Six ways to democratise city planning

Enabling thriving and healthy cities

13 February 2024

James MacDonald-Nelson, Claudia Chwalisz, Ieva Česnulaitytė, & Lucy Reid

DemocracyNext

About DemocracyNext

We believe in a more just, joyful, and collaborative future, where everyone has meaningful power to shape their societies. We work to shift who has power and how we take decisions in government and in institutions of daily life like workplaces, schools, and museums.

DemocracyNext is a non-profit and non-partisan research and action institute. We are an international knowledge hub on deliberative democracy. We create tools and resources to build the field and experiment with innovative governance approaches. We advise on the design and establishment of new democratic institutions, processes, and spaces, including Citizens' Assemblies.

We want more people to see the democratic potential of sortition (selecting decision makers by lottery), deliberation, and participation for strengthening trust, reducing polarisation, and improving decision making. We believe that these principles enable us to be with complexity, channel our collective wisdom, and find common ground.

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About the co-authors

James MacDonald-Nelson is the Project Lead for Urban Design and Planning at DemocracyNext, a designer with degrees in landscape architecture, urbanism, and global development studies. Having studied and worked in spatial practice for 10 years in Toronto and then Berlin, mostly delivering large-scale commercial and residential development projects James has a deep knowledge of how the built environment is transformed, how decisions are made about our cities - and how often citizens are left out of these processes.

Claudia Chwalisz is the Founder and CEO of DemocracyNext and she is Co-Lead of the Tech-Enhanced Citizens' Assemblies Pop-Up Lab - a joint initiative between DemocracyNext and the MIT Center for Constructive Communication. Previously, she set up and led the OECD's work on Innovative Citizen Participation — establishing an evidence base of ~600 examples of Citizens' Assemblies, setting standards for implementation, and establishing guidelines for institutionalisation. She co-authored the OECD's flagship report *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave* with Ieva Cesnulaityte and led the development of the OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes. She oversaw the development of the OECD *Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes* (2021) and wrote the OECD paper on *Eight Ways to Institutionalise Deliberative Democracy* (2021). Claudia was involved in designing the world's first permanent Citizens' Assemblies in Ostbelgien, Paris, and Brussels. She is an Advisor to Design & Democracy Research Collaborative and is on the Global Advisory Council of The Data Tank. She is an Obama Leader 2023.

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Johan Galster
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Flora Samuel
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Jane Weru

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Jan Boelen
Zahra Ebrahim
Francis Fukuyama
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Abstract

The future of the cities we inhabit and where we spend our daily lives matters to all of us in very tangible ways. This future is also collective. We share the spaces we call home with numerous beings. Balancing a diversity of people's needs and preferences, concerns for environmental and social justice, a flourishing living planet, sustainability and resilience, communities' health and well-being, as well as a desire for beauty, joy, and belonging is no easy feat. So many of these things are interconnected and are directly and deeply impacted by urban planning and the multiple other decisions we take about our built environment.

Who makes these decisions, and how they are made matter greatly. We argue that the 'who' and the 'how' of urban planning decision making need to change. To live in thriving and healthy cities, we propose six possible ways to instigate systemic changes that can democratise the governance of urban planning decisions through Citizens' Assemblies and connected participatory approaches.

Depending on a city's current starting point, at least one, if not multiple, of these options can be seen as an initial 'way in' to begin making systemic changes to urban planning decision making. The six ways are detailed in Chapter 5, outlined as scenarios:

1. If you are a city or a region about to initiate a major urban infrastructure project consider initiating an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly to shape project objectives and key design goals that are more aligned with the community's wants and needs.
2. If you are a developer in the early stages of a large urban development project, consider implementing an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly to generate higher quality, community-supported design strategies and site programming that, in turn, enables the creation of places where people can connect, live, and thrive.
3. If you are a city about to embark on developing your next long-term plan, a significant urban policy, or a financial plan, consider initiating this process with an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly to develop a citizen-driven vision for the city, a multi-year budget, or a planning policy that is aligned with and reflects the needs, values, and desires of the city's residents.
4. If you are a city, or a region, frustrated with the status quo of legally-required public consultation, commit to improving the quality of mandatory public engagement by implementing an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly for a significant urban development project instead.

5. If you are a member or leader of a community board or neighbourhood association and want increase the membership's representativeness of the community, consider changing how people are chosen to be part of the board or association by using sortition to select new Members / OR If you are a municipality or a civil society organisation in a city where community boards or neighbourhood associations do not exist, consider creating new sortition-based Community Assemblies to represent each district, borough, ward, or neighbourhood (depending on the size/configuration of the city).
6. If you are a city that is already familiar with Citizens' Assemblies, how they work and their benefits, but want to implement them to tackle city-wide challenges in an ongoing way, consider implementing a city-wide Citizens' Assembly that convenes on a regular basis to tackle ongoing, systemic, city-wide challenges by forming recommendations that shape key urban policies, the city's long-term vision, amendments to this vision, and significant development projects.

At the heart of these scenarios are three types of Citizens' Assemblies with rotating Members selected by sortition (lottery) - city-wide, community, and ad-hoc. These representative and deliberative Assemblies are envisioned to be a core part of a much wider participatory ecosystem that involves digital surveying, participatory data collection and map-making, citizen science, and community-driven initiatives like placemaking, public dialogues, and design workshops.

We have thought about Citizens' Assemblies holistically, as an intrinsic part of a city's decision-making processes. This means there should be a direct connection to the relevant public authority and other key actors, including managers, urban planners, developers and investors, civil society groups, architects, and researchers.

We have also begun exploring the intersection between the systemic governance infrastructure and the spatial infrastructure needed to enable these changes to the existing democratic culture in a long-lasting, effective way.

Finally, we suggest practical ways to get started in implementing these ideas depending on context, taking into account a city's size, existing institutions and processes, and resources available.

Reader's guide: Key definitions

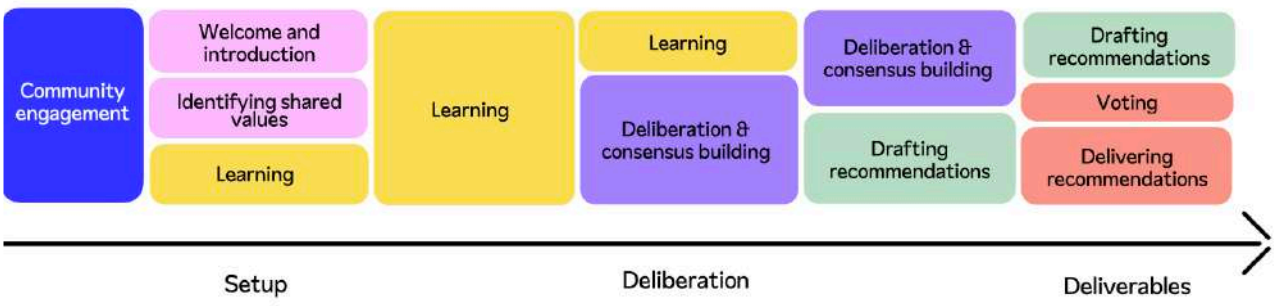
The terms Citizens' Assembly, sortition, deliberation, and citizen appear regularly throughout this paper and are key to its understanding.

Citizens' Assembly

A Citizens' Assembly is a group of people who are selected through sortition to be broadly representative of a community. They are convened with the aim of making shared, consensus-driven recommendations for decision makers through deliberation. Citizens' Assemblies are sometimes called Citizens' Juries, Panels, or Councils depending on their size and the country where they are taking place.

There are two main ingredients of a Citizens' Assembly that differentiate it from other forms of participation and enable its effectiveness and legitimacy - these are sortition and deliberation.

For more details on the technical and practical considerations for running a Citizens' Assembly (including how many people to invite and select, an expected budget for running an Assembly, and other key elements) refer to our Assembling an Assembly Guide here.



An example of a typical Citizens' Assembly process

Sortition

Sortition refers to a two-stage lottery selection process that brings together a broadly representative cross-section of society. In practice, this happens in two stages:

In the first stage, a large number of invitations (often between 10-30k) are sent out at random by the convening authority or organisation to people living in a city or a particular community. The invitation details why the Assembly is being convened, the issue to be addressed, how the process will work, how members will be compensated for their time and what resources are available to reduce barriers to participation (support for elder care, child care, translation during the deliberations etc), and what will happen as a result of their recommendations. People are invited to accept by confirming that they would like their name to be included in a second lottery process to choose the final group of Assembly Members.

Amongst everybody who responds positively to this first invitation, the second lottery takes place, this time with a process – known as stratification – to ensure that the final group broadly represents the community's diversity in terms of gender, age, geography, and socio-economic differences, or other relevant criteria to the issue.

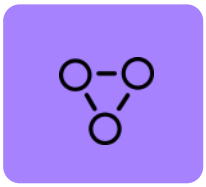
Stage 1

Invitation sent (by post, phone, email) to a random sample of the population (2.000-30.000)

Recipients can volunteer to opt in to the lottery

Stage 2

Second lottery - Stratified based on : Gender, Age, Location, Socio-economic criteria ...

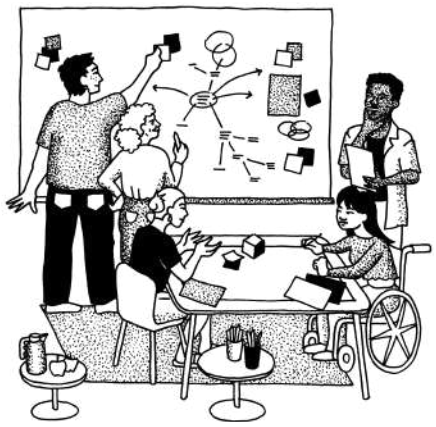


Final Group - Broadly representative of the community concerned (city, state, country etc.)

The principle of sortition means that everyone has an equal chance to represent their community as an Assembly Member, and to be represented in turn. It is a fair process for choosing a small group of people to be involved in shaping a collective decision. We cannot all be involved in every decision all the time, so there is a need for mechanisms that enable us to choose a sub-group who will dive deeply into an issue. Rotation means that the responsibility and privilege of being an Assembly Member is shared over time. It recognises that everybody has the dignity and capacity to be involved in shaping decisions affecting their lives. Bringing together a diversity of perspectives is also crucial for enabling collective intelligence to emerge.

Deliberation

Deliberation refers to weighing evidence and coming to a shared decision off the back of it. Deliberation creates the conditions to consider the complexity of the issue and to find common ground about how to tackle it. It can help unlock action where decision makers are stuck or may be facing resistance from a small portion of a community. In a Citizens' Assembly, Members spend significant time listening, learning and collaborating through facilitated deliberation to find common ground (often 70-80% agreement) and form collective recommendations for policy makers, decision makers, and the community.



Citizen

We use the word 'citizen' intentionally. We mean the term in the broadest sense of a person living in a particular place, which can be in reference to a village, town, city, region, state, or country depending on the context, rather than in the more restrictive sense of 'a legally recognised national of a state'. In this document, we use the word 'citizen' interchangeably with 'people'. We see citizenship as an active practice.

Further information

Specific details about how to reach people who may not have a fixed address can also be found in section 1.5 Before the Assembly and on p.19 of FIDE's guide on organising a democratic lottery.

CHAPTER

01

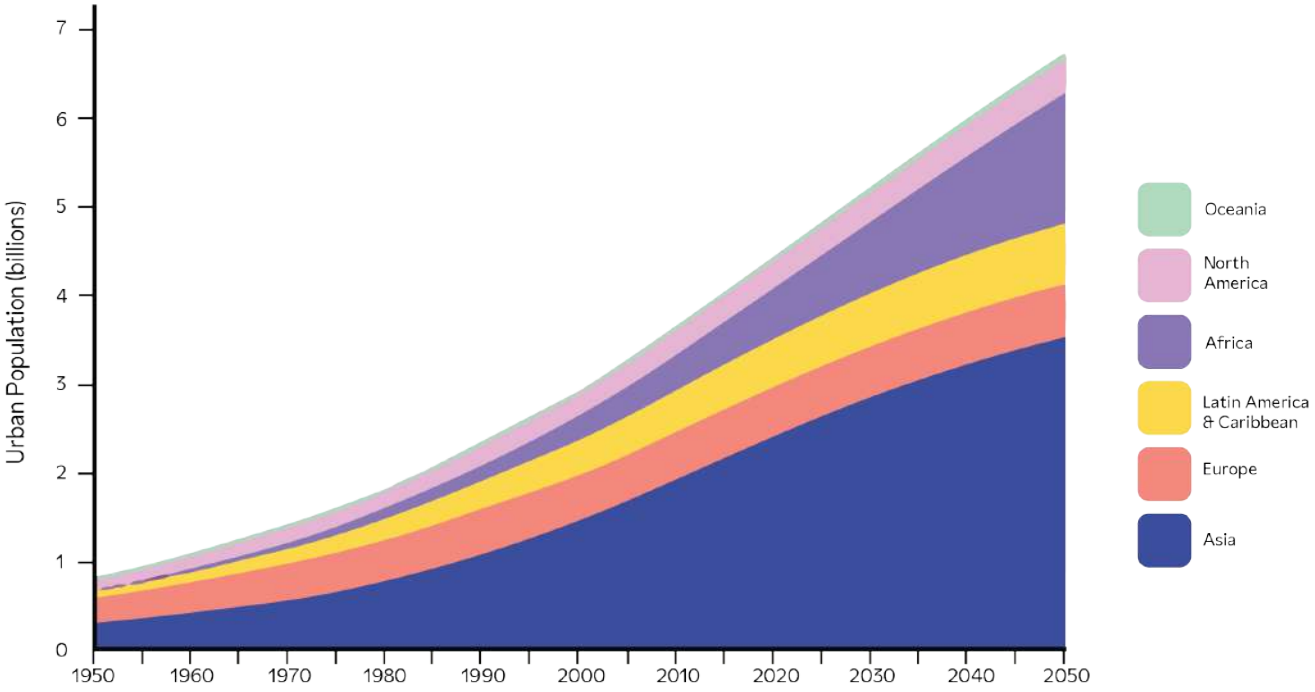
Introduction

Why and how did we develop these proposals?

1.1 Rationale for developing these proposals

The global urban population is expected to more than double by 2050, with nearly seven in 10 people living in cities, meaning that more and more of us are directly impacted by the decisions made about our urban environments.

Around the world, urban areas are facing similar issues related to housing affordability, the widening gap of social and economic inequality, vulnerability to climate change, population increase, rapid urbanisation, and mobility challenges. These issues are pressing and complex, and will require the collective agency and intelligence of everybody to find better, more inclusive, paths forward. For this reason, we see a huge opportunity to re-consider how people living in urban areas can be empowered to shape the places they call home.



Urban population of the world by geographic region, 1950-2050. Data source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2018a). Word Urbanisation Prospects 2018

Convening with the Task Force in The Hague, the Netherlands - September 2023. From left to right: Gabriella Gomez-Mont; Lucy Reid; James MacDonald-Nelson; Diego Luna Quintanilla; Daniel Fusco; Claudia Chwalisz; Jane Weru; Flora Samuel; Johan Galster; Elisa De Los Reyes García López; Ifeoma Ebo; Trivik Verma; Felipe Rey Salamanca; Gustav Kjær Vad Nielsen; and Ieva Česnulaitytė.

1.2 Assembling an International Task Force

We convened an International Task Force on Democratising City Planning in recognition of these problems, and with a desire to propose systemic changes for addressing them. We began this work by having many conversations with city councillors, officials, planners, architects, developers, and citizens in different parts of the world. They shared a frustration with the current system of urban planning.

