness of the deliberations, the balance achieved between the different statements of the discussion participants, and finally – promoting reasoned debate and resolving observed conflict situations. These aspects were discussed based on interviews with VMPA stakeholders and surveys of Assembly participants. results.

#### *Different facilitation methods used in the Assembly, the balance between them*

As already discussed in subsection 3.1.1, there were a number of challenges in the area of the division of responsibilities during the preparation **of the Assembly program**, but the final result (the VMPA program and its implementation) was **highly** appreciated by various stakeholders. Attention is primarily drawn here to **the extremely strong sense of responsibility felt by the facilitators who developed and implemented the program** and the efforts they made (as already discussed, disproportionate to the remuneration received) **107**. These efforts in developing the program and implementing it paid off. **After the Assembly, the facilitators themselves assessed the process as excellent looking through the prism of the achieved result: the Assembly process was successfully organized and implemented** so that the participants, having seen different perspectives, agreed. Thus, **the agreement of the participants was considered a success of the facilitation****108**. However, looking more broadly, the legitimacy of the Assembly process created through facilitation should also be considered an achievement. As one of its organizers noted after the Assembly, both through the methods used and through their personalities, **the facilitators were able to secure the trust of the participants:**

*"What was important to me was the variety of methods, just like in the learning stage <...> The methods were varied: changing, interactive – opportunities to discuss both in smaller groups and larger groups, that kind of mix, which was also really there. It was really incredibly well followed."*

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<sup>107</sup> "From all those signals, I see that they are really trying to do the best they can. <...> [the facilitators] felt very much that, well, more precisely they understood the importance of facilitation and that responsibility, that this is really the essence of, well, coming to those recommendations. I think that they feel a responsibility to, simply, to society in general. Plus, this is not a political process, but still, democratic and related, still, well, it can become, for example, politicized or something else. I think that both because of their personal reputation and because of some kind of accountability, they probably felt very much that there is actually a lot involved here." Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025. Also, "[H]ere, we were also thinking mostly about the residents, that it wouldn't be so that the artificiality would simply be visible, that we kind of want them to bring something, and then the residents would not be satisfied with the process, but in the end they would also critically evaluate the whole thing. I have in mind studies that if residents participate in such processes and remain disappointed because they see neither changes nor further actions, then they tend to withdraw more from such movements and even possibly from voting in the future. With that in mind, I thought, here we need to do everything super carefully so that both the residents feel valued and, when telling their family members about all this, they would see the meaning of their presence or their actions and in the end they would see that the municipality is not doing all this for some PR or something similar, but really wants to involve the residents in decision-making." Interview with the facilitator of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 11, 2026.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, March 27, 2026.

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*schedule and really, I don't know, I felt like the participants trusted the facilitators and the process, because those facilitators and their methods and everything else really instilled that trust."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

**The participants' overall assessment of the Assembly program** during its course was also **extremely positive: more than half** of the survey respondents **gave the Assembly program the highest rating**: during the second survey, 52 percent of respondents rated the program very well, 39 percent as good, and 9 percent as average. There were no poor, very poor, or no-answer responses to the question. The reflection of one of the participants during the interview could be illustrative here – even from a critical perspective, the Assembly organization, its smoothness, and the conduct of the process were considered extremely attractive:

*"I was moved, in a word, as a person. How talentedly it was all [organized, - author's note]!"*

*"It was done really, really sincerely, I say, it's incomparable to any other famous conference, say, taking place in the country."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

The diversity of methods chosen and implemented for the Assembly process contributed greatly to this success. The facilitators who created the assembly program, in order to achieve the set goals of the process, **tried to apply different methods, respond to different types of people's learning, information consumption and work habits, and maintain various dynamics of the process** - "so that the program had both speed and time to slow down, to think where necessary. Information was also presented in several ways - text, visuals, words, and several times"<sup>109</sup>. In these respects, the successful result was reflected both in the program itself, which was rich in **the variety of methods** applied<sup>110</sup>, and was also noticed and highlighted in various groups that reflected on the program and the methods applied in it (observers, other organizers, the facilitators themselves, and participants). It is likely that the dynamics of the process and the diversity of methods applied in the program were also contributed to by the fact that the team of five facilitators had shared five sessions of the Assembly among themselves, each of which was assigned a main responsible facilitator (thus making it even easier for different preferences, habits, and experiences of the facilitators to find a place in the program, enriching it with diversity). Observers also noticed that the diversity of the selected methods was complemented by the diversity of the team of facilitators – they found it interesting to observe not only the various facilitation methods chosen, but also to feel the "different energy of the facilitators"<sup>111</sup>.

**The balance between the two main groups of methods – plenary group work and smaller groups in small groups – was assessed as optimal by the participants themselves.** The time allocated to these different ways of working was assessed as adequately balanced by many participants (53%) in the survey. True, for some – 25% – it seemed that the time allocated to work in plenary sessions was (somewhat) too much, while for another 18% – on the contrary, that (somewhat) too much time was allocated to work in smaller groups. However, this criticism was quite mild – none of the Assembly participants chose extreme answers on a 7-point scale (where 1 – "very much time was allocated to work in smaller groups", 7 – "very much time was allocated to

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, March 27, 2026.

<sup>110</sup> A complete, systematized list of applied methods can be found in Vilnius City Municipality (2025a).

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, February 27, 2026.

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for work in plenary sessions"), and the average value of the responses was 4.16 (very close to the position marked 4 "Time between work in smaller groups and general sessions is balanced properly").

It should be noted that when it comes to the distribution of time between work in a common group and in smaller groups, **some facilitators** reflected after the Assembly that one of the branches of work in a common group – **common forums – was still somewhat lacking**. Although the risks posed by forums were also mentioned (it is more difficult for quieter participants to reveal themselves in such a format), it was considered that the common space provided by the forum, the opportunity to express themselves, react, and refine the general opinion – is very valuable, difficult to counterbalance with other options.

*"[G]enerally, for example, I was glad that on the last day during the formulation of recommendations we had that roundtable forum, even though it was complicated, maybe with some dissatisfaction, heat, taking an unplanned amount of time and the like, but it seems to me that we really needed a forum. And it seems to me that we needed a forum earlier, not necessarily with the formulation of recommendations, maybe at another time, but simply so that there would be more of that kind of not presentation, because we had presentations, but specifically a forum. And then, of course, later on I thought that maybe the same problem would arise again, that during the forum those who had been silent would again have remained silent, and those who had been raised would have risen, but – I also answered this for myself in this way - but here is the specificity of the forum, and here is the specificity of our society, then others may reveal themselves in the work of the group, maybe we need to accept it as such - that's how it is. But the forum gives the whole group something that the work of the groups does not give, and even then there is that great iteration in the groups.*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 3, February 11, 2026.

Meanwhile, **the participants** themselves were very **happy with the work in smaller groups** – they appreciated both their **diversity** and the discussions that took place in them, getting to know and **working with different people**: in the open question asked during the second survey about what the participants had liked most about the Assembly so far, the following aspects received a lot of compliments ("dynamics, many different groups, discussions", "Opportunity to work in different groups, variety of activities <...>", "Generation of ideas; working with different people", "work in different groups, discussions, <...> opportunity to get to know interesting people"<sup>112</sup>). The organization of the Assembly **was also praised** in a more abstract way –

**preparation, action, organization**: "I really like the preparation", "It was very carefully arranged", "It is obvious that a lot of organizational work has been put in. This is great", "Organization of such an event, its course", "organized without any comments", "organization, provision of information", "organization" (repeated), "<...> work of facilitators, activity; organization"<sup>113</sup>.

It is true that among **the areas that the participants saw that the Assembly needed to be improved** were also shortcomings in the deliberation process itself. The mentioned problematic areas of the process are related to **the high pace, lack of time, and participants getting lost in some instructions**: "Partly high pace. Sometimes there is not enough time to think", "Sometimes there was quite little time to formulate thoughts, write them down completely and present them", "There is not enough time for some questions/tasks", "Sometimes there is not enough time for discussions in group work",

<sup>112</sup> The second survey of Assembly participants, answers to the open question "What have you liked most about the Assembly so far?".

<sup>113</sup> The second survey of Assembly participants, answers to the open-ended questions "What have you liked most about the Assembly so far?" and "If you have any additional thoughts or suggestions for organizing the Assembly, please write them down."

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"Sometimes too much information is given when explaining a task and people no longer understand/get lost in what/how to do" 114. Looking at the representative picture, as already discussed in section 3.1.3., the duration of time allocated to discussions and formulation of recommendations in the Assembly was generally assessed positively, with 50 percent and 44 percent of Assembly participants, respectively, assessing this duration as optimal, however, a significant proportion of participants assessed the time allocated to both the discussion part and (especially) the formulation of recommendations as slightly too short – in both cases, 38 percent of respondents chose an estimate that deviated by one position from the average value, indicating that the time allocated was too little, another 3 percent in the case of discussions and 9 percent in the case of in the case of formulating recommendations, indicated that the time allocated to these parts was significantly too little (in both cases compared to 3% who thought that too much time was allocated and no one who thought that the time allocated was significantly too much). Thus, **although the overall time allocation was mostly assessed as optimal, a significant part of the participants still felt a little short of time, especially at the stage of formulating recommendations.** As mentioned in subsection 3.1.3, this could be

due to the complexity of the issue that emerged during the Assembly - although the introduction of additional sections (dividing the city into separate zones) was supposed to facilitate, clarify, and better structure the discussion of the topic, in the end they also led to a high complexity of the discussion, which produced an extremely large number of recommendations, which became a challenge to discuss in the time available. Although the facilitation methods were prepared in advance for various scenarios of the number of recommendations and selected accordingly, the organizers themselves regretted that **the large number of recommendations led to a focus on quantity rather than quality.**

*"We were ready for the fourth or fifth, I don't remember which stage now, in other words, several stages before the end, and we'll see - if they get more than those first recommendations, we'll adopt such a plan, such a method, if they get that much - we'll go into discussion. Well, we saw that they agreed with almost all the recommendations, so there was no more room for discussion. Well, maybe that's where things went in the quantitative sense, which sometimes... I felt, maybe sometimes we should think better about quality, let's get at least one or two recommendations, but then we'll have that deep understanding, well, in depth. Sometimes I feel where quantity and quality fluctuate between each other. But maybe it's time, that was the main thing."*

*rebusas."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

The interviews with stakeholders also revealed several other problematic areas of the deliberation process related to the chosen facilitation methods and their implementation, the discussion of which may provide valuable lessons for the future. Although in the above-quoted answers to the open-ended survey question, some participants mentioned not quite clearly understood instructions on what to do at certain points in time during the deliberation process, representative data from the third survey reveal that **the instructions provided by the facilitators to the majority (82%) of the VMPA participants were understandable and did not cause major ambiguities.** 43 percent of respondents completely agreed with the statement that the work instructions provided by the facilitators were clear to them, another 39 percent agreed more. 14 percent still found it more difficult to assess the clarity of the instructions – they chose to neither disagree nor agree with the statement and only 4 percent indicated that they completely disagreed that the work instructions were clear to them (rather

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<sup>114</sup> The second survey of Assembly participants, answers to the open question "What have you disliked the most about the Assembly so far?"

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(there were no disagreements). As the interview data suggests, this can most likely be associated with the specific characteristics of the participants – how easily and quickly they adapted to the methods used, how familiar they were with the individual working methods used in the deliberation process.

*"Everything was clear. Very clear. Everything was worked out so that even a child could understand. <...> The whole process was organized very conveniently, correctly. Everything was on time, and from a technical point of view – they did everything, showed everything, everything was correct."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

*"For me, the process itself was quite... Well, I won't say that it's 100% clear, but it's clear enough. But again, all people are different and some catch on faster, others slower, it's not bad or good. It's just different - it's different for everyone. <...> there were moments like this, like... Mistakes. I won't give a specific example, just from general memory, right, that there were moments like, what the hell does he want from us now and what do we have to do?"*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 2, January 30, 2026.

The more significant **uncertainty experienced by the participants during the Assembly was not related to the clarity of individual work tasks, but to their entirety, the clarity of the overall Assembly process.** Although the vision and tasks of the Assembly were successfully understood, there were difficulties **in specifically linking the individual stages, tasks to the overall whole, and orienting in the process .**

*"<...> it was unclear [the process, - author's note]. That is, we actually did not know how, when those specific recommendations would be created, how they would be presented, when they would be discussed, when they would be amended, when they would be voted on or somehow it would be done. Because basically it turned out that on the third half-day, that is, the second half-day of the third Saturday, we wrote those recommendations, in that sense we wrote them down, then on the fourth Saturday we actually threw them from corner to corner, and then, if I may put it briefly, on the fifth we were given the task [to write recommendations, - author's note]."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 11, February 10, 2026.

*"In principle, it seems to me that everything was good and sufficient [with the program, - author's note]. <...> At the point where the expert reports end and our independent work with the preparation of proposals was supposed to begin, it was briefly mentioned which day we would do what, how we would prepare it, but I, for example, would have liked a clearer detailed plan. That is, detailed enough for me to know. Because there was confusion on certain days. That is, we have already written the proposals, then we return to the proposals again, we fill something in again - why do we fill it in then? And so on. There were such question marks, not entirely clear, and perhaps a detailed explanation of the process in advance would have helped me. But here it is. Not a critical remark, so to speak. <...> It was simply incomprehensible why we were doing it at that time. Well, it had to be done, but why we were doing it - it was not always clear. The very meaning."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

*"Here, the facilitation may have lacked some purity, some, let's say, specificity, in how we proceed and in which phase we are already finishing and moving on."*

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Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

It is likely that, again, this uncertainty is also due to the fact that the detailed facilitation program was developed in the process<sup>115</sup>, which, on the one hand, provided flexibility and more opportunities to adapt the program to the needs of the situation, but on the other hand, made it difficult to clearly communicate a more detailed plan of the entire process to the participants. One of the most striking **examples of such uncertainty** was the uncertainty about **when new ideas can still be submitted for consideration, and when they can no longer be submitted.**

*"[The question was raised somewhat by, as I understand it, many of the participants themselves, about at what point new ideas for recommendations should no longer be proposed. As someone who is not a participant, it is perhaps difficult for me to assess where they felt that there was a limit to the extent that their recommendations were not accepted. It is simply that from the facilitators' side, at some point new recommendations need to be stopped, because then they can no longer do that in-depth analysis. I don't know if that decision was made at the right moment. As I understood from the facilitators themselves, they were perhaps also a little confused about it.]"*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

*"We really missed this moment [when it would no longer be possible to propose new ideas, - author's note]." I missed it too. There were meetings and group work, and arguments where you had to either pass on an idea or reject it, and a new idea came to a person. But there are rules of the game [it was no longer possible to include it, - author's note].*

*There were moments like that. But new ideas arose either because the Assembly person forgot at the beginning, or another one emerged from the discussion. <...> It is true that if a new idea arises, it should be given space, but I don't know how to do that."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

*"It was not clear that the new proposals were finished and no more new ones could be submitted, because it seemed that we would still be able to [insert - author's note] and consider them. <...> I think that it actually did not have much of an impact, because the main ideas were all born there and, if they were just complementary, then in the end those complementary ideas still contributed when we specifically formed the measures, the goals, those action points. So I think that everything contributed."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

As can be seen from the quotes of the participants, this unclear time limit for submitting new proposals and ideas for consideration was ultimately not considered to have had a particularly negative impact on the process – although it is noted that it would be right to include ideas that emerged later, it is acknowledged that doing so in a structured manner is difficult. On the other hand, other participants note that (at least some) of the new ideas still found their place in the process, were included as complementary, concretizing others, and the most valuable ideas for recommendations were those that were raised and included at the very beginning.

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<sup>115</sup> For example, "[T]he first days they were as clear as day, because they are about learning and they were already clear a long time ago. Now those remaining three days from the 18th [October, - author. Past.], then two Saturdays in November, and they are like this... Now they are clearer, but they still need to be specified and it seems to me that the volunteers [meaning the facilitators, - author Past.] will also start specifying them only from next week, maybe so that they can put together what is happening at what time." Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, 2025. September 30.

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It is worth noting that **some participants took the position that there were already a lot of initial ideas**, which, limited time (in agreement with the above-mentioned comments of the organizers) led to superficiality, paying a lot of attention to ideas that were later rejected anyway and, accordingly, leaving too little time to detail the ideas and recommendations that were later agreed upon. So, in this case

**An additional threshold is missing, which would filter out ideas earlier in the deliberation process** that are less supported by the entire group of Assembly participants.

*"[W]hen we started working on the draft recommendations, we used the previous day [the ideas generated, – author's note] as a source for these recommendations and somehow got stuck with this set of drafts. There was no other time and process to propose new recommendations [ideas for recommendations, – author's note] and to adjust something. So maybe we should vote in the middle of the process to start better pre-filtering these recommendations, so that fewer of them are selected and [respectively, – author's note] more, as I said here, are more carefully processed, prepared and discussed in detail, because a lot of time was spent discussing recommendations that we ultimately rejected. And we spent a lot of time discussing recommendations (and I think you heard that not only me but also other participants agreed with this) that are not ours, should not be part of our Assembly, they are not related to the topic and so on, but we still spent time on it."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 6, December 17, 2025.

On the other hand, during the deliberation process, during the fourth session of the Assembly, **one of the intermediate ideas "filtering" processes was applied** (called "traffic light" according to the colors assigned to individual ideas), when the participants sorted out the recommendations into those on which they agreed in principle and which they wanted to pass on to the group formed by the municipality for feedback ("green list"), those that they would like to clarify, which they thought still needed more information and consultation ("yellow list"), and those that raised too many questions that the participants could not easily answer, could not find an agreement, needed discussion, or which should simply be left behind ("red list"). This "filtering" process, in turn, **also contributed to the lack of clarity of the aforementioned general process at individual stages.**

The participants had the impression and expectation from the initial communication that it would still be possible to return to the ideas assigned to the "red list". However, later, due to the large number of remaining ideas on which there is more consensus ("green" and "yellow" lists) and lack of time, this was no longer possible. Therefore, the decision not to return to the ideas that required the most additional work from the group is understandable, but at the same time it led to another ambiguity in the communication of the overall process.

*"But it seems to me what, and what I heard from the participants, what seemed a little off to them was this grouping by traffic light. And it seemed that if that recommendation is on the 'red' [list, – author's note] goes away, then it will still be possible to return to it, but somehow it turned out that it was as if there was no return to them. There were only those that went to the "yellow" and "green" categories, and those "red" ones somewhere... Well, several participants told me that, as if they had disappeared somewhere. They wanted to maybe return to them, although they were the kind that needed more discussion and discussion, and were unclear. Or we had to immediately formulate it that what we put in the "red" category, [into, - author's note] we will not return to. On the other hand, it was difficult for the facilitators to predict how everything would unfold in time, because you never know. It may have seemed at that moment that we would still be able to return to them, but when we started working with it, we saw that*

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*"Well, we guess, as much as we guess, and we can't catch those 'reds' because it wasn't a priority, the priority was 'yellow' and 'green'."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

Participants and observers noted that, in general, during the Assembly's deliberations, **the initial ideas, considered valuable, and proposals for recommendations were lost in the large number of ideas**. True, this was not only about the organization of the deliberation process and the methods used, but also returned to the perceived breadth and complexity of the issue as a factor that led to the loss of ideas and, at the same time, we could say, made the deliberation process more difficult.

*"[I]n my opinion, this Assembly has a minus, where it lacked, how to say, a bit of specificity. There were many good questions, but they somehow got lost in the crowd. We talked to a few guys there and we agreed that there was that one good question, that one, that one, and there were none left, they just got lost in that big crowd."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 13, February 24, 2026.

*"And it seems that other topics, like [ideas for recommendations], were perhaps even lost during the process." [author's note], because, let's say, time is running out, so let's refine what we have already grasped, although maybe something was important to others. So I think that if the issue were narrowed down a bit, let's say, just walking, just bicycles, just public transport - something a little narrower, then we could look for those solutions more specifically. But again, the topic is very complicated, because those connections, in that sense, connect in every way. So this one really felt it and <...> [participants, - author's note] say that certain thoughts or topics got lost, or not, simply because there wasn't enough time to cover everything."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, February 27, 2026.

**Individual participants** (note that **they did not participate in one of the deliberation sessions**, therefore, having missed part of the deliberation process) saw **the "losing" of some ideas** and the retention of others **as manifestations of a certain external intervention, bias, and raised questions about the "inconvenience" of the dropped ideas for the municipality**. Thus, the unclear dropping of some ideas, "losing" in the process, together with the insufficiently effective informing of the participants who missed the session about the process, also caused a broader **lack of perceived legitimacy of the deliberation process**.

*"There were some good ideas, but where did they go? It seems they only added what was useful."*  
*<...> Yes, I had the feeling that all those other statements that didn't fit that, in a certain direction and gradually, fell away. Although no one said that they were unnecessary, or redundant, or something like that, but they disappeared. Well, whatever came out came out. <...> Well, okay, something got lost along the way, well, for example, let it be. But, for example, I really like that idea about those school buses. I remember it well. [About, - author's note] it was talked about until the last meeting, but the vote is coming and there is no such thing. So how, where did it go? Probably because, well, of course, the municipality had to pay for this project, finance it, and additional expenses. It would be better to plant trees. <...> [N]owever, this matter is not reflected anywhere now. And now those decisions that have been made, they seem to me personally*

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*then they seem so imposed. And you vote because these and these points are presented, and it turns out that everyone here thinks this and that. But basically I didn't know how many people really thought that way. <...> I don't know if it's because of bias, maybe not, but somehow someone spread all those ideas, I don't know, for example, who, for example, well, those leaflets were written in that Nauja Vilnia, then some topics were chosen there. And, and what? Part of it disappeared. So I don't know who can be blamed, because where did the one who disappeared go? Someone formulated these final ideas that need to be voted for. Well, I don't know who.*

*"Well, the municipal employees, apparently, are the organizers or what, I don't know. But what are they relying on to sift out some and leave some. I mean, it's a bit of a conspiracy theory, but what was presented was purely beneficial to the municipality. That's the impression you get here."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

However, **the majority of interviewed participants** who noticed **the "confusion" of ideas attributed** it more to The organization of the process that took place in the Assembly sessions, and most importantly, **the phase of considering and refining ideas for recommendations and initial recommendations in small groups.**

*"[W]hy it gets lost. When I write, a second person, a third. But when you put it in a cauldron, read it, you don't always understand what a person wanted to write there and say, because I think one way, another thinks differently and I would say this instead, maybe even this instead. And the biggest problem is that that prepared question gets lost, because it goes to another group and they understand that question completely differently than the creator and they see that it's not worth it <...> This is perhaps one of the reasons why some of the questions disappeared: we simply rejected them because we didn't understand what they wanted to say."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 13, February 24, 2026.

As can be seen from the interview material, a number of participants criticized the stage of structuring the initial ideas and considering and refining the recommendations due to the method used in it – when the recommendations were refined, reviewed and finally formulated in different groups of participants of the Assembly of mixed composition. The participants found that **the process "stuck"** as the recommendation (draft recommendation, draft) moved from one group to another – (at least in some cases) **there was a lack of clarity about what the previous group(s) wanted** to achieve with that recommendation, why it was made in that way, sometimes – and understanding what the recommendation is all about. It was emphasized that the participants were quite different and sometimes it was simply difficult to understand the initial idea conveyed or it was understood differently at all. So, in the absence of understanding, **In the absence of experience in the group related to a specific recommendation, and sometimes even time to delve deeper** (especially when specific participants in the process had not previously discussed the relevant idea), **the ideas either completely changed their content according to the understanding of the new group, or were simply rejected.** This is ultimately **associated with both the "loss" of ideas and the insufficient quality of the recommendations.**

*"The phone was completely broken. That was one of the biggest problems. <...> the same words can have different meanings for different people. That's what happens when those little notes start to come in, some of them are just thrown away. Because you work in a group, especially if you have people who are not interested in working very hard or are just, as I say, "well, you decide here" or something else, then you just throw away some of them [the notes with ideas, - author's note], you somehow try to understand what others wanted to say and it turns out that everything falls apart and remains a very disorganized mess. And on top of that,*

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*"Something else contributed quite strongly to the score, namely that it was given that it was the old town, the city center, residential areas, private or all. I would say that this was not necessary <...>."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 11, February 10, 2026.

*"There were many cases when we worked with cards in groups. You are given a card and you have to adjust, rephrase this recommendation. But, for example, the topic is not close to me and I don't understand it. So what I hope is that someone from the group that proposed the options will be able to present their opinion, defend it, if we [the current group, - author's note] have questions or other opinions: is it good or not. So, we can discuss it. Because if people are just given a card, they can understand it in their own way and vote for their opinion in this case. But when the card is given with justification and arguments, when it is discussed, all people really start to understand what this card is about. And they consciously work with this card -*

*with a meaningful description, meaningful comments, and so on. There was actually a case during group work when there was a card and our whole group, I don't remember, maybe six people, just sat there and didn't know what to do with this card. We didn't understand what it meant, why it was there, and because of that we just completely ignored this card. We didn't vote in the result. But maybe if the author of this card explained, rephrased, maybe we would understand and maybe ultimately vote yes."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 6, December 17, 2025.

*"The only fundamental flaw that remained for me was that. Well, maybe not so much a flaw, but it is important. This is the very end - when it was necessary on the very last day, when it was necessary to write the final text and it turned out like... Well, again, by chance someone received some of the remaining recommendations and had to finalize them, oh, and they all went to the final vote. What was the problem here?*

*In that some people worked more on some recommendations throughout the process, and that's how it actually turned out, while others worked on others. Someone had gone deeper into one topic, someone had gone deeper into another, right? And when that... when they got the chance, well, in the sense of how someone or not, there were such things and then they would get caught up in those... For example, you've gone into a question quite deeply, haven't you, it got caught up in someone who didn't go into it - well, there wasn't a lot of time there - and they had to write something. Well, they probably wrote it in a hurry, because the minutes were ticking. And when it's already set in stone, like it's carved in stone - you can't change it anymore. That's where I see a big flaw."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 2, January 30, 2026.

*"But we still need to vote on it, even though we as a group agreed that it was pointless. And someone suggested it [the idea, author's note], and even the person who suggested it said, 'Yeah, that wasn't exactly my idea as such.' You have to discuss it in a group, but every time it's a random group, another random group of people, and you get an idea and you have to decide how to improve it. Why? I don't know what the original idea was, now you've changed it, someone tried to improve it, even though they all think it's bad, now it's reformulated again and it's completely different from what the first person wrote.*

*Even the initial idea might have been vague, and throughout this process we made it even vaguer because everyone contributed something, but because it was a haphazard process, no one understood what we were doing, and time was also tight. We have 15 minutes for a new topic, but this is the first time I've thought about this idea, I've never thought about it before, and now I have to decide how to improve it."*

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Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, February 3, 2026.

**On the other hand, the facilitators** who developed the program saw the development of recommendations in small rotating groups as an advantage, **a method** recommended in joint training before the Assembly, allowing **a larger number of participants to touch** on the recommendations, **refining the most important commonly visible aspects**, creating **a sense of "ownership"** of the recommendation for the largest possible number of participants.

*"Oh, that's what I was also happy about, that we really did a lot of that iteration and I think that this calmed us down, because in some cases it even worked like a vote. We could not worry about certain words, perfection, because we knew that that one sentence had passed through, say, twenty people through different combinations of groups. This is a good thing. <...> [W]e took to heart those words of Zakija during the March training, that those iterations simply help everyone contribute to the formulation of a specific recommendation. And to answer this simply, yes, the recommendation really came a very, very, very long way and the group that originally worked on that recommendation from the very beginning, really couldn't recognize and distinguish it at the end, but in principle, maybe that's how it should be, because it should be the voice of all the residents, and not the voice of some specific group and, since we really had in our sample of all participants individuals who were experts in a certain field experts <...>. This is so that those recommendations don't remain with that one expert person who will interest a certain group with his voice and his knowledge."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 3, February 11, 2026.

Some **other participants responded similarly to this process**, emphasizing that if not everything is clear when considering an idea in small groups, then that idea or recommendation still requires discussion, is not well-formulated enough, and **the ideas that "disappeared" in the iterations were probably not worthy enough** - good, clear, and receiving wider approval.

*"[S]uppose, if there is a dispute, then not everything is correct and clear there. If there is none – then, it means, everything is clear to everyone, we say "yes". <...> If there is a small dispute, then it means that someone disagrees with something. If they disagree, then it is even more impossible to assert such a topic, as I understand it. Because it has not yet been "worked out". Because this topic will touch even more people than the one we represented in the assembly, it touches a much wider circle of people. And in such a short time [of the Assembly, – author's note] to say that "yes, let's do this", that's not right. Yes, it is normal here that from group to group it is like this... You understand how it is in those groups – someone sat there, talked, talked, talked, decided and wrote it down. And here the person changes, and that person has a different approach to history. And he says "But wait, this is not worth it at all". For example, when it's an engineering issue. <...> Maybe it's a nice, great idea, but wait, it's not for Lithuania at all, such an idea is not suitable for the tropics here. <...> If the idea was changing, it means it was insufficient. It means it needs to be either postponed or forgotten altogether. There are more important topics that everyone agrees on - let's decide better, discuss them. And that will be more realistic."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

Without denying these visible advantages of deliberation in separate, changing groups – the search for consensus, the creation of a sense of "ownership", correction, completeness, and effective filtering of ideas, it is worth

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to take into account the challenges highlighted by a significant number of participants – the experience of ambiguity, misunderstanding (more than disagreement) of the idea conveyed by another group. In this case, it is worth noting the participants' own idea that **the groups lacked a "guide"** – a person who could convey to the next group the thoughts of the previous group, the idea of a relevant recommendation, which may not yet be well formulated. This **would help to work with ideas more effectively, to take over the work of the previous group(s) and improve it** (it is worth noting that "guides" were used in some stages of the Assembly's deliberations, but, as can be seen from the experiences reflected by the participants, not enough).

*"<...> when there was a list of all those recommendations, there was no guide in the groups. And those recommendations just jumped from A to Z, until they returned to N, and then back to A. Some of them deviated a lot from their starting points, and because of that, those who wrote those initial recommendations, for example, and then hear that recommendation, the final version of it - it is completely different. That is why they wanted to express their opinion [after hearing the recommendation during the vote, - author's note] and explain what they meant, because in some places it was completely unclear what was in that recommendation. Although yes, the initial stage of it [the program, - author's note] was very good, but the final, let's say, product turned out to be fifty-fifty, in some cases. <...> This is probably why it was precisely him, the guide was missing, and then that is exactly what caused the voting and that discussion to be so drawn out. redundant, which should not have been there anyway, where there should have been only a vote.<...> it was precisely those first who set the tone, so that he would maintain that guideline, so that there would be no, I say, such a tossing in one direction [or the other, - author's note], then there would be a lot of change. Yes, yes, he, we wanted exactly such a person, so that, well... That he was not there, we, of course, understood after, as I said, those recommendations were some very different from the initial stage.*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

As can be seen in this quote, **the challenges of smooth transfer of ideas between groups caught up with** the Assembly participants **at the voting stage**, when, upon hearing the previously discussed idea in its modified final formulation, those who had initially worked on it wanted to explain, clarify what was meant, and, in some cases, upon hearing the initiators' explanation, to clarify. There was no longer enough time for these discussions, so some participants were left with a certain bitterness of not (sufficiently) discussing it, disappointment with the quality of the deliberation (no more detailed resolution of the issues arising in the final stage, quickly "running" through a large number of recommendations).

Finally, when discussing the methods used in the VMPA, it is worth paying attention to **the aspect of the cultural context**. Although, as discussed, everyone generally liked the organization of the deliberation process and the methods used, **some participants** nevertheless expressed **criticism** during the interviews.

**methods** related primarily to creating a positive atmosphere, group camaraderie, and a sense of security. These methods appeared to be more personally alien, focusing too much, in the participants' opinion, on aspects of the process that were considered secondary, and accordingly distracting attention from the main goal - preparation of recommendations. This also corresponds to the observation already discussed in 3.1.3 that **the facilitators really focused on the quality of the process, trying to create a mutual connection between the participants, a safe, open-minded atmosphere** as necessary conditions for quality work. Meanwhile, **for some participants this**

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**appeared to be redundant, time-wasting actions**, prioritizing the content and arguments of the discussions themselves, focusing more on the result itself.

*"[I]n addition to the morning lap and the farewell lap – well, those are not my kind of laps."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

*"[N]ot was a bit like kindergarten here for me. On the one hand, well, yes, people need to be distracted, but we stand for a minute with our eyes closed, say some word that comes to mind spontaneously, well... I don't know. Well, yes, I understand, they go to all sorts of trainings there and so on, and so on, but not everything applies to all people. What you learned, for example, in some America, doesn't necessarily apply in Vilnius. Well, it's just the mentality of the people and everything else. <...> we didn't come here to make friends, or to go for a drink together. Here, the purpose of those meetings was completely different, and the whole thing was supposed to be work-related, not some kind of games."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

There were also **participants who were sometimes surprised by the freedom and responsibility encoded in the deliberation process (and the methods used) and did not meet their initial expectations**. For example, the interviews show that some participants expected a more formal, more defined, goal-oriented process, greater involvement of experts. Their role here is seen more as that of decision-makers who would decide between the alternatives presented by experts, that is, after receiving a certain expert "feasibility study", weighing the arguments presented, making choices.

*"To be honest, I expected the whole process to be more, I don't know, <...> focused, narrower, more robust. <...> I expected the experts to be much more actively involved in our discussions and perhaps we would be given some [information, - author's note], what solutions exist in the world for the problems that we exactly have. What solutions are proposed from different perspectives, from an architectural perspective, from other points of view, what budget do we have and so on. And then we, as representatives of Vilnius, will decide. So, I certainly didn't expect the preparation of all these recommendations to be so freely formulated. I expected it to be a more formal process, more predefined and perhaps, I would say, more targeted. We would have a more specific goal, what exactly we want to get as a final set of recommendations, how they should be formulated, how they would be, I don't know, linked or grouped according to some specific real city activity."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 6, December 17, 2025.

### *Facilitator objectivity*

As has been mentioned many times, the facilitators felt a great responsibility for the success of the Assembly and made efforts to meet the expectations of various groups (primarily the participants) and to respond to the principles of deliberative democracy.<sup>116</sup> Setting themselves the goal of ensuring that the VMPA participants would successfully consider the problem and, after the discussion, agree on the recommendations to be made,

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<sup>116</sup> Interview with the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 3, February 11, 2026, interview organizer no. 1, 2025 September 25.

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**The facilitators assigned the most important role in the process to the participants, understanding their role as a support, helping the participants achieve the result - their own agreement, but in no way guiding, advising or shaping the content.**

*"We tried to create from the very beginning that you [participants, - author's note] would create, you are responsible for it and you have to choose what you will write down. And no one has the right to say that what you wrote here is good or bad, or to direct you in some way, if you haven't discussed it internally, that you need to do it differently. <...> That the facilitators are here to help, not to direct you somewhere, your thinking, or change your attitude. You all discuss it among yourself. <...> Maybe they asked for examples. But when facilitating, you have to come up with examples from a different context so that you don't direct them. Because our role is not to direct them to where we think they should start recommending. That's where the detachment comes in. That's why I tried not to read the recommendations too much, so that I wouldn't start later... Because sometimes, when you're in that topic, it's hard to refrain from saying, "Maybe I'll give you a little advice and maybe it'll improve." But that's not your job right now. <...> this is a skill, one of the essential skills of a facilitator."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, March 27, 2026.

The facilitators reflected that fulfilling the role of neutral, impartial moderators of the process was not easy in itself - for example, many of them work with sustainability and mobility topics and have expert knowledge in them.

However, he emphasized that **even small steps** (e.g., not reading too many recommendations) **made conscious efforts** to accept and become aware of their neutral role, as well as **the skills they had (facilitation experience)** and **mutual assistance in the team helped maintain impartiality.**

*"[about what was the most difficult thing in the facilitation process – author's note] To fully accept the role of your facilitator role and not to direct, not to advise, to abstain. Because it is very difficult. And some facilitators really facilitate in a very different way. But at least from my point of view, in this process I had to be completely neutral. Because there is also such a matrix that you are, are you a facilitator and how much expertise do you have in the issue that people are discussing. And then there are such squares - or not, a matrix with two axes. And it depends on how you are invited to the process. And we were invited as facilitators. We are not experts, we are not supposed to provide any knowledge about that topic. This is where, it seems to me, and it was difficult for some [facilitators, - author's note]. Because we all know about sustainability, we all know about mobility, and, well, there were, some people who even work with that at the city level. So, well, to abstain and be in the role that you were invited to [was a challenge, - author's note]. We did quite well."; "I remember, at some point, even when we were working in the hall and I see <...> he looks at me, and he already knows that I have started to express too much opinion, and then – zip [suddenly falls silent, – author's note]! <...> that is what we are there for, to hold each other accountable, and to support, and to help, and to notice who is doing what and how, and to advise."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, March 27, 2026.

**The facilitators were also assessed as objective and impartial by the participants of the VMPA. 91 percent** of those who participated in the third wave of the Assembly participants' survey (at the end of the Assembly) agreed with the statement that the facilitators of the process were objective and impartial. **59 percent** of them – the absolute majority – chose the strongest (**"completely agree"**) answer option, thereby indicating an extremely high assessment of the facilitators' impartiality. 3 percent of the participants disagreed with the statement, completely disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed.

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**Those who observed** the process from the sidelines also emphasized that **during the Assembly, certain topics were not suppressed or obscured during facilitation** - it seemed that **even uncomfortable**, perhaps initially unrelated positions and ideas **were expressed, not written down in advance**.

*"From what I saw, anyway, they got such ideas that were, so to speak, a hair's breadth away. And I really liked that they encouraged, even seemingly off-topic [unrelated idea, - author's note], but oh well, not off-topic. In fact, the transportation issue is so heavily transfer [overlapping, - author's note] very much. And the spirit was that you can bring some "nonsense", but when we talk about the bureaucratic apparatus, that's fine."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 3, March 4, 2026.

Participants also **appreciated the facilitators' responsiveness, attentiveness to all positions, open response to participants' ideas**, and, if there were any misunderstandings when summarizing or hearing positions, quick response, correction.

*"There were some, maybe not necessarily facilitators, for example, but perhaps not everywhere, that idea was clearly expressed and it would go, for example, it wouldn't quite get to [the, - author's note] that subtopic somewhere. But that's because sometimes you just raise your hand and say what you have in mind, maybe clarify it and it goes where it needs to go. So they can't know the thoughts of all fifty people, how many people participated in the principle, and what they exactly had in mind, but overall they really managed it very well."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

**The facilitators themselves identified the choice of "unmoderated tables" in smaller groups as one of the most important design decisions that ensured the impartiality and neutrality of the facilitators.** Using this design decision, the facilitators consciously withdrew from smaller group discussions – treating moderation as the power to formulate and direct ideas. According to the facilitators, this withdrawal from this position marked the transfer of all responsibility for the formulated recommendations to the participants and their trust in them.

*"[W]hen there were no facilitated tables, there would be no facilitators sitting, listening to the discussion and writing things down for people. People wrote themselves, formulated themselves, looked for ways to express their thoughts in words, and I think that was one of the most important elements why this group of people could and believed in that text. That they were, were proud of what they had created together. Because there was a suggestion that at each... that the work should be organized in such a way that whenever there is group work, a facilitator sits at each table, listens to everything and takes notes. And that scared me right away, and that... Every time a person is chosen to write, he is immediately given a lot of power. I wanted that power to remain among the participants. They then decide internally which of the participants can write down quickly, or more clearly, or something, but they decide this themselves, and not something imposed on them. That, in my opinion, is an important and great success here. It seems to me that DemNext also said that it is not always done this way and "Maybe this is not always done because people are distrusted."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, March 27, 2026.

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On the other hand, it should be noted that **some participants still lacked moderation in the groups.**

On the one hand, it was noticed that **not all Assembly participants wanted to take on the roles required in the groups**<sup>117</sup> (the facilitators had prepared a list of such roles – timekeeper, writer, speaker, internal facilitator<sup>118</sup>). On the other hand, **there was a shortage of external moderators and in order to structure the work more effectively** – it was expected that external moderators would help to speak and formulate more specifically, and would orient the group discussion more towards the goal. Thus, here we also see the previously discussed (3.1.3, also this subsection) difference between the facilitators' priority orientation towards the process and the quality of deliberations in terms of inclusiveness, participants' responsibility, and the priority orientation of some participants towards results and the efficiency of the process.

*"Well, regarding moderation in groups, yes, actually, as I mentioned, perhaps it was a bit lacking here, those in groups, so to speak, help each other. And, if there was, I mean, a moderator, raising questions, as I mentioned, if there was one extending the discussion and moderating it, it would be possible to express more specifically, I mean, and formulate the final opinion, conclusion accordingly. <...> It would lead us down a path more, because it is complicated like this, we have gathered, even now, as here, even though the topic is certain, still what do we want to discuss, I mean, what aspects. So, well, it would probably be more useful than it was."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 12, February 12, 2026.

*"From my perspective, there was a lack of moderator work where they could actually coordinate people, make them follow the main topic, not get distracted by other discussions, incompatible questions, and so on. So, yes, it could have been done, but, again, I know it's very difficult, so there's no magic solution, unfortunately."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 6, December 17, 2025.

### *Inclusiveness of deliberations, balance between discussion participants*

The organizers of the VMPA process sought to respond to **the basic principles of deliberative democracy – inclusion, equality and independence.** In this way, it was expected to create “a transparent, credible and representative process for the population, in which decisions are made based on knowledge, discussion and consensus”<sup>119</sup>. When defining the principles of the Assembly, it was explicitly stated that “*the process is organized in such a way that everyone has the opportunity to express their opinion and contribute to the formation of recommendations*”, “*All participants have an equal voice and the opportunity to participate in the process, regardless of experience, status or competence*”, “*The role of facilitators is to ensure a safe, respectful and constructive discussion environment*”<sup>120</sup>. Applying these principles to the program, the methods used in the Assembly's deliberation process were selected in such a way as to “ensure equal participation and the audibility of different experiences, create a psychologically safe environment, structure discussions and reduce the risk of dominance, allow for a gradual move from individual insights to collective decisions and create conditions for achieving results based on consensus”<sup>121</sup>. Much attention was paid to these principles and their reflections and assurance in the chosen methods not only in the Assembly documents -

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<sup>117</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

<sup>118</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025a), p. 79.

<sup>119</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025a), p. 39.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025a), p. 78.

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Interviews with VMPA organizers and facilitators reveal that these **principles** were well internalized (or did they correspond to the organizers' and facilitators' prior attitudes and preferences) and **became effective guidelines guiding both the facilitation program and the specific actions chosen in individual situations.**

Finally, a safe environment, diversity and equality, respectful dialogue, community, transparency and active engagement were also defined as the rules of common work<sup>122</sup>, which were agreed upon by all participants during the first session and were constantly recalled during subsequent sessions. Therefore, **a lot of attention was openly paid to inclusiveness of deliberations, equal opportunities to speak, balance between different positions and participants' statements, and reasoned discussion.** Interviews with the organizers reveal that inclusion, along with the learning process and the ability to agree, was generally considered the most important and highly prioritized.

*"I think that day and the assembly process itself should look like it feels legitimate to everyone, especially the participants, but I don't think it's possible to achieve some kind of perfection, because we don't live in a one-dimensional world where that's possible. The goal is not in complete perfection and neutrality, at least for me. The goal is in the learning process and the ability to agree, in involving people."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

Both the results of the survey of Assembly participants and interviews with various stakeholders reveal that this targeted attention **really helped to create a good atmosphere** during the Assembly - open, inclusive, respectful of various positions. Participants and observers emphasized that the facilitators **managed to unite the group, create a safe space that encouraged active discussions and enabled them to reveal themselves.** At the same time, this was seen as **a sharp contrast** compared to other methods and forms of citizen engagement used by municipalities, which usually prevail in opposition.

*"It doesn't matter how different people are - the organizers were very successful in uniting, connecting, and directing people to discuss and think. <...> Compliments once again go to the organizers, they really moderated properly so that there was room for other opinions, and they also managed the crowd very well, because it was still a large group of people. They managed the crowd with clear, repeatedly repeated rules on how to behave if, say, one opinion dominates or one speaker dominates. Imagine me, if I allowed myself the freedom to chat or if I suddenly had some kind of attack of attention to myself, then... If there weren't clear rules, then everyone would have to be carried out on a stretcher from boredom. Seriously, everything was managed perfectly, and there was also space for conversation. Discussion, opinions, and those opinions sounded very clearly different. The organizers' ability to unite [is fascinating, - author's note]."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

*"Everyone could express their thoughts, friendly environment. Accessible to different groups."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

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<sup>122</sup> see Vilnius City Municipality (2025a), p. 65.

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*"<...> the atmosphere [atmosphere, – author's note] is good."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 3, March 4, 2026.

*"It actually created a very good atmosphere. And knowing that these were very different residents who came anyway <...> They were very, quite open and understanding with each other."*

Interview with expert No. 1 of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly, January 28, 2026.

*"[We] often get stuck in our own bubble, some kind of polarization still occurs, doesn't it, that here cyclists versus motorists, well, here, let's say, a confrontation arises. I liked that [VMPA, – author's note] the inclusion of all, all kinds of representatives <...> that diversity and that multifacetedness – and it was an opportunity for everyone to come together. I think that is very important – to hear everyone's opinion. Everyone's opinion, namely, different angles. <...> It is very difficult to describe – that kind of co-creation, that communion. <...> when there is that group and then you see that out of that awkwardness, those discussions start to develop, you find some kind of solution and then people don't have time – another thought, another idea, another thing they want to say. It is that kind of process, I don't know, a kind of cooking, like a kitchen – the expression is there. It is so inciting, enchanting. Wow, when you just give people, create, provide a safe space to discuss, they actually have so much to say... I was really inspired by that dialogue with that different person, not from your bubble. That is the most important thing here, what I take away, what was important to me."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, February 27, 2026.

In the open-ended question of the second participant survey, Assembly participants also expressed satisfaction with communication (an extremely frequent response), "friendliness, attentiveness", "attention of volunteers/facilitators", "emotional environment" <sup>123</sup>. However, Table 12 reveals that **approximately one-fifth of participants assessed the atmosphere prevailing during the Assembly as worse:** 19 percent more likely or completely agreed that there was a poor atmosphere prevailing during the Assembly – e.g., arguments, lack of understanding, while **75 percent** indicated **the opposite** position.

Regarding the atmosphere prevailing at the VMPA, the survey data of the participants of the first and third Assembly also allow for a more detailed look at the well-being of the Assembly participants during the process.

At the beginning of the Assembly, a third of the participants (34%) were worried that they would have to publicly express their opinion in the discussion. The least worried was that it would be unpleasant, for example, there would be arguments or a lack of understanding (16%) or that it would be boring (13%). Few were also worried that the Assembly process would be too complicated or too intense for them personally (24% and 16%, respectively) – in this regard, the majority were confident in their own abilities (47%, respectively), while 29-32% did not have a clear position.

**Table 12.** Assembly participants' assessment of their experience in the process at the end of the Assembly, percentage

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<sup>123</sup> The second survey of Assembly participants, answers to the open question "What have you liked most about the Assembly so far?".

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|                                   | Participation<br>It was too<br>complicated for me<br>in the assembly | Participation<br>The assembly<br>was too intense for<br>me. | Often<br>During the<br>assembly<br>I was bored. | There was a bad<br>atmosphere<br>during<br>the assembly –<br>e.g. arguments,<br>lack of<br>understanding | During the assembly, I<br>felt compelled<br>to speak out<br>publicly.<br>my opinion, even<br>though I didn't want to |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| At the end of the Assembly (N=32) |                                                                      |                                                             |                                                 |                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                      |
| I completely disagree.            | 46,9                                                                 | 40,6                                                        | 31,3                                            | 34,4                                                                                                     | 50,0                                                                                                                 |
| Faster<br>I disagree.             | 28,1                                                                 | 28,1                                                        | 46,9                                            | 40,6                                                                                                     | 28,1                                                                                                                 |
| I neither agree nor disagree.     | 12,5                                                                 | 15,6                                                        | 3,1                                             | 6,3                                                                                                      | 12,5                                                                                                                 |
| I agree more quickly.             | 9,4                                                                  | 9,4                                                         | 9,4                                             | 9,4                                                                                                      | ,0                                                                                                                   |
| I completely agree.               | 3,1                                                                  | 6,3                                                         | 9,4                                             | 9,4                                                                                                      | 9,4                                                                                                                  |
| Didn't answer                     | ,0                                                                   | ,0                                                          | ,0                                              | ,0                                                                                                       | ,0                                                                                                                   |
| I agree (generally)               | 12,5                                                                 | 15,6                                                        | 18,8                                            | 18,8                                                                                                     | 9,4                                                                                                                  |
| I disagree.<br>(in general)       | 75,0                                                                 | 68,8                                                        | 78,1                                            | 75,0                                                                                                     | 78,1                                                                                                                 |

Source: Third survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators.

By the end of the Assembly, it became clear that the stronger or weaker **fears they had about the process (its complexity, intensity, prevailing atmosphere, pressure to speak publicly) did not come true for most participants, and** the opposite opinion became even stronger. Looking at the change (comparing the answers in the first and third survey; Table 12), only 16 percent of participants assessed the Assembly process as more complex than they expected, while as many as 47 percent assessed it as less complex (the rest did not change their opinion). By the end of the Assembly, 50 percent of participants felt that their participation in the Assembly was less intense than expected, and 20 percent felt that it was, on the contrary, more intense than expected. 34 percent had a better opinion about the atmosphere prevailing in the Assembly compared to their prior fears, while 22 percent had a worse opinion (44 percent did not change their opinion).

Comparing pre-conceived fears about expressing one's opinion publicly with the experience during the Assembly, 44% of participants reported less pressure after the Assembly than they expected before the Assembly, 9% –

higher, and 46 percent said their experience met expectations. True, 33 percent of participants found the Assembly more boring than they had expected after its process, although 30 percent found it less boring than they had expected.

Such **participant survey data, taken as a whole, suggests a successful process and its organization, emphasizing the well-done work of the facilitators.**

**The participants themselves also highly appreciated the quality of the facilitators' work** - during the second participant survey, 76 percent of the Assembly participants indicated that they rated it with the maximum rating - very good, another 18 percent - good, and only 6 percent - average. There were no people who rated it poorly, very poorly, or did not answer the question.

Thus, the facilitators managed to appear excellent in the eyes of the participants and create a good emotional atmosphere, despite the tension they themselves felt due to the division of responsibilities, the program development process already underway, and the perceived inadequate compensation for their work.

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"<...> there was some tension between the municipality and the facilitators <...> sometimes it felt unconstructive and even unfriendly to me. I'm talking about this because I really hoped that it wouldn't be transmitted to the feeling in the room and that the participants wouldn't feel that maybe some tension, but it definitely was between them [the facilitators, - author's note].

Maybe the participants didn't feel it anyway, I hope so."

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

Focusing on inclusion, **91% of Assembly participants** agreed in the third participant survey at the end of the Assembly that **the facilitators made an effort to ensure that everyone had a chance to express their opinion**. The fact that 66% of them chose the extreme answer "strongly agree" and the fact that only 3% of them somewhat or strongly disagreed and neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, reveals that these efforts by the facilitators to provide everyone with a chance to speak were very clearly visible. Other data support the fact that the achieved result was also successful.

According to the survey of the participants of the third Assembly, 94% of them personally felt empowered to express their different opinions in the group during the Assembly, 84% believed that all participants of the Assembly had equal opportunities to express their opinions, and 84% agreed that the participants of the Assembly were ready to listen to the opinions of others. Thus, in general, it can be seen that **the participants' opinion about the group discussions held during the Assembly is very good** (Table 13). They **provided an opportunity to talk to those with different opinions** (91% agreed with the relevant statement) **and a safe space for expressing their opinions, equal opportunities to express themselves, as well as to be listened to**. Participants assessed the representation of different opinions in group discussions relatively less negatively. This is likely related to the insufficient representation of youth, discussed in subsection 3.1.4, which was mentioned quite often by the participants.

**Table 13.** Opinion of assembly participants about the group discussions held during the assembly, percent.

|                                   | During the assembly, I felt that I could freely express myself. different opinion in the group | All participants in the Assembly had equal opportunities to express their views. opinion | Participants were willing to listen to others opinions | The Assembly was represented in principle by different opinions | At the assembly I had the opportunity to talk to people who have different opinions than me. |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| At the end of the Assembly (N=32) |                                                                                                |                                                                                          |                                                        |                                                                 |                                                                                              |
| Completely I disagree.            | 3,1                                                                                            | 3,1                                                                                      | 3,1                                                    | 6,3                                                             | 3,1                                                                                          |
| Faster I disagree.                | ,0                                                                                             | 3,1                                                                                      | ,0                                                     | 6,3                                                             | ,0                                                                                           |
| I neither agree nor disagree.     | 3,1                                                                                            | 9,4                                                                                      | 12,5                                                   | 12,5                                                            | 6,3                                                                                          |
| I agree more quickly.             | 43,8                                                                                           | 37,5                                                                                     | 43,8                                                   | 37,5                                                            | 40,6                                                                                         |
| I completely agree.               | 50,0                                                                                           | 46,9                                                                                     | 40,6                                                   | 37,5                                                            | 50,0                                                                                         |
| Didn't answer                     | ,0                                                                                             | ,0                                                                                       | ,0                                                     | ,0                                                              | ,0                                                                                           |
| I agree (generally)               | 93,8                                                                                           | 84,4                                                                                     | 84,4                                                   | 75,0                                                            | 90,6                                                                                         |

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|                         |     |     |     |      |     |
|-------------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|
| Disagree<br>(generally) | 3,1 | 6,3 | 3,1 | 12,5 | 3,1 |
|-------------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|

Source: Third survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators.

*"Really, I think it will be second of me if you ask me something else about the fact that no one paid attention to age, gender, or nationality. This is Vilnius in all its beauty, here is the whole beauty of Vilnius. In that sense, it didn't matter at all whether an old man sat next to you or a shepherd sat down - there were young people, maybe not as many as others wanted, but there were - whether a young woman sat down, an older woman, a man, a Ukrainian, or whatever, whoever. There would have been dark-skinned people there, I think that probably also - well, everyone would be curious for the first half hour, [because, - author's note] we are not used to this, and then no one will pay attention anymore. There are a lot of such healthy things in our society here."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

Thus, various data collected during the Assembly indicate that the VMPA managed to create an atmosphere in which **participants felt comfortable, able to freely express their opinions (including those that differed)**. In this context, during the Assembly, participants also noticed that if some of them could not be included in the process, it was more due to the participants' own decision – in the second Assembly survey, in response to an open question about what they had disliked most about the Assembly so far, one of the participants wrote *"The lack of involvement of some participants, a dismissive approach to finding solutions"* 124. Conversely, there were a couple of observations in the open survey questions indicating that, in the opinion of some participants, the facilitators did not create an insufficiently inclusive deliberation process, but **rather allowed too much free expression, did not restrict** "off-topic" statements: *"Moderators could be stricter", "I would suggest that the moderators return some of the "talkers" to the discussion framework more quickly and strictly. We used the T =) sign too little [referring to the Assembly's conventional sign to stop those who talk too long or deviate from the topic, - author's note]"* 125. During the interviews, such cases of a dominant discussant were associated not so much with the facilitators' laxity as with the participants' excessive politeness, adherence to another point of the same set rules - listening when the other person is speaking.

*"[There were] some, there were a few people who seemed to me to be a little too vocal, because no matter what they were talking about, they would still speak out. And sometimes they even went a bit off-topic, but they would still speak out. Well, I don't know, but it depends on the person. And on the other hand, yes, there was this principle that, come on, one person talks, the others listen, and that's how it turned out. They talk, everyone listens. <...> On the other hand, if you say, "Okay, stop talking," then it looks like this again, you'll talk rudely and everything else. Everyone was very well-bred, they adhered to these principles, and that's how it turned out, one person talks, the others stay silent."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

However, overall, there were not many cases of a dominant debater. In the third wave of the participant survey, **31 percent of participants agreed that the Assembly discussions were dominated by a few**

<sup>124</sup> The second survey of Assembly participants, answering the open question "What have you disliked the most about the Assembly so far?"

<sup>125</sup> The second survey of Assembly participants, response to the open question "What have you disliked the most about the Assembly so far?", the third survey of Assembly participants, response to the open question "If you have any additional observations about the Assembly, its organizational process, the results achieved and your experience in the Assembly - We invite you to share them here."

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the most eloquent people, but another **59 percent disagreed with the statement** (another 6 percent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, 3 percent did not answer the question). When assessing the expectations of the influence of the Assembly process in this aspect, at the beginning of the Assembly, the group of participants lacked a clear position on whether the discussion would be dominated by a few most eloquent people (47 percent had no clear opinion), which is why 21 percent of the surveyed participants clearly expressed their concerns, while 32 percent, on the contrary, believed that there would be no dominance of the most eloquent. Thus, after the Assembly, the number of participants in the group who believed that the Assembly was dominated by a few most eloquent people was 10 percentage points higher than those who had initially feared this, on the other hand, those who believed the opposite – that there was no dominance of the few eloquent people – was 28 percentage points higher than those who had expected the same at the beginning of the Assembly. Looking at the changes at the individual level, it also becomes clear that 45% of participants noticed less than they feared the dominance of several other most eloquent participants in the discussions, but 42% on the contrary noticed more (13% of the fears were in line with experience). So, although the participants' assessments on this issue differ, they tend to be more positive (more participants did not notice the dominance of individual colleagues).

In the context of the not entirely unanimously observed (non-)dominance of the eloquent, the reasons for the less frequent speeches of the quieter participants become relevant. The participants themselves reflected during the interviews that the number and duration of speeches depended more on the personal characteristics, habits, and experience of the participants, but at the same time, neither the higher frequency of speeches nor the longer duration in themselves determined the higher quality of the speeches, nor did they demonstrate the participant's (dis)interest. The facilitators held the opinion and position (and the participants who spoke about this indirectly agreed with them) that the most important thing in the deliberation process was the opportunity to have and feel to speak out, to argue without disagreeing. As we saw above, 94 percent of the participants who had such an opportunity to "freely express a different opinion" appreciated it, so the frequency of speeches (as already mentioned in subsection 3.1.4) is indeed more related to the personal characteristics of the participants, rather than to a fundamental deficiency in the deliberation process. More importantly, the interviews also noted that even the quieter participants got involved and defended their position when they saw the need to do so. So, it seems that **the safe atmosphere created by the facilitators, in which even the quieter participants felt free to speak up when they disagreed, but at the same time not to be forced to speak up when they did not want to, worked well in ensuring inclusive deliberations and consensus among participants on the desired outcomes in a group of very different participants.**

*"There were opportunities for everyone and everyone spoke up. According to character, temperament, and socialization experience." Everyone spoke. There was a [person who held a high position, - author's note] - says a few sentences, but fundamentally. And the other woman talks, talks, but it is still not clear what she wants to say. Everyone spoke as much as their temperament required - no one pressed and just, no one forced to speak.*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

*"As far as I've noticed, some people did come, but they didn't really, how can I say, express their opinion, or give it a try - no, no, it wasn't. Maybe they just came out of curiosity, to have a good time. I don't know, I can't say, but not everyone wants to express themselves. Well, that doesn't mean that they aren't interested in the outcome, for example."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

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*"Was everyone involved? I think it's impossible to answer this question, because ultimately it depends on the person. You can tease them as much as you want, if they're an introvert or, let's say, someone like that, they just won't speak up. It really depends on the participant. You can pull their tongue as much as you want." <...> When there was already general communication in a circle or several circles, certain participants would emerge who were more likely to express their opinions, let's say, more active, others quieter. I noticed that women are quieter, so this is a psychological matter. I would say that these are things that are bigger than the facilitator could cover or somehow control."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, February 27, 2026.

*"As I mentioned before, yes, there were those who wanted to take over the airwaves more, of course, but this is where we saw that in some cases there were quite heated discussions. <...> everyone still had their own opportunity. Maybe others, if they agree, it doesn't mean that they have that opinion. That's why they chose, perhaps, the role of a writer in groups, or somehow, in which less discussion is needed. Because again, maybe just like my goal, as I said, was to look at it from the other side, maybe the goals of others were also something. Maybe they didn't want to express their own opinion, but they also wanted to see how it all happened, just for the sake of curiosity."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

*"Some women here, you know, don't talk much. Well, there are just some types of people who won't say anything about anything, just to say something out loud. So I believe that we have created different ways to express ourselves - and, uh, a big circle where everyone can speak, and, uh, there were women who, especially in the back, in those big circles, where, some groups there formulated some sentences, and then we all discussed together, is this right, or does something need to be changed, and uh, and there were moments when those quiet women said, "no, this changes the essence, no." <...> Well, we also discussed a lot in the team, what to do with people who don't talk much. <...> how to get them all to talk, so that they all speak, like someone who stands up and speaks for five minutes. Well, but... <...> When I already know that there is a conversation going on somewhere where I disagree, then I will speak up. Well, as long as I agree, there is nothing problematic, everything is fine. And maybe there is no need to put me in the spotlight [center of attention, - author's note] and force me to have some kind of opinion that I think differently. Well, I don't think so. If I think differently, I will speak out. And it seems to me that in the last few [last, - author's note] rounds, when it was about specific [recommendations, - author's note] sentences and words, there were some quieter women who said "no, this changes the meaning", "no, we wrote it like this because it should be like this, because otherwise it's not about the same thing anymore".*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, March 27, 2026.

Three groups that **were observed to have more challenges in terms of equal inclusion in individual cases were older people, foreigners and car drivers.** In the first case, the interviewees mentioned that the pace set in the Assembly's deliberation process still prioritized younger, working-age people, and that it was sometimes more difficult for older people to keep up with the group and maintain the pace.

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*"[It would be necessary, – author's note] when organizing such a process to think about the age and ability of different people to understand, because our process was probably more adapted to people of working age. It seems to me that it was sometimes difficult for retired people to understand what was being talked about, and I don't think they could always participate in the discussion in a quality manner and work in groups at the same speed and discuss. Sometimes, I know that they gave up a little – "well, you decide something here, tell me.""*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

However, looking at the survey data, it is clear that the answer is not so unambiguous. On the one hand, all of the 16 percent of participants who assessed the process at the end of the Assembly as too intense for them and indicated their age in the survey were over 40 years old (6 percent fell into the 40-60 age group, 3 percent into the over 60 age group, the rest did not indicate their date of birth in the survey). On the other hand, if we look at the distribution of responses only in a specific age group, those who admitted that the process was too intense for them accounted for only 13 percent of those over 60 years old, while the share of those who completely disagreed with the statement ("Participation in the Assembly was too intense for me") reached 38 percent, and those who rather disagreed – 25 percent. Accordingly, for those aged 40-60 in the group, 15% personally considered the process too intense, 31% completely disagreed with this, and another 39% somewhat disagreed. Thus, **although the Assembly process was seen as potentially too intense for older participants, representatively, the majority of respondents in older age groups did not experience this feeling.**

Regarding foreigners, on the one hand, during the interviews, participants noticed that the groups they were placed in had difficulty discussing and "keeping a good pace" due to the language barrier. Interpreters helped in this case, but the discussion still proceeded more slowly, and there was a risk of misunderstandings<sup>126</sup>. On the other hand, the foreigners themselves **did not indicate that they had experienced any major inconveniences and felt sufficiently included**. In the case of Russian speakers, the participants indicated that they had not experienced any major language barrier, because others, especially the older ones, knew Russian. The foreigners also indicated that they had communicated using signs and with the mediation of other participants.

Finally, one of the interviewed motorists felt that he was not fully heard, that he felt that he could not express himself completely freely<sup>127</sup>. True, other interviewed motorists did not express such a position, they felt included, and the position of motorists, which was least represented in the discussions, as already mentioned, was explained not by a lack of inclusion, but by the fact that motorists themselves agreed with the main direction of the Assembly's question or at least did not object to it, because "like sorting or eating less sweets - we all know that it is necessary", and they choose to drive cars not because they really want to, but "out of necessity"<sup>128</sup> (see more in 3.1.4). It should be noted that **in the VMPA deliberation process, the position of groups using different means of mobility was not considered or formulated separately in any form** - different mobility experiences were left with the opportunity to reveal themselves more during group discussions, solving other tasks. Most of the Assembly participants did not find such a decision objectionable, it was not reflected as a need, although some organizers, taking into account the less heard voices representing the position of motorists in the discussion (paradoxically, since this group included

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<sup>126</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

<sup>128</sup> For example, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, February 27, 2026.

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most of the Assembly participants), wondered whether it would not have been better to seat all the participants more at the beginning, grouping them according to the most commonly used means of mobility, thus encouraging a greater sense of representation of their position<sup>129</sup>.

In this case, **the formal presentation of an alternative opinion is also important.** At the beginning of the Assembly, participants were informed that there was an opportunity to present an alternative opinion, disagreeing with the generally adopted recommendations of the Assembly. Some participants, feeling that their ideas were lost in the process, ultimately missed this opportunity.

*"Because if in general, at first yes, I remember a statement from one of the organizations: if the opposing opinion is strong, it will be heard and documented somehow. Where is it, where was it at all? Then there was no talk about it at all and many people spoke [disapprovingly, - author's note] about those stupid restrictions, about some other idiotic decisions - nothing, nothing remained of it.*

*Where did they all go? Because there were those separate pieces of paper, written down, pasted, collected and everything else. And I myself wrote a lot of things much more broadly. Yes, maybe it doesn't cover this, but if we are talking in general about that idea itself, then maybe other factors should have been taken into account? Not only that we are concentrating on that bus and that's it. And I wrote about bridges, for example, the new ones in Vilnius. Where did those ideas go? A lot*  
*who sponsored it."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

True, the facilitators, for their part, considered it not their duty to formally present an alternative opinion.

Seeing their mission as an achievement to formulate common recommendations of the Assembly participants, they left the formation of a separate, alternative opinion to themselves, assuming that if the alternative opinion is strong enough, not that of a single person, but the group expressing it should organize itself and submit the appropriate text. Thus, **the discrepancy between the expectations of some participants and the facilitators' approach to the process of preparing an alternative opinion can be treated as miscommunication.**

*"The goal of the assembly is not to bring all the things that we all disagree with, that we were angry about. The goal is to come to an agreement and bring what we all agree with. <...> Such is the process, such is the method. It is pointless to record all the smallest disagreements at some point. There is an inclusive way, but it did not come up, as I understand it. Because we also asked DemocracyNext a lot about this, but the recommendations and advice were also quite inconsistent about the minority report. The minority opinion, but it cannot be one person, that was the saying for us. If that person, if there is a group of three or four people and they very strongly disagree with something and still want to bring something with a recommendation and record something, they have that right and opportunity. But they have to organize themselves. They have to formulate their text, there has to be more than one person, at least two or three, I don't know how many they named there. But they have to organize themselves then. <...> It [the process concerning alternative opinions, - author's note] is at the very end. The facilitators are not responsible for this and we were told that, well, if after the last vote, when everything is clear, what is recommended, and they [participants, - author's note] were informed then, in the slides, it seems to me as if <...> there was a part there, that if after all, something, and you have some strong opinion, it is important to know*

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

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*"For people who will receive these recommendations, then you can give something. But that was after the last vote. After the last vote, there is no time for facilitators to do anything...<...> There are opportunities, but it has to be very important for the participants to invest time in it."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, March 27, 2026.

In this case, some organizers also noticed that **there was not enough time at the end of the Assembly to discuss ambiguities and unfulfilled expectations**. This was considered an important process, and from the perspective of the good emotional atmosphere strongly prioritized during the Assembly process, while also providing an opportunity for participants who felt some dissatisfaction to discuss their comments, for example, to better understand why their suggestions and ideas were not responded to and to clarify possible further steps if they wanted to provide an alternative opinion, etc.

*"Then someone wrote the comments in writing, so I was missing such, let's say, open communication, because I felt that there was still an emotional element in the atmosphere. Some may be happy that I "participated", others may be disappointed that their efforts were not listened to at all, as they say, because there were certain ideas that were perhaps suppressed through certain methods, because they say why some [suggestions, - author's note] were taken, others were not. And then there was no more space, so maybe this is also visible in terms of design."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

Finally, when it comes to the inclusiveness of the VMPA deliberation process, attention can also be paid to the success of inclusiveness, the general consensus on the recommendations among the participants reflecting the evaluation of the recommendations. Table 14 reveals that the majority of participants (**94%**) in the third survey of Assembly participants **agreed that their group had presented good proposals for mobility in Vilnius city in the Assembly recommendations** (38% were completely sure of this, another 44% were convinced with 8-9 points on a 10-point scale, 13% with 6-7 points, and 6% held the opposite opinion – that no good proposals had been presented), with the group average agreeing with this statement reaching 8.5 points. **The majority of participants (88%) also felt stronger or weaker pride in the recommendations presented at the Assembly** (one third – very strong, 9% indicated that they did not feel pride). On the contrary, a smaller proportion (22%) stated that they were disappointed with the recommendations presented (72% did not feel disappointed). **The assessment of the reflection of personal positions in the Assembly recommendations also revealed a certain compromise reached in the deliberation process:** 91% of participants more or less strongly agreed that the Assembly recommendations as a whole reflect their personal positions, but at the same time 78% stated that some of the ideas discussed that they liked were not reflected in the Assembly recommendations.

All these responses imply that **the recommendations prepared by the Assembly were nevertheless accepted by the majority of participants as "their own" - this should be treated as the result of a successfully organized, inclusive VMPA deliberation process**.

**Table 14.** Assessment of Assembly recommendations, percent.

|  | 0 -<br>completely<br>I disagree. | 1-2 | 3-4 | 5 | 6-7 | 8-9 | 10 -<br>completely<br>I agree | Average |
|--|----------------------------------|-----|-----|---|-----|-----|-------------------------------|---------|
|  |                                  |     |     |   |     |     |                               |         |

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|                                                                                                      | At the end of the Assembly (N=32) |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|
| The Assembly's recommendations as a whole reflect my personal position.                              | 0                                 | 3,1  | 0    | 6,3 | 28,1 | 43,8 | 18,8 | 7,75 |
| Some of the ideas discussed that I liked were not reflected in the Assembly's recommendations.       | 9,4                               | 0    | 3,1  | 9,4 | 18,8 | 31,3 | 28,1 | 7,28 |
| I think we have made good proposals for mobility in the Assembly recommendations.<br>In Vilnius city | ,0                                | 3,1  | 3,1  | 0   | 12,5 | 43,8 | 37,5 | 8,50 |
| I feel disappointed with the recommendations made in the Assembly                                    | 18,8                              | 21,9 | 31,3 | 6,3 | 6,3  | 9,4  | 6,3  | 3,44 |
| I feel proud.<br>Recommendations prepared by the Assembly                                            | 0                                 | 3,1  | 6,3  | 3,1 | 25,0 | 31,3 | 31,3 | 7,88 |
| * Answers on a 10-point scale, where 0 means "completely disagree" and 10 means "completely agree".  |                                   |      |      |     |      |      |      |      |

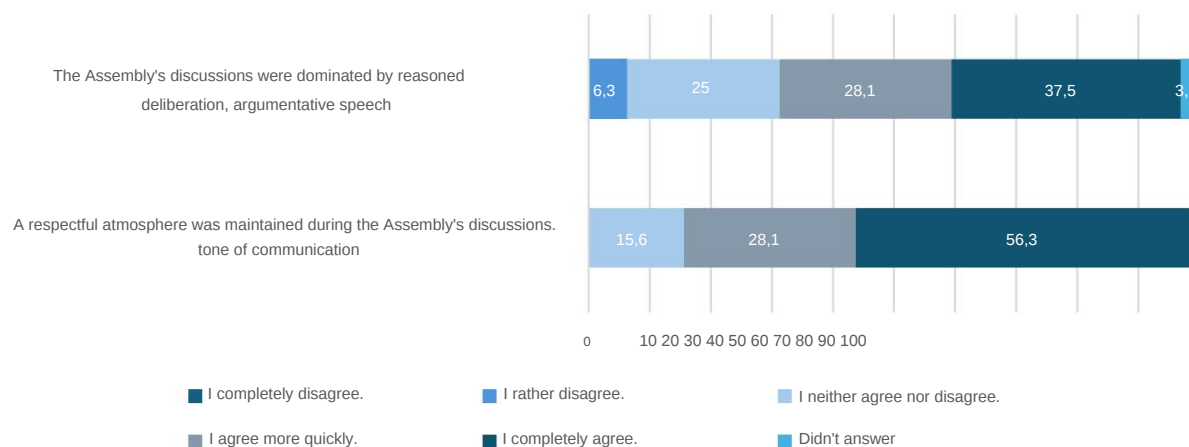
Source: Third survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators.

### Promoting reasoned discussion and resolving conflict situations

The atmosphere created during the VMPA deliberation process can be described as productive and constructive.

**According to the majority of VMPA participants, a respectful tone of communication was maintained during the Assembly discussions** (84% of participants fully and fairly agreed with this opinion, with no objections), **reasoned deliberation and reasoned speech prevailed** (66% agreed with the opinion, 6% opposed it) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Opinion of VMPA participants about the respectful tone and reasoned speech maintained during discussions, percentage.



Source: Third survey of VMPA participants (N=32) conducted by evaluators.

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It is true that **there were some sharper episodes of discussion, and differences of opinion were considered by the participants themselves as an advantage that did not change the overall atmosphere, and disagreement was not feared.** It was argued that during disputes, thanks to those who are not afraid to disagree, better, more targeted, higher-quality, and more considered decisions are born.

*"[About how they would generally assess the tone of the discussion, - author's note] More definitely, more respectful and constructive than, let's say, destructive. Maybe there were a couple of participants who were very questioning... Let's say, someone raised questions, said "no". But after going deeper and digesting everything a little bit now, let's say, it was still that way, and then it was even a little bit visible that it was good, because they rejected questions that were essentially not related to the main topic. That's exactly what they wanted to maintain that backbone more. That's why everything is good, in that sense, we also need such people. People who can say*

*"yes" . because if we [agreed with everything, - author's note] we would perhaps have expanded even further and become even more "We didn't have time for everything then, those last days there, so it was quite good here. So, I think that the destructiveness was really in place. And in general, everything was constructive and quite respectful there."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

*"I call it 'live dialogue.' That's good. Unanimity is not. That's live dialogue. A debate, friendly, to reach a consensus, a solution, not to offend anyone. The more vivid the discussion, the better the solution."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

**The prevalence of a productive, constructive atmosphere is attributed to the characteristics of the participants themselves –**

It was considered in the interview that the Assembly, by its very nature, and given the intended method, gathered people who knew how to discuss and reach an agreement.

*"[I]f you were a person who couldn't work with others, couldn't diplomatically express your opinion and listen to others, you probably wouldn't even go to such an event, because you have to understand in principle that it will be working with people and you will have to be quite diplomatic in this place. Therefore, although it was difficult for me, in principle I managed to follow those rules with all the people I had to work with in very different groups. Communication was really smooth, there were different people with different temperaments, but somehow we managed to talk to each other, we managed to make everyone heard."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

It was also noted that the discussions were also facilitated by the mutual understanding of the participants, the ability to "put themselves in someone else's shoes", to look at the situation from the outside. It was noted that **the common foundation laid during the first Assembly learning sessions also helped** in this - the presentations, oriented towards the direction of the Assembly's question (promoting specific mobility methods), outlined a common context, which was considered to be able to dampen more acute personal positions.

*"[G]enerally speaking, there are still friends and family who live in other neighborhoods. So I think we need to look at this globally, not just looking at our own backyard, but also getting along with the environment, so to speak."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

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*"I think those introductory themes were all directed that way, it dampens the ardor."*

Interview with expert No. 1 of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly, January 28, 2026.

In creating a constructive, productive atmosphere, the active work of the facilitators was noticed and highly appreciated by the participants, **as well as the rules that encouraged and helped maintain a reasoned, respectful discussion.**

*"I will repeat that the organizers should receive huge compliments. Because all of this was controlled. Because it is inevitable, when there are such a mass of people, it is inevitable that someone will be dissatisfied with something, or something will be, the tone of the response and similar things. <...> We were united very clearly by the form, the rules, and the goal, so we all somehow became unified."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

On the other hand, during the interview, **a participant was also interviewed** who described the rules and the generally polite atmosphere **as too restrictive, preventing them from** speaking out more sharply and sincerely, thus harming the discussion itself. In this participant's opinion, the participants' sharp expression was somewhat suppressed and constrained by outsiders who participated in the Assembly process (although other participants noted that they did not feel any discomfort or pressure because of this).

*"[about the first meeting with JUDAS, - author's note] Then there was some kind of gap for questions and suddenly, what happened? Everyone became like they were caught and were afraid to ask something, because if you ask something more harshly, it seems like you are attacking that person. But no, that's not the point. If I disagree with something, then I disagree. And his opinion is not binding on me in any way <...> many people immediately during the first meeting, when they came and said that yes, I came here because of this and that, that I don't like that this and that is being done in Vilnius, and all that disappeared. And then everyone is so good, well-mannered, so afraid to say a word, so you ask such an aggressive question and you don't know what you are going to be accused of, that you are trying, I don't know, to cause some kind of conflict, or something like that? <...> I think that, well, maybe there wouldn't be a conflict, of course, but you are like you label yourself as such a negative person, and how to communicate with you then"; "[about the deliberation process, – author's note] If there is a discussion, arguments, then that is natural. If you are going towards something, some truth. And here there were no arguments, nor were there discussions in principle. Well, I say, so, so, everything is so shallow, so calm, quiet and that's it. T: And why did it happen like I: It seems to me that the imposition was just like this: you have to act like this, you want to say something - raise your hand. Good afternoon, I'm in first grade again. One person is talking, the others don't interrupt? Well, OK, I might agree with that, but there's no such thing... Well, because here are emotions, well, it's still your opinion, it's your emotions, and emotions, well, they're not always like that, that's shallow, calm, like tea in a cup. So it turns out that if you push too hard, then somehow, you immediately get really angry, something's wrong with you. <...> Well, yes, there should be some general rules of behavior, but when they push too hard, then that also plays a role. <...> Maybe not so much [freedom in small groups, - author's note], because there were always those observers around, some organizers, some supervisors, and so on. And still, it seems to me, some people still tried to adjust their behavior somewhat, let's say like this."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

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*"<...> it's great that there were such professional facilitators, the volunteers were also great, and there was absolutely no push from all the observers and the like."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

For one reason or another, the absolute **majority – 82 percent – of the participants in the VMPA did not notice conflict situations arising due to different opinions or views** (data from the survey of participants in the second Assembly). One in ten (9 percent) noticed conflict situations, and the same number (9 percent) were undecided on how to answer the question.