We are not denying that there are successful and inspiring examples of participation in urban planning; there are many people around the world who have championed meaningful and innovative approaches (we highlight some of these in the appendix). But what we notice is that this is not the status quo. When it happens, it often relies on the political will and imagination of those involved at one moment in time. It is not the way decisions are routinely taken.

With our International Task Force, we learned from many inspiring examples of participatory and deliberative processes around the globe (some of which are found in the Appendix). We then considered and explored how the system could change to make meaningful and informed public deliberation and participation, such as Citizens' Assemblies, the norm in urban planning decision making.

Task Force Members

Jan Boelen: Artistic Director, Atelier Luma, Arles, France

Ifeoma Ebo: Founder, Creative Urban Alchemy, NYC, USA

Zahra Ebrahim: CEO and Co-Founder of Monumental Projects, Toronto, Canada

Daniel Fusca: Manager, Public Consultation, Parks, Forestry & Recreation, Toronto, Canada

Francis Fukuyama: Professor, Stanford University, Stanford, USA

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Elisa De Los Reyes García López Co-founder & Partner at Pezestudio, Bilbao, Spain

Felipe Rey Salamanca: Founder, iDeemos, Bogotá, Colombia

Flora Samuel: Head of Architecture, Cambridge University, UK

Jesse Shapins: Head of Urban Strategy & Design, Urban Partners, Copenhagen, Denmark

Trivik Verma: Assistant Professor in Urban Science & Policy, TU Delft, The Netherlands

Jane Weru: Executive Director & Founding Member, Akiba Mashinani Trust, Nairobi, Kenya

A panel of 15 randomly selected participants (representing 13 different countries) had a chance to engage in deliberation on ways to democratise city planning - Stuttgart, Germany

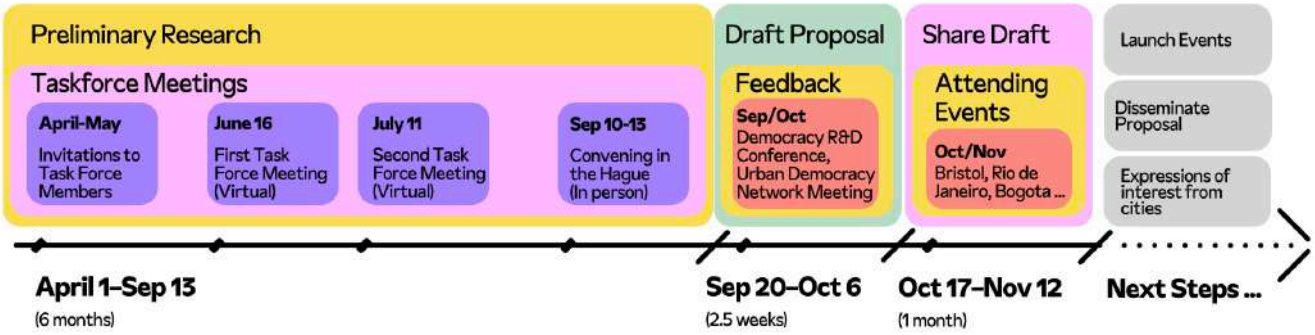
1.3 Developing the proposals

May-July 2023: During a first series of virtual meetings, we analysed the benefits and shortcomings of typical urban planning decision-making processes, common participatory practices, and the challenges facing decision makers, developers, urban planners, civil society organisations, and citizens. Between these first virtual meetings, DemocracyNext attended the Urban Future conference in Stuttgart, Germany. We led a deliberative session to explore these initial ideas with a group of randomly selected participants from the conference and their feedback was integrated into the draft proposal.

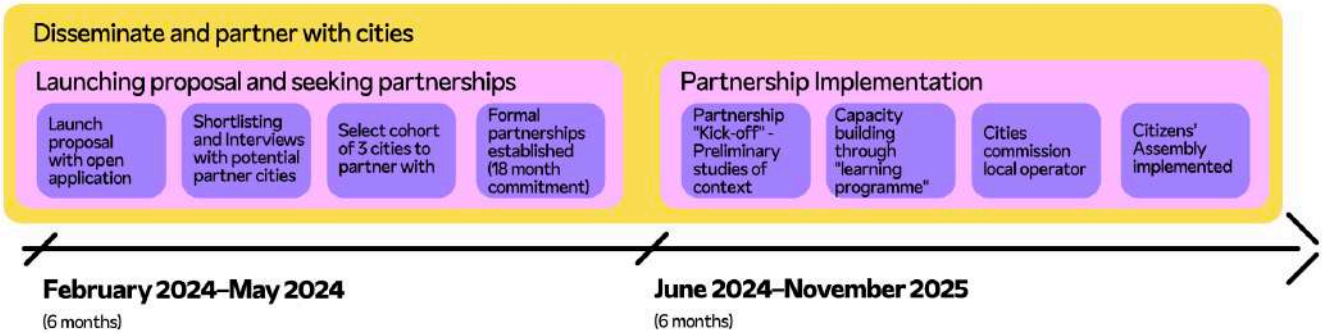
September 2023: After assessing the current landscape, we held an in-person convening at DemocracyNext's new home at the Humanity Hub in The Hague to imagine what a more democratic city could look like and how it could be governed, followed by an iterative process of sketching out what new governance models could entail.

September-November 2023: In line with DemocracyNext's values, we wanted this work to be rigorous and collaborative. We gathered feedback from a larger group of around 100 international stakeholders and experts. We convened them twice online and gathered written feedback on multiple draft versions of the document. In October and November 2023, we sought further feedback from experts from the fields of deliberative and participatory democracy at the Democracy R&D Conference in Copenhagen and the IOPD Conference in Rio de Janeiro.

Panel discussion at the IOPD Conference in Rio de Janeiro, November 2023.



February 2024: The paper is launched with an international Open Application for cities to partner with DemocracyNext and work together on contextualising and implementing these ideas.



CHAPTER

02

Identifying the challenges...

and what needs to change

2.1 What issues are cities facing?

The issues facing cities today are complex and demand solutions that draw upon the collective intelligence of society as a whole. Today, cities face a myriad of challenges and opportunities related to urban planning. For example:

- **Affordable housing crisis:** Many cities are confronted with a real housing crisis and decisions on how to address this are often stuck. They face a shortage of affordable housing, rising homelessness and housing insecurity for large segments of the population.

- **Population growth is straining resources:** Rapid urbanisation is leading to increased demand for housing, transportation, services, and infrastructure, putting a strain on existing resources. This dynamic conflicts with challenges of land capture and inequitable distribution of wealth that directs resources away from where they are needed the most.

- **Environmental sustainability:** Climate change, air pollution, loss of biodiversity and green space, and natural disasters pose significant threats to cities, necessitating strategies for climate resilience, sustainable development, nature-based solutions, and emissions reduction. Cities in regions prone to natural disasters (such as earthquakes, hurricanes, or floods) face the additional challenge of preparing for and responding to these extreme events.

- **Public health and well-being:** Issues such as mental health challenges, the opioid epidemic, an ageing population, and responses to public health emergencies like pandemics pose significant challenges for city governments.

- **Inequality and inclusion:** Cities often struggle with disparities in income, access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, all of which disproportionately affect minority communities, which can also be linked to issues of social cohesion, tensions, and divisions.

- **Accessible mobility is not available to everyone:** Accessibility and proximity to multi-modal mobility options and other public services and facilities is not evenly distributed amongst the population.

2.2 How we make decisions needs to change

We have found there is general agreement amongst different actors in the urban planning ecosystem – planners, architects, city government officials, mayors and elected councillors, investors, developers, civil society organisations, and citizens – that the current decision-making system is not equipped to tackle these challenges in a dynamic, effective, or inclusive way.

- **Engagement does not always have impact**: The typical output of engagement is not effectively integrated into decision-making and often happens too late in a design process (or without a direct connection to it), leaving little room for changes.

- **Decisions and progress are stuck:** The democratic deficit in planning decisions and approvals processes – with people being consulted only late in the game – can lead to community resistance to new projects meaning cities spend more time dealing with angry voices and legal challenges etc.

- **People lack agency:** The people living in the places impacted by development decisions are rarely meaningfully involved in shaping those decisions.

- **There is mistrust in the system:** This stems from many people feeling that the system is co-opted and that urban planning decisions are being overly determined by developers and investors, politicians, or other interest groups.

- **Mismatch between people's desires and what planning rules allow:** Planning rules are often impeding the creation of the types of places people actually want.

- **Historical inequalities are often perpetuated:** Marginalised or minority communities are rarely at the decision-making table as equals, while the engagement and facilitation skills needed to work and dialogue with communities experiencing compounded social barriers is often lacking.

CHAPTER

03

Six ways to democratise city planning

with three types of Citizens' Assemblies

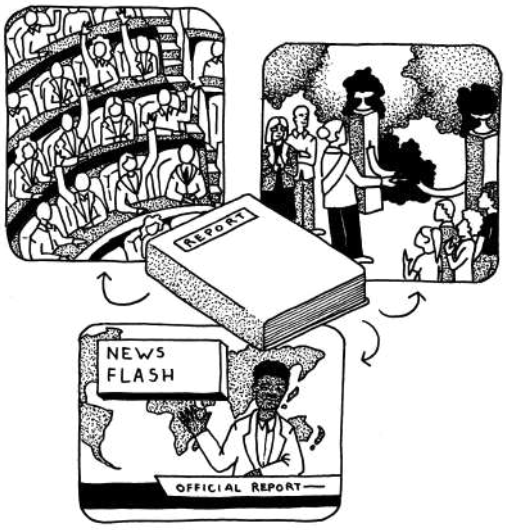
3.1 Introduction

More than a one-off process - changing the rules of the game for better, ongoing decision-making

The challenges that cities face today are not only a result of the specific decisions made in recent decades, but also stem from the way in which these decisions have been made. We see a need to change how people are integrated into the process of urban planning to create better, bolder, consensus-driven solutions to the complex challenges outlined above, in a way that engenders much greater legitimacy. This demands a departure from the status quo.

For more effective and inclusive decision making that enables action and gives people agency to shape their cities into thriving and healthy places, people should be able to wield greater power in shaping those decisions in an ongoing way, not only by voicing their opinions in town hall meetings, or as part of formal or mandatory consultation processes.

These proposals are not simply about improving one-off participation processes, it is about enriching and expanding how we engage with people by creating a deeper culture of engagement that can enable the conditions for a systemic, structural shift. We see this as a fundamental way to transform who decides and how decisions are made.



3.2 The importance of *deeper*, *wider* engagement

We need both depth and breadth of citizen involvement, with a holistic ecosystem of deliberative and participatory institutions that are connected directly into the key moments of urban planning decision making.

Depth is needed because the decisions concerned are complex, involving many considerations and trade-offs. Many of the challenges outlined at the outset are interconnected, and there is a need to sit with that complexity rather than simplify it. It is why Citizens' Assemblies are at the heart of the proposals outlined here – enabling a greater depth of citizen deliberation.

However, it's necessary to connect Assembly processes with wider citizen participation to enable a breadth of community input. There are many innovative participation processes being tested internationally from which we can draw inspiration (see Appendix for examples). Directly connecting these with citizen deliberation in a systemic way presents a great opportunity to engage both deeply and broadly.

Working in tandem with broader participation processes, Citizens' Assemblies can strengthen and help legitimise the breadth of inputs from the community. Some examples of these include community mapping, surveys, citizen science and data-gathering initiatives, design workshops, and other relevant forms of engagement that reach a wider breadth of participants. The outputs of these participation processes can be directly linked to Citizens' Assemblies as a way to determine the question (the remit) of the Assembly or as a form of evidence or testimony for Members to form recommendations.

3.3 A democratic planning ecosystem

Three types of Assemblies; six pathways to democratising planning

The three types of Citizens' Assemblies are: city-wide, community, and ad-hoc. These Assemblies play a key role in an ecosystem of wider participation strategies that are connected to the public authority, their policy and and decision-making cycles, and key actors involved in urban planning decisions, including planners, developers and investors, civil society groups, architects, and researchers. In the following section, we provide greater detail about each type of Assembly, the supporting bodies and processes that facilitate a direct connection to the public authority.

Each part of this proposal is understood as one element in a wider ecosystem of actors, wider engagement processes, and key moments of decision-making - all of which come together to form an ecosystem. We see the different Assemblies connecting to each other, to the existing infrastructure of a city, and key people and organisations as fundamental to the cultivation of a more democratic, citizen-empowered culture of deliberation.

An outline of the six ways to democratise city planning is shown on the following two pages, but we will go deeper into them in chapter 5. Depending on a city's current starting point, at least one, if not multiple, of these options can be seen as an initial 'way in' to begin making systemic changes to urban planning decision making.

Six ways to democratise city planning

01 If you are a city or a region...

about to initiate a major infrastructure project, initiate an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly to shape project objectives and key design goals that are more aligned with the community's wants and needs.

02 If you are a developer...

in the early stages of a large urban development project initiate an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly to generate higher quality, community-supported design strategies and site programming that, in turn, enables the creation of places where people can connect, live, and thrive.

03 If you are a city...

about to develop your next long-term plan, a significant urban policy, or a financial plan consider initiating this process with an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly to develop a citizen-driven vision for the city, a multi-year budget, or a planning policy that is aligned with and reflects the needs, values, and desires of the city's residents.

04 If you are a city or a region...

frustrated with the status quo of legally-required public consultation, commit to improving the quality of mandatory public engagement by implementing an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly for a significant urban development project instead.

05 If you are a member of an existing community board or neighbourhood association...

and want to increase the membership's representativeness of the community, consider changing how people are chosen to be part of the board or association by using sortition to select new Members.

OR if you are a municipality or a CSO...

and you are a in a city where community boards do not exist, consider creating new sortition-based Community Assemblies to represent each district, borough, ward, or neighbourhood.