*"<...> I didn't notice that people would discuss it so much that something would break, that they would defend their opinion there to the last. No, I didn't see that."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

On the other hand, those who noticed conflict situations also noted that they were **effectively managed** thanks to the active work of the facilitators, the methods found to "release emotions" and the clearly outlined rules. Thus, during the VMPA, it was possible to ensure a constructive, reasoned discussion, in which many participants felt able to speak out, discuss, and disagree boldly (the data discussed when talking about the inclusiveness of deliberations), and the conflict situations that arose were effectively managed.

*"Maybe there were just a couple of [more heated moments of discussion, more tense situations, - author's note].*

*"One was inside the group, the other was more public, but the moderators, let's say the facilitators, moderated it so that it didn't come to a fight. In that sense, there was no shouting, no exits, the facilitators drew the boundaries quite clearly and allowed the participants to discuss and express their emotions, which is also quite good, because if, say, someone wanted to express their opinion, and the facilitators immediately didn't even allow them to raise their voice, then perhaps those boundaries would be too low. So, I think that no one crossed the boundaries in principle, the facilitators did their job well."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

### **3.2.3. Communication with participants and commitment to participate**

This section analyses **the communication and retention of participants by the VMPA organisers**. It assesses the extent to which sufficient accountability and feedback was provided to participants by the organisers and the extent to which participants maintained their ongoing participation. The section draws on interviews with various VMPA stakeholders, the results of surveys of Assembly participants and document analysis.

**One of the organizers** was responsible for communication with participants both before and during the VMPA - a representative of the project implementer, who also took care of logistical issues, a set of training materials for participants, coordination of facilitators, and also performed the function of a facilitator herself.

Despite her many responsibilities, she paid a lot of attention to communication with participants - starting with personal phone calls to each participant before the Assembly, discussing their future participation, and during the Assembly, regularly sending informational emails-reminders about upcoming Assembly sessions, their content, program, and relevant practical aspects.

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(for those who do not use e-mail, this information was transmitted by telephone calls, printing out the necessary materials), as well as consulting participants when needed. Special

**An internal communication plan had not been prepared, but** the project implementer's representative **had prepared a certain structure**, which stipulated when and what emails would be sent to participants. It is true that this structure quickly encountered challenges - for example, after the Assembly sessions, there was a desire to share presentations, but the speakers did not always send them promptly, which also led to delays in internal communication messages.

**After the Assembly ended**, after the VMPA recommendations were handed over to the Vilnius City Municipality, **communication with the participants ceased**<sup>130</sup>. Although during the last sessions of the Assembly, the organizers carefully collected the contacts of participants who wanted to continue to be informed about the process (in accordance with the GDPR regulations, they hesitated to send messages to all participants further), however, after the representative of the project implementer responsible for communication with the participants finished her work together with the closing event, **the responsibility for further communication with the participants remained undefined, and the municipality representatives lacked the time resources for this** (after the Assembly ended, they also had to return to other tasks). So, for example, the VMPA participants were not individually informed that the first municipal VMPA report with a list of recommendations had been published. However, as the municipality has the relevant contacts of the participants, there is a possibility that they will still be informed in the future.

**The participants themselves expressed their expectation to continue to be informed about news related to the recommendations of the VMPA**, basing such a desire on their interest in the further fate of the recommendations, and their interest in how the written ideas, which they "personally touched", would be responded to<sup>131</sup>. Some raised the idea and expressed their wish to be included in a certain "Assembly alumni network", which would not only be informed about the results of the VMPA and the further progress of the implementation of the recommendations, but could also be used in other related activities, for example, mobilized during future citizens' assemblies to share their experiences, help future participants "get started", possibly improve the recommendations, etc.<sup>132</sup> Therefore, while strengthening positive practices of citizen engagement and accountability, it would be relevant and meaningful to respond to these communicative needs of the participants after the Assembly.

Participants rated the communication with the organizers during the Assembly particularly positively. In the second **VMPA participant survey, 27 percent rated the organizers' accessibility and quality of communication as good, and the remaining 73 percent rated the organizers' assistance before and during the Assembly meetings as very good. 24 percent rated the clarity and accessibility of the information provided related to participation in the Assembly as good, and 76 percent rated the information provided as very good** (there were no negative or neutral assessments in either direction). There was no shortage of praise during the interview either – **the accessibility of the organizers, the completeness of the communication and information provided, regularity, usefulness, timeliness of submission, various channels (e-mail, telephone) and languages, as well as the general attention and care felt in the organizers' communication, were noted and appreciated.**

<sup>130</sup> Based on the latest interviews conducted in early March 2026.

<sup>131</sup> For example, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 11, February 10, 2026.

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*"In principle, all the information was really very, very, very, very, we received long letters with all the information, with handouts, to read before, to read after. Everything was later put into a system so that we could return to the same information that we wrote down and that they, the facilitators, collected. In this place, I don't know, 100 out of 100, in that sense, the work was done very, very, very strongly. It was also taken into account that, for example, the information would be provided as early as possible, and not the day before, because everything took place on Saturdays and several times the information was provided on Friday evening. Well, with a small child, it's a bit of a hassle to get acquainted with the information, but later the letters were sent in advance. I say, everything in detail, clearly, in detail, and in two languages, because they sent it to everyone at the same time, with the entire agenda down to the minute, where we would go, what we would do, when we would have lunch, where we would go. Well, in a word, "A very, very strong job was done in this place."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 8, January 30, 2026.

*"It was good, really well organized. Certain nuances were well prepared, so much so, such physical organization, presentation of material, communication, then the materials, that communication after the Assembly [sessions, - author's note] - well, these are only positive emotions."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 20, March 7, 2026.

*"Since I am naturally very organized in life and work, planning and liking clear instructions, I am very picky in this area, but when it comes to organizing the assembly, everything was really very, very simple. The dates were set everywhere, it was explained everywhere what would happen when, at what stage, and how to contact them. I really have no complaints here at all, I liked it and, if I think about other age groups, and how much I communicated with the participants, who are older people,*

*"They don't use the internet, so everything was convenient and clearly laid out for them. It seems to me that a great effort was made in this place, taking the best examples, probably from what was visited."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

*"There were no complaints. I think Lithuanians are good at complaining, but they know how to complain and are fans of it, so there would be complaints. There was something about a car, that they couldn't park a car (a car!), they didn't get a permit, there was such a complaint from one person. That's the only one. They would have said that they couldn't find it or something, but otherwise everything was very... That was the attention - three reminders, maybe by letter and phone call, Gabrielė took great care of it. <...> about registration, about consent, wow, it could be - I would write 11, 10 with a plus, in one word."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 4, October 2, 2025.

Accordingly, during the Assembly (in the second survey of VMPA participants) , **76 percent of participants completely agreed, and 24 percent rather agreed, that they were sufficiently informed about the course of the Assembly and its main stages.** Among those who assessed their awareness more critically at the beginning of the Assembly, their sense **of uncertainty and lack of a broader, clearer vision of the entire future process** were noted (more on this in subsection 3.2.2).

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*"I don't know what they expect from this [event, – author's note], for example. On the first day, when there was only a presentation, of course, they didn't expect anything – it was just a presentation of their ideas, but on the first day, when, let's say, we started working for real, it wasn't clear what to expect. Well, okay, we learned small things, discussed them in groups, but what is the real result of that? For me now, I won't say that it's completely [clear, – author's note], maybe something will become clear at the end of this Assembly, but for now it's like a black box."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, September 29, 2025.

**After the assembly, the participants as a group felt informed about the next steps, but somewhat less.** The responses to the third VMPA participant survey show less certainty, a third of the participants (31%) did not have a clear position, but **the majority – 66% –** agreed with the survey statement **"I know how the recommendations prepared during the Assembly will be used in the future"** (44% chose the answer "rather agree", 22% – "completely agree"). The path of future recommendations was not very clear for 3% of respondents (the answer "rather disagree"). Along with knowledge and anticipation of the process, a **disposition to patiently and understandingly wait for the results was also observed.**

*"<...> we'll see next year. Well, now the next year has already come, but it's just the beginning. So we'll see how our recommendations will be met. <...> Already now, as far as I know, it's a bit late, because there was, it was somehow that last year, as if there should have been something, but it was postponed to the beginning of this year, but, as far as I know, already in March there should already be some initial ones, what it might be possible to try to implement, what it might really implement and what... well, we'll see, what to reject, where there are no conditions, perhaps financial, perhaps it responds to certain needs in a very narrow group. And so on. We have to wait for now. But anyway, it's clear that those stages are initial, when, what, how."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

As observed in the organization of other citizens' assemblies, communication with participants is related to the participants' felt commitment to participate and, therefore, to **the retention of participants** in the Assembly process<sup>133</sup>. In the case of VMPA, as already reviewed in Section 1.1, the largest dropout of selected Vilnius residents occurred at the very beginning, even before the first meeting of the Assembly: out of 54 selected by lottery 43 people agreed to participate in the Assembly, and later 39 Vilnius residents participated in at least one session of the Assembly. Of these, 17 managed to attend all five meetings, 10 - four, and the remaining 12 missed from 2 to 4 Assembly sessions.

Those **who dropped out even before the Assembly began** justified their future absence by unfavorable **life circumstances** that prevented them from participating on the relevant days of the Assembly, **by an excessive commitment that they had not understood** in advance, or **by their insufficient capabilities**. There were also those who registered not with the intention of actually participating, but **in order to check** whether they would actually be invited. Finally, several participants informed that they would participate, but later never showed up<sup>134</sup>.

<sup>133</sup> Redman, K., Lyn Carson (2022). How to Recruit Participants for Citizens' Assemblies. <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RD-Note-Recruitment.pdf>

<sup>134</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer no. 2, 2025. September 30, interview with organizer no. 1 of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly, September 25, 2025.

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*"I would have selected even more, because 10 people actually dropped out, we called them and explained the reasons why they ultimately didn't agree - someone's plans changed, someone said they just registered to see if they would win (maybe they didn't take it very seriously), some were scared by the length of the process - they misunderstood, thinking that one day here, and five Saturdays here seemed too long. Those reasons are various."*

*There were seniors who found it too difficult to participate in such a process. There were also a couple of people with disabilities who were selected <...> but maybe also because of their health, because of the whole process, they also refused. <...>."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

It is likely that the participation of some of those who were selected but did not participate due to the inconvenient timing of the Assembly sessions may have been influenced by **the late start of the communication process with the selected participants**: letters confirming the selection to participate in the Assembly and invitations to attend were sent two weeks before the first meeting (getting to know each other), personal calls began on the day the letters were sent and ended a week and a half before the first meeting. This start date of communication was determined by the end of the selection procedure – after the latter ended, communication started within a couple of days<sup>135</sup>. Therefore, in the future, when organizing citizens' assemblies, **it would be extremely beneficial to carry out the selection procedure earlier**, thus creating opportunities to inform the selected participants earlier, invite them, accordingly giving them more opportunities to adapt, adjust their plans, as well as leaving time after the initial wave of registrations for a new *lottery* to fill in the missing socio-demographic groups (or in advance, during the first selection, immediately prepare a reserve list of participants, stratified according to relevant socio-demographic groups).

Among the **reasons for the departure of participants who later dropped out, during the Assembly, various life circumstances** (work, illness, travel, family troubles, etc.)

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The organizers revealed during the interview that the VMPA wanted to create as many opportunities as possible for participants to get involved, help, **and facilitate participation in more difficult situations for them**, for example, by providing a nanny for young children or a social worker for relatives. However, **there was a lack of funds for such a purpose**, so the corresponding assistance opportunity remained uncommunicated more widely, offered only when the organizers thought it might be relevant for the participant (by the way, even then it was not used anyway; more on this in subsection 3.1.4). In future assemblies, in order to ensure the participation of the selected ones, it is necessary to foresee in advance the resources for providing assistance, creating more favorable conditions for specific groups of people who face certain circumstances that make participation difficult.

*"We didn't secure anything at all - neither a social worker nor a nanny. Because there were definitely mothers there with their children. Well, the husband looked after them, which was great <...>. We offered social workers as well <...> I think it was, I think it wasn't clearly communicated that there was such a possibility that we could. We were more concerned about the lack of finances, it's all about the lack of finances, so we look at what is needed individually."*

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

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Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

On the other hand, **at least one participant also withdrew due to frustration with the process, openly expressing suspicions of manipulation**, that the Assembly had already “let go” of decisions, leaving participants in the process with only a decorative function. The organizers regretted that this participant withdrew early, having participated only in the learning part of the Assembly, and therefore not having had the opportunity to participate in the sessions dedicated to deliberation and formulation of recommendations and, accordingly, possibly change his opinion<sup>137</sup>. There were also several participants **who did not clearly provide the organizers with the reasons for their inconsistent participation** – in these cases, the organizers were left to wonder: *“I am simply interested in the question of why some people participated irresponsibly “at all”* <sup>138</sup>.

The interviews **with those who participated** in the Assembly (consistently according to their capabilities) reveal **a sense of commitment and responsibility, which was created or strengthened**, on the one hand, by **the good organization of the process**, and on the other hand, by **the attention paid by the organizers**, which was also particularly felt through internal communication. Some interviews clearly reveal how these factors not only encouraged the evaluation of the organizers' efforts, but also created a broader perception that it is the participants who are most important in the Assembly process and, accordingly, strengthened the previously existing or newly created commitment to the process and responsibility for its results. In this context, other, withdrawn, participants in the process are viewed critically by their remaining colleagues - their actions are seen as a certain irresponsibility, strange and incomprehensible.

*“<...> on the second day, it really became clear to me that, after all, those people who organized this thing, in my opinion, must have put in a lot of energy and a lot of work to organize this thing. Because so far, perhaps at certain moments, it's all going quite well, that they put in a lot of work and energy. And I realized that for all that, in the event [event, – author's note], which is happening, we – those 55 or 47 people – become, in principle, the main nail in the coffin of the whole thing, that everything is happening around us and that they are trying to cram as much information into our heads as possible. We actually become the center of the whole process. From what, from those two factors, such a sense of responsibility arose.*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 2, October 8, 2025.

*“All the main characters, as they say, worked very well - very, very, very attentively. Very clearly, expressively, and it was very easy to delve into it, very much.”*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 14, February 24, 2026.

*“And then, when it came, the fateful day came, how can I say, when it was necessary to confirm registration, whether you will participate or not, simply everyone must respect the work of other people, and from that side, from that perspective, it was, for me, I simply saw that a really big job had been done, a lot of time had been spent, and so on. So, if I promised, I will come.”*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 20, March 7, 2026.

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<sup>137</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

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*"I can really see how much effort went into this, and I really appreciate the time and all the work that the organizers and facilitators put in. In my job, I also work with people, in different teams, I deal with communication, but I can't even imagine how difficult it is for them, because at work you still work with the same people at some point, and here - completely strangers, a completely new process, a new experience. You can make any assumptions. You can create your own expectations and plans.*

*Everything will be destroyed in the most unexpected way. So, really, really impressive work was done every day, how everything was organized. They [the organizers, - author's note] really managed it perfectly and we got a real result. <...> How many, 28 participants who reached the final, really felt it.*

*I don't know why others missed all of this. It's very sad to me because I think if you're committed to this and it's really important to the city, then why did you decide to ignore this opportunity that you had? It's strange to me. For example, I really can't understand how you expect to change the life of your city if you don't do this? How would your interests be heard and possibly implemented?"*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 6, December 17, 2025.

The interview also reveals that some participants felt a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to the process, linking their role and the Assembly's outcomes not only to the specific topic of mobility and its recommendations, but also to the broader context of a democratic state. There was concern and effort to ensure that this first VMPPA would achieve high-quality, implementable outcomes – recommendations that would be more likely to be implemented and, accordingly, create a positive image of the Assembly as a new democratic institute, a precedent for the future.

*"This is the first assembly in this city. Yes, this is the first experience, and if we want to create some kind of new democratic institution, the first attempt should be successful. We should achieve results and they should be positive. This would help to ensure trust in such processes, because if these recommendations are not included in the plans, when you try to organize the next assembly, all the people will see the results of the previous assembly, and especially if they are not implemented, if they are not taken into account, then who will want to participate in the next assembly? <...> one of the important things for me was to try to formulate these recommendations in a way that they are realistic, really implementable, taking into account that every government is concerned with financial issues and is trying to find a solution that will have a greater impact at a lower cost."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 6, December 17, 2025.

As a separate motivational measure for participation, it would be appropriate to discuss the remuneration offered to Assembly participants – compensation equal to 50 EUR per session of the Assembly. Although, according to the survey data, the remuneration offered to Assembly participants was not motivating (we recall that 21% indicated it as an important or rather important factor in deciding to participate, 45% indicated it as unimportant or rather unimportant), the majority of participants agreed that people randomly selected to participate in citizens' assemblies, such as the one in Vilnius, should receive remuneration for their work in the citizens' assembly.

**At the beginning of the assembly, 55% of participants saw such a need for reward, and at the end – 66% of participants.**

During both waves of the survey, there was not a single participant who would completely disagree with the need for remuneration, i.e., would claim that remuneration is not really needed (18 percent were more likely to disagree with the payment of remuneration), and at the individual level, **during the Assembly, they changed their opinion to a more favorable side on the issue of remuneration**

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**45 percent of participants<sup>139</sup>** (by comparison, only 10 percent became more skeptical about the need for remuneration, while the remaining 45 percent did not change their opinion). Thus, the survey results indicate that, overall, remuneration was viewed as necessary by Assembly participants and was seen as increasingly important over time.

The interview material also reveals that **although the remuneration was not the main reason for the participants to decide to participate** – for example, some participants did not even know about the remuneration in advance, and upon learning about it, they refused or asked to donate this remuneration instead – **nevertheless, over time, some participants accepted the remuneration as fair compensation for the long-term commitment and the time allocated** (emphasizing that five full-day Saturday meetings are still a lot). This also explains the change in opinion of almost half of the Assembly participants seen in the surveys, when the need for remuneration (abstractly speaking about citizens' assemblies) began to be viewed more favorably.

*"It seems that it didn't motivate me, nor did the money really motivate me. Some people refused, there was at least one [who, - author's note] said "I want to donate to Ukraine, as much as possible". I said, "You know, I don't know", and then I almost said - "Let them transfer the money to you, and you can donate". Well, there were some of them, of course."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

*"I don't think the reward is even up to that level. It's a nice bonus, but I really want to say that I don't care about the financial reward for those days at all. If I hadn't gotten it... Because now I only had this budget for gifts, Christmas, friends and stuff - thank you for that. But I want to provide those results to people, so for me it's not a paycheck: I did it because I wanted to do it. It's not because I was paid, given food or anything else, and I really hope that other people had the same reason to participate as I did."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 6, December 17, 2025.

*"On the one hand, if a person goes for the money, then they will go for the money. But, for example, I didn't even know about this when I decided and registered, and passed, everything else. It wasn't a fundamental thing for me that someone was very... But, since they paid, they paid. At first, I wanted to transfer some dogs to the shelter, but then somehow... Because it takes a lot of time, that's a fact. For example, Saturday was completely - it's like the sixth working day there."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

On the other hand, it seems that the reward as **compensation helped to expand the circle of Assembly participants beyond the most active, most interested and able to devote** a significant amount of time to work in the Assembly. Volunteers who worked on the registration of participants and the documentation required for the reward note that there were also participants who were more interested in the compensation, especially from less fortunate socio-economic groups. So in this sense, the reward-compensation offered for participation in the Assembly helped to ensure the representation of various socio-economic groups, as well as to "attract" less active citizens.

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<sup>139</sup> The 10 percent change at the group level somewhat masks the changes at the individual level, where participants were less likely to choose the "I tend to disagree" option (with need for reward), more often "completely agree", etc.

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*"But still, in order to get paid, they had to sign, meaning, upon arrival and departure. There were those who asked, 'What if I don't stay there all day, I leave an hour [earlier, - author's note], will I get paid?'" There were apparently also those who [came] for the reward, apparently there was a factor and reward. Because still, well, maybe for some groups fifty euros is really a lot, a lot of money. So I would say that, apparently, there were those, but the most active ones, I would think, for them, even if it were free - they would have gone. There were certainly those."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly volunteer No. 3, January 23, 2026.

*"Nobody talked about it, I certainly didn't hear anyone say, 'I came [for the reward, - author's note]'. Of course, well, we said that when you leave, you have to register again, to stay the whole day, well, to receive that financial reward. So, well, how can I say, to confirm 100 percent that it's really for that [reward, - author's note], it's not, but well, from such a general observation, such participation, in my opinion, should be voluntary and not financially motivating. Well, but otherwise you probably won't attract people. Well, a target group was formed in such ways. Because, I say, enthusiasts from society would come there, for example, and now how do you get the message out of those people who are not so, for example, active there. That's a way to simply lure them there materially. Well, there's not a lot here [the proposed amount, - author's note]. 'For me, as a working person, it's not much, but if it's a pensioner, then for him, it's his motivation to come, those fifty euros. It's not that little.'"*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly volunteer No. 4, February 26, 2026.

### 3.2.4. Communication with the public

This subsection analyses the external **communication of the VMPA** and assesses the extent to which accountability and dissemination of information about the Assembly in the public have been ensured (the responsibility for external communication and the communication plan, the availability of information about the Assembly, the awareness of Vilnius city residents about the Assembly being organized). It is based on interviews with VMPA stakeholders, data from surveys of Assembly participants and representative Vilnius city residents, as well as publicly available sources.

**The external communication of the VMPA was carried out by the Vilnius City Municipality Communication Department, with the assistance of a communication agency**, with which it has a broader contract (not only covering the publicity of the Assembly). The communication plan, public messages, and slogans were **coordinated with the Assembly organizers**, who were pleased with the professional assistance used for communication with the public and emphasized that it was precisely the decision to transfer communication into the hands of professionals that allowed for the creation of a broad, diverse, yet unified, attractive style of communication with the public campaign. The organizers assessed it as following the good examples of other assemblies, revealing the priority given to the future Assembly in the municipality's communication.

(especially before the VMPA begins) <sup>140</sup>

Preparations for VMPA's external communication began in advance - based on the organizers' interview materials, **the first version of the communication plan was prepared at the beginning of the year**. Although specific public

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<sup>140</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer no. 2, 2025 September 30.

There had been presentations about citizens' assemblies in general and about specific plans to organize a citizens' assembly in Vilnius in various media outlets earlier<sup>141</sup>, and active public dissemination of messages began in the summer of 2025, at the beginning of August, when the first round of the Assembly participants began.

for the selection stage, when letters of invitations to register were sent to various addresses in Vilnius city (more about selection 1.1 and 3.1.4). During this publicity stage before the Assembly, outdoor posters informing about the VMPA and the selection for it were displayed in Vilnius city, an informational video was created and shown on public transport, the Assembly coordinator and the Vilnius city mayor participated in various radio and television shows, podcasts, information was published on the websites of Vilnius city municipality, JUDU and their social media accounts, press releases were distributed, and advertising was spread on social media. A separate page presenting it in detail was created for the Assembly and was constantly updated during the Assembly (and less often after it ended) on the Vilnius city municipality platform *pasitarkime.vilnius.lt*. Therefore, **communication with the public before the Assembly was characterized by a fairly wide dissemination and a variety of information dissemination channels used**, which, on the one hand, was supposed to help legitimize the invitations received by residents, attract attention and encourage them to register to participate, and on the other hand, to inform a wider circle of citizens and Lithuanian residents in general about the new form of citizen engagement used by the municipality.

**During the Assembly, the number of new messages to the public decreased significantly** – this was likely largely influenced by the choice not to disclose the identities of the VMPA participants during the Assembly process, thus protecting them from possible external pressure. **After the Assembly**, the Vilnius City Municipality and JUDU **announced the VMPA result – recommendations and their transmission** – informative messages and a report on the recommendations on the website, social networks, press releases were distributed, and later a video telling more about the Assembly experience was also distributed<sup>142</sup>, **however, the scale and intensity of the dissemination did not match that seen before the Assembly.**

The news about citizens' assemblies in general and the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly **was also purposefully disseminated to different stakeholders during various meetings and events** – Vilnius City Council, elders, the association of elders, networks of architecture professionals, facilitators, etc.<sup>143</sup> Through messages related to the Assembly on their **personal social networks** shared by the organizers of the Assembly and others involved in it.

Finally, **the inclusion of observers** in the Assembly should also be considered as another form of information dissemination. Various Assembly observers participated in all sessions and observed the course of the process, but they were not granted the right to engage in discussions – both in the discussion and deliberation of the material and the formulation of recommendations, leaving the main role to the participants themselves, and in limiting the possible influence of observers on the decisions made by the participants. By including observers, the organizers of the VMPA **sought to ensure the transparency of the process, openness and the opportunity for wider groups of society to become more closely acquainted with the Assembly process, enabling them to spread the message about the Assembly further**<sup>144</sup>. Since the VMPA is the first citizens' assembly of this scale in Lithuania, it is felt that

<sup>141</sup> For example, <https://www.lrt.lt/radioteka/irasas/2000380249/pileciu-asambleja-vilniuje?srsId=AfmBOorpWFIHR1h-NA3KRhXbrHgsheZEnYr02QKDL83W3WOAvkwqOSb>.

<sup>142</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aITpcJea6i0&t=33s>

<sup>143</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

<sup>144</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025b), p.8; Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, 17 February 2026.

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The interest can be considerable. And indeed, throughout the Assembly, representatives from non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, local communities, Lithuanian and foreign universities, the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Social Security and Labor of the Republic of Lithuania, the Government Chancellery, the Vilnius City Municipality Council and Administration came to observe it<sup>145</sup>.

Representatives of NARA (a non-governmental organization uniting journalists and media professionals) **were involved with exclusive rights as permanent observers of the VMPA**, having prepared a detailed publication about the Assembly by prior agreement with the Assembly organizers (the latter was published after the Assembly ended<sup>146</sup>). **Other media representatives were not invited to and did not participate in the working sessions of the Assembly.** This decision was justified by the **protection of participants from external pressure** and the desire for them to represent their own interests and the interests of their random group, and not the positions of another interested party that might want to influence them. Thus, for example, until the end of the Assembly, the faces of its participants were strictly not made public, even in the material provided on the Assembly website itself. True, the decision was viewed ambiguously - for example, according to one of the facilitators, the issue of the Assembly was not particularly sensitive, so such closure was perhaps a bit excessive - more publicity was desired, to celebrate the smooth, well-organized process. During the interview in March, the expectation was expressed that communication about the Assembly would further intensify<sup>147</sup>.

There were also concerns about **the impact on the freedom and openness of participants' deliberations when inviting observers.** There were also hesitant, constantly changing external observers on the organizing team.

The benefits created for the Assembly outweigh the possible inconveniences for the participants and do not restrict them too much. Faced with the experience of the first sessions, when some observers actively sought to join the process, it was decided to organize preliminary introductory meetings with the observers, which not only introduced them to the broader context and course of the Assembly, but also clearly outlined the rules of participation in observing, including silence and respect, no communication with the participants, and confidentiality until the end of the Assembly (until that time, they were asked to refrain from public comments on the content of the recommendations formed by the Assembly, and to treat other information responsibly, especially if it relates to the identities and personal opinions of the participants). Thus, **although the observers were included in order to achieve both transparency and wider dissemination of information, in practice their participation responded more to the first direction (transparency, openness), and the provision of confidentiality** (until the end of the Assembly process) **limited the dissemination of information about the Assembly** to smaller groups, the closest environment of the participating observers.

*"<...> sometimes it seems to me that while there are observers, are there completely open participants? Another question. Then they don't see anymore, <...> but at first you feel such discomfort when there is someone here. <...> who change very much."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

*"Maybe it was that somehow the facilitator didn't really like it when the observers talked, well, whispered, and then somehow they kept saying that they [the observers, - author's note] needed to be told, well, that they needed to be told the rules more strictly, and then the idea came to me, maybe that*

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<sup>145</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2025b), pp. 8-9.

<sup>146</sup> Bagdonaitė, M. *Exercise of the Democratic Muscle* (2026 04 28), <https://nara.lt/lt/articles-lt/demokratinio-raumens-manksta>

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 2, March 27, 2026.

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*we can introduce them [to the rules, - author's note]. And then additional reasons arose, that well, they don't know what an assembly is - everything seems clear to us all here, but for them it's probably their first time and they're already in some kind of process, in the middle, and don't know what happened before that, so the idea just came up that we can introduce a little more."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

The observers themselves responded very positively to the briefing<sup>148</sup>, noting that not only the prior training was useful, but also the subsequent repeated reminders of the role and its limitations during the Assembly sessions, because being from related fields, interested in the topic under discussion, naturally gave rise to the desire to join the inclusively facilitated process.

*"I liked that he kept reminding me [of the rules, - author's note], because I really think that maybe when you come from that activism - that energy draws you in and you want to start discussing something too. That's really [helped me], - author's note] kept reminding me that everything was okay, that I should sit still. Because I'm really saying that, the energy was somehow very engaging. I mean, there was such anxiety at first, but then, during those live explanation sessions, everything became very clear."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, February 27, 2026.

Judging from the participants' own responses, **the Assembly participants' group reacted to the observers in a variety of ways** – as already noted in subsection 3.2.2, some participants were constrained by the observers, but others emphasized that they did not feel any pressure<sup>149</sup>. Those who were disturbed and hindered by the observers emphasized the inattention of some observers and the failure to show sufficient interest in the process as one of the most annoying things.

*"I saw someone reading a book, I don't know. What are you watching if you're reading a book <...>? Still, that presence, it influences, no matter what, the more people in the hall. There was one moment, I don't remember which meeting it was, for some reason there were so many of those observers in that hall and they were talking to each other so freely that none of us could hear each other. I don't know - came to talk. Yes, I heard about your work, your work, your travels, and everything else.*  
*"Well, I'm sorry..."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026."

When evaluating the entire array of information provided about the Assembly, it can be noted that **when communicating with the public about the Assembly, openness was indeed sought and it was largely achieved** - publicly (on the municipality website *pasitarkime.vilnius.lt* subpage, in reports) one can find both detailed information about the selection of Assembly participants, and most of the materials used in the Assembly itself (information brochure for participants, recordings or at least summaries of the presentations read by experts), as well as a detailed presentation of the Assembly's progress, all recommendations with voting statistics for them, in

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<sup>148</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Observer No. 2, February 27, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Observer No. 3, 2026 March 4th

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, 2026. March 4, open answer in the third survey of Assembly participants to the question "If you have additional observations about the Assembly, its organizational process, achieved results and your experience in the Assembly - we invite you to share them here", Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, 2026. March 2

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The composition of the team involved in the assembly and its responsibilities, and the plan for further steps after the VMPA. Perhaps the only aspect that is more difficult to find publicly is information about the Assembly's budget.

Having reviewed the dissemination of communication to the public and looking at the reception of this information, it should first be emphasized that, **by consensus of all interested parties of the Assembly, attention to the Assembly in the public sphere was perceived as an advantage, an aspiration.** Some participants even saw the publicity of the Assembly and its topic as the primary way of achieving the Assembly's goals - through public communication, changing the habits of motorists, **encouraging** - according to the formulation of the VMPA question - **people to choose public transport, walking or cycling more often.**

*"I still think that the press will write about it, and television news programs will probably also make it public somehow, I think. Yes, this is a very good question, the topic is very good. <...> Awareness is needed here... The Assembly must raise people's awareness where there are no traffic jams yet, I want to say that, ahead, to simply get ahead of those events, that evil through really such very intelligent statements, through nature, through air pollution, to raise awareness, through health - that it is harmful.*

*"We need to raise people's awareness."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 4, October 2, 2025."

According to other participants, the publicity of the Assembly would help **to destroy the negative attitudes of citizens towards government institutions, their closed-mindedness, lack of listening and disregard** for the opinions of residents, and would help **to build a relationship of trust** between residents and government institutions.

*"[I]t seems that in most societies there is such an attitude <...> these types of events, they are held more for, well, for the image, or not, for the eyes, and that they are not very, I don't know, influenced. That, well, participation in such events will not greatly influence any major decisions, will public opinion be responded to, will public opinion be heard, or not? That is simply such an attitude and it seems to me that it would be very fun to destroy it precisely through such events and through such, I don't know, repercussions, what happened after that event, what was implemented, how many people spoke up. So, that kind of publicity, I think, is very useful to show that we hear you, we listen to you and here are such things, and certain recommendations that were implemented, and which are important to us, because this is your city, isn't it? <...> Well, at least, I say that when I talk to friends who are certainly educated people, but they still have that kind of the provision that na va here in the word [event –*

*aut. post.] for the eyes, or not. I think it is quite useful to make that public, because now at least, I don't know, maybe there wasn't much talk about it, but it's just that such an Assembly took place, such results were obtained and that was adopted. It seems to me that there is really a lack of publicity for that."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 7, December 22, 2025.

However, as can be seen in the quote above, not all participants agreed that the communication aimed at achieving these goals and generally presenting the Assembly was sufficient. **The personal experiences of those involved in the Assembly in various roles were divided – for some, the Assembly's communication was visible, the information seemed sufficient, while others did not notice it at all.** It can be argued that the visibility of information, the notice of the message about the Assembly, **depended greatly on specific personal social networks** (on social media and beyond). It was observed that the information

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The Assembly was more widely known among groups more closely related to the Assembly's theme or form (e.g. climate change activists, those interested in citizen engagement, democratic innovations), but the VMPA was not particularly well known in the wider environment.

*"It was actually a lot of information, it was really about the Assembly itself, about the fact that such a  
It was organized in Vilnius for the first time, various social advertising and I saw it in the city and it kept popping up on LinkedIn.  
It was really a lot of information. I was very interested."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly volunteer No. 3, January 23, 2026.

*"Even people who are already involved in state affairs don't have much information. They were surprised that  
such a thing existed."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 13, February 24, 2026."

*R1: I really didn't know about this format, but that's probably because I don't work directly with it, although like local  
government, in any case, it works in the field of public governance, but it's not my direct field of activity and anyway,  
somewhere from the public space, from some social networks, I would have caught a message that here, here, now, this is  
happening <...>, on such and such issues, that here, this is the involvement of citizens, and that in the city where I live, it's  
definitely not. I found out from <name>'s letter that there was such a thing. I read it then, got acquainted with it and only then  
did it become known to me. <...> but also that kind of, let's say, as a resident of Vilnius City Municipality, even if I had wanted to,  
I probably wouldn't have figured out how to get involved, because, well, I'm reading something wrong, apparently,  
because I didn't read it, I didn't hear it. <...>*

*R2: Maybe because of that advertisement, too, in reaction. For me, it was just maybe <...> when I know what to see, that's when  
I saw those advertisements everywhere. It seemed that way to me, because both on public transport and with friends  
Facebook, and my friend, even acquaintances there knew, who were not related to this work. Well, since something is  
happening here, this one may have pleasantly surprised me."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 4, March 18, 2026.

*"<...> I'm in an information bubble, so that information reached me. But I can't say how it would reach an ordinary citizen here  
- I might even say, too little."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, February 27, 2026.

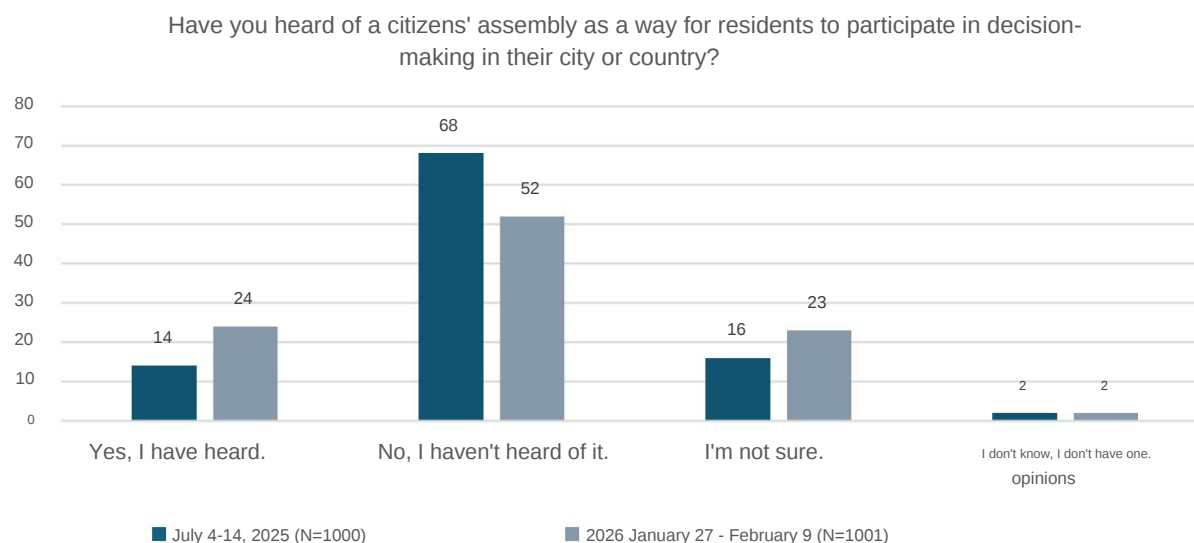
Looking at the representative data (Figure 4), when assessing the awareness of the Assembly, it is possible to conditionally rely on the data of two representative *omnibus* surveys of Vilnius city residents.

Even before the start of the broader information campaign about the upcoming Assembly and the selection for it, in early July 2025, 14 percent of Vilnius residents had heard of a citizens' assembly as a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making (at the beginning of the question, they were informed that Vilnius also intended to organize such a citizens' assembly in the autumn of that year). After the Assembly ended, a second survey conducted in January-February 2026 showed that **the awareness of citizens' assemblies as a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making had increased by ten percentage points** - 24 percent of Vilnius residents indicated that they had heard of such a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making.

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decision-making. The number of people who have never heard of citizens' assemblies has decreased even more – sixteen percentage points (respectively, the share of those who were not sure that they had heard about citizens' assemblies increased by another seven percentage points). These changes in the awareness of Vilnius city residents about citizens' assemblies (as a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making) **can be cautiously linked to the dissemination of information about the VMPA** - those who had heard about the VMPA could claim to know about citizens' assemblies as a way of decision-making, while other citizens' assemblies were not widely discussed in the Lithuanian public space during the six months in question<sup>150</sup>.

**Figure 4.** Awareness of citizens' assemblies as a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making, percent.



Source: Representative *omnibus* surveys of Vilnius city residents conducted by Norstat on July 4-14, 2025 (N=1000) and January 27-February 9, 2026 (N=1001). Full wording of the question: "A citizens' assembly is a tool for involving residents in decision-making. A representative group of residents, randomly selected, gets acquainted with the topic for at least 5 days, accompanied by independent experts, discusses it among themselves and formulates recommendations on the issue assigned to them for city or state leaders.

Such an assembly will/was held in Vilnius in the fall of 2025. The topic of the assembly: How to achieve that in Vilnius we would choose to travel by public transport, bicycle or on foot as often as possible, regardless of where we live? Have you heard about a citizens' assembly as a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making?