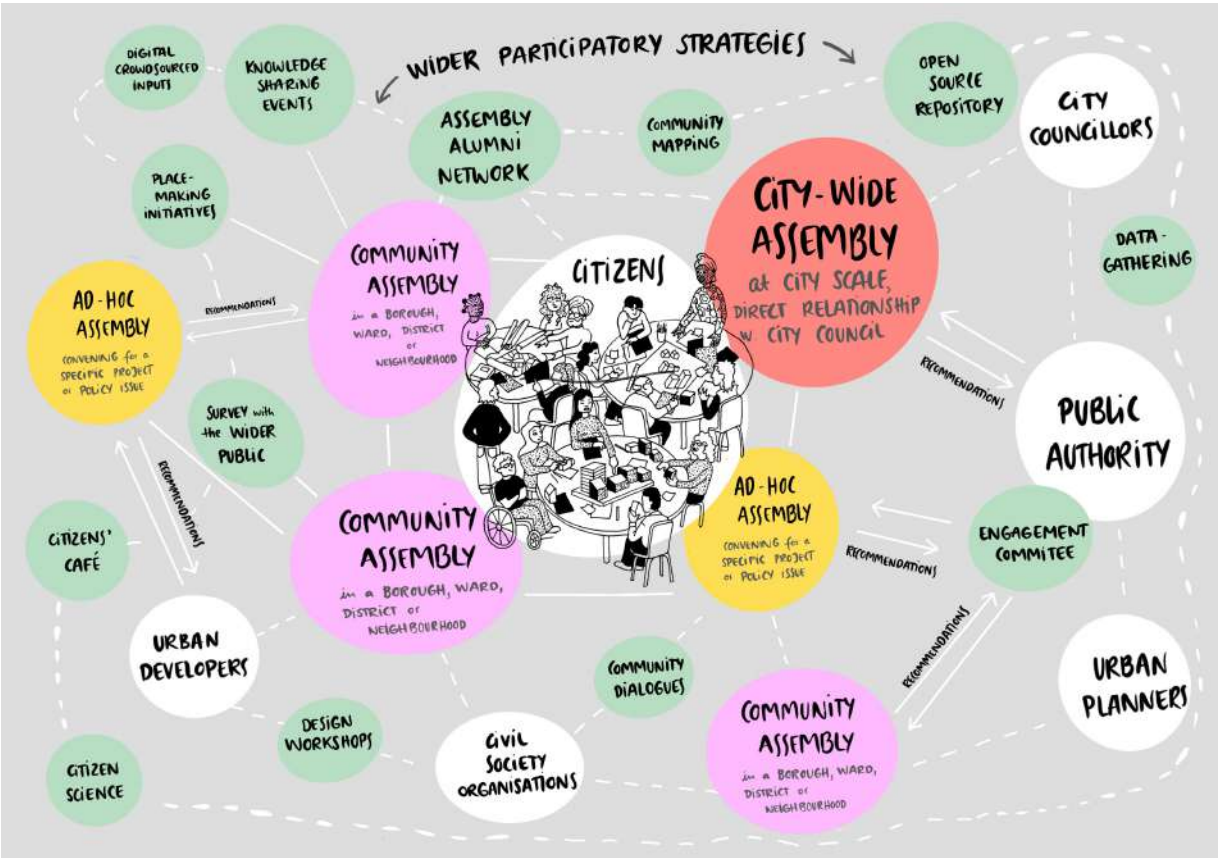
06 If you are a city...

that is already familiar with Citizens' Assemblies, how they work and their benefits, but want to implement them to find solutions to city-wide challenges in an ongoing way, consider implementing a City-wide Citizens' Assembly that convenes on a regular basis to tackle ongoing, systemic, city-wide challenges by forming recommendations that shape key urban policies, the city's long-term vision, amendments to this vision, and significant development projects.

3.4 Three types of Citizens' Assemblies

The three types of Citizens' Assemblies include: a City-wide Assembly, Community Assemblies, and Ad-hoc Assemblies. How they can be implemented, either independently or concurrently, depends on a city's size, its existing institutions, decision-making, and engagement processes, and the resources available for implementation.

The characteristics outlined are guidelines for how these Assemblies could function. The details will depend on the context and should be designed with careful consideration. More information about how to design and run Citizens' Assemblies are available in DemocracyNext's Assembling an Assembly Guide.



A conceptual illustration of how the three types of Citizens' Assemblies, in collaboration with key actors and stakeholders, and wider citizen participation strategies work together in an ecosystem. Illustration by Mona Ebdrup

3.4.1. Community Assembly

This Assembly type functions at the scale of a borough, district, ward, or neighbourhood (naming convention will be dependent on city). These Members give regular input on projects, plans, and decision-making processes that impact their particular jurisdiction. This input is directly linked to key stages in the decision-making process with a commitment from the public authority to consider, respond to, and act on the recommendations.

Members are selected from the community through sortition. An option we suggest is to select 50% of the Members halfway through the Community Assembly's term. For example, if the term is two years, then every year, 50% of the Assembly Members are replaced by new Members selected by sortition, so there is a rotation of opportunity and responsibility in the community. This helps to ensure that there is some balance between people who already hold a deeper understanding of the context and issues, with others who bring a fresh perspective.

In some cities, community-level councils or boards already exist. There are 'Casa Somos' in Quito, Ecuador, New York City's Community Boards, Los Angeles' Neighborhood Councils, and Helsinki's Neighbourhoods Association, Helka. In such cases, there is an opportunity to transform how they operate, by introducing sortition into the selection process for all, or some, of their members. Many of these existing bodies have well-intentioned and engaged citizens, but are often unrepresentative of the communities they serve, exacerbating inequalities and amplifying power imbalances. Changing the selection mechanisms from either self-selection or elections to sortition would help to ensure a greater diversity of people have the chance to become Members.

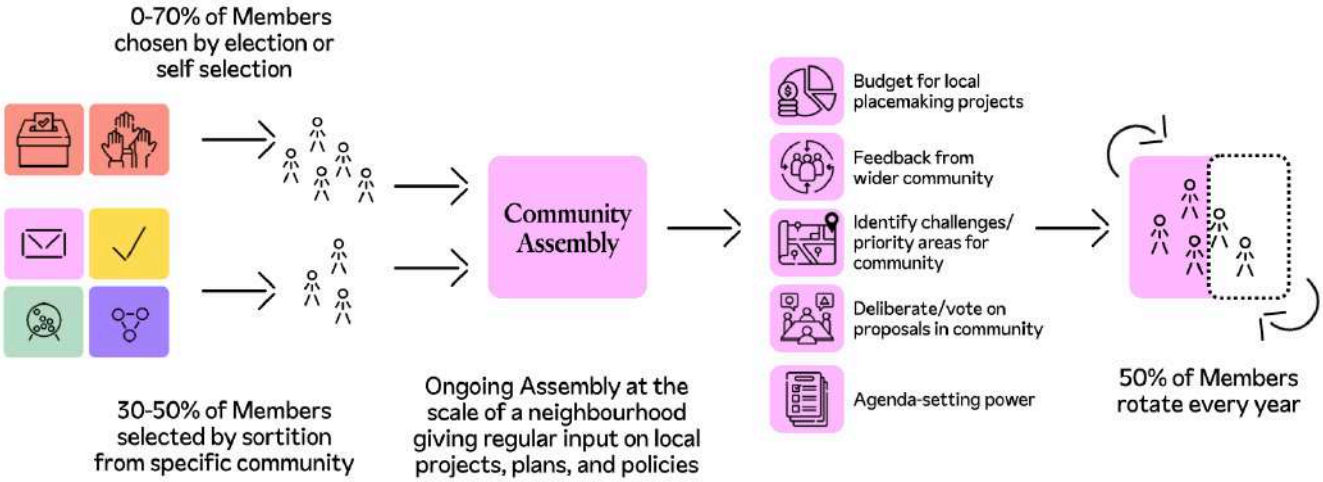
In contexts where these boards or councils already exist, reforming to selection by sortition - a selection mechanism that engenders greater legitimacy - can open an discussion as to why these bodies should be granted greater responsibility and power to influence key decisions in the city. For example, they could deliberate and form recommendations on specific development proposals in their jurisdiction or choose priority areas for implementing city-wide urban policies and initiatives. They could also be allocated a specific budget for local projects and could initiate an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly related to a neighbourhood policy or project.

Key elements of the Community Assembly

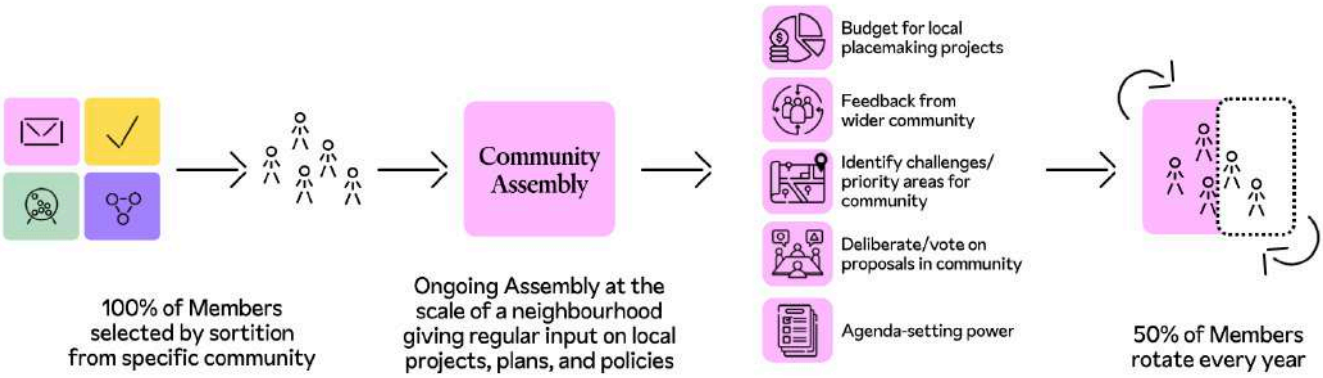
(exact characteristics will vary depending on context in which the Assembly is implemented)

1. Around 25-50 Members. The Assembly should include people from minority groups. Over time, the ideal should be a genuine possibility that every person in the district participates in the Assembly at least once in their life.
2. 50% of the members rotate out every year to allow for a new cohort of citizens to work together.
3. In cases where there are existing community boards or neighbourhood councils, Members selected by sortition could form one third or half of the Assembly in order to bring an even wider diversity of perspectives to the group.
4. They convene monthly or bi-monthly, they deliberate, and form recommendations on development proposals in their jurisdiction before final decision making goes to the City Council/Local Authority.
5. They can organise wider community dialogues, surveys, and data gathering along with other participation strategies that garner feedback from the community, to identify key challenges and priority areas for action in their jurisdiction.
6. They are allocated a specific budget for local placemaking projects.
7. Before a new cohort of Community Assembly Members are selected by sortition, the previous Members set key agenda items for the next group. This can also be done with input from a wider participation process, the local authority or the City-wide Citizens' Assembly.

If shifting to an entirely sortition-based system immediately is difficult for technical or political reasons, another option (as a way to transition to new ways of selecting Members by sortition) could be to begin by selecting 50% of an incoming cohort of Members with sortition and the other 50% with the existing selection mechanism (see diagram below). Over time, the group could become entirely selected by sortition.



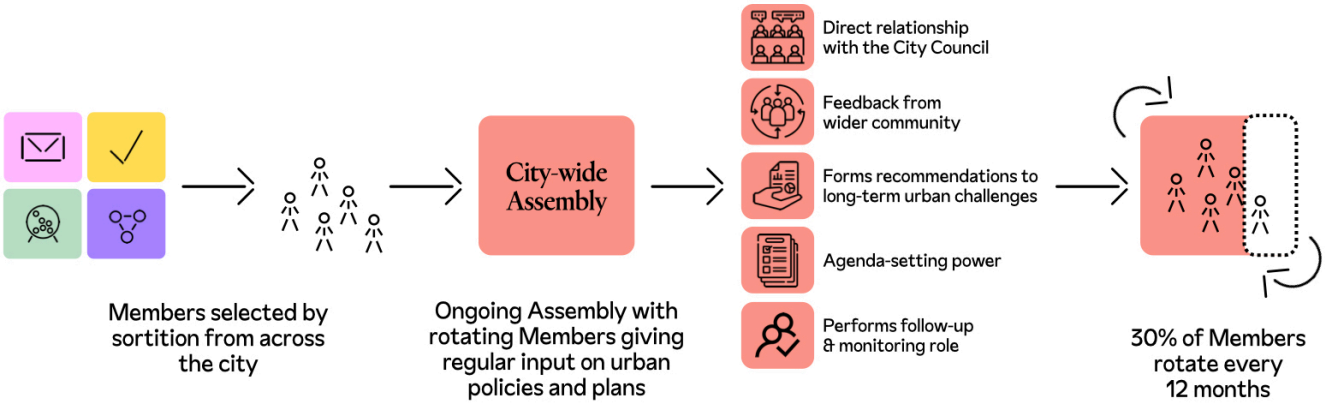
In contexts where these community bodies do not exist, we propose that they could be created, and could be solely formed of Members selected through sortition (see diagram below). They would also be granted the same responsibilities indicated above.



3.4.2. City-wide Citizens' Assembly (on Planning)

At the scale of the city, we propose a standing City-wide Citizens' Assembly with rotating Members which gives regular input on longer-term and city-wide decisions. For example, this can include the city's strategic (5-10 year) plan and amendments to / development of a significant piece of policy.

Some cities, such as Paris, have established permanent city-wide Assemblies with a general mandate, and other cities, such as Brussels and Milan, have established permanent Assemblies on Climate. Planning decisions often cut across various departments and are inter-connected with climate-related decisions as well. If a city prefers to put the emphasis on climate, or give the Assembly a more general mandate, where long-term and city-wide planning decisions are part of the wider remit, then these are also options that fit within the spirit of the proposals outlined here. What matters is the idea of anchoring an ongoing Assembly in a way that empowers it to set the agenda and to have a meaningful connection with the City Council on decision making.



Key elements of the City-wide Citizens' Assembly

(exact characteristics will vary depending on context in which the Assembly is implemented)

1. The number of Members should be relative to the size of the population they represent. Large cities with 1 million+ inhabitants will likely want a slightly larger group of around 100 Members, while in much smaller cities an Assembly of 25 Members might feel more appropriate.
2. One third of the Members are rotated out and replaced by new Members selected by sortition every 12 months. This is done to make the time commitment required to take part more manageable, to extend the opportunity to more citizens to become part of the Assembly, and to socialise and popularise the idea of citizen deliberation. It is in line with the scope of the mandate. However, a slightly shorter or longer time-frame might be appropriate depending on the exact boundaries of the Assembly's remit.
3. The Assembly has a direct relationship with the City Council and acts as an intermediary between citizens and political leadership in urban planning-related questions.
4. City-wide surveys and other large forms of crowdsourced public inputs serve as part of the evidence base for forming recommendations.
5. Connected to the existing frequency of creating and/or amending city-wide strategic plans and visions (mandated by the City Council or planning department), this Assembly establishes the core parts of the city's long-term vision at periodic points in time (often this happens every 5-10 years) and amendments to this vision (which may take place every 1-3 years).
6. It is convened regularly to address and form recommendations to address long-term urban challenges, such as infrastructure development, climate change mitigation and adaptation, housing affordability, amongst other issues.
7. It has agenda-setting power, meaning that it can initiate ad hoc Citizens' Assemblies related to specific urban policies or issues that arise (e.g. addressing congestion issues or low traffic neighbourhoods, dealing with an unexpected flood or other climate emergency), or specific city-wide or neighbourhood development projects. Agenda items can also be proposed by a Community Assembly or the City Council for consideration.
8. It performs follow-up & monitoring of policy implementation by liaising with the Engagement Committee (detailed below) to track how recommendations are being considered or acted upon by decision makers. May also follow up on recommendations developed by community assemblies and ad-hoc assemblies.
9. The Assembly can host large public forums and other forms of citizen participation. This can be to receive input into its deliberations as well as to share its recommendations for wider public input before finalisation.

3.4.3. Ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly

An ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly is convened for a specific project or policy issue and can be initiated by either the City-wide Citizens' Assembly on Planning, a Community Assembly, the City Council/Public Authority, a developer, or through a citizen-led petition with a minimum number of signatures.