So, on the one hand, we can see a significant increase in the awareness of citizens' assemblies as a way for citizens to participate in city or national decision-making. On the other hand, the share of Vilnius city residents who have heard of them – a quarter – remains relatively limited.

Specifically, regarding the adoption of the VMPA and communication to the public about it in different

During the assembly stages, the material collected during the assessment reveals that **for the initial stage before Stakeholders did not have many complaints about the Assembly** – the information was sufficient or at least not lacking, although some participants shared that they did not receive enough information when registering for the Assembly.

<sup>150</sup> It is true that in the fall of 2025, the Cultural Assembly was often mentioned in the public sphere, but an exploratory search shows that it was not presented as a citizens' assembly in media sources.

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however, they had not noticed<sup>151</sup>, and some even discussed that they considered the letters-invitations to register signed by the mayor to be a fraud (the organizers tried to avoid this with a broad communication campaign against the Assembly, in addition to general information and increasing interest).

*"I heard such feedback from other participants that they thought maybe it was a scam. But, for example, somehow I personally didn't even notice the advertisements in the city, maybe there was too little advertising. In order for people not to think it was a scam, there was a bit of a lack of communication on that side."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

**However, the communications that reached the public during the Assembly sessions, and especially after them, The scope of the Assembly was assessed more critically.** The aforementioned **restriction of information** during the Assembly, although understandable, was assessed quite critically by representatives of various stakeholders of the Assembly. They pointed out that such a restriction **created a feeling of secrecy and, accordingly, distrust, and fueled suspicions that something might be hidden.** At that time, seeing up close how the VMPA process was taking place, one **wanted to rejoice in it (more broadly and publicly) , be proud of it, and** celebrate such an opportunity implemented by the city of Vilnius. It was noted with regret that **there was too little communication after the Assembly, especially knowing the scale of the event.** Especially considering the tense general political context, it was desired **to present the VMPA more widely as a positive, inspiring example.**

*"I understand why participants and observers were not allowed to share - so that their opinions would not be influenced by the people around them during the assembly. But it felt so secretive to me."*

*I wanted to be even more happy. I felt like I had to hide something somehow, so I said I was going to the municipality on Saturday to observe such a process about such a new democratic tool and [it sounded, – author's note] I don't really know, sketchy [suspiciously, - author's note] <...> whoever asked me – such immediate distrust... I would just like to say that "oh, it's really cool here! They've thought it out, they're engaging, they're taking care of it, the food is delicious, everyone is compensated". In that sense, well, I wanted to celebrate that we as a state can, we won such a project and the city has such an opportunity to simply celebrate that experiment! <...> You understand that everything here is, well, how cool it is, and when you can't talk about it, it seems like something is wrong. <...> People then imagine that something is going on here, some kind of money laundering or some kind of imitation. Maybe, it seems to me, Lithuanians just have a lot of that kind of post-Soviet, traumatic, or not, distrust. It's just an attempt to protect the participants <...> it could have even turned out the other way around <...> it could have caused some kind of distrust. <...> Knowing the scale of the event, there's really relatively little communication. Especially in the current political climate, it seems like maybe some kind of positive story would be cool, right? Maybe somehow inspiring? That inclusion..."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly observer No. 2, February 27, 2026.

Others who participated in the Assembly described the VMPA as "an untapped opportunity in terms of public relations" and emphasized that the public (so far) has not properly reflected (both in terms of the scale and content of communication) how valuable an experience it was.

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 10, February 4, 2026.

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*"I went with that idea and it never left me, that this is, unfortunately, nothing more than public relations. Which, by the way, again, in my opinion, were not properly used. <...> The initial attitude was when going to the congress that I was a public relations extra. In essence, after seeing that it had not been used so far, I did not give up on that idea <...>. But I was very surprised that at first there was silence about it, that it was supposedly impossible to influence us. At least, I heard such an idea. Oh, I mean, and then after that congress, such a message was heard somewhere - maybe in the media related to the city, or on the Internet in general, maybe through, I don't know, social networks somewhere. So, well, it was there, that there was a vote, someone commented and that's all. And that shows either, A, or that the message was dead - in the sense of an answer, a suggestion, a statement. Or, B, it showed, "that the message was not communicated to the public in a way that would make it understood how valuable this experience was."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

However, in addition to the relative inadequacy of communication with the public in the later periods of the Assembly, as mentioned by various representatives of the Assembly's stakeholders, it is also necessary to note that **there was a lack of interest in the topic of the VMPA from the media itself**. Although the Assembly organizers confirmed that media representatives were invited to the final event – the celebration of the transfer of recommendations – they did not attend the event. The subsequent Assembly process and its results were covered in articles and programs<sup>152</sup>, but, according to the impressions of the same Assembly participants, they did not generate sufficient awareness. Finally, **the low media interest**, despite the efforts made, **was treated by the organizers as normal in the case of citizens' assemblies**. One of the organizers emphasized that, as elsewhere, the media perhaps lacked dramatic, scandalous messages; it was not particularly attractive to cover a calm discussion.

*"<...> an attempt was made to extend a hand, but it wasn't necessarily taken from the other side, so... But I can't say exactly what was done badly from that communication side. This is probably because it doesn't seem to be a very relevant issue for journalists. Plus, as far as I know from other assemblies, the problem is usually that journalists are more interested in stories about where someone got into an argument, where something bad happened, where there was some drama, and here it was a calm discussion. Although it was a different form of democracy and a different model, there was neither a very big scandal nor a very big thing that they would be interested in reporting on. This is probably a classic problem with assembly communication."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

Taking into account a certain information "quarantine" during the Assembly itself, **a lot of attention and hopes of the parties involved in the Assembly** (organizers, facilitators, participants, observers) **were directed towards broader external communication of the VMPA after the Assembly**. The interview material shows that all

<sup>152</sup> For example, <https://vilniusfm.lt/vilniaus-ritmu-beatrice-umbrasaite-pilieciu-asambleja-budas-pazadinti-empatija/>, <https://www.lrt.lt/radioteka/irasas/2000583024/tramvajus-vilniuje-miestieciai-sostinei-pateike-siulymus-kaip-mazinti-automobiliu-skaiciu>, <https://madeinvilnius.lt/naujienos/miestas/susipazinkite-24-rekomendacijos-kurias-prieme-pirmoji-vilniaus-pilieciu-asambleja/>, <https://vilnius.lt/naujienos/baigesi-pirmoji-vilniaus-pilieciu-asambleja-parengtos-rekomendacijos-darnesniam-judejimui-mieste>, <https://juda.lt/miestui-perduotos-24-gyventoju-rekomendacijos-kaip-judeti-tvariau/>, <https://vilnius.lt/naujienos/baigesi-pirmoji-vilniaus-pilieciu-asambleja-parengtos-rekomendacijos-darnesniam-judejimui-mieste>, <https://diena.lt/naujienos/vilnius/miesto-pulsas/susipazinkite-24-rekomendacijos-kurias-prieme-pirmoji-vilniaus-pilieciu-asambleja-1734540>, <https://nara.lt/lt/articles-lt/demokratinio-raumens-manksta>, <https://madeinvilnius.lt/naujienos/miestas/paiskejo-ka-savivaldybe-darytara-vilniaus-pilieciu-asamblejos-24-rekomendacijas/>.

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Stakeholders tend to believe that **reports alone are not enough to make sense of the process and, in particular, to achieve its broader goals – to encourage citizen engagement, trust, and narrowing the gap between government and society.** Attention was also drawn to the fact that future publicity will not necessarily be beneficial – if the recommendations are perceived as insufficiently responded to, it may actually encourage disappointment and a wave of criticism.

In the further communication process, regular communication about the progress of the implementation of the recommendations becomes very important, while also obliging and constantly striving for it. Accordingly, employees responsible for the VMPA's communication with the public, assigned after the Assembly, and sufficient human resources are needed. In order to achieve the broader goals of the Assembly, related to the empowerment of citizens, building trust in government institutions, reducing the gap between government institutions and society, and strengthening democracy, the idea of one of the organizers to organize regular dialogue groups that support the implementation of the recommendations, as a kind of co-creation practices that bring about change, seems significant.

*"Now I am articulating retrospectively, that's what I see, <...> that there is [there is, - author's note] that barrier, let's say, that gap, when there is complete silence, because we know that there is an implementation stage already now. And then we know, formally there will be two reports there in March and December, two reports from you [evaluators, - author's note] and nothing else in between. One thing, no communication about what is being done, about the process, how those reports will be prepared, especially by municipalities. Well, even if a working group is formed or something like that. Second, it would be possible, it doesn't cost a lot of resources, to create dialogue groups. Finland - a very large, <...> mass event has already become, where people meet and talk, and at the same time, [in place of the municipality, - author's note] I would organize such circles of support every month, where anyone could, well, let's say, invite the same participants, people from the municipality, whoever could, and do it. Because, "Well, it seems to me that just taking on that standard formality, reports, is not healthy and probably in our social vacuum it doesn't work, so to speak, trust doesn't grow on it - that's how I would see it. Everything comes through those soft [gentle, - author's note] stages of co-creation, cooperation, and dialogue."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

### 3.3. Impact of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly

- *The Assembly's recommendations are generally assessed positively, their weaknesses include the large number and, to some extent, the lack of specificity of the recommendations, which may complicate the implementation process and provide broad interpretation options for those responsible for implementing the recommendations. The recommendations were presented to politicians, but they are not involved in the implementation, for which a group consisting of Vilnius City Municipality and JUDU employees is responsible. It is difficult to measure the specific impact of the recommendations on mobility policy, since some of them are closely related to the tasks of the Vilnius City Strategic Development Plan for 2021-2030 (therefore, the implementation of the plan would also mean responding to the recommendations). The recommendations can also contribute to changes in mobility policy by legitimizing certain public policy decisions.*
- *The impact of the Assembly on its participants is multifaceted. During the evaluation, the change in attitudes towards the Assembly topic caused by participation in the VMPA was only partially observed. This may be related to the fact that a significant part of the participants who supported the goals of sustainable mobility gathered at the Assembly, while another part of the citizens' opinions could not be changed during learning and deliberation. When assessing the attitudes of certain groups of society*

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*Regarding groups, no significant change was observed, but an increase in trust in other people was recorded.*

*The VMPA also contributed to a change in attitudes towards citizen participation and empowerment. At the end of the Assembly (compared to its beginning), participants' satisfaction with democracy and confidence in it as having an advantage over other forms of governance increased, as did their confidence in their ability to engage in decision-making and their willingness to engage in this process. Although the proportion of participants who believed that they would have an impact on decision-making on important issues by engaging in the VMPA increased slightly, overall the Assembly participants became more skeptical about the suitability of methods such as the Citizens' Assembly for decision-making at both the local and national levels, and their assessment of the opportunities to influence public decision-making remained largely unchanged.*

- *The Assembly met most of the expectations placed on it by politicians and other decision-makers and organizers: it was tested as a new method, complementing the set of citizen engagement instruments already in use, and it convinced the organizers and decision-makers of its suitability for Lithuania, surprised with its constructiveness, productivity, effectiveness, achieved quality of inclusive deliberations, culture of agreement, provided experience and knowledge and an emerging "ecosystem" of citizens' assemblies. On the other hand, disappointed with the insufficient attention of politicians and municipal administration employees to the Assembly (although political support and assistance of employees can be felt in individual situations), some organizers were also disappointed with the insufficient The Assembly's publicity was assessed. Politicians and other decision-makers and organizers viewed the Assembly's recommendations as not necessarily new and unexpected, but useful, although they also drew attention to the challenges to implementation posed by the different levels of specificity and scope of the recommendations.*

*The Assembly was assessed as having repaid the resources allocated to it, and the format was worth repeating in the future, although it was emphasized that this requires not only significant human, time and financial resources, but also a clear support and commitment from politicians and a wider range of municipal administration employees.*

*The Assembly experience also increased the motivation of some organizers and other decision-makers to involve citizens in decision-making. Although in the first months after the Assembly, new formats for citizen involvement organized by municipalities inspired by the VMPA were already visible, there has been no wider word about these formats or such an adaptation of the Assembly experience. Given the ongoing implementation of the recommendations and the correspondingly still unclear outcome of this process, it is difficult to*

*to assess the broader impact of the Assembly on its organizers and decision-makers. However, stakeholders identified increased communication, cooperation and coordination between different municipal departments, encouraged by cross-sectoral recommendations, as an already evident, unexpected positive impact of the Assembly.*
- *The impact of the assembly on society was assessed in the report through the general awareness of citizens' assemblies. Data from two representative surveys of Vilnius city residents reveal that during the VMPA implementation period, citizens' assemblies as a way for residents to participate in city or national decision-making have increased*

*Awareness in Vilnius has increased by 10 percentage points. Those who have heard about citizens' assemblies evaluate them very favorably, trust city institutions and their decisions more than those who have not heard of them, are satisfied with the functioning of democracy in Lithuania, and are more likely to participate in the public decision-making process. In the group of those who had heard about citizens' assemblies, in contrast to those who had not, satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and assessment of their competences to participate in public decision-making increased during the studied period. On the other hand, changes in trust in city institutions and their decisions in this group did not stand out from the general context, and when asked about the disposition to participate in decision-making, uncertainty grew more than in other groups. The latter trends are associated with the still unclear results of the implementation of the recommendations.*

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### 3.3.1. Impact on mobility policy

This subsection will discuss **the impact of the VMPA recommendations on mobility policy** (whether the Assembly recommendations have been publicly presented, involving different groups of decision-makers, whether these recommendations have been considered by decision-makers and implementers, to what extent they are taken into account and what impact the recommendations have on decision-making on urban mobility). The assessment of these aspects was based on the results of a document analysis, a survey of VPMA participants and interviews with stakeholders.

As mentioned, the Assembly participants prepared 24 recommendations, which were presented to the Deputy Mayor of Vilnius during the closing event. Although a significant **number of participants were satisfied with this result, various stakeholders considered their number to be somewhat too large**. When describing the Assembly question (3.1.2) and facilitation methods (3.2.2), it was noted that during the VMPA its question expanded somewhat, acquired additional layers, and after generating the initial ideas for recommendations, there was not enough time for their further refinement, therefore the final number of recommendations exceeded initial expectations. Based on the negative experience of other countries, faced with the implementation of a large number of recommendations generated during assemblies, the VMPA organizers hoped that the focus would be on a few (up to 10) refined and high-quality recommendations.

*"Riga Municipality, Riga, I think, adopted about thirty-odd recommendations and Riga said, well, this is just a nightmare, because there are so many. So many and some of them are not written specifically: about everything and nothing. They say it would be better to have three and then we could clearly work on them and clarify things. So somehow I accepted this, that quantity is definitely not the goal. And here, where we took an example from that Danish, Copenhagen assembly, there were nine recommendations. That also seems like a pretty good number."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

*"Of course, everything will depend on the recommendations that will be prepared by the residents, but I think that the point is not in quantity, but rather, probably, in quality, because from what I heard during the presentations, how many recommendations were prepared in the Tallinn and Riga assemblies, the numbers were really quite large. So perhaps Vilnius will take a slightly different path and focus not on quantity, that we are also preparing fifty recommendations, or perhaps it would be better to have eight, but very clear, very specific ones, which would essentially have some kind of a more pronounced impact on the topic of mobility."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly volunteer No. 1, October 1, 2025.

*"I think it wasn't optimal, then later on more people got involved, so a lot was thrown around. I don't think that amount was optimal - it was too large, it needed to be concentrated somewhere. On the main ones... Well, in that sense, on the essential ones, which could answer the Assembly's question, but well... It's easy to say that from the side."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 2, January 30, 2026.

The large number of recommendations was not considered a problem in itself, but rather a shortcoming, given the limited time available at the Assembly, which did not allow for sufficient analysis and refinement of the participants' proposals. Part of the interview

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participants were critical **of the quality of the recommendations, and especially their specificity**. Although the majority of the Assembly participants were pleased with the result achieved, they also shared that they had an expectation that more specific, better-founded and reasoned recommendations would be formulated.<sup>154</sup> When reviewing the recommendations submitted by the VMPA, a fluctuation is indeed noticeable from very specific (e.g., "Formalized, participatory route development") to very abstract (e.g., "The railway (in Vilnius city and district) already exists, but we do not use it sufficiently") proposals. The latter are considered problematic, as they leave a lot of room for interpretation by decision-makers and therefore the implemented recommendations may not necessarily meet the expectations of the Assembly participants. **The limited connection of some of the recommendations with the main issue of the VMPA was also mentioned as a certain shortcoming of the recommendations.**

Discussions arose over recommendations such as, for example, "Multi-level (multi-storey and/or underground) parking lots and green zones", which at first glance are not directly related to encouraging citizens to travel more often on foot, by public transport or by bicycle.

*"[I] hoped that they [the recommendations, - author's note] would be more specific and deeper, and maybe it would be clearer to me from them what will be implemented. Well, I see the recommendation and I understand that this recommendation is about the fact that we can implement points a, b, c, d, but there is such a thing as improving the infrastructure, something, well, in that sense... What does it mean to improve the infrastructure? That action, it can be very small and let's say that we made that recommendation, so I see a lot of dangers with that."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 4, March 18, 2026.

*"If you make a recommendation like, 'Let's improve this classroom,' they'll write to you: 'We improved this classroom.' And how did you specifically improve it? Well, we improved it. Did you improve the soundproofing, did you repaint the classroom, did you put more chairs here, did you make it brighter, or what else? So, how do you say what the recommendations are, that's usually how the feedback will be, because if you can't understand the recommendation yourself normally, how do you expect others to understand it and do something about it?"*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 11, February 10, 2026.

*"I think there are about twenty left, but that's probably where the discussions were, that in some places there is a lack of specificity, some are very specific and not necessarily directly related to mobility. <...> in some places we had to slow down, look for that connection, and some were very specific and very clearly named, that this is directly related to mobility in the city. In some places, in terms of wording, you read and it was not very clear what the recommendation was trying to say."*

Interview with the organizer of Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 4, February 6, 2026.

When assessing the content of the VMPA recommendations, they were usually described as **useful, but not surprising, during the interviews**. In other words, some of the recommendations responded to the plans of Vilnius City Municipality, considered ideas or even already implemented activities and were therefore seen as confirming the policy direction chosen by Vilnius City Municipality, highlighting certain nuances relevant to citizens. This is not surprising, considering that the Assembly's issue was

<sup>153</sup> For example, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, February 10, 2026.

<sup>154</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, February 4, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 6, 2025 December 17th

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aligned with the long-term development goals of the city, therefore, some of the measures to achieve these goals overlapped with those already planned or implemented by the municipality. This is also visible in the implementation report of the recommendations – for example, as suggested in recommendation 3.1., "Build and Drive" parking lots have already been installed and are planned to be expanded.<sup>155</sup> So, as mentioned in the discussion The Assembly's mandate (section 3.1.1), its **recommendations can be seen not only as contributing to the implementation of a sustainable mobility policy, but also as useful for legitimizing certain mobility decisions.** It is important to note that the VMPA participants also made some unexpected recommendations - the most common ones were proposals related to the mobility of people with disabilities in the city, as well as the strong focus on education and the related challenges of urban mobility.

*"There's not much there that isn't realistic and it's great that it's not only directly related to the topic of mobility, but it's also related to the education system, like school selection and the like. It touches on a lot of social infrastructure, which also seems important, especially when it comes to polycentricity and the like. It's also great that they heard the expectation from the municipality to talk about it."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

*"I think it was easy enough [to work with the recommendations received, - author's note] in the sense that the city was already doing many things that way. It is very important to get a check whether we are going in the direction that society and communities want, so in that sense, the positive here is that we at least received feedback [feedback, - author's note] that the direction is good, for some things, for others, we received suggestions on how to improve certain things <...>."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, February 26, 2026.

*"Well, it's probably impossible to say that we didn't expect any of them - they are still related to our activities, the activities of the municipality or other companies. Whether it's urban development issues, or traffic organization issues, including public transport, certain aspects are still touched upon in some formats, they have certainly been heard at least in one context or another. <...> we certainly don't agree with all the recommendations, but in some of them we see that there is support, in the sense that the members of the Assembly have gathered and they see a certain direction of change, which we also see, so it seems to me that it is easier to sell the idea to city politicians, to look for solutions, to negotiate, when there is support from the Assembly as well <...>"*

Interview with the organizer of Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 4, February 6, 2026.

*"I think that those recommendations are not new, probably for the municipality, they are certainly being considered and what we heard before, they are already somewhat present and are now being implemented, there is the establishment of additional lanes, so we may not have invented some very new bicycle here <...> I think that most of them have already been answered and simply the majority may be, as I said, some may definitely be answered in the future."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 7, December 22, 2025.

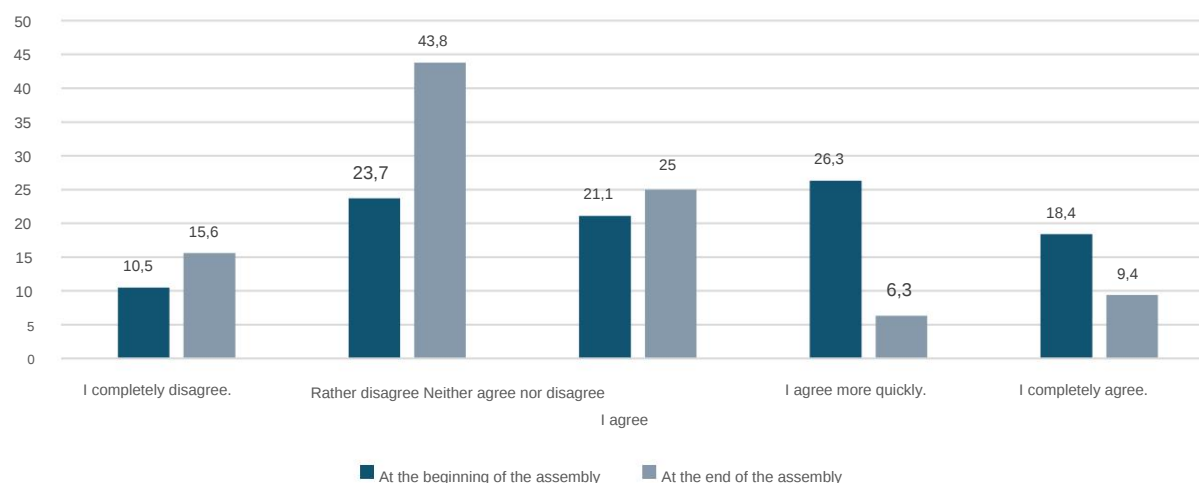
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<sup>155</sup> Vilnius City Municipality (2026), p. 14.

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It is also interesting to note that **despite the sometimes skeptical attitude towards the Assembly's effectiveness, at the end of the VMPA participants had less doubts that the recommendations would be translated into practical actions.** As shown in the figure below (Figure 5), at the beginning of the Assembly, almost half of its participants (44%) were concerned about the impact of the Assembly, and another fifth did not have a clear position on this issue. By the end of the Assembly, concerns about the recommendations had dissipated – there were 29 percentage points fewer participants who agreed and 25 percentage points more who disagreed that the Assembly's recommendations would not be translated into practical actions and decisions, and that nothing would come of it. Looking at the individual level, **53 percent of participants assessed its impact more positively after the Assembly**, 22 percent more negatively, and another 25 percent did not change their opinion. This can be attributed both to the satisfaction with the recommendations prepared or the Assembly process itself, and to a better understanding of the municipality's goals in the field of mobility, which made it possible to understand the connection of the proposed recommendations with them and, accordingly, to expect a greater impact of the recommendations.

**Figure 5.** Change in the number of VMPA participants who agree that the Assembly's recommendations will not be translated into practical actions, percentage.



Source: First (N=38) and third (N=32) survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators. Question: "What are your concerns regarding participation in the Assembly?" (first survey), "To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements?" (statement: I think that the Assembly's recommendations will not be translated into practical actions and decisions – nothing will come of it) (third survey).

The progress of the recommendations developed during the Assembly is described in section 1.3. According to the organizers, the first concrete steps to implement the recommendations were taken just a few months after the end of the Assembly (JUDU-initiated presentations to elders and regular surveys on public transport routes), which demonstrates the already evident contribution of the VMPA to policy change.

However, it is difficult to assess the impact of the recommendations on a broader scale, since, as mentioned, some of the Assembly's proposals overlap or are closely related to the tasks of the Vilnius City Strategic Development Plan for 2021-2030, and therefore it is difficult to assess whether policy change would have occurred without the Assembly's proposals. Moreover, as mentioned, the process of implementing the recommendations was not planned when organizing the Assembly, and therefore, a large part of the persons currently responsible for implementing the recommendations were not involved and familiar with the Assembly process (which may reduce ownership

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feeling), and those involved in organizing the Assembly are no longer officially responsible for the further monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations. This poses a risk that the outcome of the Assembly will be perceived as an additional burden on the municipality to achieve its strategic goals using the usual methods.

*"<...> I feel that we still need to work on it quite a bit and implementing the recommendations becomes, well, like another thing we have to do, instead of having some kind of answer to a question we didn't know. It becomes more like additional work now, those recommendations, rather than helping us learn, really clarifying something and feeling that we now understand more where the problem is or what needs to be solved."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

### 3.3.2. Impact on Assembly participants

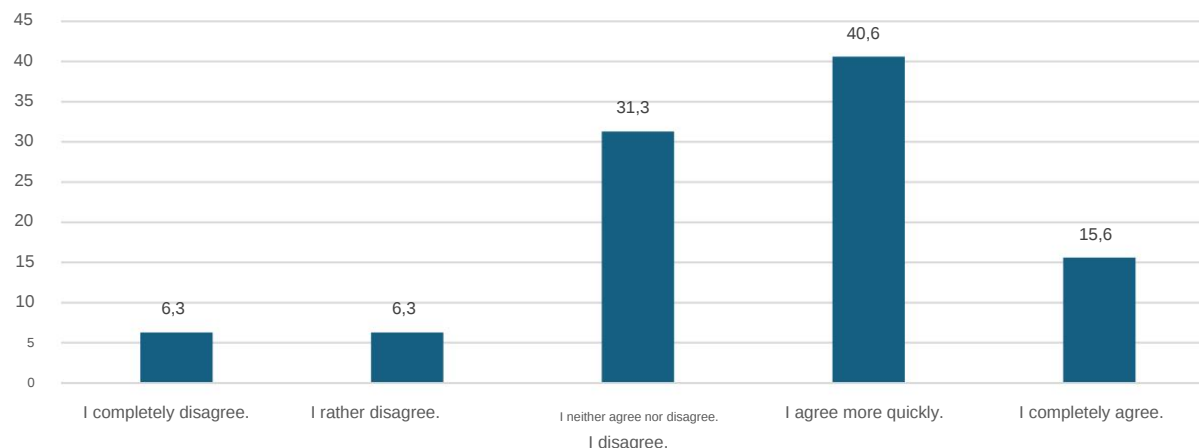
This subsection will discuss **the impact of the Assembly on its participants**. This evaluation question will be analyzed in terms of three indicators: **change in attitudes towards the Assembly topic** (to what extent did learning and deliberations affect participants' attitudes towards the Assembly topic and the reasons why this change (did not) occur), **change in attitudes towards certain groups of society** (to what extent did learning and deliberations affect participants' attitudes towards various groups of society and the reasons why this change (did not) occur), and **change in attitudes towards citizen participation and empowerment** (to what extent do participants believe they can influence public decision-making, assess the Assembly as a suitable instrument for citizen engagement and how this opinion changed during the Assembly, to what extent do participants believe that engaging in the Assembly was worth their time, and how motivated do they feel to engage in other civic activities). The assessment of these aspects was based on data from surveys and interviews of VMPA participants.

#### *Change of provisions regarding the Assembly theme*

As mentioned in subsection 3.2.1, **VMPA participants feel that they have deepened their knowledge on the Assembly's topics**, but the data collected during the evaluation reveal that this knowledge and deliberations **had a moderate impact on the change of attitudes towards the Assembly's topic**. Slightly more than half (57%) of VMPA participants who responded to the questions in the third survey agreed more or less completely that they had changed their opinion on the topics discussed at the Assembly during the Assembly. On the one hand, this can be considered a relatively positive indicator, on the other hand, a fairly large proportion of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement (31%) indicates that the Assembly's impact in this area was not particularly strong (Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** *Opinion of VMPA participants on changes in regulations on Assembly topics, percent*

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Source: Third survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators. Question: "Please think about the group discussions. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements? *I have changed my opinion about the topics discussed at the Assembly*" (N=32).

This is also related to the trend described in subsection 3.1.4, that despite the diversity of VMPA participants according to the selection criteria, **a significant part of them basically supported the ideas of sustainable mobility**, which was manifested in less than expected intensive discussions and/or opposition during the deliberations. As mentioned in subsection 3.1.4, the assumption that city dwellers using a car as their main means of transport would represent its users turned out to be not entirely correct - some drivers choose this means of transport only because of the insufficient convenience and accessibility of sustainable mobility means. Thus, according to one VMPA participant, the attitudes towards the topic did not change during the Assembly, but existing beliefs were only further emphasized.<sup>156</sup>

*„ Has it changed the attitudes towards mobility in the city... I wouldn't say that it has changed much, because at least for now, let's say, I will probably still drive a car, at least on that route in the morning, in the evening, because I can't get there otherwise. <...> it's hard to say how much it has changed. Basically, whenever there was an opportunity, you just take public transport. When there is an opportunity and the circumstances are unfavorable, you just drive a car.*

*<...> No, it didn't change much, it's still the same, in that sense... And so, literally, I still took public transportation, as much as I could."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

*"Somehow, nothing changes in that place either. Maybe just driving through the city you start paying more attention to some bushes growing nearby, you notice some details, nuances..."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 2, October 8, 2025.

It is also important to note that the change in attitudes could have been not only in a positive direction – towards greater support for sustainable mobility, but also in the opposite direction – increasing dissatisfaction with this topic. Although this trend is not revealed by the survey data, during the interviews **several Assembly participants shared that the experience of participating in the Assembly had a negative impact on attitudes in the field of sustainable mobility.**

In one of these cases, it is noticeable that disappointment with the Assembly process and the opportunities to influence public opinion

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

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politicians, thus contributing to the solution of the problem, temporarily moved to mobility behavior. Although this was not a long-term change in attitudes, it is interesting to note that the perceived quality of the Assembly process and satisfaction with it can also be transferred to the assessment of a specific policy area. In another case, it was emphasized that although the Assembly expanded the approach to mobility, the need for other road users on the streets, certain design solutions and ideas remained alien – the opinion towards them did not change, and the suggestion of these ideas even caused some irritation. It is important to note that **such cases were more exceptional than the general trend and the change of attitudes towards the topic more often either did not occur, or was in a positive direction.**

*"I would say that the Assembly pushed me in the opposite direction. After the first day I realized that it was hopeless, my impact would be very small. <...> Especially after I heard how it was organized and I realized that nothing would change. So, basically sustainable mobility brings me harm and if I see that no changes will happen, why should I try not to use the car and to reduce its impact if this impact is ignored by everyone else. <...> [I]f you disagree with something, you try to do something against it. I thought that I don't care anymore, the topic is not worth my attention, so I will use the car more often. After a while I stopped doing that, I stopped being angry about this topic."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, February 4, 2026.

*"On the one hand, somehow I realized that we need to think more globally anyway, because this is not just my street in Vilnius. Well, yes, that's all understandable. But I'm saying, on the other hand, and those new ideas about that street, where people sit in a cafe, there are tables nearby and cars drive by? Well, this is some kind of nonsense. I don't even know where they get such ideas from."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 18, March 4, 2026.

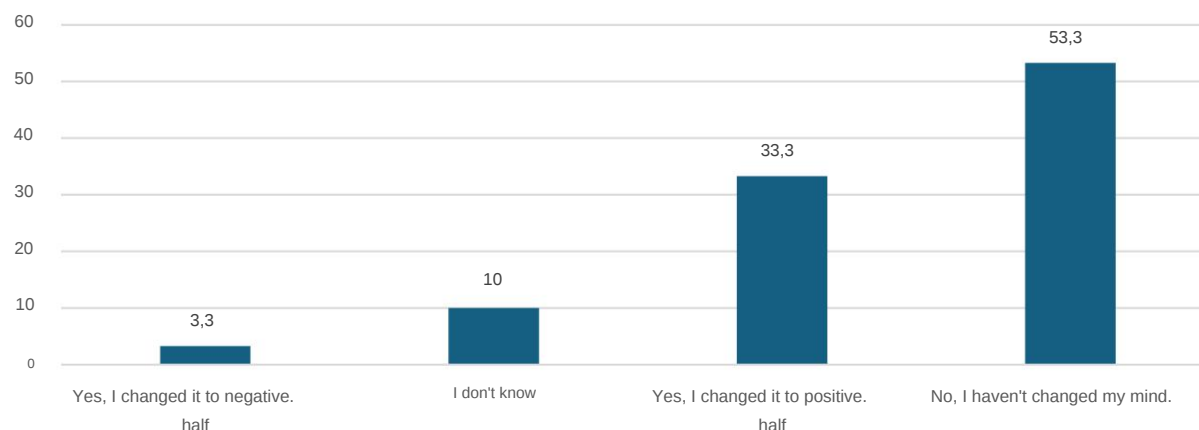
### *Changing attitudes towards certain groups in society*

Based on the material collected during the evaluation, **the VMPA had a small impact on the change in participants' attitudes towards other social groups.** As shown in the figure below (Figure 7), more than half (53%) of the VMPA participants who responded to the survey questions stated that they had not changed their opinion towards certain social groups after participating in the Assembly. About a third of the participants (33%) indicated that their opinion had changed in a positive direction, and only a minority of them (3%) indicated that the change had occurred in a negative direction. In response to the open-ended question in the survey about which social groups their opinion had changed, **the participants mentioned not only positive or negative trends, but also groups with which they were not sufficiently familiar, and during the Assembly they did this better.**

Four respondents identified the disabled as such a group – the answers emphasized that the participants were not familiar with the problems experienced by this group. Another respondent emphasized that he had changed his opinion about the mobility challenges experienced by young families and seniors. Although attitudes towards other groups of society changed little, it is possible to note **the symbolic positive impact of the Assembly on trust in other people.** Comparing the results of the survey of VMPA participants during the first and last Assembly sessions, it is noticeable that the share of participants who agreed with the statement "in general, most people can be trusted" increased from 42 to 44 percent. (2 percentage points difference), while the share of participants who disagreed with this statement decreased from 24 to 16 percent. (8 percentage points difference). At the individual level, overall trust in people increased after the Assembly among 33 percent. participants, and decreased among 17 percent.

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**Figure 7.** Opinion of VMPA participants about changes in attitudes towards certain groups of society, proc.



Source: Third survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators. Question: "During the assembly, I changed my opinion about certain groups in society" (N=30, two participants did not answer this question and were eliminated from the sample).

The changes in opinion are associated with a successful learning process and communication with representatives of stakeholders who are rarely encountered (more on this in subsection 3.2.1). In general, during the interviews, the participants of the VMPA emphasized that they were tolerant, had a wide and diverse range of acquaintances, and therefore were happy to communicate with various people during the Assembly.<sup>157</sup> This may also be related to the challenges of self-selection of participants - after learning about the principles of the Assembly, citizens who believed in the benefits of cooperation and inclusion of diverse opinions in decision-making may have registered for it. For this reason, the Assembly helped them **learn to cooperate, to become familiar with an even wider variety of opinions, but did not fundamentally change their opinions about certain groups in society** (i.e., the initial position was good enough, so only a slight change occurred).

*"There really aren't many opportunities for people from different ethnic groups, with different beliefs, in different age categories to meet and try to solve a problem together. I think such meetings are useful in bringing society together, because they make us get to know ourselves and others better, and understand each other better."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, February 3, 2026.

*"Maybe it hasn't changed because there are different people in my environment, of different age groups, with different habits, and that situation is more or less familiar. It's just that now I've encountered even more points of view. But in principle, it hasn't brought any news."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 2, January 30, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, 2026 March 3, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 14, February 24, 2026.

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### *Changing attitudes towards citizen participation and empowerment*

Data from the survey and interviews with VMPA participants reveal that **the Assembly did not have a significant impact on changing attitudes towards citizen participation and empowerment**. During the interview, one of the Assembly organizers expressed the belief that the VMPA undoubtedly contributed to changing attitudes towards democratic decision-making by exposing and educating participants about alternative forms of engagement, but the change, although it occurred, was not large-scale.

*"I think overall it was valuable to organize that Assembly, because it really changed the perception of the majority of people involved about what democracy is, how things can happen, what is possible."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, January 30, 2026.

As shown in the table below (Table 15), the results of the surveys conducted during the first and last sessions of the VMPA reveal that after the Assembly, the group of its participants **increased their trust in democracy** as having an advantage over other forms of government and **their satisfaction with its functioning** at the national and local levels. When assessing their **opportunities to influence public decision-making, the participants did not fundamentally change their opinions**: although the number of those who agree that they can influence the city of Vilnius increased (from 42 to 47%), the number of participants who disagreed with this statement also increased (from 11 to 16%). The assessment of influence on national-level decisions remained almost unchanged – the number of those who believe that they cannot influence public decision-making decreased (from 13 to 9%), but there was no increase in those who think otherwise.

However, **a positive change is noticeable when assessing one's own ability to get involved in solving public issues**. The share of VMPA participants who agreed (from 8 to 6%) with the statement "solving public issues is too complicated for people like me" decreased and the share of participants who disagreed with it increased (from 53 to 63%). Meanwhile, when assessing the statement "people like me, even when acting together with others, cannot solve the problems of their neighborhood or city", the share of participants who both agreed and disagreed with it increased, which indicates greater indecision on this aspect.

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**Table 15.** Opinion of VMPA participants about the functioning of democracy and opportunities to participate in decision-making, percent.

|                               | I feel that<br>make an impact I can make an impact<br>satisfied with the<br>such as democracy.<br><br>In Lithuania |      | I feel that I can<br>make an impact<br>superiority of public decisions over other forms of government<br>In Vilnius city |      | Democracy has |      | I am generally<br>satisfied with how<br>democracy works at<br>operates in Lithuania |       | I am generally<br>satisfied with how<br>democracy works at<br>the local level. |      | Solving public issues<br>is too complicated<br>for people like me |      | People like me,<br>even when<br>working together with<br>others, cannot<br>solve the problems<br>of their neighborhood<br>or city |      |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
|                               | W1                                                                                                                 | W3   | W1                                                                                                                       | W3   | W1            | W3   | W1                                                                                  | W3    | W1                                                                             | W3   | W1                                                                | W3   | W1                                                                                                                                | W3   |
| I completely disagree         | 2,6                                                                                                                | 0    | 5,3                                                                                                                      | 0    | 5,3           | 0    | 5,3                                                                                 | 0     | 10,5                                                                           | 0    | 28,9                                                              | 37,5 | 31,6                                                                                                                              | 28,1 |
| Faster I disagree.            | 10,5                                                                                                               | 9,4  | 5,3                                                                                                                      | 15,6 | ,0            | 0    | 21,1                                                                                | 15,6  | 10,5                                                                           | 12,5 | 23,7                                                              | 25,0 | 34,2                                                                                                                              | 28,1 |
| I don't agree, nor do I agree | 36,8                                                                                                               | 37,5 | 47,4                                                                                                                     | 34,4 | 15,8          | 12,5 | 31,6                                                                                | 31,3  | 26,3                                                                           | 31,3 | 39,5                                                              | 25,0 | 18,4                                                                                                                              | 31,3 |
| Faster I agree                | 36,8                                                                                                               | 43,8 | 28,9                                                                                                                     | 37,5 | 50,0          | 56,3 | 36,8                                                                                | 31,3  | 47,4                                                                           | 43,8 | 2,6                                                               | 3,1  | 10,5                                                                                                                              | 6,3  |
| I completely agree.           | 13,2                                                                                                               | 6,3  | 13,2                                                                                                                     | 9,4  | 26,3          | 28,1 | 5,3                                                                                 | 18,8  | 2,6                                                                            | 9,4  | 5,3                                                               | 3,1  | 2,6                                                                                                                               | 3,1  |
| Didn't answer                 | ,0                                                                                                                 | 3,1  | ,0                                                                                                                       | 3,1  | 2,6           | 3,1  | ,0                                                                                  | 3,1   | 2,6                                                                            | 3,1  | ,0                                                                | 6,3  | 2,6                                                                                                                               | 3,1  |
| I agree (generally)           | 50,0                                                                                                               | 50,0 | 42,1                                                                                                                     | 46,9 | 76,3          | 84,4 | 42,1                                                                                | 50,0  | 50,0                                                                           | 53,1 | 7,9                                                               | 6,3  | 13,2                                                                                                                              | 9,4  |
| I agree (general change)      |                                                                                                                    | 0,0  |                                                                                                                          | 4,8  |               | 8,1  |                                                                                     | 7,9   |                                                                                | 3,1  |                                                                   | -1,6 |                                                                                                                                   | -3,8 |
| Disagree (generally)          | 13,2                                                                                                               | 9,4  | 10,5                                                                                                                     | 15,6 | 5,3           | 0,0  | 26,3                                                                                | 15,6  | 21,1                                                                           | 12,5 | 52,6                                                              | 62,5 | 65,8                                                                                                                              | 56,3 |
| Disagree (general change)     |                                                                                                                    | -3,8 |                                                                                                                          | 5,1  |               | -5,3 |                                                                                     | -10,7 |                                                                                | -8,6 |                                                                   | 9,9  |                                                                                                                                   | -9,5 |

Source: First (N=38) and third (N=32) survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators. Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements?"

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At the individual level, **the change was not unidirectional, but more often positive**. After the Assembly, 26% of participants felt more able to influence public decision-making in Lithuania, but another 23%, on the contrary, felt less able to do so. When it comes to changes in the perceived ability to influence public decision-making in Vilnius, by the end of the Assembly, 26% of participants assessed it more positively, while the other 29% assessed it more negatively. Positive changes at the individual level dominated the assessment of democracy and its state. 20% of participants saw more advantages of democracy over other forms of government, while 13% saw less. After the Assembly, 42% of participants assessed the functioning of democracy in Lithuania more positively, while 19% assessed it more negatively. In the case of the locality (Vilnius City), satisfaction with the functioning of democracy increased among 33% of participants, and decreased among 17%.

The opinion that solving public issues is too difficult for “people like me” strengthened after the Assembly for 20% of the participants, but for the other 20% it actually weakened and this change was stronger<sup>158</sup>. In all these cases, **the largest** (or relatively largest) **share of participants** (e.g. 40% of participants skeptical about the possibilities of people to solve the problems of their neighborhood or city or 67% in the case of assessing the advantages of democracy over other forms of government) **did not change their opinion during the Assembly period**. Therefore, the Assembly experience was not sufficient for them to change their preconceived beliefs and attitudes.

When assessing these changes, it is important to take into account that **the Assembly was not isolated from the general political context of the country** – the country was rocked by corruption scandals, the 19th Government was replaced by the 20th Government, and mass protests began regarding the proposed amendments to the LRT Law, which could have negatively affected the attitudes of the citizens. However, some of the indicators were very specific, linked to Vilnius (e.g., there is a sense of opportunity to influence public decision-making in the city of Vilnius), so it is likely that in these cases it was possible to detect a purer impact of the Assembly. Moreover, the survey results are also confirmed by interview data.

The fact that the group of participants **assessed democratic processes and their abilities to engage in public debate more favourably after the Assembly, but became more sceptical about the possibility of influencing public decision-making**, can be explained by several aspects. First, as mentioned in subsection 3.1.2, participation in the Assembly activities – the learning and deliberation experience – empowered the participants, encouraged their confidence in their knowledge and competences, contributing to high-quality policy-making.

Increased trust in other participants, seeing them as able to contribute honestly, fairly and selflessly to joint decision-making, may have contributed to increased support for democracy. This may also have been influenced by familiarity with the Assembly as a new, innovative form of participation based on learning from diversity of opinions. Finally, several participants emphasized that greater awareness of the actions of the municipality and its institutions led to greater trust in them, changing their opinions for the better (as will be mentioned later, opinions on this aspect differed among participants).<sup>159</sup>

*“Maybe now, let's say, you feel at home here in the community, in the district, that your voice, even if it's the only one, seems to be accepted by everyone, but, let's say, maybe you disagree with something and if you don't say anything...”*

<sup>158</sup> The strengthening of opinion was observed only on one point of the five-point rating scale, while in the case of half (10%) of those who changed their opinion to the negative side – and within two points of the scale.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with a participant of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 16, March 2, 2026, Interview with a participant of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 12, 2026 February 12th.

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*If you don't say anything, if you don't do anything, nothing will change. But sometimes you need to raise questions anyway. It may be that you agree with the whole group, but you need to raise questions, those raised by others who disagree with it. Because sometimes you look through their prism and you see how you can maybe do better. And, precisely, as I say, if you don't say anything, then maybe you will do it and then everyone will agree, you will do it well. But if you look at it from another perspective, you will do even better for both the community and society."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 15, January 28, 2026.

However, it is noticeable that **the Assembly failed to convince participants that their voices would be heard and the recommendations would be implemented.** In a survey conducted during the first session of the Assembly, a significant proportion of participants agreed, but about a quarter of participants were undecided whether the authorities would listen to their opinions, whether they would influence decision-making on important issues, and whether the Assembly would bring about changes in their environment (Table 16). After the Assembly, participants were even more skeptical than before that the authorities would take their opinions into account, but they were more positive about the possibilities of influencing decision-making on important issues, and in particular, expectations about the changes that would occur as a result of the Assembly increased – this can be interpreted as a strengthened belief(s) that the recommendations would be implemented (as mentioned in subsection 3.1.1).

**Table 16.** Expectations of VMPA participants related to the impact on public policy and their assessment, percent.

|                                  | ...the authorities will hear<br>my opinion |       | ...I will influence decision-making<br>on important issues |      | ...Thanks to the Assembly,<br>changes will happen in my environment |      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
|                                  | W1                                         | W3    | W1                                                         | W3   | W1                                                                  | W3   |
| I completely disagree.           | 10,5                                       | 6,3   | 7,9                                                        | 6,3  | 5,3                                                                 | 6,3  |
| Faster<br>I disagree.            | 10,5                                       | 12,5  | 7,9                                                        | 6,3  | 13,2                                                                | 6,3  |
| I neither agree nor<br>disagree. | 21,1                                       | 34,4  | 28,9                                                       | 28,1 | 26,3                                                                | 15,6 |
| I agree more quickly.            | 34,2                                       | 37,5  | 31,6                                                       | 28,1 | 26,3                                                                | 56,3 |
| I completely agree.              | 23,7                                       | 9,4   | 23,7                                                       | 31,3 | 28,9                                                                | 15,6 |
| Didn't answer                    | ,0                                         | ,0    | ,0                                                         | ,0   | ,0                                                                  |      |
| I agree (generally)              | 57,9                                       | 46,9  | 55,3                                                       | 59,4 | 55,3                                                                | 71,9 |
| I agree (general change)         |                                            | -11,0 |                                                            | 4,1  |                                                                     | 16,6 |
| I disagree.<br>(in general)      | 21                                         | 18,8  | 15,8                                                       | 12,6 | 18,5                                                                | 12,6 |
| I disagree.<br>(total change)    |                                            | -2,2  |                                                            | 3,2  |                                                                     | 5,9  |

Source: First (N=38) and third (N=32) survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators. Question: "What expectations do you have about participating in the Assembly?" (first survey), "Please think about your experience at the Assembly.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements?" (third survey).

In this regard, **the diminished assessment of the impact of the opinion on the authorities is not related to the possibilities of implementing the recommendations, but to the Assembly process and its role in the decision-making process.** As mentioned in subsection 3.1.1, some VMPA participants believed that

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The Assembly aims to legitimize existing or future public policy decisions, therefore the opinion of the residents will be directed in a direction beneficial to the city's decision-makers and will not essentially influence decision-making. Citizens with professional experience with Vilnius City Municipality also explained that the attitudes did not change because the Assembly was seen more as a one-off initiative than a systemic change in the forms of operation. Finally, as mentioned in section 1.2, participants expressed disappointment with the low level of involvement and participation of decision-makers in the Assembly, which was also understood as a limited interest and commitment to the VMPA.<sup>160</sup>

*"I don't see why it should change. The structure is bad, in that sense, so this is also directly related to both my profession and myself. But I believe that people have changed, well, people like it when they are spoken to nicely, when they are received nicely, when they are respected or at least pretend to be respected. In this case, the municipality did everything very well, played nicely, let's say. <...> Well, here, because there are too many close and, well, yes, close, or too many related things with the municipality for the Assembly to take over and knock them out. So here's the attitude, as I said, that after the Assembly it will start working better - definitely not, because strategic changes are also needed there, in the municipality itself, so that something is better or worse, that well... The Assembly was so, well, as I say, so more for the municipality itself, such as an organization, if you can call it that, "This is pure PR. As it was, so it is."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 20, March 7, 2026.

*"<...> there are those who have worked in the municipality, in ministries, and in high positions, so I know that, in the sense of how the work is done and that it is simply a huge system that is standing still and you simply cannot control everything all the time. You can come with the best interests, desires, we put in, you still have it, you ask... Well, to penetrate through the huge filter of I want it or not, then financial planning and the like. That's complicated. So in this case, my attitude is somehow like this, I would say that no, it, like no, has not changed, it has not changed with the state, nothing."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 11, February 10, 2026.

When assessing other expectations raised by the Assembly and their response, the participants were positive. The largest positive change, comparing expectations at the beginning of the Assembly and their response at the end, is observed in assessing the interest and desire to get involved in decision-making processes stimulated by participation in the Assembly (this effect was positively assessed by participants at the end of the Assembly by 12 percentage points more often) (Table 17). The second largest positive change (over 11 percentage points) is observed in assessing the opportunities to use the acquired knowledge and skills in the future. As mentioned earlier, the VMPA provided participants with the competencies necessary for involvement in decision-making and encouraged their confidence in their abilities. Thus, it is interesting to note that although they were **quite skeptical about the possibilities that state institutions would hear their opinion, the VMPA participants felt inspired for further involvement, more active interest in political processes.**

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<sup>160</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 17, March 3, 2026.

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*"If there is an assembly on a different topic, I will participate, but not because I think I can finally change something. I participated in this Assembly with the hope that maybe something will change. It failed. Now I will participate with the idea that it can be an interesting experience for the future."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 1, February 3, 2026.

*"It really broadened my horizons. I really want to be like that, I want to say something else somewhere, to offer something."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 14, February 24, 2026.

*"Since there was no such possibility before, and suddenly it appeared, it's one thing, it made me very happy that, even if it was by chance, I was included. In the future, I might want to put a tick somewhere that I'm interested in participating in such issues, so that in principle they know that [I, author's note] can be invited. <...> it really has that effect, because suddenly I became interested in what my eldership is doing, and my elders: what decisions are being made, who are those people, maybe join, maybe just observe - it broadened my horizons in that area."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly participant No. 16, March 2, 2026.

**Table 17.** Other expectations of VMPA participants and their assessment, percent.

|                               | ...meet interesting people |      | ...I will participate in an interesting discussion |      | ...I will experience something new |     | ...I will expand my knowledge and acquire new skills |      | ...acquired knowledge and I will be able to use the skills in the future. |      | ...participation in the Assembly will increase thousand interest and willingness to engage in decision-making processes |      |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|-----|------------------------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
|                               | W1                         | W3   | W1                                                 | W3   | W1                                 | W3  | W1                                                   | W3   | W1                                                                        | W3   | W1                                                                                                                      | W3   |
| Completely I disagree.        | 2,6                        |      | ,0                                                 |      | 2,6                                |     | ,0                                                   |      | 2,6                                                                       | 3,1  | 5,3                                                                                                                     | 3,1  |
| I rather disagree.            | 2,6                        |      | ,0                                                 |      | ,0                                 | 6,3 |                                                      | ,0   | ,0                                                                        | 3,1  | 5,3                                                                                                                     | 3,1  |
| I neither agree nor disagree. | 18,4                       | 15,6 |                                                    |      | 5,3                                | 6,3 |                                                      | 5,3  | 3,1                                                                       | 13,2 | 6,3                                                                                                                     |      |
| I agree                       |                            |      |                                                    |      |                                    |     |                                                      |      |                                                                           |      | 26,3                                                                                                                    | 21,9 |
| I agree more quickly.         | 39,5                       | 34,4 | 52,6                                               | 50,0 | 36,8                               |     |                                                      | 34,4 | 31,6                                                                      | 31,3 | 34,2                                                                                                                    | 40,6 |
| Completely I agree            | 34,2                       | 50,0 | 36,8                                               | 37,5 | 52,6                               |     |                                                      | 62,5 | 52,6                                                                      | 56,3 | 26,3                                                                                                                    | 31,3 |
| No answer                     | 2,6                        |      | ,0                                                 |      | 2,6                                |     | ,0                                                   | 2,6  |                                                                           | ,0   | ,0                                                                                                                      | ,0   |
| I agree (in general)          | 73,7                       | 84,4 | 89,5                                               | 87,5 | 89,5                               |     |                                                      | 96,9 | 84,2                                                                      | 87,5 | 60,5                                                                                                                    | 71,9 |
| I agree (total change)        |                            |      | 10,7                                               |      | -2,0                               |     | 7,4                                                  |      |                                                                           | 3,3  |                                                                                                                         | 11,4 |

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|                            |     |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |      |      |     |     |
|----------------------------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|------|------|-----|-----|
| Disagree (generally)       | 5,2 | 0    | 2,6 | 6,3 | 2,6 | 0    | 2,6 | 6,2 | 10,6 | 6,2  | 7,9 | 9,4 |
| I disagree. (total change) |     | -5,2 |     | 3,7 |     | -2,6 |     | 3,6 |      | -4,4 |     | 1,5 |

Source: First (N=38) and third (N=32) survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators. Question: "What expectations do you have about participating in the Assembly?" (first survey), "Please think about your experience at the Assembly. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements?" (third survey).

At the end of the Assembly, almost all participants felt that they had experienced something new (97%), their expectations regarding participation in an interesting discussion and the opportunity to expand their knowledge and acquire new skills were also met (88% of those who agreed with this), and the participants felt that they had met interesting people (84%). Thus, assessing the data in general, **although residents had the expectation of contributing to decision-making in the city of Vilnius, some of them viewed this opportunity somewhat skeptically**, they were not assured about the municipality's openness to the ideas of the townspeople, **while the absolute majority saw the Assembly as a source of learning and new experience.**

*"This shouldn't be the goal of citizen assemblies, but as a side effect it's nice that it provides sociability, for example, especially for seniors, and finally, through such an exercise, to make yourself heard again, to discuss, maybe even argue, and then to find some kind of connection, so that, well, really very different people and really different ages and everything else, sit next to each other and work all day, that's such a good social activity."*

*<...> It seems to me that for some, this was a step too far in breaking comfort, and perhaps there is some benefit to be found here, but of course, if this were the goal, it would be too expensive a means."*

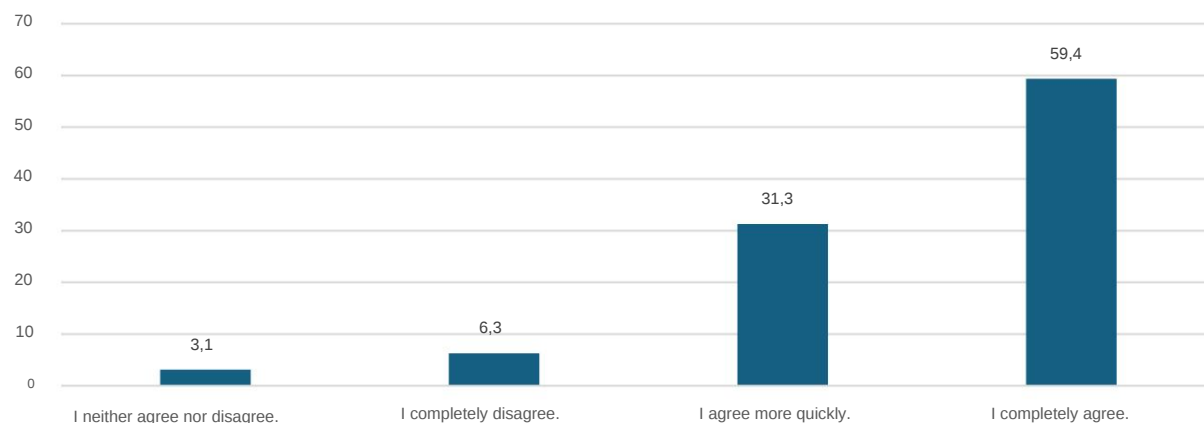
Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Facilitator No. 3, February 11, 2026.

In summary, the participants' experience **at the Assembly was extremely positive, and the majority of them would agree to participate in other meetings of a similar nature.** As shown in the figure below

(Figure 8), the majority of participants (91%) tend to or completely agree that their participation in the VMPA was worth the time spent. When asked whether they would choose to participate in a similar process on other topics of public importance in the future, the majority of participants also answered positively: the average was 8.9 (on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 meant "definitely not" and 10 meant "definitely yes"). No participant chose a score lower than 5, and almost half (44%) of respondents chose a score of 10. This is probably also related to the response to the main expectations described above. Although the mandate of the Assembly was more related to recommendations and contribution to the change of urban mobility policy, the expectations of the participants were also directed towards new experiences, participation in interesting discussions, expansion of knowledge and acquisition of new skills, which was significantly responded to during the Assembly. Some participants clearly linked the Assembly's assessment to the implementation of the recommendations, but some did not have expectations of independent contribution to public policy change or lost them during the VMPA, therefore the final assessment is positive, with the possibility of changing in the future, depending on the Assembly's impact on public policy.

## Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Evaluation Report

**Figure 8.** Participants' opinion on whether engaging in VMPA was worth their time, percentage



Source: Third survey of VMPA participants conducted by evaluators. Question: "Overall, I think that participating in the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly was worth my time" (N=32).

However, this **experience did not convince participants that political decisions at the local or national level should be made through citizens' assemblies** – after the VMPA, support for this method of decision-making declined somewhat. As shown in the figure below

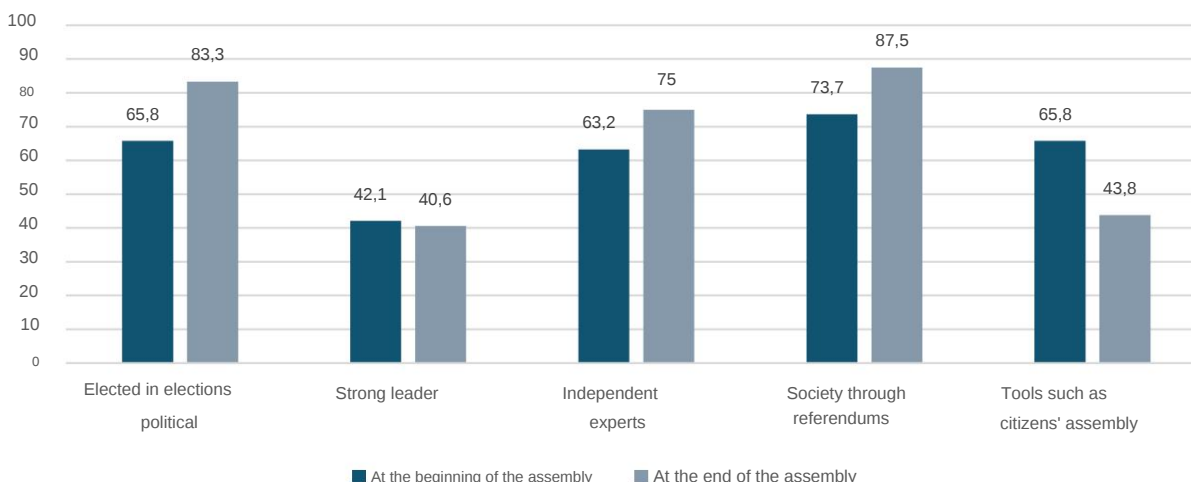
(Figure 9), Assembly participants were most likely to attribute the right to political decisions at the state level to the public through referendums, to politicians elected in elections and randomly selected people using tools such as a citizens' assembly, to independent experts and relatively least to a strong leader. At the end of the VMPA, the order of this distribution did not change, but the assessment of tools such as a citizens' assembly decreased significantly (by 22 percentage points), the assessment of a strong leader decreased slightly (by 2 percentage points), and the assessment of the remaining three actors (elected politicians, experts and the public through referendums) increased.

In terms of dissent, there was a significant decrease in the number of people who disagreed that decisions should be made by independent experts (from 18 to 3%, by 15 percentage points), and a slight decrease in the number of people who disagreed with tools such as citizens' assemblies (from 18 to 13, by 5 percentage points). Looking at the individual level, the most striking change is that almost half of the participants (43%) became more skeptical during the Assembly period that decisions should be made by randomly selected people in ways such as citizens' assemblies (20% changed their opinion to a more favorable side regarding this method of decision-making, 37% did not change their opinion).<sup>161</sup>

<sup>161</sup> The majority of participants changed their attitude towards decision-making in referendums in a positive direction (30% of those who assessed this method of decision-making more positively at the end of the Assembly than at the beginning, 17% - the opposite, 53% of those who did not change their opinion). The fact that decisions should be made by independent experts was assessed more favorably by 29% during the Assembly, another 25% began to assess this method of decision-making more skeptically, while the remaining 43% did not change their opinion. The position that decisions at the national level should be made by a strong leader through the Assembly weakened by 25% of participants, strengthened by 18%, and remained unchanged by 54%. Finally, participants are less likely to agree with the statement that decisions at the national level should be made by elected politicians (28%) than to increase it (14%). Group-level analysis allows us to see the opposite trend, since the overall distribution across waves reflects the structure of opinions at different points in time, while the analysis of change allows us to see how the assessments of the same respondents have changed; the contrast shows that overall distributions across waves can mask changes in individual opinions, so that an aggregate comparison alone does not always reveal the true direction of change.

## Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Evaluation Report

**Figure 9.** VMPA participants agreeing that decisions on issues important to the country should be made by mentioned actors, change, percent.



Source: The first (N=38) and third (N=32) survey of VMPA participants conducted by the evaluators. Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about how political decisions should be made at the state level?" The wording "Tools such as a citizens' assembly" is a shortened wording used in the survey: "randomly selected people who, after listening to the arguments of experts and all sides, discuss a certain issue together (e.g., a citizens' assembly)."

Thus, the VMPA experience **significantly reduced the suitability of citizens' assemblies for adopting decisions that are approved by the participants**. This can be attributed to a better understanding of the principles of operation of the assemblies, the complexity and the scale of problem solving - some VMPA participants stated that the issues considered in the Assembly were too broad, while it is likely that when solving problems at the national level this breadth would increase even more, thus making it even more difficult to adopt deeply discussed and high-quality recommendations.

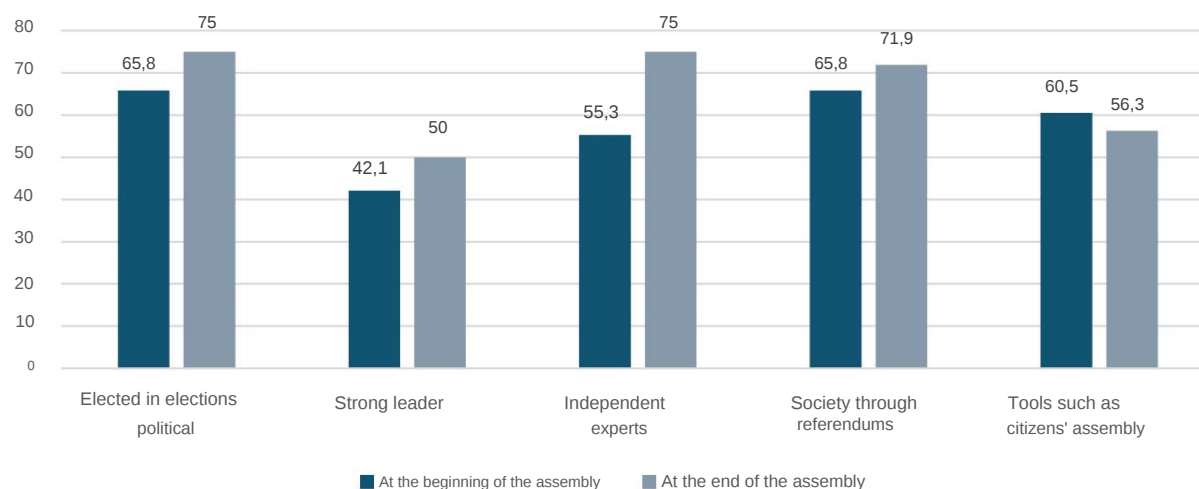
**Similar trends are observed at the local level, where the favorable assessment of assemblies also slightly decreased during the VMPA.** As shown in the figure below (Figure 10), at the beginning of the Assembly, participants considered the expression of public opinion through referendums and decisions made by elected politicians to be the most appropriate decision-making method, while decision-making by independent experts and the application of methods such as citizens' assemblies were favorably evaluated, and decision-making by a strong leader was the least favorably evaluated. At the end of the Assembly, the order of preferences changed somewhat – elected politicians and independent experts were most positively evaluated, followed by public decision-making through referendums, tools such as assemblies and decisions made by a strong leader. The use of tools such as citizens' assemblies for decision-making at the local level was supported by more than half (61%) of participants at the beginning of the VMPA, but by the end of the Assembly, support decreased to 56% (within 4 percentage points).

points), while support for all other forms of decision-making increased. It is interesting to note that **in the case of tools such as citizens' assemblies, not only did support for them decrease, but the proportion of those who disagreed that this was an appropriate way to make decisions at the local level also increased** (from 16 to 19 percent, by 3 percentage points). At the individual level, during the Assembly period 30

## Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Evaluation Report

162 The opinion of 23% of participants regarding the suitability of tools such as citizens' assemblies for decision-making has deteriorated, while the opinion of another 47% of participants has improved.

**Figure 10.** Change in the number of VMPA participants who agree that decisions on important local (municipal) issues should be made by the mentioned actors, percent.



Source: The first (N=38) and third (N=32) survey of VMPA participants conducted by the evaluators. Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about how political decisions should be made at the local (municipal) level?" The wording "Tools such as a citizens' assembly" is a shortened wording used in the survey: "randomly selected people who, after listening to the arguments of experts and all sides, discuss a certain issue together (e.g., a citizens' assembly)."

In summarizing these results, it is noticeable that over the course of the Assembly, **this tool began to be seen as less suitable for decision-making at the local level.** Although the difference in assessment between the results at the beginning and the end of the Assembly is not as large as when assessing decision-making at the national level, it can be assumed that dissatisfaction with certain elements of the VMPA process (more on this in subsection 3.2.2) and aspects of the recommendations contributed to the more critical assessment. (more on this earlier in this subsection).

### 3.3.3. Impact on Assembly organizers and decision-makers

This subsection discusses the **impact of the VMPA on its organizers and decision-makers**, i.e. whether and to what extent it influenced the attitudes of these groups towards citizen involvement. Based on interviews with various stakeholders of the Assembly, the expectations of the VMPA organizers and decision-makers towards the Citizens' Assembly and their assessment of their compliance, their views on the usefulness of the Assembly's recommendations, the overall value of the Assembly, and their further motivation to involve citizens in decision-making are analyzed.

<sup>162</sup> 50-52 percent of participants maintained the same opinion about the remaining decision-making methods, with the exception of a strong leader (in this case, 19 percent of participants' opinion remained the same, 35 percent worsened, and 46 percent improved). The opinion that decisions at the local level should be made by elected politicians changed negatively for 21 percent of the Assembly participants during its process, and positively for the other 28 percent. By the end of the Assembly, the public vote through referendums as a decision-making method began to be viewed more favorably by 27 percent, and more critically by 23 percent. Finally, during the Assembly, a significant part of its participants (31 percent) improved their opinion about experts as decision-makers at the local level (the opinion of 19 percent of participants deteriorated).

## *Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Evaluation Report*

### *Assembly organizers' and decision-makers' expectations of VMPA and assessment of their compliance*

*"We'll see. I don't know, it's a new thing, the idea is really very good. The methodology, the whole structure is also very good. I think it will definitely be good here, the only question is whether it will be very good or good. So we'll see, time will tell."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, October 14, 2025.

The quote above vividly illustrates that **the general pre-expectations of the organizers and politicians and other decision-makers who contributed to the organization of the VMPA were very positive.**

The assembly was seen as **a great way to involve and empower citizens**, to let them feel like the masters of the city ("the state is us"), and also as a way to **"initiate changes in the municipality"**, **encouraging greater involvement of city residents in municipal decision-making**, accepting that decision-makers do not necessarily "know everything" and trusting the opinions of citizens<sup>163</sup>. Organizers

**The opening speeches of the Assembly were marked by an atmosphere of anticipation and acceptance created by politicians and other decision-makers<sup>164</sup>.** However, one of the politicians **who was not involved** in the organization, while praising the Citizens' Assemblies as an instrument that allows citizens to believe that they can participate in the discussion on important city issues and decide for themselves, nevertheless **viewed the Assembly as a potential source of manipulation<sup>165</sup>**. Below, we will take a closer look at the expectations of the organizers, politicians and other decision-makers for the Assembly and their correspondence to the achieved result.

First of all, when it comes to the impact on citizen engagement provisions, it is worth noting that **the VMPA** was seen by the political and administrative representatives of the Vilnius City Municipality **as another tool in the broader context of citizen engagement initiated by the municipality**. During the interviews, politicians and other decision-makers emphasized that the high level of distrust of residents in the municipality that had been observed several years ago had already prompted them to "change the culture" and try to involve Vilnius residents more in decisions made in the municipality, at least those related to urban and territorial planning<sup>166</sup>. In search of effective ways of engagement that would restore citizens' trust in the municipality, experiments were started – various other formats of citizen engagement that had already been tried in the city were mentioned (organizing creative workshops for designing public spaces, various other different forms of co-creation, participatory budgeting, launching a public participation platform on the Internet, etc.)<sup>167</sup>. Thus, the citizens' assembly was also seen as one of the measures in the broader context, corresponding to the general direction of citizen engagement being pursued. At the same time, it was noted in the interview that **compliance with a broader strategic direction also determined the support of politicians at the highest level of local government for the idea of a citizens' assembly and its organization.**

*"We need to restore trust <...> we need to experiment. It seems to me that everyone understands that we will not change anything if we do not change anything."*

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<sup>163</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, October 2, 2025.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 2, October 28, 2025.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026, interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, October 14, 2025, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

## Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Evaluation Report

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

*"This [Assembly, - author's note] is part of what we are trying to do here, as they say, in the Vilnius city administration. Because, well, the overall goal and ambition is to change management methods and directions of activity in general from "top-down" to "bottom-up". This citizens' assembly is just part of that <...> It wasn't very difficult, the political will was just very clear from the very beginning, the mayor supported us in all of it. In the sense that we are trying to construct this whole policy in such a way as to go to the people, not to belittle them, not to force them to do anything they don't want to do. So, since this [citizens' assembly, - author's note] is a very good instrument to achieve exactly that, with that political will and support, everything is going quite smoothly."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, October 14, 2025.

Thus, the Assembly organically supplemented the broader list of citizen engagement methods and integrated into the more general strategic direction of the municipality, but **at the same time it meant that at the most abstract level, the attitudes of politicians and other decision-makers towards citizen engagement did not change significantly** - if they were positive, they remained so.

*"Yes, this [Assembly, - author's note] did not change our approach - we are always in favor of citizens being as involved as possible."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, February 26, 2026.

In this broader context, organizers, politicians and other decision-makers also **expected the Assembly to expand the democratic culture** – of cooperation, sharing, learning – , to change the style of communication between the municipality and citizens from confrontation to agreement, to learn to speak accordingly. It was noted that the format of the Citizens' Assembly was particularly grateful for this. Especially in a sensitive, sensitive topic (which is also called sustainable mobility – see below), **the Assembly was treated as an opportunity to discuss in detail, to seek agreements, and not to immerse oneself in an emotional struggle**<sup>168</sup> .

*"I hope this will change, well, and I think it has already, well, changed the perception of some municipal employees of what democracy is, how it can be seen, and what their relationship with citizens is."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025.

**In this sense** – learning to discuss and agree, expanding democratic culture and changing the style of cooperation between citizens and institutions – **the expectations of** politicians, administrative decision-makers and organizers of the VMPA were fully met and even exceeded. The interviews revealed the surprise of politicians and other decision-makers **at the productivity of the Assembly process, the group's ability to negotiate and agree, and to reach solutions together through constructive discussions.** The VMPA was named as **a good example that refuted the usual fears** of representatives of government institutions – that, for example, inclusion will be unconstructive, chaotic, and overly emotional.

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<sup>168</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, 2025. October 2, interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, 2026. February 4, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 4, 2025. October 24, interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, 2026. February 26

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*"People had the opportunity to have food, take breaks, and talk, and that it was very clearly facilitated. Those were the rules, it seems to me, looking at it from the side, that they already know how to calm down, how to vent [emotions, - author's note], where to gather here. <...> maybe in those first ones there was more chaos, but over time people understood who they were eating with here and it turns out that you can talk without shouting. This really surprised me, because [knowing, - author's note] all these public rates [for public transport, - aut. past.], it's about preparing for the worst, because those people are so negatively disposed. What surprised me was that in the room they became co-authors, co-creators, even though they were different, with different, apparently, education, knowledge. But you could see in the air that they were interested in reaching an agreement and that they cared."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

*"As you can see, the fear of this involvement is usually that there will be no constructive work, that a certain market will start, maybe I'm not... unconstructive proposals, there will be a lot of emotions and nothing will come of it. That's the fear. But this Assembly has shown that if it is done very competently, those people are selected so that they represent different segments, that they are introduced to all the necessary information, that they are consulted, then that work can be very, even very constructive. So I think that that fear really didn't work out and it - [the Assembly, - author's note] is a great example of showing that it is possible to work constructively with communities and that it can become a real advisor, and not some kind of riot or rally there, you know, an unconstructive expression of emotions, which is sometimes feared. So here, I think, is really a good example in that sense."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, February 26, 2026.

*"Because I even have something to compare it to – it was a very constructive [discussion, – author's note], it was just its purpose, different opinions, different needs were expressed and that, just like that, it challenges [challenges, – author's note] thinking a little bit broader and it all really happened constructively. Because I really have examples where those discussions were much less constructive. Where they just shouted. Well, it destroys, in that sense, that whole, some kind of part of the meeting, engagement. But that wasn't the case here. Here, that challenging [questioning, throwing a challenge (meaning also the representatives of the municipality, JUDU), – author's note] was really very healthy and it is really necessary, in my opinion. Yes, because there are, there have been meetings where they just shout and don't even let other people speak. Or you see that a person wants to ask, but is already afraid, because their opinion may be different from the opinion of the person shouting. This is when in a calm voice, a calm tone and with arguments, let's start with that – with arguments [emphasis added, – author's note], this is completely different from just screaming <...>".*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 4, October 24, 2025.

As can be seen, **the comprehensive learning, presentation of materials and high-quality, professional facilitation processes that enabled informed, inclusive deliberations** are considered to be among the main reasons for such a successful evaluation of the Assembly process. **The prevailing constructive atmosphere also stems from Assembly selection principles** – as a positive aspect, decision-makers at the political and administrative levels also highlighted the fact that the Assembly format allowed for the gathering of a more representative group of Vilnius residents (compared to the usual methods of involving citizens), thus expanding the group of those

## Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Evaluation Report

citizens being spoken to, beyond the usually visible, involved (often outraged, highly emotionally reactive) ones.

*"That process [of selection, - author's note] was transparent and as intended, no, not for specific intended people, because it is very obvious that it was constructed so that we would select the society as it is, let's say, mention the Vilnius group, which can discuss its arguments one way or another, but would not talk only to the same people who are shouting from the vat, no, I'm not saying that they are talking, but they are shouting [emphasis, - author's note] from the vat. Well, it is very difficult to talk to the same people who seem to be doing the process for the sake of the process - well, simply to oppose. That's because our goal is not the process, [there is no, - author's note] to oppose. Our goal is to reach an agreement. And here is the hard part - to reach an agreement. <...> Learning to speak - we still have the expectation to this day - with the society."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

It is important that both the organizers, politicians and other decision-makers **also viewed the Assembly as an opportunity to discuss sensitive topics, to move forward with big, uncomfortable, controversial and unpopular, but necessary decisions**, reducing the tendency observed in institutions to avoid taking such decisions – **by receiving new ideas during the Assembly and at the same time sharing the responsibility for the decision with citizens, gaining greater legitimacy and reducing tension**<sup>169</sup>. Sustainable mobility was seen as precisely such a sensitive topic, requiring "drastic" decisions that are being delayed and hesitant to make.

*"On the one hand, this makes the job of politicians a lot easier, because then no one will be able to accuse you of accepting it alone without consulting us, and on the other hand, it is also a certain satisfaction for the community itself. Well, this is public transport, a particularly sensitive area, mobility as such in general - do we need to narrow or widen streets, do we need more bike lanes, because it [area for the path, - author's note] needs to be taken from somewhere, so all these sensitive questions should be answered very purposefully, at least that is our expectation."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, October 14, 2025.

*"Because we have the biggest stigma of development – this is transport, movement and mobility. Vilnius's major problems and the related transport or mobility strategy. And how we are failing to implement it. <...> a sustainable mobility plan has been approved, which sometimes looks like some kind of theoretical document to everyone that no one, well, takes seriously. I dare say so, because the indicators according to this sustainable mobility plan have not improved, but have worsened, and we, in my opinion, are not doing anything to improve those indicators, and they involve very drastic decisions. And what happens when drastic decisions are put on the table – they need to be considered in every way and, well, difficult decisions should be made by one person, say, the mayor, an architect there, or specifically a chief engineer here, maybe even a decision should be made, it is really complicated and in any case <...> we are faced with many people's opinions, views and we have to discuss them and eventually come to a common decision. So imagine what it means for the city to talk about mobility and about changing habits. Because it is needed - how will we come to an agreement with*

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<sup>169</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Organizer No. 4, 2025 October 24, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Organizer No. 2, 2025 September 30, interview with politician or other decision-maker No. 1, 2025 October 14, interview with politician or other decision-maker No. 3, 2026 February 4

## Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Evaluation Report

*"The citizens, that we all have to do something little by little to make the city better. It's not enough to write a post on Facebook [arguing for the Assembly, - author's note]."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

This expectation refers to major, confrontational changes that the Assembly could mandate (for example, the Irish Citizens' Assembly, identified with a change in abortion policy, has become a benchmark in the world for the implementation of this type of expectation). **However, after the end of the VMPA, it is noticeable that the recommendations made by the Assembly, which encompass more sensitive, larger-scale changes,**

(for example, regarding rail transport, the expansion of the low-emission zone) **one does not dare to undertake** without being confident that the Assembly that has taken place provides a sufficient basis for overcoming general resistance<sup>170</sup>.