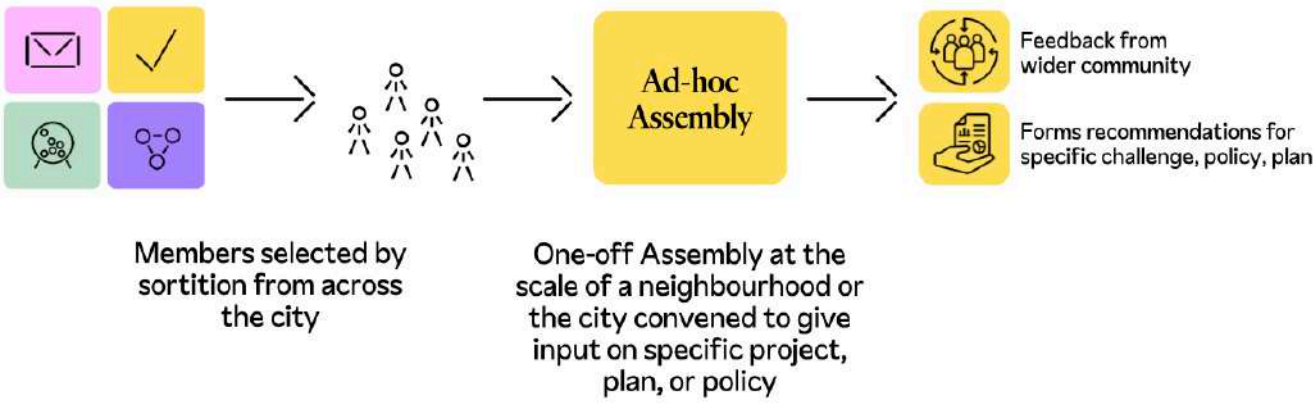
Key elements of the Ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly

(exact characteristics will vary depending on context in which the Assembly is implemented)

1. The number of Members depends on the impact or reach of the topic. Members selected through sortition meet at least 4-6 days over a 4-6 month period, though both the size and the length may vary depending on the specific circumstances.
2. Depending on the topic, the Members may come from a city-wide sortition process, a localised sortition process (to include those within the catchment area of the specific project or policy and who will be impacted personally by it), or a mixture of the two.
3. Results from community mapping and data gathering, community dialogues, and/or design workshops serve as an evidence base for Members to form recommendations.
4. This Assembly is one-off and specifically addresses one main question. Recommendations are delivered to the commissioning body (City-wide Citizens' Assembly, a Community Assembly, or the City Council/Public Authority). Follow-up on those recommendations is ensured by an Engagement Committee (described below) in collaboration with the ongoing City-wide Assembly where there is one.

Triggers that can initiate an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly can include:

- → A large-scale project that will have a significant environmental and/or economic impact on the city.
- → If the cost of a project is above a certain threshold.
- → Exceptional circumstances (i.e. city has declared bankruptcy, city has declared a climate emergency).



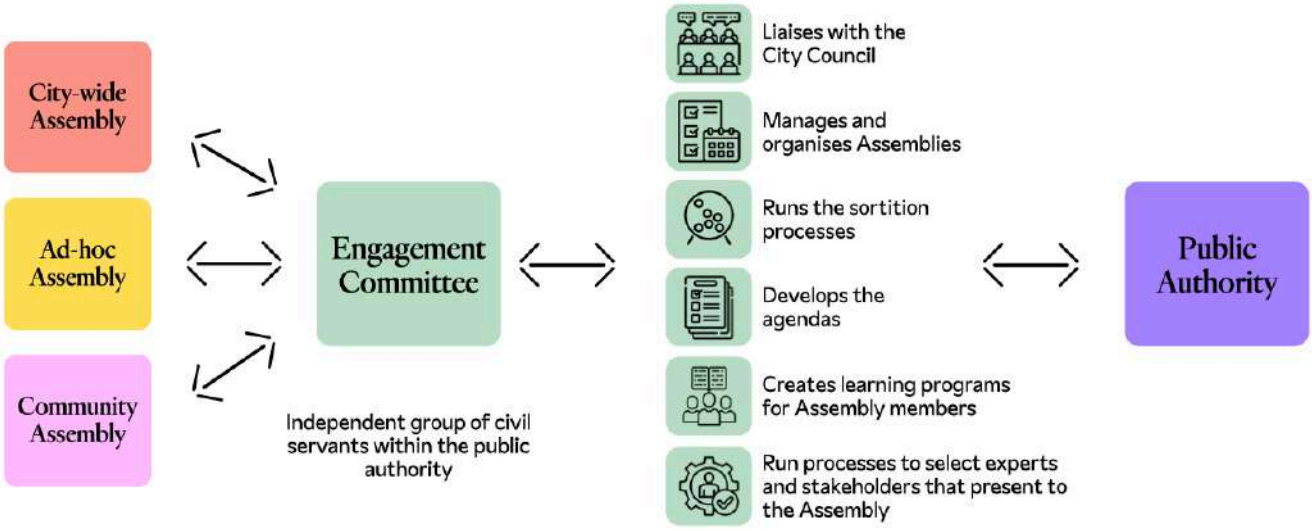
3.4.4. Essential supportive infrastructure

These Assemblies are supported by a designated engagement committee that helps to facilitate and ensure feedback loops, whilst ensuring accountability, and enabling continual knowledge exchange.

Engagement Committee

This Committee is formed of an independent group of civil servants from within the public authority (such as the engagement team in the planning department and/or the public engagement department) that acts as an impartial secretariat. A portion of the committee can also be made up by a small, randomly selected, group of Assembly Members. Their role is to manage and organise all of the various Assemblies - running the sortition processes, creating learning programs for the Assembly Members, running processes to select the information and choose experts and stakeholders that present to the Assembly, (all of which should be carried out in close partnership with local delivery organisations).

The engagement committee is also responsible for facilitating and maintaining an open line of communication with relevant decision-makers, city managers, and key city departments to ensure that recommendations are realistic, followed up and acted upon. They also manage the budgets and carry out the operational tasks for running the Assemblies.



Delivery organisations

Delivery organisations are practitioners who have expert knowledge and experience in organising, facilitating, and implementing the Assembly process. Examples of delivery organisations from around the world include:

- → Delibera - Brazil
- → Deliberativa - Spain
- → G1000 - Belgium
- → Healthy Democracy - USA
- → iDeemos - Colombia
- → Mass LBP - Canada
- → Mosaic Lab - Australia
- → newDemocracy - Australia
- → Nexus Institute - Germany
- → SoCentral - Norway
- → Demos - UK
- → We Do Democracy - Denmark

A longer list of organisations with expertise in Citizens' Assemblies can be found on the Democracy R&D network website.

Of course, we recognise that not every country will have an organisation specifically experienced in delivering a Citizens' Assembly. However, in many contexts there are often non-profit organisations and NGOs that have valuable experience in delivering participation processes which use similar techniques in facilitation. They can be trained in Assembly facilitation techniques and develop Assembly organisation and facilitation competencies.

Note: DemocracyNext will be launching a Citizens' Assembly learning program for civil servants and practitioners in late 2024/early 2025. Please let us know if you are interested in participating and we will notify you when this becomes available.

Knowledge-sharing network across different Assemblies

To cultivate a network amongst Assembly Members (past and present) and to create opportunities for experimentation, learning, iterating, and knowledge sharing, we propose a series of different mechanisms to help build such a community of learning. This could include:

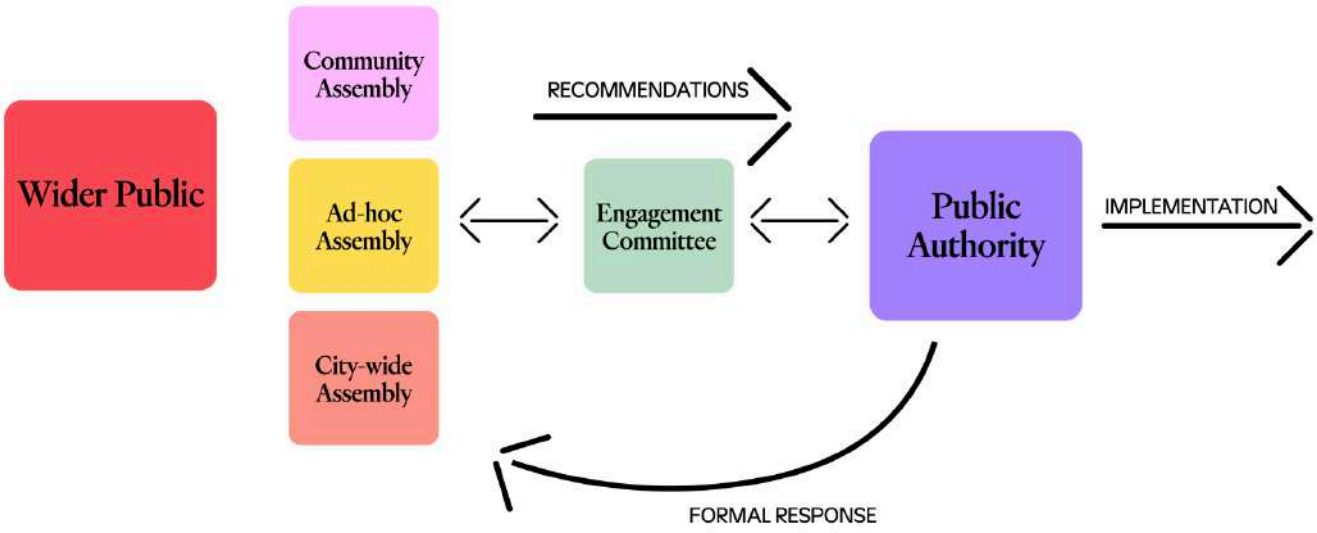
- → Knowledge-sharing events between Community Assemblies.
- → Supporting an alumni network of past Assembly Members.
- → Creating an open source repository or portal of the different Assemblies, their mandates, recommendations, and impact.
- → An annual democracy festival to share learnings, hold space for dialogue, and innovate more broadly across the city, with the wider public, and other cities from around the world who are innovating in similar ways.

3.5 Connecting to decision-making processes

It is incredibly important that recommendations delivered by any of the Assemblies have an impact. The ability for Assemblies to weave into the decision-making processes that already exist in a city is crucial to their empowerment and the effectiveness of the solutions they propose. That said, this will vary in every city. We have proposed that an Engagement Committee can ensure an open line of communication between the Assembly and key actors, but there are two fundamental points that, if followed, can also help ensure accountability and that the Assembly process is well integrated. These include:

1. **A formal response**: The public authority should publish a formal public response to the Assembly recommendations, outlining which recommendations they intend to implement and those they will not, with clear justifications as to why, and further details in a timely way.

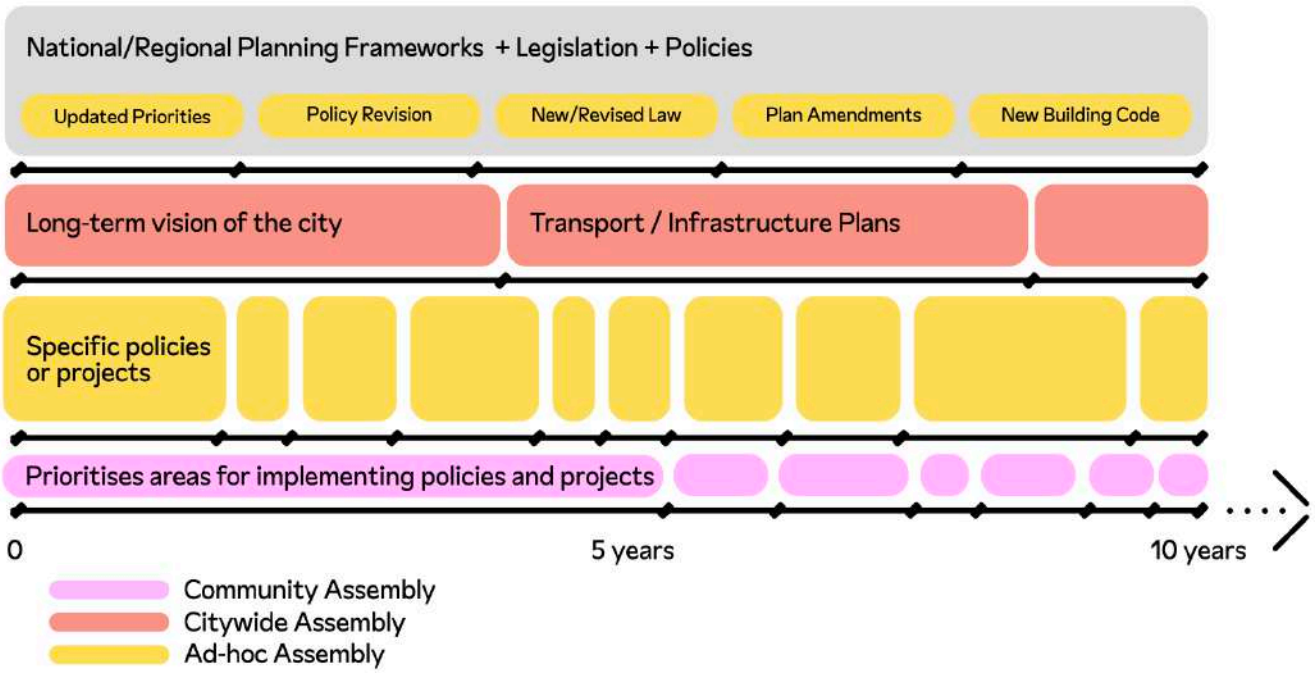
2. **Regular follow-up**: The implementation of accepted recommendations should be monitored with regular public progress reports. The first one should be timed to occur three months after the Assembly, and followed by updates every six months after that.



It is also important to consider how each Assembly type could plug into the specific timelines of the many city projects, plans, and policies happening at any given time. For example, at a national or regional scale, an Ad-hoc Assembly could be implemented to produce recommendations for new policies, or during a period when amendments to a particular piece of planning legislation, or a building code are being made.

A City-wide Assembly, on the other hand, could be convened to gather valuable input from citizens before a city drafts its long-term vision or a new transport plan.

At the scale of an individual development or community project, an Ad-hoc Assembly, or a Community Assembly, would be also useful for providing recommendations during the initial stages (and also throughout the development process).



Types of decision-making processes and possible associated Assembly types

CHAPTER

04

Why Citizens' Assemblies?

Who benefits?

4.1 The benefits of Citizens' Assemblies

Why are we so focused on Citizens' Assemblies? Why do they play a central role in these proposals? Below, we first list the general benefits of Citizens' Assemblies followed by how these are specifically helpful in cities.

- **Agency:** The social, political, and economic investment in adopting a deeper, ongoing culture of engagement through Citizens' Assemblies means that people will have more opportunities to take part in building a better future for their communities.
- **Complexity:** They provide the democratic spaces for people to actively 'citizen' together - working alongside each other to grapple with the complexity of these challenging, complex urban issues.
- **Cohesion**: They create the conditions to overcome polarisation and strengthen societal cohesion.
- **Collective intelligence:** They bring out the collective intelligence of society — the principle that many diverse people will come to better decisions than more homogenous groups.
- **Trust:** Tapping into this collective intelligence not only results in bolder, more innovative solutions, but also builds a greater level of trust between citizens, decision-makers, and political leaders.
- **Representation:** By selecting members through sortition, Citizens' Assemblies bring together a broadly representative group of people that reflects the diversity and reality of a community.

More detailed data and evidence on the benefits of Citizens' Assemblies can be found in the OECD's Catching the Deliberative Wave report.

4.2 Benefits for cities

Benefits for public authorities

- Citizens' Assemblies help to build greater legitimacy and accountability which can enable action, particularly on decisions that are hard to take or where authorities are 'stuck'.
- Public authorities get to tap into the knowledge of their citizens - all of whom have invaluable expertise and experience of living in their city.
- Citizen's Assemblies can lead to better quality visions, plans, and projects that are more aligned with community wants and needs, enabling cities to make bold or difficult changes with citizens rather than imposing changes on citizens.
- By investing in high quality engagement through Citizens' Assemblies, public authorities can avoid the high cost of a failed policy or a prolonged development process.

Benefits for developers and investors

- High-quality democratic process in the form of a Citizens' Assembly carried out early in development projects helps to reduce risk, especially in the timeline of zoning approvals, where there is often resistance by community members when they are consulted late on plans that have been finalised, and have had no say in shaping the project.
- Engaging with people in this way can help create better conditions for investment and generate more value by creating higher quality places, more resilience, and greater social cohesion.

Benefits for everyone

- Citizens are part of creating better neighbourhoods and cities, and the places they live will be better as a result.
- Citizens feel genuinely represented when their city is making big decisions.
- Citizens' individual and collective agency is strengthened, leading to a population with strong civic muscles.
- Strengthened social cohesion is possible because deliberative spaces bring a diversity of people together as equals working together.
- Citizens build an evidence base and share knowledge about their places. The result is places that are more fit for purpose.

4.3 Citizens' Assemblies as one part of public engagement

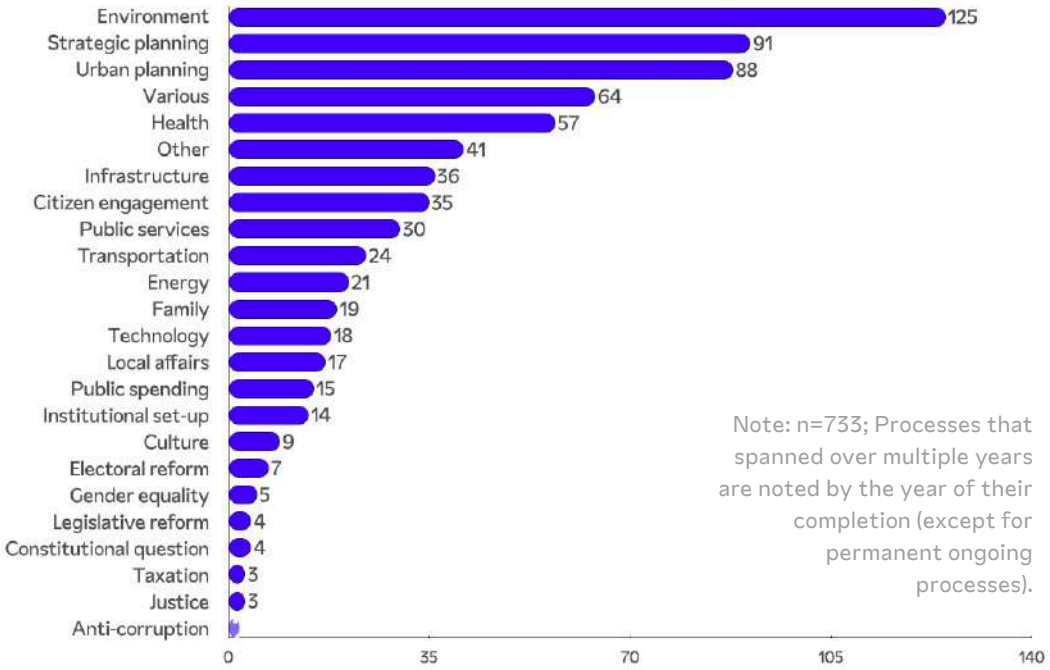
The Assembly types detailed above cannot sit alone and separate from existing (or potential) ways of engaging with the wider public. Assembly Members might represent the diversity of society but ultimately they are a small group of people. This is why Assemblies must be connected to a wider ecosystem of engagement strategies that can run in cooperation with, and feed directly into, the Assembly process as evidence for forming recommendations. These can include (but are not limited to):

- → Community mapping and data-gathering
- → Community dialogues (potentially leveraging technology like Fora)
- → Design workshops
- → Citizen science
- → Citizens' cafés
- → Surveys with the wider public
- → Crowdsourced community inputs (using platforms like Decidim, change.org, or make.org)
- → Placemaking initiatives
- → Generative AI platforms for participatory planning and co-design (such as UrbanistAI)

These engagement strategies can take place before the Assembly process (as a way to determine the question - the remit - of the Assembly) or during it (as a form of evidence or testimony for Members to form recommendations), while others can happen afterwards as a way to present and discuss recommendations from the Assembly with the broader public for feedback before it goes to the public authority.

The specific kinds of wider engagement strategies to implement will ultimately depend on the context and existing mechanisms for participation in a given city, the design of the Assembly itself, and the impact of the challenge to be tackled (whether it has city-wide implications or not). Designing or selecting the best kinds of participation strategies would be done in partnership with local organisations working in participation and/or municipal departments for public engagement in order to determine exactly how Citizens' Assemblies and the wider engagement strategies can work together. For more guidance on participation strategies more broadly, we recommend the OECD's Guidelines to Citizen Participation.

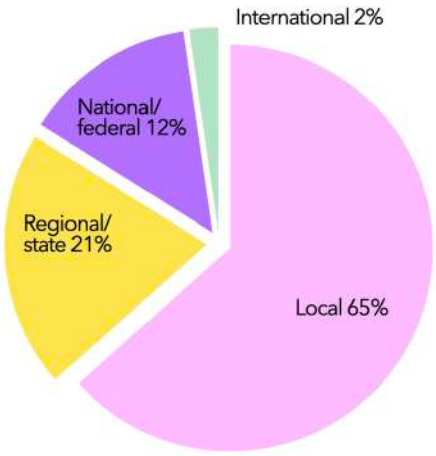
4.4 Extensive evidence of Citizens' Assemblies used to tackle urban planning issues



Number of times a policy issue has been addressed through a representative deliberative process. Source: OECD Deliberative Democracy Database (2023).

In the OECD's database of around 700 Citizens' Assemblies that have taken place in the past four decades around the world, the three most commonly tackled issues were related to the environment, urban planning, and strategic planning. Specific issues included climate change, infrastructure investment, long-term city plans, air pollution, mental health and well-being, amongst others. Some of the following examples are included in the OECD database, while others have taken place more recently.

Citizens' Assemblies have been used by various levels of government - 65% of which occur locally (OECD 2023). This is because local governments often address issues directly affecting people's daily lives, making it easier for citizens to participate and express their views compared to national issues. The lower costs of organising local Citizens' Assemblies also contributes to higher participation. On the next page are some of the examples from different parts of the world.



Number of representative deliberative processes per level of government 1986 -2023

CASE STUDY

Citizens' Assembly for the Island of Lynetteholm

Copenhagen, Denmark (2023)

→ Link to project

Image credit: We Do Democracy

How can Lynetteholm become a district that supports sustainable development for people, nature and the environment in the capital area in the future?

- → This is an example of how a city is trying to reconcile the controversial decisions that were made without early public engagement. An initially weak democratic conversation with citizens has been transformed into a strong one by empowering them to scrutinise the project and come up with recommendations in response to the question above. To do this, an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly was initiated in 2023 to deliberate after the project received significant public backlash.
- → The Citizens' Assembly's recommendations have been published publicly and handed over unedited to the Citizens' Representation in the Municipality of Copenhagen.

Key facts

- → 10.000 invitations sent to citizens from greater Copenhagen - 66 citizens were recruited.
- → 10 full days of deliberation over 8 months, evenings and weekends (November 2022 to June 2023).

CASE STUDY

Bogotá Itinerant Citizens' Assembly

Bogotá, Colombia (2020 - Present)

→ Link to project

Image credit: OIDP 2023 Award Best Practice in Citizen Participation

An ongoing model of citizen deliberation has been implemented for people to form recommendations on the land-use regulations and a vision of the city of Bogotá for the next twenty years.

- → Bogotá City Council, through its public innovation lab DEMOLAB, launched a sequenced public deliberation through the Itinerant Citizens' Assembly (ICA). This is an interconnected series of representative deliberative bodies that is attached to the City Council (OECD 2020).
- → This created conditions to enhance trust and accountability between citizens and the municipal government by creating an ongoing way for citizens to shape urban planning decisions, while ensuring a high level of inclusion by enabling people from all parts of the city to participate, including those considered to be the most vulnerable.

Key facts

- → First chapter, 110 citizens, second chapter 60 citizens (incl. 18 from first), third chapter 120 citizens - representing all 20 district of Bogotá.
- → 2 weeks of learning and 2 days of deliberation.

CASE STUDY

Brussels Climate Assembly

Brussels, Belgium (2022 - Present)

→ Link to project

Image credit: Assemblée citoyenne pour le climat /Burgerraad voor klimaat Instagram post

This permanent body for deliberation addresses the breadth of ongoing and increasing challenges related to climate change and is helping to close the gap between what citizens think is necessary and what the government does.

- → This permanent Assembly of rotating citizens is made up of an ongoing series of Citizens' Panels, who make recommendations on climate policies on a regular basis, and have the power to set the agenda for incoming panel Members.
- → During each cycle, the Assembly will address a theme defined by the previous Assembly. The first cycle focused on "Habitat". The second will focus on "Food".

Key facts

- → 10.000 invitations sent to citizens from Brussels region. 65 - 100 Members are selected by sortition per panel. This group is replaced by a new one each year, to allow the Assembly to last over time.

CASE STUDY

Ostbelgien Citizens' Assembly: Assembly 3 on the topic of housing

Eupen, Belgium (2021)

→ Link to project

Image credit: Ostbelgien Citizens' Assembly Flickr page

Housing for everyone! How can politicians create sustainable and affordable housing for everyone?

- → In the German-speaking region of Ostbelgien (East Belgium), a model of ongoing Citizens' Assemblies has been in place since 2019. It includes an Agenda-Setting Citizens' Assembly that initiates ad-hoc Assemblies. In October 2021 a group of citizens were selected through sortition and deliberated to form recommendations in response to the question above.
- → Even though this is a multi-layered, complex topic, citizens reached clear, tangible recommendations for this broad issue (including specific legislative changes, a call for new legal frameworks to support different types of property ownership models, and targeted changes to the planning regulations).

Key facts

- → 10.000 invitations sent to citizens from region of Ostbelgien. 65 - 100 Members are selected by sortition per panel.
- → Assembly process ran for 5 months from October 2021-February 2022.

CASE STUDY

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Toronto, Canada (2015 - 2019)

→ Link to project

Image credit: The City of Toronto, Toronto Planning Review Panel

A standing body of citizens were given a two year mandate to regularly meet, deliberate, and form recommendations on a variety of different city-wide projects, policies, and guidelines.

- Between 2015 and 2019, two cohorts of citizens were members of the Toronto Planning Review Panel. During each of the two years, members met approximately once a month, deliberated, and formed recommendations about issues including transportation plans, the city's climate strategy, and master plans.
- This helped to create a sense of legitimacy and accountability for projects carried out by the city and included a cross-section of Toronto residents, representing the diversity of people in the city, many of whom had rarely had the opportunity to provide input.

Key facts

- 12.000 invitations sent to citizens from all parts of the greater Toronto area. A group of 28 people were selected to be part of the first cohort (2015-2017).
- Over the 2 years, Assembly Members met for 4 full day orientation sessions and 11 full-day meetings.

CASE STUDY

Melbourne's People Panel

Melbourne, Australia (2014)

→ Link to project

Image credit: Members of Melbourne's People's Panel Outside City Hall. Photo: City of Melbourne via ABC Radio National

The City of Melbourne produced a $5 billion AUD 10 Year Financial Plan, which was considerably informed by the Melbourne People's Panel which helped to close a $900 million AUD budget hole.

- → This was the first time the City of Melbourne produced a 10 Year Financial Plan, and granted unprecedented access to a representative group of citizens selected by sortition to produce recommendations for the Lord Mayor and Councillor.
- → After reflecting on the Panel's proposals for seven months, the council publicly launched the final budget, which accepted 95% of the Panel's proposals.

Key facts

- → 43 Members were selected by sortition to join the People's Panel.
- → The met 6 times over the course of 4 months (August - October 2014).

CHAPTER

05

Where to begin?

5.1 Six possible starting points

In the table and section below, we have outlined 6 possible scenarios, showing how each Assembly type can be used to address a specific challenge in the urban planning system and we include key considerations for their implementation.

While some elements of urban planning decision processes are comparable in cities across the world, we recognise that there are differences from city to city. It's why we have started from the premise of outlining several, general, ways forward that can then be adapted to a city's institutional, political, socio-economic, and cultural context.

The table is organised by an increasing level of embeddedness (1-6) into existing decision-making processes. For example, in some cities it may make the most sense to begin with an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly for a specific major or contentious project or area of policy development to learn from the process and then reflect on how an ongoing Citizens' Assembly might be a logical next step to find solutions to other persistent and challenging issues. In some cities, where Citizens' Assemblies or other forms of deep engagement have already been tested and there is momentum to continue using them, a more ambitious approach to initiating an ongoing, City-wide Assembly model could be the next step.

If a city is interested in implementing more than one Assembly, it could consider taking a multi-layered approach that holistically connects each Assembly type and the recommendations they form to feed directly into different moments of decision making. This could mean that Ad-hoc Assemblies are initiated for specific projects, while ongoing Community Assemblies and a City--wide Citizens' Assembly provide regular input into specific urban planning decision-making processes. As outlined above, these would be supported by a dedicated Engagement Committee and other knowledge-sharing mechanisms. There are several entry points and capacity levels to consider when initiating Citizens' Assemblies.

<u>The starting point for implementation can differ depending on numerous factors, including:</u>

1. The encompassing legal and regulatory framework for planning decisions;
2. The city's size and jurisdictional powers;
3. The issue and scope of the decision to be made;
4. The point of time in the decision-making cycle;
5. The relationship with existing political and administrative institutions;
6. The existing culture of public engagement;
7. Available resources.