It is likely that it would have been more helpful to respond to these greater specific expectations and to build stronger support if the assembly theme and main question had been focused more specifically on the most sensitive issues and aspects (preferably one) in the field of sustainable mobility –

By giving full attention to one aspect, it could have been considered in great detail and in a variety of ways during the time allotted to the Assembly, presenting more detailed, more comprehensive, more comprehensively based recommendations on one issue, focused on one (most sensitive) aspect, which would likely make the institutions feel more solid in that sensitive aspect.

Since the format of the citizens' assembly had not yet been tested in the city of Vilnius, among **the expectations of the organizers and politicians and other decision-makers was the desire to simply try out this method of citizen involvement as a new one, to check and better understand its strengths and weaknesses, suitability and adaptability** to the context of the city of Vilnius, as mentioned - to the culture of society in general. These **expectations were met - it was confirmed** that citizens' assemblies, as a good international practice, can be implemented in Lithuania with high quality, and both government institutions and citizens are sufficiently prepared for such a process.

*"The expectation was simply to try this tool, this methodology, and understand what it's about. It happened <...> there's a feeling that this process is missing something, or not, maybe it's in the future, but the expectation that such a process would happen, it has come true."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

*"What is the purpose of this? To check how mature we are, do we, well, do our society want to get involved? Because if, well, the society doesn't even want to participate at all, then why are we here then? If this is authoritarian rule, we have delegated the rights to decide, then be nice, don't write your bad reviews. If our decisions as a municipality somehow don't satisfy you. That's another thing for us [in the municipality - author's note] to learn ourselves, if, let's say, it worked and we see that it is a tool that different countries use, because, well, there are very different maturities, relevant cultures, different, well, in those countries. Maybe there, you know, we will decide that we tried once and we will not try again, because it was not successful. <...> And anyway – I think the results exceed expectations. I would have justified this experiment, in any case, because it is, well, necessary to check from time to time, where, how much we can, how much we cannot experiment and propose new ways of negotiating. Because from society, I say, from that*

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<sup>170</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

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*We hear on Facebook that they care a lot. But do they really care? Prove it with your activity, dedicate your Saturdays to those meetings."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

*"I think we managed to somehow, well, show that this model is possible to implement in Lithuania."*

*Because there was definitely a lot of skepticism. And I think that was definitely shown."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

True, the process of organizing the Assembly itself was not easy. In this sense, it was noted that the novelty itself required a lot of effort from the organizers, constant leadership while "walking on untrodden paths", often encountering obstacles<sup>171</sup>. However, the knowledge gained and the solutions found in addressing these emerging challenges **met another expectation raised by the organizers and decision-makers – to learn how to organize this type of citizen engagement format**. During the interview, it was noted that the next time a citizens' assembly is organized, things would go much easier – certain processes, algorithms, the need for human and financial resources would already be clear, and the solutions found could serve as a precedent<sup>172</sup>.

*"It's much more difficult to make a change or an innovation within the system, because you're just consumed, absorbed, and you still have your duties, you have to do what you're assigned."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

*"There were a lot of dots to connect. <...> With the benefit, as with every Assembly issue, the first response was that it was impossible. It was impossible to send letters, it was impossible to pay benefits, everything was impossible. But it turns out that when you talk to people, you find [solutions, - author's note] and everything might be possible."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

Such learning also **met another related expectation of stakeholders – to broaden interest in citizens' assemblies, increase awareness, strengthen emerging organizational practices**, i.e., in the words of one of the organizers – to strengthen the **"ecosystem"** necessary for citizens' assemblies. After the Assembly, such an expectation was considered fulfilled, based on the interview materials of various stakeholders: it was observed that the organizers themselves acquired the necessary skills and knowledge, citizens' assemblies became known and attracted the attention of a wider audience – both the municipal administration and the general public –, it allowed representatives of other institutions (e.g., those who participated as observers) to get to know citizens' assemblies better, and some of those who joined also became active "ambassadors" of citizens' assemblies as an engagement method.

*"Some other assembly will also have to be composed of some parts. So, in a word, my expectation would be something like this, perhaps a secondary one, that this ecosystem would continue to develop and that interest would arise."*

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<sup>171</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, March 9, 2026.

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Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025.

*"Also, one of the main results for me is the enthusiasm of people <talks about the involvement of individual members of the VMPA team in international networks, projects related to citizens' assemblies> For me, this is one of such great achievements that a little more ecosystem has emerged and people who want to continue it, so enthusiastically. <...> Even the facilitators themselves now contact me after the process, asking if there will be other assemblies here, or if they can be organized. So in the end, they have also become more fans of this process now."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

*"It seems like when you start, there's nothing and what are you doing here <...>, but then you come to a department and say "I need this and that", and they join the process and do it. That's it for me. There are a lot of people who could have closed the door and said "I'm not required to do this according to my function and I won't do it", but there are definitely a lot of departments in the municipality who join in on this <...> I feel that people are also fascinated by the idea, when you tell them what it's about, they're like "well, that looks cool", so there's a lot of that feeling that there's something new, something meaningful, maybe something that we don't do, that's not so bureaucratic and people get involved."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

In this emerging practice and culture of citizens' assemblies, **not only did the organizers' and institutional competencies strengthen, but there was also more courage and freedom to create one's own, unique format suitable for the Lithuanian context.** This was greatly contributed to by experience in practically encountering different solutions offered by different schools of citizens' assembly organization.

While mentors provided theoretical knowledge and a broad context, organizers and facilitators also sought answers to emerging practical questions, and sometimes the answers did not correspond to theory - in such cases, they had to make their own decisions and create. This experience also enabled greater self-confidence.

*"I've really felt for several schools now. <...> we applied there and wrote to "We Do Democracy", and I think we even wrote to Latvians and Estonians, we applied, because in some places you can see - you don't know what is true anymore. They ["DemocracyNext", - author's note] as theorists say that according to theory it should happen this way, others say that in practice, "We Do Democracy" says, we do it differently. And what about us then? And then you, means, you have to make your own decision, how you create it yourself. I really see that the method itself simply invites you to create your own school. We tried the classic one, let's say that, because we followed "DemocracyNext", as they do, but now I would really let my hair down more. And I know more, I would go in a way, how to say, to create that cooperation, to break those walls [between government institutions and citizens, - author's note] with each other."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

**The biggest disappointment and unfulfilled expectations for the organizers of the VMPA was the insufficient attention paid to the Assembly by politicians, including at the highest level.**

Although, as already mentioned, the VMPA had clear political support from the municipal leaders, and its idea was also approved by the municipal council, so at the start it feels that a positive attitude prevails at the political level, recognizing the value and benefits of the Assembly, but over time, more active involvement of politicians is lacking, for example, the right to visit as observers (only a couple of politicians exercised this right). This demotivated

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and part of the Assembly organization and implementation team itself. The mayor's participation was especially missed – his photo was used in the invitations sent to Vilnius residents to participate in the Assembly, the mayor gave a couple of interviews, but it was hoped that a **personal visit during the Assembly and the attention shown by him would have additionally motivated the Assembly participants, demonstrated strong support and high assessment of the process, and given the participants more confidence and belief that the recommendations would be taken into account.** At the same time, the organizers (as well as the participants) emphasized that **even a short participation in the process (albeit as an observer) allows us to more clearly imagine how the relevant recommendations were achieved and convinces us of the value of the process.** In this case, it is also noteworthy that the attention and even the visit to the Assembly of those who were very critical of the VMPA in advance significantly softened their initial position<sup>173</sup>.

*"We made a presentation to the Council and what was very interesting and surprising to us was that all the Council members were unequivocally in favor of this experiment and this project. And they blessed it before it went ahead. That is very, very important."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

*"It's definitely the involvement of top management from the ground up - they knew about this process that it was happening. <From the very beginning> there was regular updates on what was happening with the project and what we were working on now, so that they could feel the pulse of the project, but involvement is also important." <...> I really want them to come and stay in that room for at least an hour, we'll try <...> to somehow persuade them to come in and see what it is. Because until you see the room, it's probably difficult somehow - it looks like a regular meeting with the residents, but it's a little different. So you want them to feel it and then they can decide.*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 2, September 30, 2025.

*"And I hope that they will participate, that they will come to see, maybe even more, and other [representatives] of the Council and the municipality, - author's note], well, they would invite and so on, as those citizens are considering and so on. So that they could see it, understand it and see the benefits of those assemblies and that some interest in them would increase and, ideally, of course, the desire to somehow organize more of them, or maybe even in some way in a more systematic, institutionalized way."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025.

*"[I]m very disappointed because the mayor didn't participate anywhere – he was only in the letter to the original mayor, the mayor's signature is there, and Delfi gave an interview about the Assembly, but nowhere else as the mayor speaking, meeting with the participants in person – that didn't happen."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

*"Speaking of involvement, I know that they [municipal council members, - author's note] attended very passively. Well, of course, those meetings were on Saturdays, you have to dedicate the weekend, but I know that those council members who were interested in seeing the process itself attended. So here we did everything,*

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<sup>173</sup> "I'm shrinking from such a very ardent skeptic to a constructive critic." Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 2, October 28, 2025.

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*what we could. Apparently, the Council members themselves could have made more of their own contributions, this was their most passive [contribution, - author's note]. The most passive reaction was that the Council was given time to hear the results of the Assembly and only one Council member came. After the entire Assembly. It is clear that everyone there found out, knew everything, but when there was a separate dedicated time to discuss all the results, the process, <...> showed the presentation, then the activity was low.*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

It is true that the politicians interviewed themselves explained that they did not attend the VMPA sessions due to lack of time, and claims that they were constantly informed in detail by their colleagues about the progress, followed the situation. The mayor's absence was also explained by the intensive agenda, and the deputy mayor's delegation was natural according to the functions performed. The opposition politician, in turn, stated that they lacked information about the Assembly, which they generally learned about only from the public sphere, so there was even an impression that the process was being hidden from the opposition and manipulated<sup>174</sup>.

Although, as mentioned above, the organizers were pleased with the kind help of their colleagues from the municipal administration in organizing the Assembly, they were also **disappointed and disappointed that there was also a lack of greater attention to the Assembly among the administration employees**. It was stated in the interview that, except for the organizers themselves "and a couple of other people", others were little interested, did not understand the essence, meaning and importance of the Assembly – as a signal of this was also named the failure to visit the Assembly as an observer: it was noted that more people participated "from outside", including other institutions, ministries, than from the Vilnius City Municipality itself. Accordingly, **it was feared that**, especially in cases where the relevant employees will have to contribute to the implementation of the Assembly's recommendations, they will greatly **lack a broader understanding of where and how these recommendations came from and the strength of their commitment to them may decrease**.

*"I think that few people cared about that Assembly apart from <...> and a couple of people, they just... I believe that until now few people from within the municipality understand the essence, meaning, and importance of the Assembly itself. <...> it was visible even from the same observers: there were units from the municipality, it seems to me, more external participants came, even a couple of ministries participated there, than from the municipality itself. That shows me how important it is to them."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

Another **unfulfilled expectation** was **identified by the organizers as insufficient publicity for the Assembly**: although the news about the citizens' assembly had spread, it was regretted that it deserved to reach a larger audience. However, it was also considered that this could also be a problem of insufficient attention paid by the media themselves (more on this in subsection 3.3.4).

Thus, the Assembly largely met the expectations of the organizers and decision-makers – it was tested as a new method that complemented the set of citizen engagement instruments already in use, convinced the organizers and decision-makers of its suitability for Lithuania, surprised them with its constructiveness, productivity, and effectiveness, achieved the quality of inclusive deliberations, a culture of agreement, provided experience and knowledge, and significantly strengthened the emerging citizens' assembly.

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<sup>174</sup> Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 2, October 28, 2025.

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"ecosystem". On the other hand, disappointed by the insufficient attention of politicians and municipal administration employees to the Assembly (although political support and employee assistance can be felt in individual situations), some were disappointed by the organizers and the achieved (assessed as insufficient) Publicity of the Assembly.

### *The views of the Assembly organizers and decision-makers on the usefulness and usability of the Assembly recommendations*

Neither the politicians and other decision-makers who contributed to the VMPA, nor the organizers, spoke during the interviews about specific expectations they had in advance regarding the content of the Assembly's recommendations. It was simply stated that any possible proposals would be accepted and acceptable. When asked about the inconvenient ones, it was mentioned that even proposals that deviated from the strategic priorities of the Sustainable Mobility Plan would be considered, although not necessarily adopted directly – compromises were sought more often<sup>175</sup>. During the interviews, **the desire to maintain neutrality, not to set a direction for the recommendations, and accordingly, the uncertainty that arose at the beginning of the Assembly regarding what could be expected** from its results (a broader discussion on impartiality – 3.2.1).

*"If you knew that the result, which is or is not, completely unpredictable (because it is the work of people), would end in one direction or another, then we wouldn't do it here, because we want some result that we expect and project. ,<...> We didn't project any result. <...> you can't have any expectations for the results, because then, everything would be very crooked."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

On the other hand, **it was hoped that the recommendations would be specific enough to make it easier to work with and use them**. Most of the organizers and decision-makers interviewed emphasized (also before the Assembly) that they are very much looking forward to and have **high hopes for the implementation of the recommendations developed during the VMPA**, emphasizing that this is important both for the sustainable mobility policy itself and more broadly, as a positive, contagious example that lays the foundation for future citizen engagement.

*"I would really like them [recommendations, - author's note] to be used and I hope so. Because I think that those recommendations, well, Vilnius is, well, like good vitamins - they really, really need them. So, well, some [suggestions, - author's note] will go slower, others maybe faster. We are already doing many of those processes anyway."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

*"I hope that those recommendations will be specific enough. And that they will be taken seriously by decision-makers. And that, well, as much as possible, they will be taken into account. That's really why. Then I hope that there will be <...> reports on how, what is happening with them [the recommendations, - author's note]. This is very important, the real essence of the whole process."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, September 25, 2025.

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<sup>175</sup> Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, October 14, 2025.

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**The recommendations received were evaluated** by the VMPA organizers and decision-makers in various ways (similarly to other groups, see subsection 3.3.1). First of all, it was noted that they were **very uneven – in the collection**. There have been both narrow and broad, very detailed and specific, and more abstract ones – those that will be more difficult to implement<sup>176</sup>. Some of the organizers took the view that recommendations on a more specific issue to be addressed, along with a deeper analysis of that one aspect, or recommendations of a smaller scope, e.g. for smaller districts, **would have been more beneficial**.

The breadth and lack of specificity of (some) recommendations in this case was linked to the breadth of the topic<sup>177</sup>. On the other hand, some other recommendations were assessed as too specific – it was believed that **there could have been fewer recommendations, but they would have had a greater impact, and it would have been preferable if the recommendations had been formulated more as a direction, rather than “specific homework for institutions”**<sup>178</sup>. Other organizers regretted that, in their opinion, the recommendations **remained superficial – they expressed a need for greater purity and clarity**, and although some liked the grouping of individual recommendations into blocks, others were more skeptical about the fact that the recommendations **were quite separate and individual** – they wanted a clearer overall whole<sup>179</sup>. All these aspects are seen as posing smaller or larger **challenges to the usability and implementation of the recommendations**. On the other hand, other organizers also highlighted the fact that the most important thing is that the proposals prepared at the Assembly and included in the final list of recommendations received **high support from the Assembly participants**<sup>180</sup> – this not only gives the recommendations legitimacy, but also **additional weight**, increases their usability and the likelihood of implementation.

**Politicians and other decision-makers assessed that** the Assembly's recommendations **contained useful suggestions - even if not all of them were new and unexpected**, they were nevertheless seen as **having the potential to improve** processes. The fact that the recommendations were quite expected did not cause frustration - This was partly expected, considering that citizens are often unaware of all ongoing works and projects. In this case, the recommendations **were accepted as confirmation** that sustainable mobility was “going in the right direction,” and **the direction of change seen by the citizens was the same** as the expressed support. It was joked that **the work was actually made easier by the fact that the Ideas were not “revolutionary” or inconvenient**.

*"I think that we received really useful advice, and useful in the sense that we were already doing some of those things, so some advice will simply help improve those decisions, and we also received quite original and, let's say, new proposals, which we are also committed to considering and that's what we are doing <...> It is very important to get a check on whether we are going in the direction that society and communities want. In that sense, the positive thing here is that, well, we received at least feedback that that direction is good for some things. For others, we received suggestions on how to improve certain things <...> we would see it as a really positive thing. It wasn't some revolutionary idea, but, you know, in that movement there are probably a lot of new things to invent.*

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<sup>176</sup> Interview with the organizer of Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 4, February 6, 2026.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with the organizer of Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 4, February 6, 2026.

<sup>178</sup> Interview with the organizer of Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 4, February 6, 2026.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer no. 1, 2026 January 30.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

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*"There's not much room for a bike. But what we're doing and what's been proposed, well, it seems like we're on the same page with the community, with the people of Vilnius. That's very gratifying."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, February 26, 2026.

Finally, while some decision-makers admired the boldness of some of the recommendations, the scale of the proposed change, and **welcomed the quality of the deliberations, in which participants exchanged views in open discussion, as a factor that enabled reasoned, problem-based recommendations, others**, considering the Assembly process itself, felt somewhat disappointed with the recommendations. The **qualitatively organized process** they **saw raised their expectations, which the achieved result (the recommendations) did not live up to. In both cases**, this once again highlights **the highly valued Assembly learning and deliberation process implemented** by politicians and other decision-makers .

*"Obviously, you know, they hear. Some of the recommendations were very surprising, that they themselves make such proposals that are bold, that require a huge change <...> It seems that they heard the problem and responded to the possible solution to that problem as much as they could know. <...> they themselves testify that at first there was one opinion, and then their opinion changed with each one, when the news came and the arguments appeared like that, because when there are no arguments, then the first emotion is.*

*These were the answers, the results. <...> So, it wasn't just like that. There couldn't have been such recommendations without such a process, it simply wouldn't have been possible."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

*"When I participated in the process and when I saw those final recommendations, I was a little disappointed. They seemed to me, it seemed to me that there were a lot of ideas, interesting things, deep things during the process, and the recommendations turned out to be quite abstract. And for me, I expected them to be more specific and deeper, and maybe it would be clearer to me from them what would be implemented. <...> And are those recommendations really, are they really more valuable than, for example, if an in-depth study were commissioned, conducted by consultants, and the same focus groups were held. Wouldn't the results be better than the recommendations themselves, for example?"*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 4, March 18, 2026.

### *The view of the Assembly organizers and decision-makers on the overall value of the Assembly*

Some **politicians or other decision-makers were firmly convinced even before the Assembly that the benefits it brings were worth the resources allocated. After** the Assembly, their **position did not change significantly**, the benefits of the Assembly were primarily argued through the answered expectation of knowing the position of the citizens, which allowed them to orient themselves in further work. It is worth noting that the uncertainty of the end of the process, the "unfinished cycle", also contributes to the uncertainty of the value of the Assembly.

*"This is a really insignificant amount [compared to, - author's note] with the benefits that the city receives. Because, first of all, it relieves some tension about important matters, because you simply get, well, very legitimate advice on how to act, as a politician, and you get suggestions that you might not even think of yourself. This is the amount, I really think, that will pay off unequivocally."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, October 14, 2025.

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*"It's very difficult to say here. It will probably be clear in a few years, when we see concrete work."  
But I think it paid off, it paid off in the sense that we got a legitimate voice from the public, how the public sees the solution to certain processes, and that is very important. Because in many cases, besides that, well, the political leadership, the administration sometimes has to guess how it is here, what the residents need here, or not, and where the majority is, where the average opinion is, where this or that direction is. So yes, in that sense it paid off a lot."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, February 26, 2026.

**The organizers** emphasized after the Assembly that it **was worth the effort and resources spent** – It was argued that during the organization of the VMPA, **much was tested and learned, a greater general understanding** of citizens' assemblies as ways to involve residents in decision-making emerged, **the necessary infrastructure was set in motion accordingly**, and the bond of trust was **at least somewhat strengthened**. It was emphasized that **the benefits or suitability of such methods of involving residents as citizens' assemblies are very difficult to assess in advance in a new context**, so when looking for ways to bring government institutions closer to residents and restore trust, **all that remains is to experiment**. And as an experiment, the VMPA **was a success**. It was also discussed about the personal value and benefits for those involved - the acquisition of new knowledge, significant improvement of skills<sup>181</sup> - these benefits can be attributed to the previously mentioned fulfilled expectation **of creating an ecosystem** of citizens' assemblies.

*"[About the facilitators, – author's note] they have also now become more fans of this process than they were before. It finally seemed to them that here, when it had already happened, that everything was very good here, maybe not that good, but that it was worth it. And I think that a lot of things were really tested and learned in this whole process and that the first random selection was made, and there was a greater understanding in general of what this thing is."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

*"It's probably worth experimenting, because we live in an ecosystem where everything is very immeasurable and probably only through experimentation will you see whether it works or not. Because, I think, one way or another, at least some kind of connection will be established, at least some infrastructure will be set in motion first, and maybe some actions will be taken from that."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

On the other hand, for some stakeholders, **the perceived lack of attention from municipal political level representatives, as already discussed, makes them skeptical** about the value of the Assembly. Some organizers were not entirely sure at the end of the Assembly about the attitude of politicians – to what extent the latter see deliberative democracy and its individual methods as suitable for connecting with citizens, talking, and to what extent they really take the VMPA seriously, and to what extent the Assembly has become a one-off initiative for politicians, an experiment that does not create a clear commitment to continue it in the future<sup>182</sup>. In this case,

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<sup>181</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer no. 3, 2026. February 17, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly facilitator no. 2, 2026. March 27,

<sup>182</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

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**In the absence of sufficient attention and commitment at the political level, the value of the Assembly has also been questioned – whether in such a case it is worth organizing citizens' assemblies at all<sup>183</sup> .**

In general, **the value of the Assembly was assessed mainly during the interviews through (un)reflected expectations.** However, the VMPA also had an impact in unforeseen areas. Perhaps the greatest **unplanned, unexpected**, but very positively assessed effect of the VMPA, which was observed by various stakeholders and also increased the value of the Assembly itself, was **the stimulated cooperation of municipal departments.** At the very beginning of the Assembly, the insufficient cooperation of different municipal departments was identified and emphasized as a problem – it was noted that in its absence, it is very difficult to achieve the implementation of the VMPA idea in practice, and everyone has to be convinced separately<sup>184</sup>. However, **the intersectoral recommendations formed by the VMPA and the needs for their implementation encouraged different municipal departments to communicate more, create common cooperation formats, and coordinate.** The Assembly acted as a kind of additional impulse – giving such cooperation a clear direction, pushing the deadlines for the implementation of the recommendations, and injecting additional energy. Various stakeholders drew attention to such increased

He considered the cooperation between municipal departments as a great advantage, an unexpected boost from the Assembly, and emphasized that such regular meetings would be very useful<sup>185</sup> .

*"<...> the recommendations went to different departments, but the response from those departments was that we could not accept the responses, because the recommendations themselves were very cross-sectoral, let's say, complex, that we needed to assemble a whole working group that would meet again and accept them among themselves. Well, they would learn to cooperate, which is also very good."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

*"Yes, yes, it is unequivocal. The very fact that we have deadlines and have to answer specific questions is already mobilizing and binding. This is a certain separate format created for that [inter-sectoral implementation of the Assembly's recommendations, - author's note] <...>, this is another additional factor, so that we would somehow respond to the public voice and solve them even more actively. I'm not saying that they weren't solved here before, but, well,*

*"sometimes there was a lack of either acceleration or a certain direction. This is where I think it really contributed, brought additional energy and clarity."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, February 26, 2026.

It is true that some interviewees, while rejoicing that municipal departments had begun to cooperate more with each other, **regretted that closer cooperation between the same departments and the participants, closer discussion, and open dialogue were not achieved.**

At the same time, this was seen as **an aspect of the Assembly's program that needed improvement<sup>186</sup> .**

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<sup>183</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, October 2, 2025.

<sup>185</sup> For example, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer No. 4, February 6, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer No. 1, January 30, 2026, interview with politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026, interview with politician or other decision-maker No. 1, February 26, 2026, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly organizer No. 3, February 17, 2026.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

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### *Further motivation for assembly organizers and decision-makers to involve citizens in decision-making*

Regarding the motivation of organizers and politicians and other decision-makers to involve citizens more in decision-making after the VMPA by organizing citizens' assemblies or using other forms of participation, again, it should be noted that **even before the VMPA, politicians and other decision-makers were willing to expand the practice of citizens' assemblies if it worked out** during the first Assembly (as we have already seen, a lot of hopes were placed on it). When talking to these groups after the end of the Assembly, in early 2026, **it was confirmed that the practice of citizens' assemblies in the municipality is intended to be continued, but for now** this is not being thought about in more detail, **focusing on the implementation of the results of the VMPA that has just taken place**.

*"I think so, unequivocally. I just think we need to see how this experiment of ours will work, and if it works out, I think we will expand it [the practice of citizens' assemblies, - author's note] as much as the elections allow."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, October 14, 2025.

*"And regarding the examination of other topics, we certainly do not rule it out. It is clear that it does not end here, we still need to go through all the steps, the entire cycle, and yes, we plan to continue [the practice of citizens' assemblies, - author's note]. Only now I cannot say specifically about the topics, where, but we see that further, broader applicability and we will definitely continue. <...> So far, the signals are good, we see the added benefit and then we will look, I do not rule out that this could be one of the ways [to involve citizens, - author's note]. Because, especially as society matures, as the city grows, increases, and becomes richer, residents probably want to be more involved in the same governance, and here is a time-tested method and other cities how this could be done."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 1, February 26, 2026.

Other decision-makers also emphasized that the citizens' assembly process **is valuable, but it requires a lot of human, time, and financial resources**, so it is believed that it **is necessary to prepare for it, to pay attention not only to securing the aforementioned resources, but also to the involvement of the municipal administration and politicians. Thus**, there is motivation to organize citizens' assemblies in the future, but **the necessary conditions for organizing and implementing such a process are also emphasized. Accordingly** Stakeholders considered that large resources of various types are needed, and the format of citizens' assemblies itself focuses on **strategic issues, larger-scale but less frequent** assemblies.

*"This project is huge, it costs administrative effort, resources, not just economic, it requires preparation and there must be conscious involvement of the entire municipality and politicians. It is obvious that you can't do such a big job often. Well, it's just normal that it requires time, energy and purposefulness."*

*"Experience still remains the highest priority for solving problems. <...> it would be very logical to have one assembly for one term. This means that if mayors change, the mayor would have one specific strategic topic on which he would consult with residents. <...> If it were more frequent, then it depends on the will of the politicians, on the problems they raise, because all this will have to be implemented! <...> it depends on the current issues for the city that are important at that time."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

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The observations about the workload and the required resources **are also echoed by the organizers' experience**. The latter also, on the one hand, **feel changes on a personal level, are more motivated to personally get involved and involve in the future, and** continue working on citizen engagement topics, **but**, on the other hand, they notice that organizing the Assembly required a lot of initial work, leadership, and coordination, so there are

**doubts whether they would dare to organize the Assembly a second time under the same conditions –**

**The organizers would like to have a larger team and delegate some of the work (perhaps even by hiring from outside).**

True, at this point the organizers immediately point out that the work that required a lot of effort and time, such as coordinating new solutions required for the format, constant presentation of the idea, etc., would no longer need to be done when organizing it for the second time, which would make the work much easier<sup>187</sup>.

At the same time, after the Assembly, the organizers **express both the visible meaning of institutionalizing citizens' assemblies and expanding citizen engagement practices even more broadly, including new forms that ensure continuous dialogue through regularity** - organizing not necessarily in the format of citizens' assemblies, but similar regular (there was talk of monthly or quarterly) meetings, where the needs of citizens would be heard, information would be collected, questions that arise would be answered, and regular (e.g., several times a year) initiation of co-creation processes (perhaps on a smaller scale than the Assembly)<sup>188</sup>.

**External observers** at that time, after the Assembly, **lack more specific follow-up actions** from the municipality to involve citizens in decision-making and **note that the VMPA experience remains unused**, with the assembly process being accepted as a result in itself and without more specific plans and guidelines for a broader strategy. **The municipality representatives themselves, on the contrary, claim that the VMPA experiences are already being applied in other contexts, and more open cooperation has been learned**<sup>189</sup>.

*"I don't really know all those strategic goals and I'm an optimist, so I'm really trying to be an optimistic realist. But I don't know what the real goals will be in a year or two, because I don't see whether this internal, daily work will continue. It was clear to me that <those who contributed to the organization of the VMPA> were extremely happy and satisfied that the Assembly took place and that's really fun, but I haven't seen any other steps after this Assembly that would translate into other steps related to citizen participation and inclusion [- author's note] yet. How long has it been, half a year or 3 months? That time flies quickly. <...> now with each month it somehow seems that the goal was perhaps simply to have the Assembly. It somehow begins to become more and more apparent, because, well, if there are no other decisions, other publicly announced steps, and there is only a citizens' assembly, then probably the fact that the citizens' assembly took place was the result. But maybe "It could be that I just don't know enough or I'm not seeing something."*

Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Observer No. 1, February 26, 2026.

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<sup>187</sup> Interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Organizer No. 1, 2025 September 25, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Organizer No. 1, 2026 January 30, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Organizer No. 2, 2025 September 30, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Organizer No. 2, 2026 March 9, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Organizer No. 3, 2025 October 2, interview with Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Organizer No. 3, 2026 February 17

<sup>188</sup> Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, 2025. October 2, interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly (-e) No. 1, 25 September 2025.

<sup>189</sup> More information about the example of the urban development vision of Medinių Šnipiškės mentioned in the quote: <https://vilnius.lt/naujienu/mediniu-snipiskiu-urban-vision-will-be-created-in-part-with-local-residents>, <https://pasitarkime.vilnius.lt/lt-LT/projects/mediniu-snipiskiu-urbanistine-pletros-vizija>.

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*"There are many starting points why, in my opinion, the Assembly worked. One of them is that we are now applying a similar model, way of thinking, structure to Šnipiškės. We would never have come up with it without having experience after the Assembly. We are going in a completely different direction – less, I don't know, we are not dedicating money, we are not paying people there, as was the case with the Assembly, everything is in a lighter form, but [emphasis added] we are involving equally dedicated people in the complex topic of Šnipiškės and asking them: "Do you say that this territory is important to you?" and if so, "Are you committed to contributing not just by shouting, but by real participation?" And we are forming three teams today, we have work to do, we have put architects there who will lead those teams until May.*

*Architects, planners, designers and residents. And then there are the developers. Imagine that. There were no such things. I don't know at all here. I just don't know how it will end. Nobody knows how it will end, we're not the ones deciding here. What would we do if we knew the end? We say that if the countries are so opposed, then let's all sit down and come to an agreement at one table."*

Interview with a politician or other decision-maker No. 3, February 4, 2026.

Comparing these positions, it can be noted that the impact of the Assembly on the motivation and actions of decision-makers by involving citizens in decision-making in a wider, more diverse format is indeed visible (recognizing echoes of the VMPA in the design of the example mentioned in the quote - the formation of the urban development vision of the city of Medinij Šnipiškės - elements in the selection intentions, the learning session, and discussions), but at the same time, such an impact is not yet sufficiently noticeable in the public space, and, moreover, it is still visible as more than individual initiatives.

In general, when it comes to the impact of the Assembly on its organizers and politicians and other decision-makers, it can be noted that **the assessment of the scale of such an impact is greatly limited by** two aspects reflected in the observations of these stakeholders themselves. On the one hand, **the relatively short period of time** that has passed since the end of the Assembly, which was referred to in almost all interviews, with the main focus on the still unclear outcome of the implementation process of the recommendations, as well as on the future communication messages of politicians about the Assembly (in this case, there were fears of manipulative communication instrumentalization of the Assembly in the pre-election process). Secondly, the fact that **the VMPA has so far been only one**, so its possibilities for significant, broader change in society and in the municipality itself, changing attitudes towards the inclusion of citizens beyond the circle of those who directly contributed to the organization and implementation of the Assembly, were also seen as limiting the broader, more significant impact.

### 3.3.4. Impact on Vilnius city residents

This subsection, based on data from two representative surveys of Vilnius city residents, analyses **residents' attitudes towards citizen involvement in decision-making and their links to awareness of citizens' assemblies**. It also compares key indicators before and after the implementation of the VMPA and after its completion, in order to assess whether any significant changes in the attitudes of the population were recorded during this period.

Before the start of the first stage of selection for the VMPA and the simultaneous launch of a broad communication campaign to inform citizens about the upcoming Assembly (more about this in subsection 3.2.4), a representative survey of Vilnius city residents (*omnibus*) was conducted on July 4-14, 2025 .

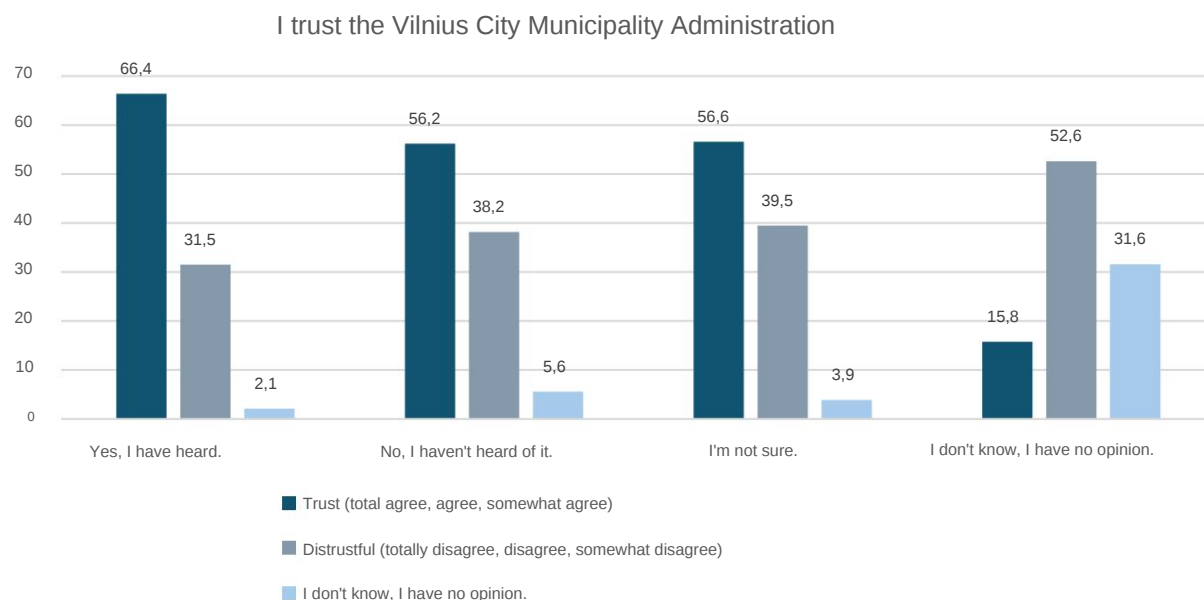
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The second such survey was conducted after the Assembly had already ended, from January 27 to February 9, 2026.<sup>190</sup> The data from these surveys allow us to analyze how residents' knowledge of citizens' assemblies is related to trust in city institutions and general satisfaction with democracy, as well as to personally felt competence to participate, intentions to engage in civic activities, and allows us to measure the assessment of citizens' assemblies as a means of engaging residents. A comparison of the two waves of surveys also allows us to assess whether these indicators changed before and after the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly.

As already reviewed in section 3.2.4, from July 2025 to January-February 2026 (when the surveys were conducted), **the awareness of citizens' assemblies as a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making in Vilnius increased by 10 percentage points** - from 14 percent to 24 percent (the number of those who did not remember exactly increased by another 7 percentage points). Thus, in this period of implementation of the VMPA, During the period, the topic of citizens' assemblies became more visible and recognizable among city residents.

Analyzing the data from the second survey, it can be seen that **residents who have heard about citizens' assemblies have greater trust in city institutions**. Among those who have heard, 66 percent of respondents expressed trust in the Vilnius City **Municipality Administration**, while among those who have not heard, 56 percent did so. The share of residents declaring distrust in the municipal administration was also lower among those who have heard about citizens' assemblies than among those who have not heard (Figure 11).

**Figure 11.** Trust in the Vilnius City Municipality administration among groups of those who have heard and those who have not heard about citizens' assemblies, percent.



Source: Representative *omnibus* survey of Vilnius city residents conducted by Norstat in January 2026. 27 - February 9 (N=1001). Full wording of questions: "Citizens' assembly is a tool for involving residents in decision-making. A representative group of residents, at least 5, randomly selected

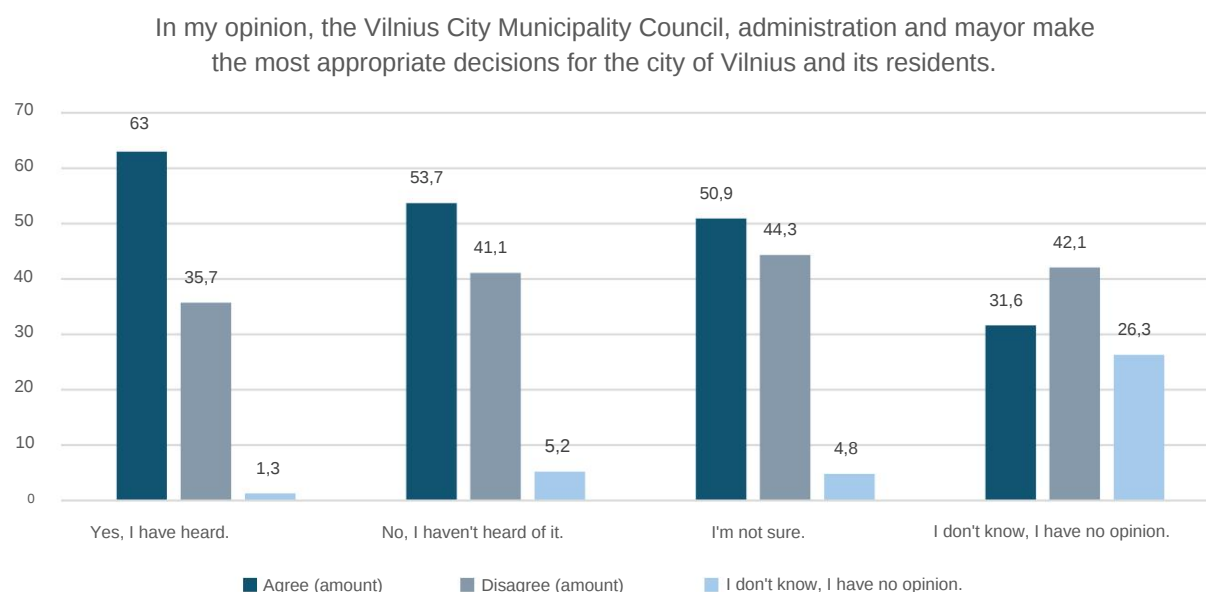
<sup>190</sup> Both surveys were commissioned by Vilnius City Municipality and conducted by Norstat, an international market research and survey data collection company. More information is presented in subsection 2.2.