	Instigator	Scope	Challenge	Assembly Type	Benefits	Applicability	Other forms of participation	Impact	Next steps	Precedents
1	**If you are a city....**	A large-scale, city-wide infrastructure project	A lack of trust in the system and a sense of powerlessness in shaping major decisions affecting the city	Ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly	→ Avoids risk and cost of public pushback and a prolonged development process. → Results in higher quality visions, plans, and projects that are aligned with community wants and needs, and generates value for decision makers and planning departments.	Suitable for all city sizes and projects with a significant impact on the city.	→ Surveys with the wider public → crowdsourced community inputs	Recommendations are delivered, considered, responded to and integrated into the project.	Consider launching an ongoing city-wide Citizens' Assembly.	Copenhagen, Denmark (2023)
2	**If you are a developer...**	An urban development project that could be contentious and will have a large impact on the city	Powerlessness and a lack of trust in developers to build inclusive, affordable, sustainable neighbourhoods	Ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly	→ Avoids risk and cost of public pushback and a prolonged development process. → Results in higher quality visions, plans, and projects that are aligned with community wants and needs, and generates value for decision makers and planning departments.	Suitable for large urban development projects that will impact many residents.	→ Community dialogues → Design workshops → Surveys with the wider public → Crowdsourced community inputs	Recommendations are delivered, considered, responded to and integrated into the project.	Consider using Citizens' Assemblies on a regular basis for other projects	Copenhagen, Denmark (2023)
3	**If you are a city....**	Developing an urban policy or a long-term plan that affects all communities within a city	Decisions taken by public authorities are not always aligned with the needs, values, and desires of impacted communities	Ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly	→ Leads to more socially cohesive visions and policies that are more aligned with community wants and needs while avoiding the high cost of a failed policy.	Suitable for all city sizes and policies or plans that will have a lasting influence on the city.	→ Surveys with wider public, → Crowdsourced community inputs → Community mapping/data gathering → Placemaking initiatives → Community dialogues	Recommendations are delivered, considered, responded to and integrated into the project.	Consider launching an ongoing city-wide Citizens' Assembly.	Melbourne, Australia (2014) Bogotá, Colombia (2020 - 2023) Ostbelgien Belgium (2022)
4	**If you are a city, region, state, or province....**	Change the minimum requirements and raise the quality of mandatory public engagement	Mandatory public engagement rarely creates the conditions for the diversity of society to have a voice	Ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly	→ A truly representative group of citizens play a regular role in transforming their neighbourhoods and cities which helps strengthen individual and collective agency and social cohesion.	Suitable for all city sizes or regions with existing legal obligations for public consultation.	→ Community mapping/data gathering → Citizens' cafe → Crowdsourced community inputs (using digital platforms) → Placemaking initiatives	Recommendations are delivered, considered, responded to and integrated into the project.	Amend legislation for mandatory engagement to include Citizens' Assemblies.	Brussels Climate Assembly, Brussels, Belgium (2022 - present)
5	**If you are a city, civil society organisation or member of a community board or association...**	Reform or create new community /neighbourhood boards to better represent the needs of residents on an ongoing basis	Community-level councils or boards either do not exist, or if they do, lack power. They are sometimes unrepresentative of the diversity of people living there due to selection processes	Introduce sortition-based Community Assemblies Or Incorporate full or partial sortition-based member selection into existing community councils/boards	→ Citizens' individual and collective agency is strengthened, which leads to better quality visions, plans, and projects that are more aligned with community wants and needs	Suitable especially for cities with large, distinct neighbourhoods and/or cities with existing neighbourhood/ community boards or associations.	→ Crowdsourced inputs → Community dialogues → Placemaking initiatives → Design workshops	Community Assemblies vote on development proposals in their jurisdiction and choose priority areas in their jurisdiction for implementing city-wide urban policies and initiatives.	Consider introducing a city-wide ongoing Citizens' Assembly that connects with the Community Assemblies and incorporates their input	NYC Community boards (NB. currently members are not selected by sortition)
6	**If you are a city...**	Address systemic, ongoing, city-wide, challenges (i.e. homelessness, climate change risks, the future of mobility)	A lack of trust in the system and a sense of powerlessness in shaping major decisions affecting the city in an ongoing way	Ongoing City-wide Citizens' Assembly	→ Builds greater legitimacy and accountability while citizens feel genuinely represented when their city is making big decisions.	Suitable for all city sizes. Might require regulatory changes; will require significant resources and a Citizen Engagement Committee for support.	→ Community mapping → Community dialogues → Design workshops → Citizen science → City-wide surveys	Recommendations are delivered, considered, responded to and integrated into the project, policy, or vision.	Implement Community Assemblies connected to the City-wide Assembly	Toronto, Canada (2015-2019) Bogotá, Colombia (2020 - 2023)

01 If you are a city or a region about to initiate a *major infrastructure project...*

Consider implementing an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly to shape project objectives and key design goals that are more aligned with the community's wants and needs.

Not only does this significantly reduce the risk of public pushback and criticism, it helps to avoid the high cost of a prolonged approvals process, and generates greater social and economic value and community buy-in for the project in the long-term. Usually, people are left out of (or minimally consulted on) the initial stages of major decision-making processes for large-scale, multi-generation infrastructure projects. By giving people the time, space, and resources to learn about, deliberate over, and reach broad consensus on key aspects of the proposal, it's possible to increase trust in the system and deliver a better project overall.

An ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly implemented at the beginning of the decision-making process (possibly during the initial project phases involving feasibility studies, objective setting, or needs assessment) can help to shift the status-quo of typical public engagement for such developments. Of course, surveys with the public, crowdsourced community inputs (using online platforms like Decidim, change.org, make.org), or input from community dialogues must be used to include the wider public and to collect broader input which can be presented as evidence to the Assembly members to inform their final recommendations.

To ensure accountability and legitimacy, the recommendations should be publicly delivered to key decision makers, carefully considered, publicly responded to, and integrated into the project. Assembly members and the wider public must also be informed about how their specific input has shaped the decisions concerning the project, while a follow-up committee ensures that recommendations are being acted upon.

Evaluate the Assembly process and reflect on the lessons learned. Consider how implementing an ongoing City-wide Citizens' Assembly might benefit other important developments in the future. By taking a systemic approach, it could be possible to tackle similar challenging decisions on a regular basis and gradually build greater public trust and understanding in the way we make decisions about our cities.

02 If you are a developer in the early stages of a *large urban development project...*

initiate an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly to generate higher quality, community-supported design strategies and site programming that, in turn, enable the creation of places where people can connect, live, and thrive.

Not only does this reduce the risk of public opposition to the project, it frontends a deeper, engaged, and informed process of public consultation which can help speed up the approvals process, while also generating greater social and economic value for the project in the long-term. Since people are usually left out of, or minimally consulted during, the initial stages of concept development and other major decision-making moments of large-scale urban redevelopment projects, it's understandable that they often feel disempowered. By giving people the time, space, and resources to learn about, deliberate over, and reach broad consensus on key aspects of the project from the beginning, it is possible to build more inclusive, sustainable neighbourhoods, to increase public trust in developers, and secure greater buy-in for the project.

An ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly initiated by a developer before design professionals have presented a full concept or the approvals process has begun, can help to shift the status-quo of typical public engagement for such developments. The Assembly Members can be tasked with forming the project's sustainability goals, determining how it connects with the surrounding neighbourhood, recommending what kind of public services could be located there, or developing key design strategies for the project.

Placemaking initiatives, community dialogues, surveys with the public, crowdsourced community inputs (using online platforms like Decidim, change.org, make.org) must be used to include the wider public and collect broader input to be delivered as evidence to the Assembly Members to inform their recommendations.

A second stage of engagement could involve public design workshops with the broader community in collaboration with design professionals like architects, planners, and environmental consultants, to explore how the recommendations could be tangibly implemented. Technology like Fora could be leveraged to enable qualitative community inputs into the smaller, more representative Assembly process.

To ensure accountability and legitimacy, the recommendations should be publicly presented, carefully considered, publicly responded to, and integrated into the project brief. Bidding architects and other design professionals must indicate a commitment to upholding these recommendations in order to be awarded the contract. Assembly Members and the wider public must also be informed about how their specific input has shaped the decisions concerning the project, while a follow-up committee could ensure that recommendations are being acted upon.

Evaluate the Assembly to reflect on the lessons learned. Consider how using Citizens' Assemblies on a regular basis for other large developments might benefit their success and reduce other risks. By using this model of engagement as a developer, it is possible to demonstrate what high quality public consultation looks like and how it positively impacts the project. Using Assemblies on a regular basis would also gradually build greater public trust, avoid the risk of prolonged approvals processes, and build more inclusive and sustainable neighbourhoods.

03 If you are a city about to develop your next *long-term plan, a significant urban policy, or a financial plan...*

consider initiating this process with an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly to develop a citizen-driven vision for the city, a multi-year budget, or a planning policy that is aligned with and reflects the needs, values, and desires of the city's residents.

In this way, the Assembly process can enable the development of more socially cohesive visions, policies, and plans while avoiding the high cost of a failed policy, long-term, or financial plan that does not equitably benefit the city.

Running an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly at the beginning of these kinds of processes creates the conditions for a diverse set of perspectives, life experiences, and visions for the future to come together. The results are bolder, widely supported, ambitious plans for the future of the city. Crowdsourced community inputs (using online platforms like Decidim, change.org, make.org), surveys, and citizen science must be used to include the wider public and to collect broader input to be delivered as evidence to the Assembly members in order to inform their recommendations. These tools can also be used to present interim recommendations to the public in order to receive feedback before the Assembly Members deliver the final recommendations.

To ensure accountability and legitimacy, the recommendations should be publicly delivered to key decision makers, carefully considered, and publicly responded to. Assembly Members and the wider public must also be informed about how their specific input has shaped the decisions concerning the project, while a follow-up committee ensures that recommendations are being acted upon.

Evaluate the Assembly and reflect on the lessons learned to iterate the design for each cycle. Consider how implementing an ongoing city-wide Citizens' Assembly might benefit the drafting of other important plans, visions, or budget questions. Perhaps a Citizens' Assembly is convened on a regular basis to close budget holes or make amendments to the long-term plan or policy.

By taking a systemic approach, it could be possible to tackle similar challenging decisions in an ongoing way and gradually build greater knowledge and capacity amongst the population to tackle these complex challenges. This can also lead to an increase in public trust and a deeper understanding of the important trade offs involved in making decisions about our cities.

04 If you are a city or a region *frustrated* with the *status quo of legally-required public consultation...*

Commit to improving the quality of mandatory public engagement by implementing an ad-hoc Citizens' Assembly for a significant urban development project.

This should be done with the intention to learn from the experience in order to consider changing legislation that mandates the minimum legal requirements for public consultation to include Citizens' Assemblies. Current public consultation is often a one-off, 'Town Hall' style process (and in some cases a legal obligation) that often brings out what are often called "the usual suspects" who have the time and resources to participate and voice their concerns about a particular project or policy. These meetings are usually organised in such a way that people are informed but cannot meaningfully shape the project. They also rarely represent the diversity of perspectives from across the city.

When the legal obligation for public consultation exists, it often becomes an item to 'tick off' when seeking approval from the planning department. Projects are generally presented to the public and they are given a choice between a few design proposals. Feedback delivered in such forums are mostly top-of-mind opinions rather than consensus-driven, thoughtfully-considered recommendations. These meetings are not designed to be constructive, and often they are not a particularly effective way of garnering constructive community inputs; there is widespread frustration with these processes from city officials, planners, developers, and citizens alike.

Amending municipal or regional legislation to make Citizens' Assemblies the go-to method (instead of relying on the typical Town Hall format of public participation) would fundamentally raise the bar of quality, impactful public consultation because:

1. A broadly representative group of people would be able to deliberate (rather than debate or air grievances on what feels like a 'done deal', or give feedback based only on limited context) over a particular project.
2. They would be given the time and resources to learn, to hear from experts, civil society organisations and those with lived experience, in order to develop informed feedback and recommendations.
3. Their input could have a tangible impact on the project as members of the Assembly would need to consider the trade-offs and compromises when making decisions about a project.
4. This could be connected to a wider public engagement process where residents of the city could provide input into the Assembly as evidence, and would, in turn, be informed about the recommendations produced by the Assembly members.
5. Ultimately this helps to strengthen both individual and collective agency. This also helps to build trust between citizens and decision-makers and fosters a greater sense of legitimacy and accountability.

After the process has finished, consider how changing the legislation that dictates the minimum legal requirements for public consultation to include Citizens' Assemblies might have a positive impact on future projects across the city. This may only be for particular kinds of development projects (considering scale, budget, community impact etc), but can function as a higher quality method of engagement for challenges that need citizen input the most.

05

If you are a member of an existing community board or neighbourhood association and want to *increase the membership's representativeness of the community...*

Consider changing how people are chosen to be part of the board or association by using sortition to select new Members.

This would be an alternative to membership based purely on self-selection or elections; those chosen through sortition would be broadly representative of the community, and rotated on a regular basis to ensure ongoing representation. Adopting this way of selecting members could help existing boards or associations better address the needs of the diversity of residents in their community on a regular basis.

OR if you are a municipality or a CSO and you are a in a city where community boards do not exist...

Consider creating new sortition-based Community Assemblies to represent each district, borough, ward, or neighbourhood (depending on the size/configuration of the city).

These Assemblies would consist of rotating members, selected by sortition, and would be tasked to deliberate and form recommendations on specific key issues affecting their area. This means they would be responsible for choosing priority areas to implement city-wide urban policies and initiatives and could be tasked with voting on development proposals in their jurisdiction before final decision making goes to the public authority.

Community Assemblies should also work in tandem with wider public participation strategies. They can organise neighbourhood dialogues, surveys, and citizen data gathering, carry out local placemaking initiatives, or host design workshops with the public to garner feedback from the wider community. This can also help Community Assembly Members to identify key challenges and priority areas for action in their jurisdiction.

Changing the selection method for new Members in existing community bodies, or creating Community Assemblies would create the conditions for all community members to be better represented. This would help strengthen the individual and collective agency of people which can lead to better quality visions, plans, and projects for the city that are more aligned with community wants and needs.

To ensure accountability and legitimacy, there needs to be a clear, and continual, line of communication between the Community Assemblies and the public authority so that recommendations can be delivered to the right department. These should be carefully considered, publicly responded to, and integrated into projects, policies, or budgets (depending on the nature of the recommendations). Assembly Members and the wider public must also be informed about how their specific input has shaped the decisions concerning the project, while a follow-up committee ensures that recommendations are being acted upon. As a next step, consider introducing a city-wide ongoing Citizens' Assembly that connects with the Community Assemblies and incorporates their input into recommendations with city-wide impact.

06 If you are a city that is *already familiar with Citizens' Assemblies,* how they work and their benefits, but want to implement them to *find solutions to city-wide challenges in an ongoing way...*

Consider implementing a City-wide Citizens' Assembly that convenes on a regular basis to tackle ongoing, systemic, city-wide challenges by forming recommendations that shape key urban policies, the city's long-term vision, amendments to this vision, and significant development projects.

This can include some key issues such as housing and affordability, homelessness, the city's climate policies and adaptation measures, public mobility priorities, amongst others.

People are usually left out of major decision-making processes and are not meaningfully involved in shaping the city's vision and longer-term plan, but implementing an Assembly that convenes regularly, and is directly connected to decision making in a systemic way, could help to change this. Not only would this give people greater agency, it can help generate recommendations that can regularly feed into a decision-making process, can increase trust in the system, and result in plans or policies that are in line with what people want.

To ensure accountability and legitimacy, recommendations should always be publicly delivered to key decision makers, carefully considered, and publicly responded to. Assembly members and the wider public must also be informed about how their specific input has shaped the decisions concerning the project, while a follow-up committee ensures that recommendations are being acted upon.

Surveys with the public, crowdsourced community inputs (using online platforms like Decidim, change.org, make.org), community dialogues, design workshops, citizen science, and community mapping exercises must be used to include the wider public and to regularly collect broader input to be delivered as evidence to the Assembly members to inform their recommendations.

As a next step, consider implementing sortition-based Community Assemblies as a way to connect to the City-wide Assembly and deepen resident representation on the community level.

5.2 Can these scenarios be implemented anywhere?

The challenges of urban planning decision-making processes may differ greatly in their specifics from place to place, but many are shared in cities around the world. The actors involved, the interplay between national and local legislative and regulatory frameworks, and the stages of decision-making are sometimes quite similar. The scenarios proposed here are adaptable and can be contextualised to the particularities of a place.

We recognise that in all contexts, there is a tremendous value, and a necessity, to tap into the knowledge and expertise of a particular place in order to adapt these general proposals. There are certainly other scenarios beyond those that are outlined here which are rooted in circumstances or challenges that we have not yet considered, beyond the scope of the 100 people involved in shaping this work. While we were intentional in collaborating and seeking feedback from people on all continents, we are mindful that we only heard from people in around 30 countries. There are certainly other contexts, considerations, and situations that we have not necessarily thought about. However, we are keen to learn, and to understand how elements of this proposal could inform an approach in differing contexts.

5.3 Important considerations for all scenarios

There are two other important considerations to reflect on in all of the scenarios listed above. We see them as horizontal considerations because they have the potential to play a key role in all of the iterations outlined. One is a consideration of the physical spaces needed for Citizens' Assemblies and the other is the necessity of including young people and children in the decisions we make about the future of our cities.

5.3.1 Spatial infrastructure

To accompany the systemic and procedural infrastructure for deeper and wider public engagement for urban planning, including Citizens' Assemblies, it is important to consider the spaces in which they take place. This is crucial for enabling greater social cohesion in a community and across the city.

Demokrati Garage, Nordvest, Copenhagen, Denmark. Photo: Nils Meilvang

This can mean a number of things in terms of the spatial conditions necessary to accompany such a systemic shift. Existing community or neighbourhood organising spaces could host Community Assemblies, while the larger, less frequent, City-wide Assembly might take place in a more centralised, multi-functional community space in the city.

Many of the existing cases of Citizens' Assemblies from around the world have taken place in the legislative chambers of local and national government buildings, in hotels, or conference centres, but there is an opportunity to reimagine and relocate where decisions about our cities are made. Current legislative spaces are not always conducive for Citizens' Assemblies because they are not designed for deliberation. Instead, civic spaces could host Assemblies, and also connect to a wider ecosystem of community activities. Such changes could help us reconsider how and where we take important decisions about the future of our environment by placing power and decision making in closer proximity to the communities directly impacted by these decisions.

Croydon Urban Room - Image source: Croydon Urban Room website - Photograph by Ruth Ward

Below is a list of some inspiring examples that already exist, where people work together, convene for community gatherings, meet to run workshops, engage in dialogue, and come together to consider important questions about their cities or neighbourhoods.

Civic spaces around the world

Inspiring examples of civic spaces we've encountered:

- → Urban Rooms - Across the United Kingdom
- → The Democracy Garage - Copenhagen, Denmark
- → Civic Square - Birmingham, UK
- → The Unity Hubb - Birmingham, UK
- → East Scarborough Storefront - Toronto, Canada
- → Sager der Samler - Aarhus, Denmark
- → Casa Somos - Quito, Ecuador
- → East Marsh United - Grimsby, UK
- → Every One Every Day Kjipuktuk - Halifax, Canada
- → East Quay - Watchet, UK
- → DOKK1 - Aarhus, Denmark
- → Astra - Guernica, Basque Country, Spain
- → Casa Sur - Buenos Aires, Argentina
- → StudioBE - New Orleans, USA
- → Biblioteca España - Medellín, Colombia
- → National Library Building - Singapore
- → Impact Hubs - Global

5.3.2 Including young people

Another important consideration is the inclusion of young people (under 16 years of age) into the decision-making processes that will shape the future of our cities. The next generation of young people deserve, and have the capacity to imagine and help shape the places they will live in long after the current generation of decision-makers are gone.

Including young people in an Assembly process could be achieved in a number of ways. It could be that, through an adjacent process of engagement, they are asked to form recommendations on the same topic as the 'adult Assembly'. These recommendations would then be brought to the adult Assembly as evidence to be considered for the final recommendations or directly to the public authority. They could also be presented to parliamentarians alongside the Citizens' Assemblies' recommendations, with equal standing and merit.

There are examples where young people's or Childrens' Assemblies have been implemented during both Ireland and Scotland's respective national Citizens' Assemblies on climate. In both cases, children produced thoughtful, bold, and tangible recommendations.

Members of Ireland's National Youth Assembly on Climate 2023 - Image source: Government of Ireland's National Youth Assembly on Climate Summary Report 2023

CHAPTER

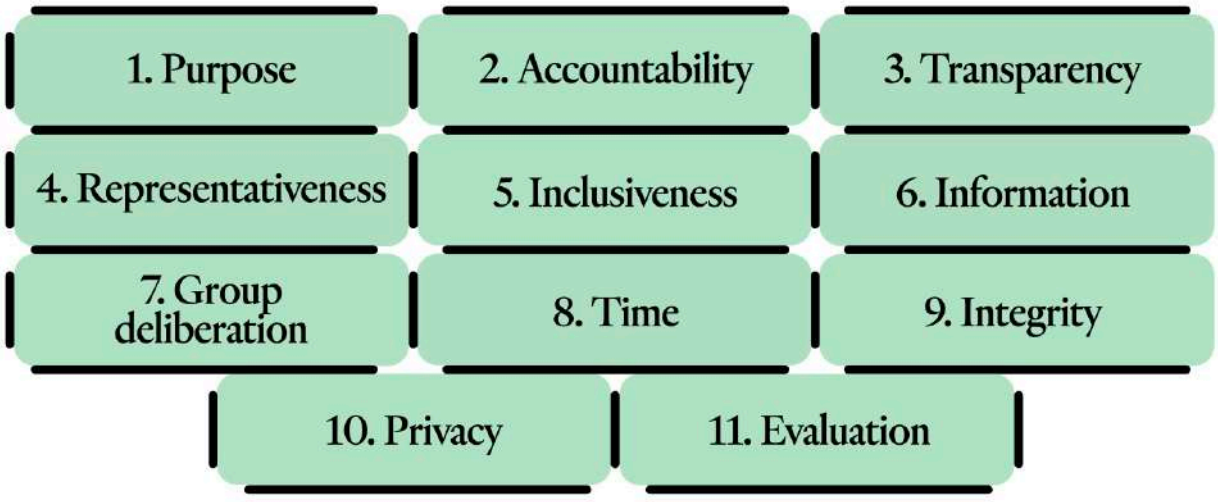
06

Measuring impact

6.1 What is the minimum threshold for high quality deliberation?

The following Good Practice Principles are outlined in DemocracyNext's Assembling an Assembly Guide in section 1.1 - Conditions for Success as well as in the OECD's Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making. We consider these principles as the minimum threshold for a deliberative process to be able to deliver the full benefits of a Citizens' Assembly.

The OECD Good Practice Principles for running Citizens' Assemblies have been developed based on the analysis of close to 300 examples of Assemblies, in collaboration with an advisory group of leading practitioners from government, civil society, and academia. When in doubt, refer to them as guidance as to what constitutes a high quality Citizens' Assembly. They include:



Source: OECD (2020). Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave

OECD Good Practice Principles

1. **Purpose**: The objective should be outlined as a clear task and is linked to a defined public problem. It is phrased neutrally as a question in plain language.

2. **Accountability**: There should be influence on public decisions. The commissioning public authority should publicly commit to responding to or acting on Members' recommendations in a timely manner. It should monitor the implementation of all accepted recommendations with regular public progress reports.

3. **Transparency**: The deliberative process should be announced publicly before it begins. The process design and all materials – including agendas, briefing documents, evidence submissions, audio and video recordings of those presenting evidence, the Members' report, their recommendations (the wording of which Members should have a final say over), and the random selection methodology – should be available to the public in a timely manner. The funding source should be disclosed. The commissioning public authority's response to the recommendations and the evaluation after the process should be publicised and have a public communication strategy.

4. **Representativeness**: The Assembly Members should be a microcosm of the general public. This is achieved through random sampling from which a representative selection is made, based on stratification by demographics (to ensure the group broadly matches the demographic profile of the community against census or other similar data), and sometimes by attitudinal criteria (depending on the context). Everyone should have an equal opportunity to be selected as Members. In some instances, it may be desirable to over-sample certain demographics during the random sampling stage of recruitment to help achieve representativeness.

5. **Inclusiveness**: Inclusion should be achieved by considering how to involve under-represented groups. Participation should also be encouraged and supported through remuneration, expenses, and/or providing or paying for childcare and eldercare.

6. **Information**: Assembly Members should have access to a wide range of accurate, relevant, and accessible evidence and expertise. They should have the opportunity to hear from and question speakers that present to them, including experts and advocates chosen by the citizens themselves.

8. **Group deliberation**: Assembly Members should be able to find common ground to underpin their collective recommendations to the public authority. This entails careful and active listening, weighing and considering multiple perspectives, every Member having an opportunity to speak, a mix of formats that alternate between small group and plenary discussions and activities, and skilled facilitation.

9. **Time**: Deliberation requires adequate time for Assembly Members to learn, weigh the evidence, and develop informed recommendations, due to the complexity of most policy problems. To achieve informed citizen recommendations, Members should meet for at least four full days in person, unless a shorter time frame can be justified. It is recommended to allow time for individual learning and reflection in between meetings.

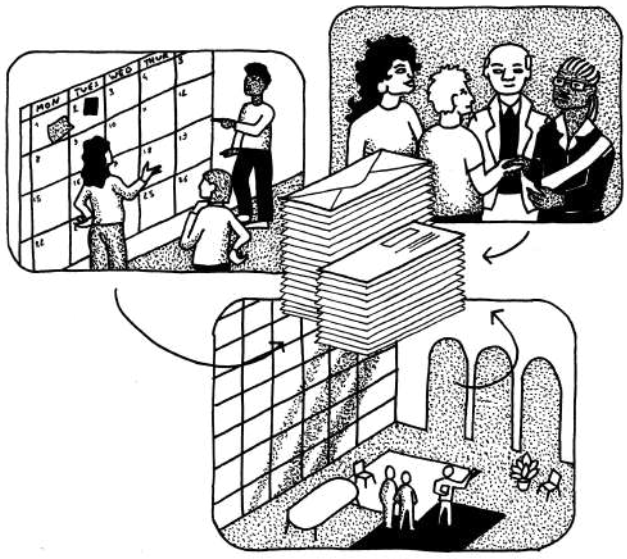
10. **Integrity**: The process should be run by an arm's length co-ordinating team different from the commissioning public authority. The final call regarding process decisions should be with the arm's length co-ordinators rather than the commissioning authorities. Depending on the context, there should be oversight by an advisory or monitoring board with representatives of different viewpoints.

11. **Privacy**: There should be respect for Members' privacy to protect them from undesired media attention and harassment, as well as to preserve Members' independence, ensuring they are not bribed or lobbied by interest groups or activists. Small group discussions should be private. The identity of Assembly Members may be published when the process has ended, with the Members' consent. All personal data of Members should be treated in compliance with international good practices, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

12. **Evaluation**: There should be an anonymous evaluation by the Assembly Members to assess the process based on objective criteria (e.g. on quantity and diversity of information provided, amount of time devoted to learning, independence of facilitation). An internal evaluation by the co-ordination team should be conducted against the good practice principles in this report to assess what has been achieved and how to improve future practice. An independent evaluation is recommended for some deliberative processes, particularly those that last a significant time. The deliberative process should also be evaluated on final outcomes and impact of implemented recommendations.

6.2 How would we know that the systemic changes we're suggesting are successful?

- → Fewer controversial or failed developments and more high quality, people- and nature-driven urban transformations.
- → Better quality urban policies and plans that benefit all members of society.
- → Recommendations are being implemented, monitored, and evaluated in order to learn and adapt future Assembly design.
- → Social discontent around urban planning decisions has reduced (fewer protests, petitions etc) while general public knowledge and understanding about planning processes has increased.
- → Former Assembly Members take on active roles in their communities - this could be organising and mobilising around the challenge their Assembly focused on, or advocating for greater participation, or getting involved in civil society organisations.
- → Increased levels of efficacy/agency/trust amongst citizens.
- → Levels of social cohesion have increased.



CHAPTER

07

Practical considerations to get started

7.1 Cultivating political and administrative buy-in

Getting buy-in from all relevant parties to experiment with Citizens' Assemblies as a viable, legitimate, and worthwhile way to engage with the public is fundamental. It is important to secure cross-partisan support, and to work to obtain stakeholder buy-in.

7.2 Building capacity

Building capacity within municipal departments to be able to understand the value of and deliver an Assembly is a key element of ensuring success. It is equally important that recommendations can be efficiently incorporated into decision-making processes. As mentioned earlier, DemocracyNext will be launching a Citizens' Assembly learning programme for civil servants and practitioners in late 2024/early 2025. Please let us know if you are interested in participating; we will notify you when this becomes available.

7.3 Budget considerations

Finding and allocating the necessary financial resources for municipal departments, developers, or civil society organisations to initiate and deliver a Citizens' Assembly is not always an easy task. Below are some examples that have taken place on a local level in different parts of the world with varying budgets. The size of budget required will naturally depend on the context, size, and length of the Assembly, but these numbers can begin to provide a rough idea. It's important to note that a significant part of the budget goes into compensating Assembly Members for their time, and hiring skilled facilitators. Ongoing Assemblies reduce costs involved as they become a normal way public decisions are taken, familiar to instigators, organisers, facilitators, and citizens.

Tolosa (Spain) Citizens' Assembly on Emotional Wellbeing (2022)	• Local level • 32 Members • 5 days of deliberation • Includes capacity building • Does not include project team staff costs	*217.330 EUR*
Petaluma (California, US) Fairgrounds Citizens' Assembly (2022)	• Local level • 36 Members • 12 days of deliberation • Includes interpretation costs • Partially includes project team staff costs	*455.000 USD*
Francisco Morato (Brazil) Citizens' Assembly on Waste Disposal (2022)	• Local level • 40 Members • 5 days of deliberation • Does not include venue hire	*47.500 USD*

7.4 Cultivating thriving, healthy, citizen-empowered cities

We have laid out why and how making these systemic changes to the governance of urban planning decisions can help enable thriving and healthy cities. There are clear benefits to improving collaboration across the entire ecosystem of actors, as well as a huge opportunity to re-establish the status quo of participation.

There are already numerous places around the world doing this by experimenting with the ideas behind, and practices of, sortition and deliberation in order to engage with citizens both broadly and deeply. They show us that step by step, deep and transformative systemic change is possible. There is a need to start somewhere, and it's why we have laid out six different entry points that, taken together, add up to an ambitious vision of a completely different system for urban planning decision making.

From the experience of designing and implementing Citizens' Assemblies in different parts of the world, we have witnessed a shift in how decision makers value such processes and increase their trust in citizens, as they present thoughtful, bold, and consensus-driven solutions to some of the toughest challenges. We have also witnessed how citizens increase their trust in government, as they understand the complexity and trade-offs involved in making hard choices.

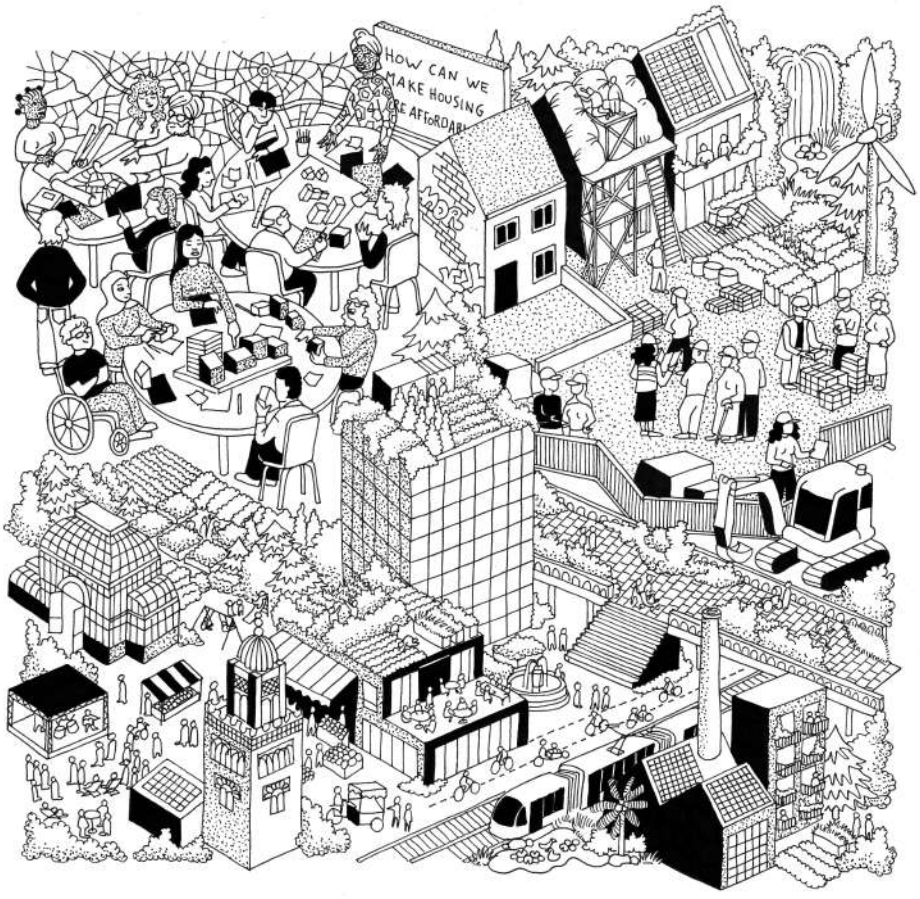
This is why we want to enable more experimentation and encourage a greater commitment to systemic shifts that embed Citizens' Assemblies as a regular part of decision-making cycles. Only by creating deliberative spaces and providing the time and resources for people to be part of an Assembly process can we begin to make this shift more impactful.