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days, they get acquainted with the topic accompanied by independent experts, discuss among themselves and formulate recommendations on the issue assigned to them for the leaders of the city or state. Such an assembly will be held/was held in Vilnius in the autumn of 2025. The topic of the assembly: How to achieve that in Vilnius we would choose to travel by public transport, bicycle or on foot as often as possible, regardless of where we live? Have you heard about the citizens' assembly as a way for residents to participate in the decision-making of the city or the country? " and "I trust the Vilnius City Municipality Administration".

A similar trend is seen when assessing the residents' opinion on the appropriateness of decisions made in the city. Respondents who had heard about citizens' assemblies were significantly more likely to agree with the statement that the Vilnius City **Municipality Council, administration and mayor make the most appropriate decisions for the city** and its residents. Among those who had heard about them, 63 percent of respondents thought so, while among those who had not heard about them, 54 percent (Figure 12).

**Figure 12.** Vilnius residents' assessment of whether city decision-makers make the most appropriate decisions, percentage of those who have heard and have not heard about citizens' assemblies in groups.



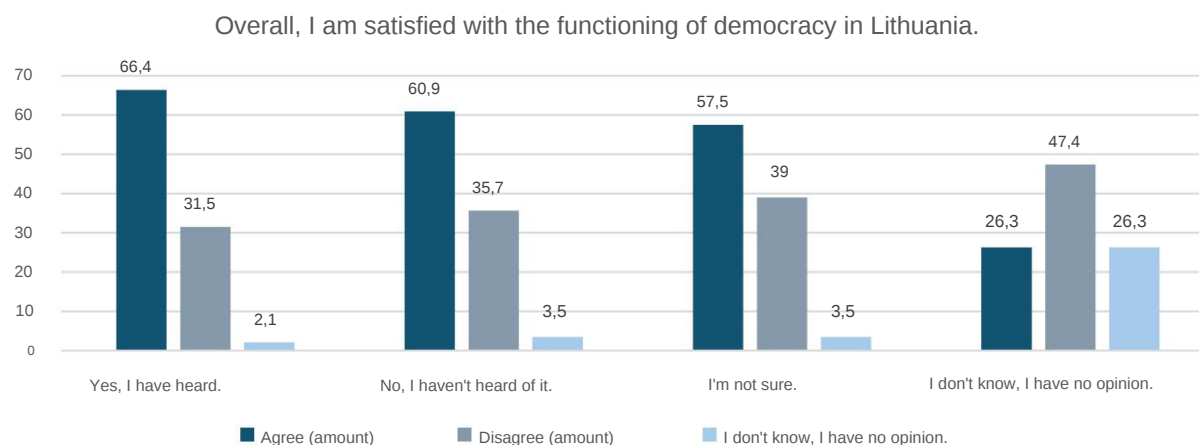
Source: Representative omnibus survey of Vilnius city residents conducted by Norstat from January 27 to February 9, 2026 (N=1001). Full question wording: "Citizens' assembly is <...> Have you heard of a citizens' assembly as a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making?" and "In my opinion, the Vilnius City Municipality Council, administration and mayor make the most appropriate decisions for the city of Vilnius and its residents."

**Those who had heard about citizens' assemblies were also more likely to have a positive opinion of the functioning of democracy in Lithuania.** 66 percent of those who had heard about it and 61 percent of those who had not (Figure 13)

agreed with the statement that they were generally satisfied with the functioning of democracy in Lithuania. Although the differences between the groups are smaller here than in the case of trust in city institutions and the decisions they make, the trend remains the same. Those who have heard about it give more favorable assessments. Thus, it can be seen that awareness of citizens' assemblies is positively related to both the assessment of local government institutions and the general assessment of democratic processes at the national level.

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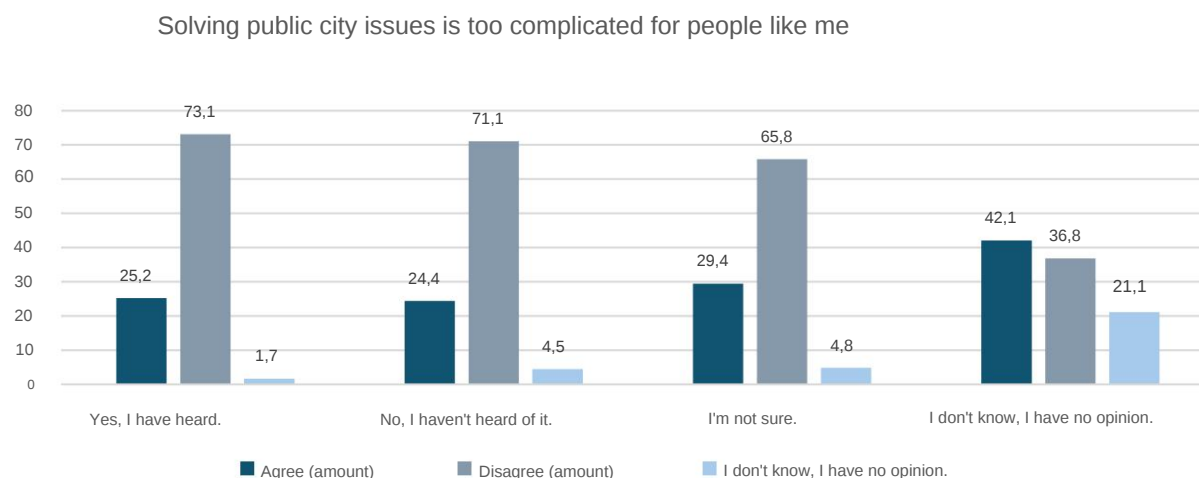
**Figure 13.** Satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Lithuania in groups of those who have heard and those who have not heard about citizens' assemblies, percentage.



Source: Representative omnibus survey of Vilnius city residents conducted by Norstat from January 27 to February 9, 2026 (N=1001). Full question wording: "Citizens' assembly is <...> Have you heard of a citizens' assembly as a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making?" and "Overall, I am satisfied with the functioning of democracy in Lithuania."

**When assessing subjective internal political efficacy** (the extent to which respondents feel able to understand and meaningfully participate in politics), **no significant differences were found between hearing and non-hearing residents.** A similar proportion of respondents in both hearing and non-hearing groups agreed with the statement that solving public city issues is too complicated for people like them (25 percent and 24 percent of Vilnius residents surveyed, respectively, Figure 14). This allows us to conclude that mere knowledge of citizens' assemblies is not directly related to residents' confidence in their own abilities to understand or evaluate public city issues - these attitudes are more reliably changed by the practice of personal engagement (as mentioned in subsection 3.3.2).

**Figure 14.** Vilnius residents' assessment of whether city decision-makers make the most appropriate decisions, based on whether residents have heard about citizens' assemblies, percentage.



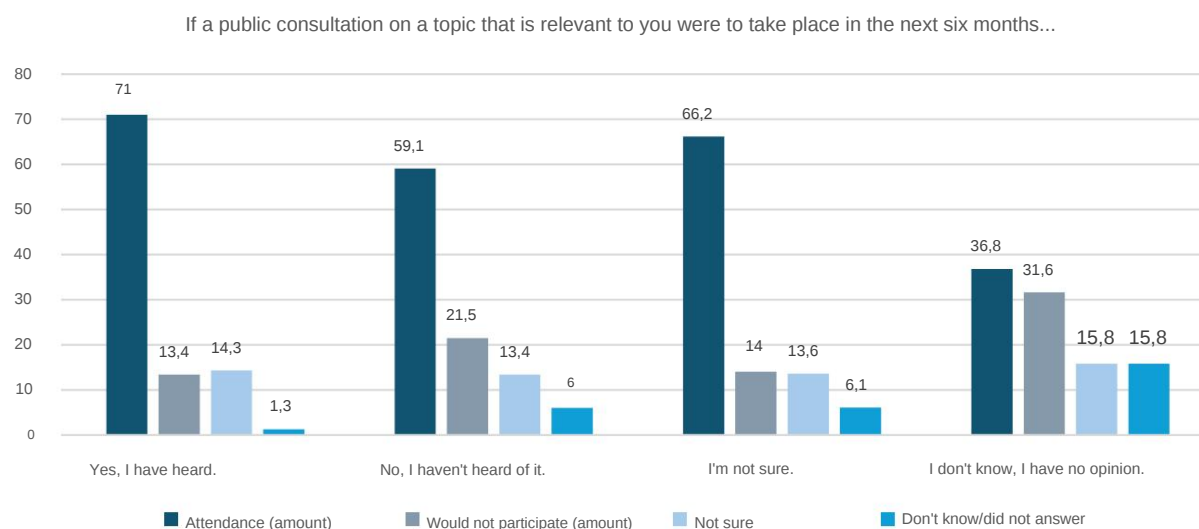
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Source: Representative omnibus survey of Vilnius city residents conducted by Norstat from January 27 to February 9, 2026 (N=1001). Full question wording: "Citizens' assembly is <...> Have you heard of a citizens' assembly as a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making?" and "Solving public city issues is too complicated for people like me."

Finally, those who have heard about citizens' assemblies were also significantly more likely to be willing to participate in the decision-making process in the future (Figure 15). According to the survey, if a public consultation on a topic relevant to them were to take place in the next six months, 71% of those who have heard about citizens' assemblies would participate (17% of them resolutely state that they would "definitely participate"), while 59% of those who have not heard of them would do so (8% of them chose the answer "definitely participate"). A similar trend is seen when assessing potential participation in another citizens' assembly<sup>191</sup> - 61% of those who have heard of them and 42% of respondents who have not heard of them would be willing to participate (of which 13% in the first group were willing to "definitely participate", and 7% in the second). This suggests that awareness of citizens' assemblies is associated with a greater declared willingness to engage in various forms of participation in the future. However, it is noteworthy that the commitment is not the same in the case of both different forms of engagement –

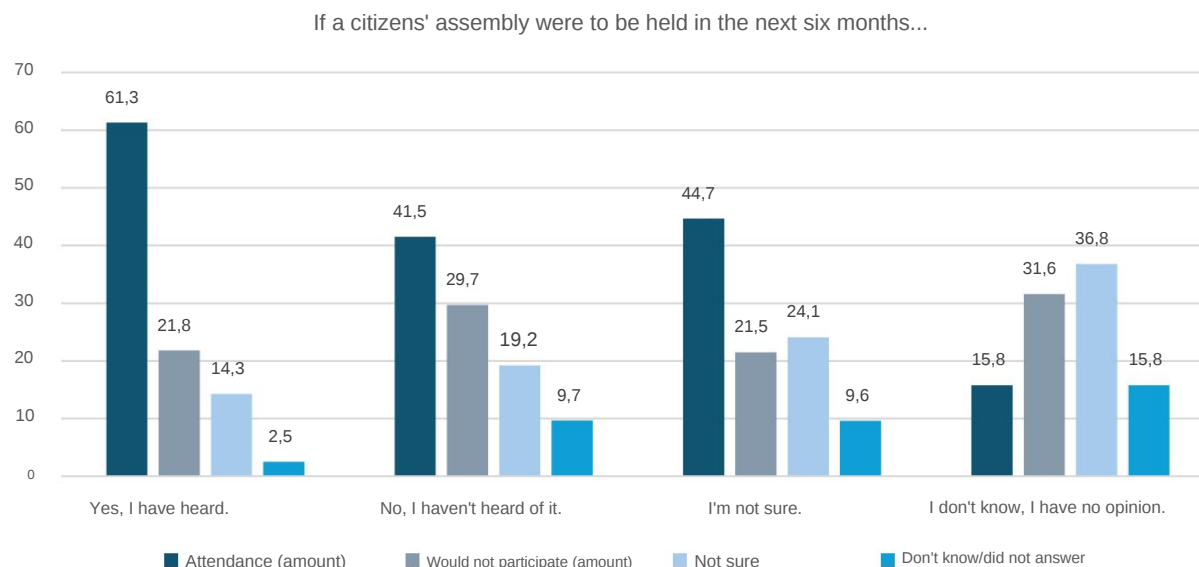
According to the survey, public consultation remains a more attractive form of engagement even among those who have heard of citizens' assemblies - this signals that citizens' assemblies, perhaps due to their unusual nature, are still viewed with more caution.

**Figure 15.** Probability of participating in a public consultation and citizens' assembly among those who have heard and those who have not heard about citizens' assemblies, percent.



<sup>191</sup> It is assumed that those who stated during the survey that they had not heard of the Assembly, when asked whether they would participate in a citizens' assembly in the future, relied on the detailed explanations provided in the survey questionnaire, presenting this form of involvement in the decision-making process.

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Source: Representative omnibus survey of Vilnius city residents conducted by Norstat in January 27 - February 9, 2026 (N=1001). Full question wording: "Citizens' assembly is <...> Have you heard of a citizens' assembly as a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making?" and "If a public consultation on a topic relevant to you were to take place in the next six months. If the events listed below were to take place in the next six months, how likely are you to participate in them? If a citizens' assembly were to take place in the next six months."

It is true that, in general, citizens' assemblies are viewed very favorably by those who have heard of them: **citizens'**

**The assembly was identified as a suitable way to involve residents in the decision-making process by 90%** of Vilnius residents who had heard about the assemblies (those who had not heard were not asked this question). Compared to the data from the first survey, the overall support for citizens' assemblies remained almost unchanged - in the first survey it was 88%.<sup>192</sup> However, the distribution of support has changed significantly: if in the summer of 2025, 45% of those who had heard about citizens' assemblies were of the opinion that this was a "really suitable way to involve residents in decision-making", and another 43% agreed that this was a "rather suitable way", then in January-February 2026 it can be seen that already 35% of those who had heard about citizens' assemblies confidently considered them a "really suitable way" and another 55% - "rather suitable". It is noteworthy that such a decrease in confidence could be explained by a significantly increased proportion of those who had heard about citizens' assemblies – this is sufficient to explain the generally observed greater caution. On the other hand, in such a case, it would also signal that those who had newly learned about citizens' assemblies were not particularly convinced of the appropriateness of this form of engagement<sup>193</sup>.

Looking at other **changes in the attitudes of Vilnius residents during the implementation period of the VMPPA**, it is clear that the change in trust in city institutions during the period under consideration was either insignificant or positive. **The overall trust in the Vilnius City Municipality administration varied within the limits of statistical error** (from 55 percent to 58 percent), although a closer look shows that the number of those who trust it more strongly increased slightly, at the limit of statistical error. At that time, the Vilnius City Municipality

<sup>192</sup> The statistical error with this distribution of responses is about 1.9 percent.

<sup>193</sup> Since the surveys did not involve the same respondents, we cannot reliably track changes in attitudes at the individual level – the distribution could have changed for other reasons.

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The suitability of decisions made by the council, administration and mayor for the city of Vilnius and its residents **has been assessed 7 percentage points more positively** (change from 48 percent to 55 percent).

**It is true that these changes did not seem to be closely related to the VMPA** - in both cases, quite similar changes in attitudes were recorded both in the groups of those who had heard about citizens' assemblies and those who had not. Considering the interview material, it could be assumed that a larger change in trust in Vilnius city institutions related to citizens' assemblies was not recorded due to the lack of clarity regarding the fate of the recommendations prepared by the VMPA - to what extent they will ultimately be taken into account.

On the other hand, at a more abstract level, changes related to citizens' assemblies can be seen.

Although **satisfaction with the functioning of democracy** in Lithuania **did not change statistically significantly** during the period under study (in the summer of 2025 it was 64 percent, and in the winter of 2026 – 61 percent), we can see more significant changes when looking at the groups of those who had heard about citizens' assemblies and those who had not. In the first group, **those who had heard about citizens' assemblies, satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Lithuania increased by 6 percentage points, while in the second group, those who had not heard about citizens' assemblies, it decreased by 5 percentage points**. Therefore, it seems that awareness of citizens' assemblies as an innovation in democracy did indeed improve the results of overall satisfaction with democracy.

When it comes to motivation to participate, the change in society is also not significant. First of all, **the general belief of Vilnius residents in their competence to solve city issues has not changed** in principle – the share of both those who believe that solving city issues is too complicated for “people like me” and those who disagree with this opinion has changed within the limits of statistical error (from 25% in the summer of 2025 to 24% in the winter of 2026). True, this change was more significant **among respondents who had heard about citizens' assemblies – subjective internal political efficacy** in this group **increased by 4 percentage points** (in the group who had not heard about it – within the limits of statistical error, by 1 percentage point). Finally, **the willingness to engage in specific participatory decision-making activities did not change significantly** at the level of all city residents (64% of respondents said they would join a public consultation in the summer of 2025 and 63% in the winter of 2026 in the near future; 48% and 47% said they would join a citizens' assembly in the respective periods). Both those who had heard of citizens' assemblies and those who had not heard of them in the winter survey were less likely to indicate that they would engage in these two ways<sup>194</sup>, but it was **among those who had heard of citizens' assemblies that uncertainty (“I am not sure”) about whether they would join increased significantly in both cases** (10 percentage points in the case of a public consultation and 12 percentage points in the case of a citizens' assembly).

In summary, it can be stated that Vilnius residents who have heard about citizens' assemblies as a way for residents to participate in city or country decision-making are very positive about citizens' assemblies as a means of involving residents, have greater trust in city institutions and satisfaction with how democracy works in the country, and are also more likely to declare their intention to participate in various civic participation activities (however, the available data do not allow us to draw firm conclusions about the causal effect of VMPA on this). True, those who have heard about citizens' assemblies do not differ from those who have not heard about them in terms of assessing their competences in city decision-making.

<sup>194</sup> This is not strongly reflected in the overall change in citizens' attitudes due to the other two groups (not sure if they have heard about citizens' assemblies and those who do not know, who did not respond to the question) of the compensatory nature of the answers.

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Paying attention to the change in attitudes of this group that had heard about citizens' assemblies during the implementation of the VMPA, it is worth noting that even in the absence of major changes in the general satisfaction with democracy and subjective internal political efficacy of Vilnius residents, the group that had heard about citizens' assemblies stood out with a positive, albeit small, change in attitudes (compared to the group that had not heard about citizens' assemblies). In the group that had heard about citizens' assemblies, satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Lithuania increased by 6 percentage points and subjective political efficacy increased by 4 percentage points. True, changes in trust in city decision-makers and the appropriateness of their decisions did not differ in this group during the studied period. And when asked about possible future participation in a public consultation or citizens' assembly, the group stood out with a significantly increased uncertainty about their actions (compared to the group that had not heard about them).

Regarding the limited change in attitudes of Vilnius city residents that may be associated with citizens' assemblies during the implementation of the VMPA, it should be noted that the organizers themselves did not expect a particularly large change in society in Vilnius city – both due to the dissemination challenges that are also characteristic of citizens' assemblies held in other countries, and due to the novelty of such a practice and the method of involvement in decision-making. It could also be added that citizens' assessments are also greatly influenced by the final result – the implementation of the recommendations prepared by the citizens' assembly. At the time of the second survey discussed in this subsection, the outcome of the implementation of the recommendations prepared by the VMPA was not yet known. For these reasons, the observed changes, although small, are nevertheless important.

*"As one might expect, it is not easy to reach the general public and increase that understanding of assemblies in a slightly broader sense. So maybe that expectation was not fully fulfilled. Although efforts were certainly made, but anyway, when we see examples from other countries, it was as one might expect, because assemblies have been taking place for maybe 30 years, but they are not a very widely known thing. The general public does not necessarily understand what it is. That is, unless in situations like, say, Ireland, where a national assembly takes place, where it is very loud, then that awareness increases.*

*But such local assemblies may not achieve as much as we would like."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 1, January 30, 2026.

*"People around me have learned something about it, but there are probably a lot of inquiries, and many people don't know. Well, in one go [and it's no surprise, - author's note], you probably need to do it about five times so that you can say that something is already maturing a lot. Well, that's probably why I feel that it's very difficult to measure after one go."*

Interview with the organizer of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly No. 3, February 17, 2026.

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### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Summing up the results of the Assembly evaluation, it can be stated that it was **a valuable process, responding to good international practices, which methodically and transparently involved a diverse group of Vilnius city residents in Vilnius mobility policy decision-making**. The strengths of the process include a relevant issue, consistent communication with and attention to the Assembly participants, a balanced and responsive learning process, facilitation characterized by a variety of methods, impartiality, inclusiveness and responsiveness to the needs of the participants during the stages of deliberations and formulation of recommendations, and professional and active external communication about the VMPA in its early stages.

Nevertheless, several critical elements should be noted, which could become a space for improvement when organizing assemblies in the future. This category could include the narrow circle of initiators and organizers of the Assembly, which did not allow for a wider mobilization of knowledge and support for the recommendations prepared during the VMPA in the Vilnius City Municipality. Although the initiative **received political support, it lacked political attention** - city politicians and decision-makers were not active observers of the VMPA sessions, they were slow to get involved in the presentations prepared for the Municipal Council, and the event for presenting the Assembly recommendations did not attract much interest. All this poses risks for support for the implementation of the Assembly recommendations and citizen involvement as a significant decision-making practice. It is also worth considering the **relatively late (ended a couple of weeks before the start of the Assembly) selection process of participants**, which, given the limited human resources, did not allow for timely application of risk management measures in the face of the relapse of selected citizens. Although the sample of VMPA participants remained representative after experiencing the first decrease in the number of participants, as it shrank further during the Assembly, some groups of society (especially youth) were less represented. It is also worth mentioning **the planning of the Assembly's program during its implementation**, which, on the one hand, provided flexibility, but on the other hand, opened up space for hasty changes.

Finally, **challenges were encountered due to the abundance of recommendations** (24 proposals were prepared) and, accordingly, insufficient depth (or, conversely, extremely specific and technical details), which can be explained by the expansion of a relatively broad question in the facilitation process and the balance that changed over time between learning and the time allocated to considering and formulating recommendations.

In line with the expectations for the Assembly's outcomes set out in the intervention logic presented in the annexes to this report, **it can be stated that they have been largely achieved**, but a more accurate assessment would require monitoring covering a longer implementation phase of the recommendations.

Given the short period since the end of the Assembly, this assessment does not consistently assess its long-term impact – this requires further monitoring and a stronger impetus for change.

(e.g. implementation of another assembly). First, although at the time of preparing this report (spring 2026) **it is not yet possible to accurately indicate the level of implementation of the recommendations provided**, the created accountability mechanism for participants and the public (reports are submitted), the cross-sectoral working group operating in Vilnius City Municipality, and the compatibility of the recommendations with the Vilnius City Strategic Development Plan for 2021-2030 should be considered a positive sign. These reasons, as well as the fact that some of the recommendations have already been implemented, suggest that the VMPA will contribute to a sustainable and

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establishment of accessible mobility in the city for various groups of Vilnius city residents. Secondly, **the initial institutional practice of implementing citizens' assemblies has been formed in Vilnius City Municipality, but it has not yet been properly institutionalized** - the acquired knowledge and skills are most closely linked to the persons who participated in the VMPA process, therefore there is a risk that some of the knowledge will be lost when they leave their positions.

Third, the awareness of citizens' assemblies as a way for residents to participate in city or national decision-making in Vilnius increased by 10 percentage points - from 14 percent to 24 percent (compared to the period before (before and after the Assembly)). Thus, **citizens' assemblies became more visible and recognizable among citizens**. Moreover, both participation in the VMPA and knowledge about it strengthened citizens' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, and residents who have heard about the assemblies are more likely to trust the city municipality and its institutions. Contrary to what was expected in the logic of the intervention, **the assessment of the opportunities to influence public decision-making among the Assembly participants did not change significantly**. It is also important to note that after the Assembly experience, the participants' assessment of the Assembly as an appropriate method for decision-making decreased. This allows us to assume that the participants positively assessed the process, its experience, acquired knowledge, and in-depth discussions, but did not assess the VMPA as an effective method for making public policy decisions.

Finally, **no significant cultural and/or institutional changes are currently evident that would underpin the application of citizens' assemblies at the local and/or national levels**. The main impact of the VMPA in this area is the dissemination of knowledge about deliberative democracy practices as a tool for citizen engagement and the accumulated experience that can be transferred when organizing citizens' assemblies or other citizen engagement formats in the future (currently, Lithuania already plans to implement at least two more citizens' assemblies in different municipalities). However, it is important to emphasize that **politicians or other decision-makers familiar with this process in Vilnius City Municipality were mostly positive about the application of the method in the future**, but further implementation of the recommendations and its results are important for a full assessment.

The following sections provide summaries of each dimension of the assessment with recommendations for improving the application of assemblies in the future (recommendations are not provided solely for the impact section, as the results of the latter are determined by the design and process decisions discussed) and provide suggestions that can help institutionalize deliberative democracy practices.

Lithuanian decision-making.

### *Assembly design*

**The governance structure** of the VMPA was compact, partly adapted to the Vilnius city context and involving key stakeholders. The small governance structure can also be explained by the fact that the VMPA was initially a small group of people, rather than a broad initiative. However, no permanent mechanisms for stakeholder engagement were established, the existing division of responsibilities created a disproportionate workload for the main organizers of the Assembly, and the unclear division of functions between the initiator and the implementer could create the appearance of bias. Weak

The involvement of a wider circle of decision-makers in the early stages of the process also became an obstacle to the implementation of the recommendations - the employees responsible for this needed to be additionally informed about

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process, to explain the content of the recommendations. On the other hand, interviewees confirmed that even participation in the feedback group was extremely useful later, when they got involved in the activities of the group responsible for the implementation of the recommendations. The uncertainty in the process of adopting governance and strategic issues also became an obstacle for the facilitators, when there was a need to adjust specific elements of its design during the Assembly. Finally, it is important to mention that the governance structure was only in place during the VMPA – As the process of implementing the recommendations began, a new decision-making mechanism was established, in which leadership emerged more informally.

The Assembly's **mandate** was perceived similarly by stakeholders, but alongside the evaluators Alternative views emerged regarding the VMPA as a way to improve mobility in Vilnius city (orientation towards public policy changes). Some stakeholders viewed the VMPA as an experiment – a test of a new method of involving citizens in decision-making (orientation towards democratic innovations), while others revealed that they had no expectations towards the Assembly and saw it as a communication tool of the Vilnius city municipality, helping to legitimize existing or future public policy decisions.

The latter approach can be explained by the Assembly's connection to the Vilnius City Strategic Development Plan for 2021-2030: it was expected that the VMPA recommendations would be focused on *how* the sustainable mobility objectives set out therein should be implemented, rather than *on what* strategic direction should be chosen. Although such an expectation does not in itself mean politicization of the Assembly, but rather refers to the specific definition of its mandate and the needs of decision-makers, it was understood in the opposite way by some participants.

The VMPA **question** was formulated with the involvement of various stakeholders, and its breadth and openness allowed for significant citizen involvement in the deliberations and formulation of recommendations. Nevertheless, the process of formulating the question was relatively long, and the lack of a governance structure uniting all key stakeholders became an additional burden for the Assembly initiator in coordinating the question formulation with key beneficiaries and involved parties.

When assessing the chosen formulation of the question, its breadth and complexity were often emphasized, but this is more related not to the question itself, but to its further examination and the chosen design solutions of the Assembly (e.g., the introduction of urban territorial zoning categories).

When assessing **the duration of the Assembly**, it should be noted that it responded to good international practices and was positively assessed by the participants themselves. The only drawback in this regard is the slightly shorter than planned time allocated for deliberations and formulation of recommendations: due to the additional, unplanned second presentation of JUDU, the learning part was extended, leaving less time for working with recommendations. This time was extremely important, taking into account the expansion of the issue, after the introduction of urban territorial zoning categories. Thus, although the Assembly sought to adapt to the needs of the participants, the changes made to the program and content somewhat increased the workload on the participants and reduced the time allocated for deliberations and formulation of recommendations.

The selection of VMPA participants was organized based on the principle of democratic lottery and criteria in line with international good practices, which allowed for the formation of a diverse and **representative group of participants according to the selected characteristics**. The inclusion of an additional criterion related to the daily use of transport provided the prerequisites for better reflecting the different mobility experiences of urban residents, but was not sufficient to attract people who would not fundamentally agree with the principles of sustainable mobility. However, after a part of the selected residents refused to participate, and later with a decrease in

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Due to the activeness of the participants, some groups of society were less represented during the Assembly, especially young people. Although demographic diversity was largely maintained, the process, as in many similar initiatives, showed a self-selection effect – more civically active members of society than average participated in the Assembly. The organizers created favorable conditions for participation, which were highly appreciated by the participants and became one of the strongest aspects of the process design. Survey and interview data also show that the Assembly created conditions for inclusive and respectful discussions, but some stakeholders missed a more pronounced clash of different positions, especially on mobility policy issues. This can be attributed both to the formulation of the Assembly's question itself, focused on the implementation of sustainable mobility goals, and to the chosen methods of facilitation and group work, which encouraged the search for consensus and weakened the consolidation of group identities and opposing positions.

### **Recommendations for the future application of deliberative democracy practices:**

1. Clearly define and agree in advance the roles of the actors involved before, during and after the assembly. Ensure separation of initiator and executor functions by hiring an external assembly organizer (e.g. an independent non-governmental organization) or by creating a specialized unit within the institution. This principle is particularly relevant at the stage of creating an assembly design – the group or organization responsible for it should act independently of the initiator of the assembly, thus contributing to greater legitimacy of the process;
2. Form a steering group and/or project team that includes city decision-makers, politicians, and other stakeholders involved in the implementation of the recommendations from the early planning stages of the assembly (i.e., develop a governance structure that takes into account not only the specifics of the assembly but also the general governance context). Involving them in making key decisions, such as the formulation of the assembly question, would strengthen ownership of the process and the recommendations generated during it, which would likely facilitate their implementation. This would also consolidate knowledge about deliberative democracy practices within the organizations involved;
3. Openly communicate the expectations placed on the assembly to the public and participants, emphasizing at which decision-making level (strategic – direction or operational – implementation) their input is needed, what is expected from the prepared recommendations and what they will be used for. The VMPA example confirms that a suitable assembly question can also be formulated at the operational level, however, in order to ensure meaningful citizen involvement, it is worth avoiding highly technical questions, the answers to which are more appropriate to consult experts. In order to achieve accurate communication of expectations, it is important to foresee in advance the review, implementation, supervision and accountability mechanism of the assembly recommendations and responsibility for it;
4. When implementing citizen assemblies, coordinate the duration of their learning and deliberations and the formulation of recommendations. Taking into account the complexity and breadth of the assembly question, more time should be allocated to discussions and refining recommendations. According to the VMPA assessment, an assembly program divided in half in terms of time (into learning and deliberation/recommendation parts) is not an ideal option, as it does not provide sufficient opportunities to discuss the ideas heard in the learning part, direct them towards the formation of recommendations, and consistently discuss, refine, and formulate proposals that are most adapted to the public policy process;
5. Implement risk management measures for participant dropout. Several alternatives are possible for this: 1) Prepare a longer list of potential participants in advance than necessary. If dropout is encountered at an early stage,

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an additional invitation of participants is carried out (taking into account the characteristics important for the selection); 2) in the event of a drop-out, an additional selection and invitation of participants is carried out; 3) "backup" participants are immediately invited, warning them that if all the planned participants show up, their participation in the assembly will not be required and providing compensation for the time spent. It is also recommended to complete the participant selection procedure at least a month before the start of the assembly, thus not only leaving time to manage the risks arising from early drop-out of participants, but also creating opportunities to inform the selected ones in a timely manner, invite them and give more time for the participants to adapt and adjust their personal plans. During the assembly, it is recommended to clarify the reasons that led to the decision of each participant to withdraw;

6. When communicating and selecting assembly participants, introduce additional mechanisms (e.g., communication tools, selection criteria) that would allow prioritizing the participation of residents who are usually less civically active. It is recommended to foresee sufficient financial and organizational resources in advance for measures that help reduce barriers to participation for various population groups. Measures such as childcare, social assistance or other services tailored to individual needs can significantly contribute to the involvement of residents representing a wider range of experiences. It is also important to communicate clearly and openly about these opportunities so that potential participants feel free to use them. Although we could not find specific evidence that some citizens refused to participate in the VMPA in the absence of proactive communication about the supporting measures provided (e.g., childcare, social taxi), the introduction of such communication is recommended for future assemblies in order to ensure equal opportunities for all participants;
7. Ensure a variety of means of registration for the assembly by introducing the possibility of registering in person, upon arrival at the Vilnius City Municipality or a precinct convenient for the citizen. The VMPA example showed that some residents do not use telecommunications or digital communication means, therefore, in order to ensure the diversity of participants, it is important to further expand the availability of registration.

*Assembly process*

**The learning process** at the Assembly took place in various formats, leaving a very positive impression on most participants: in general, the information provided was assessed as understandable, valuable both for personal development and in the further Assembly process. However, there were also comments regarding the relevance of not all the information received in the subsequent process of deliberations and preparation of recommendations -

It is likely that the participants' perceived lower relevance of the first presentations (more focused on the context and general issues) to the recommendations formulated later was also determined by the additional question directions introduced during the Assembly. The participants rated the material prepared for the Assembly participants, the quality, expertise and reliability of the selected expert presentations very positively. Although there were a number of proposals, the majority of participants found the diversity of approaches represented in the learning process and the balance between the presented positions to be sufficient. True, the strange program during the Assembly process (the inclusion of the second JUDU presentation) not only demonstrated the organizers' responsiveness to the participants' wishes, but also raised the risks of less well-managed (without more thorough prior preparation) bias and directional presentation. However, the participants underestimated such a possible impact of bias and directional presentation, emphasizing the freedom they felt to disagree with the recommended solutions presented, as well as trusting each other and highly appreciating the internal competencies of the participant group.

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During the VMPA **deliberations and formulation of recommendations**, various facilitation methods were applied, an optimal balance between work in the general group and in smaller groups was achieved, and the process itself ended with a clear result - a general agreement of the group and jointly developed recommendations. The process was ensured legitimacy. The facilitators consistently emphasized the role of the participants, transferred responsibility for the results of the Assembly to them, and created a trust-based, safe space for discussions.

The process of deliberations and formulation of recommendations was assessed by various stakeholders as highly inclusive (without coercion), and the atmosphere created enabled different, sometimes opposing groups to discuss freely, equally and respectfully. The facilitators were assessed by the majority as objective and impartial, responsive and attentive, although a certain tension was felt between the facilitators' orientation towards the quality of the process through inclusion and the responsibility transferred to the participants, and the expectation of some participants for greater efficiency and orientation towards results. The result of a successfully organised, inclusive process was that the Assembly's recommendations were accepted by the majority of participants as "their own".

Despite the overall very positive assessment, several weaker points in the deliberation and recommendation formulation process were also identified. First, although the individual tasks were clear to the participants, they lacked clarity on the overall process, linking the individual stages and tasks to the whole (probably due to the program that was created and adjusted during the process). For example, it was unclear to the participants when new ideas could no longer be proposed for deliberation, when and how an alternative opinion should be presented. Second, a number of participants regretted that some initial ideas that were considered valuable were "lost" during the process. Although there were participants who, after missing some sessions, attributed this to an opaque process, most attributed such a "confusion" of ideas to the methods used, for example, the groups that changed to formulate separate recommendations, which lacked communicators, "guides", who were left with the text when the groups changed (facilitators, by constantly changing the groups working on the recommendations, sought to create a sense of "ownership" of the recommendations for as many participants as possible). Third, due to the additional learning part, there was a bit of time left for formulating recommendations, and the complex formulation of the question and the large number of ideas determined a compromise between quantity and depth, which caused a feeling of both viscosity and superficiality of the process for some stakeholders.

During the Assembly, **communication with participants** was assessed very positively – both with the whole group and individually. Participants particularly emphasized the accessibility of the organizers, the completeness, regularity, timeliness of communication, the various channels used (e-mail, telephone) and languages, as well as the perceived attention and care. However, participants felt somewhat less informed about the steps after the Assembly. This is also due to the fact that internal communication was interrupted when the organizer responsible for communication left work immediately after the Assembly. At the same time, some participants expressed a desire to continue to be informed and involved, but at the time of the evaluation, this need had not yet been sufficiently met.

The largest **dropout rate** was recorded before the beginning of the Assembly – among the selected individuals who ultimately did not confirm their participation or, having confirmed their participation, did not attend the Assembly sessions. Those who dropped out argued for this decision by unfavorable life circumstances, excessive the great commitment required (the extent of which they did not understand) or the insufficient

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opportunities. There were also cases where registration was more of a "check" to see if they would be invited. In later stages, the dropout rate was lower, although the majority of participants missed at least one session, and less than half managed to attend all sessions. The participants' engagement was strengthened by a sense of responsibility and commitment, which was significantly contributed to by the high-quality organization of the process and the attention shown by the organizers. Although the financial reward paid to the participants was not identified as the main motive for participation, it was seen as fair compensation for the time spent and possibly contributed to a greater diversity of participants, creating more opportunities for economically disadvantaged and less active citizens to get involved. The evaluation also showed that at the end of the Assembly, the need for such compensation was assessed more favorably by the participants than at the beginning.

**Communication with the public** was most intensively carried out in the initial stage of the Assembly - an information campaign coordinated by the Vilnius City Municipality Communication Department, which started together with the first stage of participant selection, spread the word about the upcoming VMPA through various channels and invited Vilnius residents to register. After the Assembly began, external communication slowed down due to the organizers' conscious choice to limit the amount of information transmitted to the outside during the Assembly, in order to protect participants from external pressure. Although these restrictions were lifted after the Assembly sessions, it was no longer possible to attract greater media attention: various parties associated with the Assembly assessed the communication after the event as insufficient, not reflecting the scale, importance and depth of the process that took place.

Publicly available information about the Assembly is assessed as sufficiently comprehensive, detailed and open.

### **Recommendations for the future application of deliberative democracy practices:**

1. When preparing materials for citizens' assembly participants, consistently take into account the needs of all participating groups. This requires identifying in advance whether the group will include participants with special needs - blind, deaf, neurodiverse or other groups – and adapt the material for them. Also, identify participants with poor vision and have prepared presentation materials in a convenient way for them – printed, in larger font, etc. In the case of foreign participants – to ensure maximum quality participation, translated presentation slides are required (if not bilingual on the screen, then provided to the participants and translators in electronic or printed form during the presentations). This is especially relevant when the slides contain a lot of information, data, etc.;
2. The VMPA information publication was highly rated by the participants. However, in the future, it is necessary to foresee sufficient financial and/or human resources for the preparation of such educational material (to collect, synthesize, translate into a language understandable to non-specialists, format, etc., the recommended and other additional material by independent experts working on a pro bono basis). It would also be useful to devote a section to the principles of good practice in formulating recommendations in this publication. Alternatively, to foresee financial resources to compensate the work of the independent expert group, while asking them for greater involvement in preparing a package of initial materials for the participants;
3. When expanding the selection of potential speakers, it is worth considering, together with the initial information campaign for the Citizens' Assembly, to issue an open call to citizens and experts, civil society organizations or institutions not directly involved in the organization of the PA to propose potential speakers - both experts and representatives of interested parties. The final list of experts should be compiled based on clearly communicated selection criteria;

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4. During the learning process, include groups (even large groups) represented by the assembly participants themselves in the presentations. During the VMPA, it became clear that it is not enough to have representatives of groups with more specific experiences among the participants - it is necessary to give their perspective an equal voice in the learning part of the program;
5. The experiences of VMPA participants would suggest avoiding (or overly relying on) learning formats in which different participants are exposed to different material (e.g., traveling in groups to listen to different presentations) – participants more emphasized and expressed the need for a “common knowledge base”, which general discussions in groups after hearing different presentations do not compensate;
6. The experiences of the VMPA participants confirmed and emphasized that it is important to constantly clearly and consistently communicate to the participants about the entire process and the place of the current stage in the overall process, especially by highlighting key moments - for example, from when new ideas are no longer accepted and only those already submitted are worked on. Also, not only at the beginning of the process, but also at the end, to remind participants how they could properly express and present an alternative opinion;
7. It is necessary to allocate sufficient resources to pay the work of facilitators. The analysis revealed that the role of facilitators was crucial to the success of the process, but a significant part of the work was carried out based on personal commitment and motivation, with the remuneration received being treated as symbolic, not reflecting the workload (including the preparation of a detailed program, preparation of materials for meetings, etc.).  
Adequate remuneration would contribute to ensuring the quality and sustainability of such initiatives in the future;
8. Discussion of recommendations in different groups moderated by the participants themselves should be considered one of the strengths of the process, as it creates opportunities to include more perspectives, complement previous discussions, and allow a larger number of participants to contribute to individual recommendations and gain their “ownership.”  
feeling. However, it is recommended to pay more attention to ensuring continuity between group discussions. Some VMPA participants noted that during the recommendation formulation stage, when groups were completely changing for individual recommendations, it was sometimes difficult to understand the arguments and work of previous groups, therefore some discussions were not as productive as they could have been, recommendations were sometimes rejected or reformulated not because they were opposed, but because they were simply not understood. One of the possible solutions is to leave at least some of the participants (e.g., one or two people) to work on the same recommendation or their group for several iterations, thus ensuring a smoother transfer of the results of previous deliberations to the new group;
9. In order to strengthen the legitimacy of the process in the eyes of all participants, ensure consistent and comprehensive information transfer to those participants who missed one or more sessions for various reasons. The analysis data shows that insufficient understanding of the process, discussions, decisions made and their reasoning for some participants reduced confidence in the results of the process and their legitimacy;
10. In order to maintain contact with participants and build trust in the process, provide clear responsibilities and sufficient resources for post-assembly communication in advance. It is important for participants to receive regular information about the progress of the implementation of recommendations, related decisions and other opportunities for engagement. This would strengthen positive practices of citizen engagement and accountability, and help retain former participants as “ambassadors” of the assembly;
11. More actively exploit the participants' desire and motivation to remain involved after the Assembly ends. Involved residents with a positive participation experience could help in the later stages of implementing the recommendations of a particular assembly (presenting arguments, explaining the process, representing the assembly participants, maintaining constant attention to the process of implementing the recommendations),

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both to engage in other channels of citizen participation offered by the municipality, and to help expand the culture of citizen assemblies, by presenting the citizen assembly as a method in other contexts, sharing their experience and advice. Also, at the suggestion of some of the VMPA participants themselves, it is appropriate to consider the creation of a network of participants (*alumni*), which as an informal structure could contribute both to the continuity of the Assembly's results and to the broader development of citizen assemblies and other deliberative democracy practices. Although such organization depends on the participants of the assembly themselves, the invitation of the municipality (or other government institution), the decision to include such a network in the implementation of recommendations, popularization of citizen involvement, dissemination of practices or

other communicative processes would help participants see the meaning and purpose of engagement, encourage more active gathering;

12. The experience of the VMPA shows that relatively small financial compensation for participation can be an effective tool for ensuring wider population involvement. It is recommended that mechanisms for compensating participants for their time and commitment, which are perceived as fair and proportionate, should also be envisaged in the future. Such compensation can contribute to a more diverse composition of participants and reduce financial barriers to participation, especially for groups of the population with fewer resources or less active;
13. The evaluation data show that it is appropriate to pay more attention to public communication not only before the assembly, but also during the assembly, and especially after it ends. It is recommended to present the process, the content of the deliberations, the experience of the participants and the achieved results in a wider way. More intensive communication would increase the visibility and transparency of the process, create opportunities to disseminate positive examples of citizen involvement in public decision-making more widely. This would significantly contribute to reducing skeptical attitudes about citizen involvement, strengthening trust in institutions and narrowing the gap between government institutions and the public;
14. Based on the experience of the VMPA, pay sufficient attention to the preparation of observers to participate in citizen assembly. It is important to provide observers with information in advance about their role and the rules of participation, as well as to provide a more detailed presentation of the assembly's goals, progress, results of the sessions held and the tasks for the current (observed) phase. A better understanding of the process would create the prerequisites for more meaningful observer engagement, more consistent adherence to the rules and greater added value created by them.  
during the process;
15. As the analysis revealed, the VMPA lacks more active involvement of municipal representatives. On the one hand, in order to achieve a broader impact of the assemblies on strengthening democracy, reducing the gap between citizens and government institutions, and increasing trust in government institutions, it is necessary to ensure sufficient attention of representatives of the political and administrative level of the municipality to the assembly, for example, by coming to observe the assembly sessions. On the other hand, it is recommended to consider creating more opportunities for municipal politicians and administrative employees to get involved in the assembly process not only as observers, but also in the role of active participants in the process (e.g. by engaging in deliberations), but while maintaining very clear decision-making boundaries and not granting these groups the right to vote. Such participation would allow representatives of the political and administrative level to better understand the logic of the deliberation process, the arguments of the participants and the course of the discussions, and at the same time would strengthen the commitment to the assembly recommendations in the municipality. Direct engagement could also contribute to greater mutual trust, reduce the gap between citizens and decision-makers and create a culture of shared responsibility for public decisions. It is important to emphasize that such engagement should be based on clearly defined rules of participation and safeguards that ensure that

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so that the authority of politicians or administrative representatives does not disproportionately influence discussions or final decisions. To this end, it is recommended to provide clear boundaries of engagement, strong facilitation and procedural solutions that allow for maintaining the autonomy of assembly participants.

*Assembly impact*

It is difficult to finally **summarize the impact of the Assembly on mobility policy**, since public policy change processes require time, but the data collected during the evaluation suggest that changes in Vilnius City Municipality will take place in the direction indicated in the recommendations. The recommendations of the VMPA were generally positively assessed by various stakeholders, but their main shortcomings were the large number of recommendations, the uneven level of specificity and the not always clear connection with the main issue of the Assembly. The abundance of recommendations was not considered a problem in itself, but in the conditions of limited time it made it difficult to consistently refine, justify and prioritize proposals, therefore some of them leave wide possibilities for interpretation for the persons responsible for implementation. On the other hand, a significant part of the recommendations coincide with the strategic directions of Vilnius City Municipality in the field of mobility. Although this complicates the direct assessment of the impact of the Assembly on mobility policy, the recommendations can contribute to policy formation,

legitimizing the direction of change chosen by the municipality. At the end of the process, the Assembly participants significantly more positively assessed the possibilities of the recommendations to be transformed into practical solutions. However, the impact of the recommendations may be limited by the fact that the process of their implementation was not clearly planned during the Assembly, and some of the persons responsible for the implementation were not involved in the previous stages of the process. Thus, there is a risk that the recommendations will be perceived not as help in solving problems, but as an additional administrative burden.

The impact of the VMPA **on its participants was multifaceted**: the Assembly significantly contributed to the expansion of knowledge, civic empowerment and a more positive assessment of democratic processes, but had a limited impact on changing attitudes both on mobility issues and towards different groups in society. Most participants reported that they had deepened their knowledge of mobility policy and had a better understanding of different perspectives, but changes in attitudes towards the topic more often meant a strengthening of existing beliefs than a fundamental transformation of them. This is partly explained by the fact that a significant number of Assembly participants were already positive about the ideas of sustainable mobility before the process. Similarly, changes in attitudes towards other groups in society were limited – the Assembly contributed more to a better understanding of the needs and challenges of certain groups than to changing preconceptions, which in many cases were already quite positive. However, the recorded slight increase in interpersonal trust indicates that the Assembly contributed to strengthening mutual understanding. The most pronounced impact was in the area of civic empowerment: at the end of the Assembly (compared to its beginning), participants' satisfaction with democracy and trust in it as having an advantage over other forms of governance increased, confidence in their abilities to engage in decision-making and willingness to engage in this process increased. However, at the same time, the Assembly did not strengthen belief in their ability to directly influence public decision-making. Some participants were more skeptical about the readiness of institutions to take into account citizens' opinions, and support for citizens' assemblies as a decision-making instrument even decreased at the end of the process.

As mentioned, this suggests that the Assembly was effective as a platform for learning, dialogue and

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a tool for developing civic competence, but less convincing as a mechanism that can give citizens real influence on public policy formation.

Focusing on **the impact of the VMPA on its organizers, as well as politicians and other decision-makers**, the Assembly met most of the expectations these groups had of it: tested as a new method that complements the set of citizen engagement instruments already in use, it convinced organizers and decision-makers of its suitability for Lithuania, surprised them with its constructiveness, productivity, effectiveness, achieved the quality of inclusive deliberations, a culture of agreement, provided experience and knowledge, and an emerging "ecosystem" of citizens' assemblies. On the other hand, disappointed by the insufficient attention of politicians and municipal administration employees to the Assembly (although political support and assistance from employees can be felt in individual situations), some organizers were disappointed and underestimated the publicity of the Assembly. Politicians and other decision-makers and organizers viewed the Assembly's recommendations as not necessarily new and unexpected, but useful, although they also drew attention to the challenges posed by the different levels of specificity and scope of the recommendations for implementation. The Assembly was assessed as having repaid the resources allocated to it, and the format was worth repeating in the future, although it was emphasized that this required not only significant human, time and financial resources, but also clear support and commitment from politicians and a wider circle of municipal administration employees. The experience of the Assembly also increased the motivation of some organizers and politicians and other decision-makers to involve citizens in decision-making. Although in the first months after the end of the Assembly, it was already possible to see new citizen involvement formats inspired by the VMPA organized by the municipality, there has not yet been a wider spread of news about these formats or such an application of the Assembly experience. Given the ongoing implementation of the recommendations and the correspondingly still unclear outcome of this process, it is difficult to assess the broader impact of the Assembly on its organizers and decision-makers. However, stakeholders identified the increased communication, cooperation and coordination between different municipal departments, encouraged by the cross-sectoral recommendations, as an already manifested, unexpected positive impact of the Assembly.

The report assessed the impact of the assembly **on society** through the overall awareness of citizens' assemblies. Data from two representative surveys of Vilnius city residents reveal that during the VMPA implementation period, the awareness of citizens' assemblies as a way for residents to participate in city or national decision-making in Vilnius increased by 10 percentage points. Those who have heard about citizens' assemblies evaluate them very favorably, trust city institutions and their decisions more than those who have not heard about them, are satisfied with the functioning of democracy in Lithuania, and intend to participate in the public decision-making process more often. In the group of those who have heard about citizens' assemblies, satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and assessment of their competences to participate in public decision-making increased during the studied period, in contrast to those who have not heard about them. On the other hand, changes in trust in city institutions and their decisions in this group did not stand out from the general context, and when asked about the disposition to participate in decision-making, uncertainty grew more than in other groups. The latter trends are associated with the still unclear results of the implementation of the recommendations.

### *Recommendations for the institutionalization of deliberative democracy practices in Lithuania*

The institutionalization of deliberative democracy practices often refers to two different processes. First, the process of institutionalization is associated with the formal, legal nature of the deliberative democracy.

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consolidation of practices (for example, by adopting relevant internal procedures, laws or other legal acts). Secondly, institutionalization is considered to be the consolidation of a permanent citizens' assembly (as a formal, regularly operating entity).<sup>195</sup> Considering that a citizens' assembly based on the principle of democratic lottery was organized for the first time in Lithuania, and also considering the relatively low level of prevalence of permanent citizen involvement practices, this assessment adheres to the first position, seeing the second more as an experimental and/or longer-term direction. Thus, institutionalization is understood as a combination of formal (through laws, legal acts, etc.) and informal (through culture, values, etc.) establishment of deliberative democracy practices in the decision-making process, when these practices become regularly applied in various forms in various policy areas and help to achieve changes.

The data from the interviews conducted during the assessment reveal a prevailing consensus among local and national decision-makers that more opportunities for the application of deliberative democracy practices are seen at the local government level (however, the possibility of inclusion at the national level is not ruled out, for example, by choosing topics of public importance such as national defense).

Based on the material collected during the evaluation, the following recommendations are made for the further institutionalization of deliberative democracy practices at the municipal level:

*Capacity building and networking.* In order to apply deliberative democracy practices, there is currently a lack of expertise: there is a shortage of both specialists who are familiar with organizational principles (e.g., implementation of selection) and professionals who are able to create and implement the design of such practices (e.g., facilitators). Moreover, fragmentation of participatory practices is often observed in municipalities: different specialists are responsible for inclusion processes in their coordinated area, but do not necessarily discuss and exchange good practices with each other. In addition, there is no non-governmental or private organization in Lithuania that would have experience in applying deliberative democracy practices and could provide assistance as external service providers. **In this regard, it is recommended:**

- Establish a position or, if necessary, a unit in municipalities that specializes in internal consulting on inclusion practices and assistance in their implementation (even if an external organizer is hired, such a position in the municipality would be necessary for internal coordination, accumulation of competencies, and ensuring quality control of the process). This is important for the concentration of competencies, preservation and transfer of knowledge (the formation of an "institutional memory" that is more resistant to employee turnover), more effective exchange of experience between different policy areas, centralized access, and the use of different municipal resources (e.g., coordination with departments responsible for communication and logistics is necessary). Moreover, in terms of deliberative democracy practices, this would allow for the formation of a distinction between the initiator and the executor, thus reducing the risks of politicization. It is important to note that this recommendation does not propose isolating politicians and decision-makers from the organization and implementation of deliberative democracy practices. On the contrary, as the evaluation indicates, building a broad "supporting coalition" and involving stakeholders from the early stages of the practice

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<sup>195</sup> Diskusija apie institucionalizacijos sampratę pateikiama: Ravazzi, S. (2026). The Legal Institutionalisation of Public Deliberation and the Embeddedness in the Democratic System: The Italian Case. *Politics and Governance*, 14, Article 10692. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.10692>; Pospieszna, P., & Hoffmann, M. (2026). Institutionalizing Democratic Innovations in Poland: Mapping the Evolution of Citizens' Assemblies Through Rules of Procedure. *Politics and Governance*, 14, Article 10596. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.10596>

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stages is extremely significant for the later stage of implementation of the recommendations, however, the assignment of a clear coordinating person would ensure the methodical nature of this involvement.

- Strengthen the national-level competence center for citizen involvement (for example, the Open Government Department of the Chancellery of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, which has already applied deliberative democracy practices and has relatively greater experience in this area). This center could help plan the application of deliberative democracy practices, provide methodological assistance (see the following recommendation), share good practices, etc. Its employees could also coordinate an informal network of deliberative democracy practices, including employees of municipalities, central government institutions, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations  
(In 2027, Lithuania plans to implement at least two citizens' assemblies, in which these organizations will be involved), thus creating opportunities to jointly address emerging challenges and share experiences.

*Support for informal institutionalization of practices.* In order to consolidate collaborative practices in Lithuania, their informal and formal institutionalization taking place in parallel is necessary. Formal regulation of deliberative democracy practices, which, according to interview data, are not yet widely known and do not have substantial support among decision-makers, would pose a risk that these will be implemented mechanically, in order to meet official requirements, but without really seeing the meaning and hoping to receive high-quality recommendations from citizens. If we focus only on informal institutionalization (an unregulated, but value-acceptable and therefore supported process), there is a risk that the application of deliberative democracy practices will depend only on individual initiative.

(thus creating a gap between different municipalities and/or institutions), it will lack sustainability and consistent application. **In this regard, it is recommended:** to expand the practice based on the DemocracyNext urban program model for the organization of deliberative democracy initiatives in Lithuanian municipalities, providing non-financial, but expert assistance for the organization of citizens' assemblies. This would contribute to the creation of success stories and informal institutionalization of this practice (this action could be coordinated by the Open Government Department of the Chancellery of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania). Once the awareness of the practice has increased and support for it has been formed, it is recommended to move to its minimal formalization (see the following recommendation).

*The place of deliberative democracy in the "toolbox" of citizen engagement.* Currently, several main practices of citizen engagement dominate in Lithuania – public consultations are most often implemented at the national level, participatory budgeting and the institute of elders operate at the municipal level, therefore it is important to ensure that the new tools introduced do not overlap, but on the contrary – complement each other and lead towards effective citizen empowerment.

**Taking this into account, it is recommended:**

- Review the existing range of citizen engagement tools and ensure that the introduction of a new tool does not lead to overlapping of functions with existing practices (e.g. surveys, aldermen's activities, participatory budgeting, consultations, etc.). It is important to clearly distinguish and communicate what the citizens' assembly contributes and how it complements the opportunities for citizen engagement, and avoid presenting this format as a "competing" one, creating respective narratives that encourage division.

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- During the VMPA assessment, when discussing the optimal frequency of organizing citizens' assemblies in municipalities such as Vilnius, it was noted that both due to the time required for high-quality organization and other costs, citizens' assemblies are seen as more infrequent events. It is noted that the assembly process includes not only the meetings themselves, assembly sessions, but also requires long preparatory work (formulation of the question, preparation of materials for participants, formation of a team of independent experts, selection, communication processes, etc.), as well as leadership and coordination after the assembly, at the stage of implementing recommendations (coordination of the implementation process of recommendations, communication with assembly participants and the public, reporting). Taking this into account, it is recommended to organize assemblies no more often than once every two years. One of the recommended application options worth noting is

organize one citizens' assembly at the beginning of the municipal council and/or mayor's term of office, during which recommendations from residents on an issue of strategic importance to the city would be requested.

- Given the low trust of Lithuanian citizens in government institutions, as well as the low assessment of the opportunities for citizens to influence decision-making, it is recommended to consider mandatory mechanisms of accountability to citizens. For example, the implementation of recommendations could be presented not only in the form of reports, but also by forming monitoring groups from among the participants or organizing annual progress meetings (see the recommendation above about more active involvement of former participants, a network). Maintaining contact with the involved residents would strengthen their trust in self-government, deepen their knowledge of the processes taking place in the city, and, based on the example of VMPA, it is likely that a group of "ambassadors" of the idea would be formed, spreading a positive message among the citizens.

*Strengthening the participation skills of the younger generation.* As mentioned in the report, one of the least represented groups of society in the VMPA is youth. During the interviews, it was often mentioned that one of the reasons for this is the desire of this group to achieve quick results, to see the fruits of their work, which is difficult to reconcile with the processes of deliberative democracy that require considerable time resources. **In this regard, it is recommended:** to apply deliberative democracy practices even in schools, involving their communities in smaller, institutional-level decisions. This would allow, from an early age, to educate citizens who understand the decision-making process and the added value created by deliberations that require more time, who have the value foundation and skills to engage in such processes. The best practice here is the work of the organization Transparency International

The Lithuanian chapter's activities include disseminating participatory budgeting practices and providing the necessary tools for their implementation in schools across the country.

*Ensuring the necessary funding.* Organizing a citizens' assembly requires considerable human and time costs, as well as financial costs, which also limits the practice of deliberative democracy.

However, direct external funding and support provided by the private sector to municipal institutions may pose risks regarding the maintenance of impartiality and the conflict of public and private interests.

**In this context, it is recommended to:** consider establishing a targeted funding mechanism at the national level. In this context, ideas for crowdfunding instruments, the search for patrons, as well as public-private sector cooperation or the use of independent

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a fund coordinated by the organization(s) and supported by the private sector. Such a fund could provide support not only for the implementation of individual deliberative democracy practices, but also for the application of innovative solutions, experimentation in municipalities that have shown initiative or selected through a selection process. For example, funding could be provided for the experimental establishment of a permanent citizens' assembly in one or more Lithuanian municipalities, in order to find out how such a format is applied in the Lithuanian context, what challenges are encountered, to what extent it is possible to integrate it into the municipal decision-making cycle, etc. In all these cases, a prerequisite is ensuring impartiality, providing support not for the implementation of a specific assembly, but for the development of democratic innovations in the country.

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towards scientific activity.

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### Accessories

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### Annex 1. Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly Evaluation Matrix

|          | Evaluation question                                                                                                                                                         | Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Evaluation criteria                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Data collection methods            |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Assembly | How does the assembly's governance structure work?                                                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Management structure</li> <li>- Understanding the mandate given to the Assembly</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a clear division of responsibilities and coordination mechanism between the countries involved</li> <li>- A common understanding of the mandate given to the assembly between organizers and participants</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Document review, survey, interview |
|          | To what extent are the assembly's purpose and question formulation clear and acceptable?                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants' understanding of the problem being solved</li> <li>- Question formulation</li> <li>- The potential of the question to empower participants</li> <li>- Under consideration the suitability of democracy for solving the problem</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A common understanding of the problem being solved among all groups involved</li> <li>- Different aspects are included in the question formulation stakeholders</li> <li>- Participants agree that the assembly issue allows them to be significantly involved in solving the problem</li> <li>- Organizers, decision-makers, facilitators and participants understand the citizens' assembly as an appropriate way to solve the chosen problem (<i>before/ after comparison</i>)</li> </ul> | Interview, survey                  |
|          | How appropriate is the chosen duration of the assembly for the issue being addressed?                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assembly duration</li> <li>- Participants' opinion on the duration of the assembly program and its sufficiency to address the issue</li> </ul>                                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants, facilitators and organizers identify the assembly duration as optimal</li> <li>- Participants agree that sufficient time was allocated to each part of the assembly (learning, deliberation, formulation of recommendations)</li> <li>- Reasons for naming the duration of the assembly as (not) optimal</li> <li>- List of activities that, in the opinion of the participants, are given relatively too much or too little attention</li> </ul>                              | Interview, survey                  |
|          | To what extent do the assembly participants reflect the diversity of Vilnius residents (in various aspects) and what impact did the selection and organizational processes? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participant selection criteria</li> <li>- Inclusion of harder-to-reach groups in society</li> <li>- Conditions for participation for people representing various groups in society</li> </ul>                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The selection criteria, in the opinion of the groups involved, include groups of society that are important to the topic of the assembly</li> <li>- The selection process took into account the representation of various social groups</li> <li>- Additional measures have been taken to include hard-to-reach groups of society</li> <li>- Participants, organizers and facilitators agree that the assembly conditions meet the needs of the target groups</li> </ul>                     | Interview, survey                  |

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|     |                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                      |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|     |                                                                                  | <i>Demographic representation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Diversity of participants attending the assembly according to selection criteria</li> <li>- Participants' opinion on the level of representation of groups relevant to the topic</li> </ul>                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assembly participants respond to the public groups identified during the selection process</li> <li>- The participants agree that the assembly will be attended by different representatives of public groups</li> <li>- Unrepresented/underrepresented/overrepresented list of social groups</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Document review, survey, interview   |
|     |                                                                                  | <i>Discursive representation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Divergence of positions during discussions</li> <li>- Participants' opinions on the diversity of positions</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A diversity of positions is observed during the discussions</li> <li>- The participants agree that the assembly was fundamentally different opinions are represented</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Survey, interview                    |
| The | How is the diverse learning of assembly participants ensured during the process? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information submission forms</li> <li>- The importance of information provided during learning when answering an assembly question</li> <li>- The diversity of information provided and the perspectives represented therein</li> <li>- Expertise and credibility of speakers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information is provided to assembly participants in an understandable, objective manner, in optimal quantities, and in different forms</li> <li>- Participants and facilitators agree that the information provided helped them form a position and engage in the deliberations in a reasoned manner (for them personally (in the opinion of the participants) and for all assembly participants in general (in the opinion of the participants and facilitators))</li> <li>- The information provided maintains a balance of delivery for different positions</li> <li>- Participants agree that equal attention was paid to the presentation of different positions</li> <li>- Participants recognize the expertise and credibility of the selected speakers</li> <li>- List of speakers or positions that participants believe were underrepresented</li> </ul> | Document analysis, interview, survey |
|     |                                                                                  | Principles governing the selection of rapporteurs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organizers can identify the principles on which the selection of speakers was based</li> <li>- Opportunity for interested parties to suggest speakers or the content of the information provided</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                      |
|     | To what extent is the continuous participation of participants ensured?          | Participant retention                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants who started participating but decided not to withdraw from the assembly number</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Document analysis, interview, survey |

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|  |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                    |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
|  |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                        | - (If data can be collected) Reasons for withdrawal of participants who started participating but decided to leave the assembly                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                    |
|  | How did the methods used and the work of the facilitators contribute to the quality of the deliberations? | Balance between the application of different methods                                                                                                                                   | - Methods used to adapt to different learning styles for people with types<br>- Participants and facilitators agree that the format between work in smaller groups and the plenary session was maintained                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Interview, survey                                  |
|  |                                                                                                           | - Objectivity of facilitators<br>- Inclusiveness of deliberations, balance between discussion participants<br>- Encouraging reasoned discussion<br><br>- Resolving conflict situations | - Participants and facilitators agree that facilitators acts objectively (does not show favoritism towards specific positions or participants)<br>- Participants agree that the deliberations are inclusive, maintaining a balance between the participants' statements<br>- Participants and facilitators agree that all participants had equal opportunities to speak<br>- Participants agree that they were encouraged to argue their position, reasoned discussion prevailed, and the language<br><br>- Participants and facilitators agree that the discussions were maintaining a respectful tone<br>- Participants and facilitators agree that emerging conflict situations were resolved constructively |                                                    |
|  | Is sufficient accountability and feedback to participants and the public ensured?                         | Communication mechanisms with participants                                                                                                                                             | - Responsibility for communication with participants before, during and after the assembly is assigned (employee, department, etc.)<br><br>- Prepared communication with participants before assembly, during and after it plan<br>- Participants are informed about the main stages of the assembly and the steps after it<br>- Participants agree that they are sufficiently informed about the progress of the assembly<br>- Participants know how the recommendations developed during the assembly will be used                                                                                                                                                                                            | Document analysis, interview, survey, Poll for all |
|  |                                                                                                           | Public communication mechanisms                                                                                                                                                        | - Assumes responsibility for communication with the public before, during and after the assembly (employee, department, etc.)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                    |

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|          |                                                                                 |                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                      |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|          |                                                                                 |                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A plan for communication with the public before, during and after the assembly has been prepared</li> <li>- Information about the assembly (process, funding, recommendations made) is openly available</li> <li>- Vilnius city residents are informed about organized assembly</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                      |
|          | What impact have the Citizens' Assembly recommendations had on mobility policy? | Consideration, response, and implementation of recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly were publicly presented, involving different groups of decision-makers.</li> <li>- The recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly were discussed by the institutions responsible for public transport in the city, decision-makers and decision-makers.</li> <li>- Citizens' Assembly recommendations have an impact on urban mobility decisions and are partially or fully taken into account</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                  | Interview, survey, document analysis |
| Assembly | What impact did the Citizens' Assembly have on its participants?                | Change of policy regarding the assembly topic                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants agree that the learning and discussions had an impact on their attitudes towards the assembly topic.</li> <li>- Reasons for the change or lack of change in regulations</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Interview, survey                    |
|          |                                                                                 | Changing attitudes towards certain groups in society                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants agree that the learning and discussions have had an impact on their attitudes towards certain groups in society.</li> <li>- Reasons for the change or lack of change in the provisions</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                      |
|          |                                                                                 | Changing attitudes towards citizen participation and empowerment                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants agree that they can influence public decision-making (<i>before/ after comparison</i>)</li> <li>- Reasons for the change or lack of change in regulations</li> <li>- Participants' expectations for the Citizens' Assembly, citizens Change in the assessment of the assembly as an instrument of citizen engagement (<i>comparison before/ after</i>)</li> <li>- Reasons that determined the change in expectations or their absence (e.g., the opportunity to express an opinion, recommendations that meet everyone's positions, a clear plan for using the recommendations)</li> </ul> |                                      |

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|  |                                                                          |                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                   |
|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
|  |                                                                          |                                                                  | <p>Participants agree that participation was worth their time</p> <p>Participants agree that they feel more motivated to engage in other civic participation activities (e.g. elections, public consultations, future assemblies, volunteering)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                   |
|  | What impact did the Citizens' Assembly have on its organizers?           | Changing attitudes towards citizen engagement                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change in organizers/decision-makers' expectations of citizens' assemblies (<i>before/ after comparison</i>)</li> <li>- Reasons that determined the change or lack of change in expectations (e.g. changes in the political context, experiences of the process, quality of recommendations)</li> <li>- The organizers/decision makers agree that recommendations are useful and will be used in the decision-making process (<i>comparison of expectations before/ after evaluation</i>)</li> <li>- Reasons for the change in attitudes in terms of usefulness and usability of recommendations</li> <li>- Organizers/decision makers agree that organizing the citizens' assembly was worth the resources allocated</li> <li>- Organizers/decision-makers agree that they feel more motivated to involve citizens in decision-making by organizing citizens' assemblies or using other forms of participation</li> </ul> | Interview, survey |
|  | What impact did the Citizens' Assembly have on the residents of Vilnius? | Changing attitudes towards citizen participation and empowerment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vilnius city residents, informed about assembly, trust decision-makers more</li> <li>- Vilnius city residents, informed about assembly, believes that this is a good way to involve residents in decision-making</li> <li>- Vilnius city residents, informed about assembly, feel more motivated to engage in other civic participation activities (e.g. elections, public consultations, future assemblies, volunteering)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Poll for all      |

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### Annex 2. The logic of the intervention of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly

Following the standard set out in the European Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolkit<sup>1</sup> for policy evaluations, the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly evaluation is based on the intervention logic (also known as the theory of change) presented below, which was discussed and approved with the Assembly's organising team. An intervention is considered to be a solution to a specific problem or a need, while the intervention logic is a tool that helps to explain the different steps of the intervention and reveals the likely cause-and-effect relationships.

As illustrated in the diagram below, the logic of change of the Vilnius Citizens' Assembly is linked to two main needs – improving mobility in the city that meets the needs of all residents, and strengthening citizens' trust in the municipality and its institutions. The goals set for the assembly are also linked to these needs – consensus on recommendations for improving mobility and growing citizens' sense of power and trust in the city municipality. Promoting the use of citizens' assemblies is used as an additional goal, contributing to citizen empowerment and openness of the city and national and local government institutions in general.

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Needs/Challenges</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban mobility is accessible to various groups of Vilnius city residents</li> <li>• Development of the city and its settlements, requiring a public transport network development and creation of conditions for sustainable movement</li> <li>• Trust of city residents in the city municipality and institutions</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Goals</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formulate and implement to a feasible extent various projects in Vilnius public policy recommendation acceptable to urban population groups on promoting accessible, sustainable mobility for all</li> <li>• Strengthen the trust of Vilnius city residents in the city municipality and their perception of civic influence</li> <li>• Promote the use of citizens' assemblies in policy formulation and implementation at the local and national levels</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Resources</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial resources</li> <li>• Human resources</li> <li>• Knowledge and expertise</li> <li>• Information technology solutions</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Activities</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assembly planning process and establishment of governance structure</li> <li>• Communication about the Vilnius Citizens' Assembly to city residents and institutions for employees (external and internal communication)</li> <li>• Assembly facilitator training</li> <li>• Selection of assembly participants</li> <li>• Selection of Assembly expert rapporteurs</li> <li>• Preparation of information materials for assembly participants</li> <li>• Assembly process: learning, deliberation, formulation of recommendations and presentation to representatives of Vilnius City Municipality</li> <li>• Consideration and implementation of recommendations</li> </ul> |
| <b>Products</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitators who participated in the training</li> <li>• City residents who participated in the assembly</li> <li>• Recommendations formulated and presented (citizens' assembly report)</li> <li>• Public communication about the Vilnius Citizens' Assembly (e.g. articles, publicly available information material)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

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|                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Results</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations formulated during the Vilnius Citizens' Assembly have been (partially) implemented</li> <li>• Vilnius City Municipality has formed the initial institutional practice of implementing citizens' assemblies</li> <li>• Formed a team of experienced assembly organizers, process managers group of team members, facilitators</li> <li>• Participating city residents trust the city municipality more and believe they have more power to influence city decision-making</li> <li>• City residents informed about the citizens' assembly</li> </ul> |
| <b>Impact</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing sustainable mobility in the city that is accessible to various groups of Vilnius city residents</li> <li>• Vilnius city residents have more trust in the city municipality and its institutions</li> <li>• Vilnius city residents believe they have more power to influence city decision-making</li> <li>• Cultural and/or institutional changes are observed, which consolidate the role of citizens' assemblies application at the municipal and/or national level</li> </ul>                                                                       |

Source: compiled by the authors of the proposal, based on European Commission (2023). Better Regulation Toolbox.

Human, financial, information technology resources, as well as knowledge and expertise are used to implement a wide range of Assembly activities. This includes the work of both Vilnius City Municipality employees and representatives of the organization "DemocracyNext" or external experts, and the information technologies used. All of the above factors contribute to the creation of Assembly products. They include not only the direct product of the activity – recommendations formulated and presented to Vilnius City Municipality representatives, but also by-products – trained facilitators, prepared information materials, participants familiarized with the process. The short-term result of these products: a precedent for the implementation of citizens' assemblies created in Vilnius City Municipality, recommendations formulated during the Assembly implemented to the extent possible, and the attitudes of Assembly participants towards their opportunities to engage in public decision-making that have changed positively. In the long term, these results may lead to an impact in the areas of accessible mobility, trust in the city municipality and its institutions, and the institutionalization of citizens' assemblies.

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### Annex 3. List of interviews with stakeholders of the Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly

| El. No.       | Code                 | Type                                       | Date of performance | Format   | Comment                                    |
|---------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------|--------------------------------------------|
| Organizers    |                      |                                            |                     |          |                                            |
| 1. Interview  | ORG1_0925            | Repeated                                   | 2025 09 25          | Remotely |                                            |
| 2. Interview  | ORG1_0130            | Repeated                                   | 2026 01 30          | Remotely |                                            |
| 3. Interview  | ORG2_0930            | Repeated                                   | 2025 09 30          | Remotely |                                            |
| 4. Interview  | ORG2_0309            | Repeated                                   | 2026 03 09          | Remotely |                                            |
| 5. Interview  | ORG3_1002            | Repeated                                   | 2025 10 02          | Remotely |                                            |
| 6. Interview  | ORG3_0217            | Repeated                                   | 2026 02 17          | Remotely |                                            |
| 7. Interview  | ORG4_1024            | Repeated                                   | 2025 10 24          | Live     | 3 informants participated in the interview |
| 8. Interview  | ORG4_0206            | Repeated                                   | 2026 02 06          | Remotely |                                            |
| Experts       |                      |                                            |                     |          |                                            |
| 9. Interview  | EKSP1_0128           | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 01 28          | Remotely |                                            |
| Facilitators  |                      |                                            |                     |          |                                            |
| 10.           | Interview_FAS1_0929  | Repeated                                   | 2025 09 29          | Remotely |                                            |
| 11.           | Interview_FAS1_1217  | Repeated                                   | 2025 12 17          | Remotely |                                            |
| 12.           | Interview_FAS2_0929  | Repeated                                   | 2025 09 29          | Remotely |                                            |
| 13.           | Interview_FAS2_0327  | Repeated                                   | 2026 03 27          | Remotely |                                            |
| 14.           | Interview_FAS3_0211  | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 02 11          | Remotely |                                            |
| Volunteers    |                      |                                            |                     |          |                                            |
| 15.           | Interview_SAV1_1001  | Interview at the beginning of the Assembly | 2025 10 01          | Remotely |                                            |
| 16.           | Interview_SAV2_0115  | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 01 15          | Remotely |                                            |
| 17.           | Interview_SAV3_0123  | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 01 23          | Remotely |                                            |
| 18.           | Interview_SAV4_0226  | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 02 26          | Remotely |                                            |
| Participants  |                      |                                            |                     |          |                                            |
| 19.           | Interview_DAL1_0929  | Repeated                                   | 2025 09 29          | Live     |                                            |
| 20.           | Interview_DAL1_02 04 | Repeated                                   | 2026 02 04          | Live     |                                            |
| 21.           | Interview_DAL2_1008  | Repeated                                   | 2025 10 08          | Live     |                                            |
| 22.           | Interview_DAL2_0130  | Repeated                                   | 2026 01 30          | Live     |                                            |
| 23.           | Interview_DAL3_1002  | Interview at the beginning of the Assembly | 2025 10 02          | Remotely |                                            |
| 24.           | Interview_DAL4_1002  | Interview at the beginning of the Assembly | 2025 10 02          | Live     |                                            |
| 25. Interview | DAL5_0930            | Interview at the beginning of the Assembly | 2025 09 30          | Remotely |                                            |
| 26. Interview | DAL6_1217            | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2025 12 17          | Remotely |                                            |

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|                                        |                                            |            |          |                                            |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------|----------|--------------------------------------------|
| 27. Interview_DAL7_1222                | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2025 12 22 | Remotely |                                            |
| 28. Interview_DAL8_0130                | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 01 30 | Remotely |                                            |
| 29. Interview_DAL9_0122                | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 01 22 | Remotely |                                            |
| 30. Interview_DAL10_0204               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 02 04 | Live     |                                            |
| 31. Interview_DAL11_0210               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 02 10 | Live     |                                            |
| 32. Interview_DAL12_0212               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 02 12 | Live     |                                            |
| 33. Interview_DAL13_0224               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 02 24 | Live     |                                            |
| 34. Interview_DAL14_0224               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 02 25 | Live     |                                            |
| 35. Interview_DAL15_0128               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 01 28 | Remotely |                                            |
| 36. Interview_DAL16_0302               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 03 02 | Remotely |                                            |
| 37. Interview_DAL17_0307               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 03 03 | Remotely |                                            |
| 38. Interview_DAL18_0304               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 03 04 | Live     |                                            |
| 39. Interview_DAL19_0305               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 03 05 | Live     |                                            |
| 40. Interview_DAL20_0307               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 03 07 | Live     |                                            |
| <b>Politicians and decision-makers</b> |                                            |            |          |                                            |
| 41. Interview_POL1_1014                | Repeated                                   | 2025 10 14 | Live     |                                            |
| 42. Interview_POL1_0226                | Repeated                                   | 2026 02 26 | Live     |                                            |
| 43. Interview_POL2_1028                | Interview at the beginning of the Assembly | 2025 10 28 | Live     |                                            |
| 44. Interview_SP1_0213                 | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 02 13 | Remotely |                                            |
| 45. Interview_SP2_0318                 | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 03 18 | Live     | 3 informants participated in the interview |
| <b>Observers</b>                       |                                            |            |          |                                            |
| 46. Interview_STEB1_0226               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 02 26 | Remotely |                                            |
| 47. Interview_STEB2_0227               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 02 27 | Remotely |                                            |
| 48. Interview_STEB3_0304               | Interview after Assemblies                 | 2026 03 04 | Remotely |                                            |