We need to tap into the collective wisdom of the people who inhabit cities, who are experts and stakeholders in their own communities, and who bring a diversity of perspectives to the challenges cities are facing. We strongly believe people can, and should, regularly play a role in decision-making processes that affect their everyday lives, in a democratic and systemic way.

As a next step, DemocracyNext is seeking to partner with a cohort of three cities, which we will select through an open application process beginning in February 2024. Once we have established these partnerships, we will advise, and co-design with officials from each of these cities to explore and establish what is possible in their context. This will include a consideration of how specific elements of these proposals, including which kind of Assembly type and entry point is most suitable. We will also need to account for important elements such as the existing legal and regulatory frameworks for planning decisions, the city's size and jurisdictional powers, the existing culture of public engagement, and available resources to carry out such a process.

However, this is an ongoing project. For interested cities that are not part of the first cohort in 2024, but who would like to stay updated on their progress in order to learn from these experiences, it will be possible to do so. There will also be opportunities to partner with us in the future to expand this work. Learning from one another, understanding what works, and what doesn't, is an essential part of cultivating thriving and healthy cities with empowered citizens across the world.

Progress will be shared regularly via our website, social media platforms, and regular newsletter. If you are interested in exploring how these ideas can apply in your own city, don't hesitate to reach out - we'd love to hear from you.



APPENDIX

Inspirational participatory & deliberative processes from around the world

based on interviews with the International Task Force Members

Mukuru Special Planning Area (SPA)

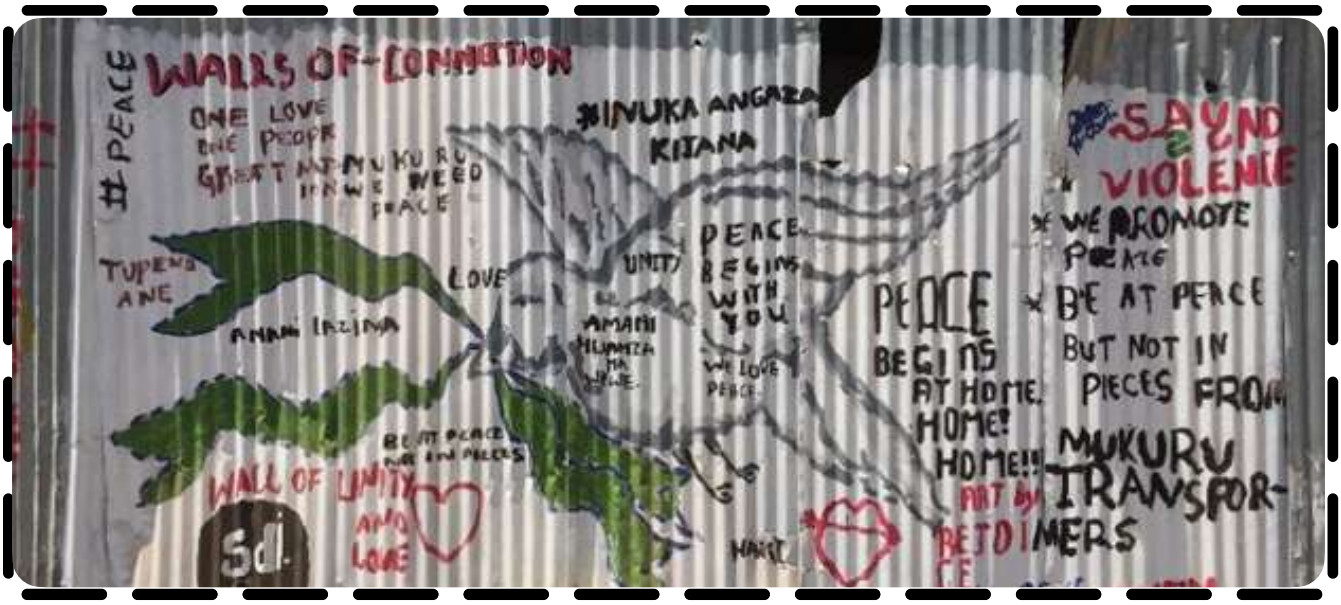
Nairobi - Kenya
2017-Present

Task Force Member involved: Jane Weru

The Akiba Mashinani Trust (AMT) and its partners have been involved in the Mukuru Special Planning Area (SPA) project in Nairobi, Kenya since 2017. The project was initiated in response to eviction notices faced by the community members of Mukuru due to the improper zoning of the land they were inhabiting. AMT, in collaboration with various organisations, worked to stop the evictions and conducted research to understand the living conditions and power structures in Mukuru. This led to the initiation of a planning process to develop infrastructure and formalise the community, which took two years to persuade the county government to begin. The community was extensively involved in the research and planning phases through community meetings, radio shows, and consultation meetings.

The participation process involved the mobilisation of 41 civil society organisations, which divided the planning process into 8 planning consortiums, each focusing on a specific sector such as water, sanitation, energy, housing, and education. Residents were asked to participate in the consultation process and provide feedback on the analysed sectors. The community members were also involved in preparing plans for each consortium and an integrated plan for the entire settlement through approximately 200 community planning forums.

Key stakeholders involved in the project included the Nairobi county government, various universities, Muungano (the Kenyan federation of slum dwellers), and the International Development Research Centre. The direct impact of the project was significant, as Mukuru was designated as a 'Special Planning Area,' which allowed for alternative planning solutions to meet the unique needs of the community.



A 'peace wall' in Mukuru, one of the largest slums in Nairobi, Kenya (Photo: Urban ARK) Image source: International Institute for Environment and Development

The planning process resulted in the development of 6 sector plans and the Mukuru Integrated Strategic Urban Development Plan (ISUDP). Infrastructure such as roads, electrical, sewage, and water facilities have been installed, and three hospitals and one secondary school have been developed.

The project is an ongoing, multi-year process that is still in development. The after-effects of the process have been far-reaching, with the SPA designation being viewed as a successful and necessary component of slum upgrading projects. The methodology used in Mukuru has also garnered interest in other informal settlements, both within and outside of Kenya.

The project has showcased a rare, precedent-setting opportunity for upgrading participatory partnerships, and has led to genuine co-planning between the community and various organisations. The SPA approach has also generated interest from other large slum settlements in Kenya, such as Kibera and Mathare.

Related Material

→ The Muungano alliance: Mukuru SPA

→ The Closer Cities project: Reimagining Urban Informal Settlements : The Mukuru SPA

Crowdsourcing a Constitution

Mexico City - Mexico
2016-2018

Task Force Member involved: Gabriella Gómez-Mont

In 2016, Mexico City embarked on the groundbreaking initiative of "Crowdsourcing a Constitution," aimed at reshaping the city's governance and addressing long-standing tensions between citizens and their government. This was initiated by the Mexico City Government and led by Mayor Miguel Angel Mancera, with active involvement from various government agencies, including the Mayor's Office, the Attorney General's Office, and Laboratorio para la Ciudad (LabCDMX). Gabriella Gomez-Mont, the former Chief Creative Officer of Mexico City and founder of LabCDMX, played a pivotal role in this transformative process.

The project was a response to decades of the city's limited autonomy within the federal government, which left citizens without a participatory mechanism in decision-making. In 2016, a constitutional amendment granted greater autonomy to Mexico City, paving the way for crowdsourcing the city's constitution. The initiative involved a diverse group of 28 "notables", which included individuals from various backgrounds, tasked with drafting the initial constitution. To counterbalance the disproportionately right-leaning representation in the national government, LabCDMX facilitated the participation of Mexico City residents in shaping the constitution, thus initiating the crowdsourcing process.

The engagement process comprised four key stages: collaboration, surveys, online petitions, and Citizens' Assemblies. Citizens were encouraged to voice their opinions on city challenges, aspirations, and future visions, with 31,000 residents across 1,000 neighbourhoods participating. LabCDMX also created platforms for civil society to interact with the Drafting Group and gathered feedback. Citizens were allowed to form their own meetings and discussions on topics of their choice, with over 100 groups addressing issues such as mobility and indigenous rights.

Image source: Cities of Service - Engaged Cities Award Case Study Crowdsourcing a Constitution

The input gathered from these various sources informed the drafting of the new constitution, which came into effect as the Carta Magna on 30 January, 2017, with 84% of crowdsourced recommendations incorporated. The constitution now enshrines diverse rights and principles, including those related to the LGBTQIA community, transparency, disability rights, environmental conservation, and more, reflecting the direct impact of this groundbreaking work on the city's governance and the lives of its residents.

This ambitious crowdsourcing project not only transformed Mexico City's constitutional framework but also empowered its citizens to actively participate in shaping the policies and principles that govern their lives. It stands as a remarkable example of innovative and inclusive governance that has inspired positive change and bridged the gap between government and the people.

Related Material

→ Observatory of Public Sector Innovation

→ Cities of Service: Crowdsourcing a Constitution

Aux Arbres Citoyens - Part of Contrat de Quartier Durable Jardin aux Fleurs

Place de Ninove, Brussels - Belgium
2015 - 2018

Task Force Member involved: Diego Luna Quintanilla

The project "Aux Arbres Citoyens" was part of the "Contrat de Quartier Durable Jardin aux Fleurs" in Brussels, Belgium, which took place from 2014 to 2016. This initiative was a part of the "Neighbourhood Contracts" used by the City of Brussels and was located at Place de Ninove. It was initiated by the Regional Government of Brussels in collaboration with municipal governments within Brussels. The project aimed to develop a sustainable neighbourhood contract, which is a planning and financial tool that enables funds from the regional government to be invested on a neighbourhood scale, addressing disparities between different socio-economic positions of the municipalities.

The specific project "Aux Arbres Citoyens" involved a €54K fund to green the neighbourhood and streets together with citizens, comprising 31 small projects. One of the activities was to update and activate Place de Ninove, a public square in the neighbourhood. Participants were asked to make a physical intervention in the square and were involved in co-creation and construction workshops to identify challenges and ideal solutions for the space. The key stakeholders included neighbourhood residents, the core team integrated by Cakri/The Urban Ecology Center, and a group of neighbours called Adoptninop.

Image source: Carki - Place de Ninove

The participation process began from the very beginning and was used to create awareness about a larger project. The physical intervention resulted in a colourful composition of wooden platforms, urban furniture, seating, and a community garden. Socially, it allowed participants to exchange experiences and knowledge, leading to continued collaboration as a community organisation. The temporary intervention exceeded its expected duration, and the square has since been fully renovated, serving as a catalyst for neighbours to come together and collaborate as a community organisation.

Additionally, the "Aux Arbres Citoyens" project not only led to the physical and social transformation of Place de Ninove but also served as a model for community engagement and sustainable urban development in other neighbourhoods. Its success demonstrated the potential for active citizen participation in shaping their local environment, and fostering a sense of ownership and community pride.

Related Material

→ Urban Brussels: Contrats de Quartiers Durables

→ Contrat de Quartiers Durable - Jardin aux Fleurs

→ Cakri ASBL - Cultural projects celebrating the streets

Crear Villaverde - Public Participatory Architecture and Urbanism Office

Villaverde District, Madrid - Spain
2017-2019

Task Force Member involved: Elisa De Los Reyes García López

“Crear Villaverde” was an ambitious public participatory architecture and urbanism initiative that took place in the Villaverde District of Madrid from 2017 to 2019. The project was commissioned by the Junta Municipal de Villaverde's Participatory Service Office through a public tender, as part of a city-wide effort during the Carmena government to embed citizen participation into the fabric of local governance. The initiative aimed to reinvent and adapt public facilities to the evolving needs of the community, ensuring that public spaces were designed with direct input from the people who use them.

There was a call for tenders for the Villaverde Participation Service (SPV), which included four areas: Strategic Participation, Promotion of Associations, Participatory Design and Communication. The "Crear Villaverde" project sought to improve neighbourhoods and buildings, foster collaborative spaces, and initiate a renewed dialogue between the administration and citizens, emphasising transparency, learning, and connection with the local context and entities.

The Pezestudio team, along with urban sociologists, were responsible for incorporating citizen participation across a range of urban projects, including the design of a new library, a civic centre, auditorium, community garden, and park.

Image source: Pezestudio - Crear Villaverde

Citizens were invited to participate from the outset, contributing to sessions that gathered insights on the desired uses and design of the facilities and spaces. This collaborative approach allowed for the collection of ideas and prototypes, which were then synthesised into reports for the technical professionals tasked with the actual development of the projects. The participatory process was inclusive, engaging local residents, expert architects, civil servants, and active civil society groups.

Despite initial challenges in mobilising citizen involvement, a variety of outreach strategies were deployed, such as emails, flyers, posters, and direct calls, leading to an average participation of 20 to 30 people per session.

The tangible outcomes of "Crear Villaverde" were comprehensive reports that guided the technical development of the projects in the neighbourhood. These reports were integrated into the briefs of architectural competitions and used for internal development, with all findings published on the municipal website.The project also allowed for continued citizen input after the announcement of competition winners, ensuring that the community had a voice in the final stages of design. While the Villaverde Participation Service was discontinued following a change in government, the documentation of the processes remains available, serving as a valuable resource for replicating successful participatory practices in other districts and cities.

Related Material

→ Pezestudio: Crear Villaverde

Creating a community-engaged process to transform the public realm across 15 public housing sites in New York City

New York City - USA
2017-2023

Task Force Member involved: Ifeoma Ebo

The project was initiated by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice as part of the Mayor's Action Plan (MAP) for Neighbourhood Safety. It aimed to transform the public realm across 15 public housing sites in New York City, which were identified as high-crime areas.

Instead of adopting a traditional law-enforcement approach, the Mayor's office sought to understand the root causes of crime in these communities through a community-engaged process. The goal was to create a public realm strategy that addressed these root causes and activated the sites to make them safer and more usable for residents.

The engagement process involved working with resident teams from each of the public housing sites. The first year focused on capacity building, training the community on human-centred design, placemaking, fundraising, and community organising. The aim was to make the project sustainable and empower residents to continue the work after the programme ended. Residents were asked to identify spaces to activate and key stakeholders to work with. Each team was given $50,000 to develop and steward these ideas. Once they developed an action plan, it was presented to the relevant municipal department representatives for feedback and advice. The residents then began to implement their projects, starting with events to generate interest, followed by surveys, design work with local university students, and continued programming and participatory evaluations.

Image source: Mayor's Institute on City Design

Key stakeholders involved in the project included the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, relevant municipal departments, and resident teams. People were asked to participate throughout the life of the project.

The project had a direct impact, with agencies initiating a number of pilot projects to address crime and social cohesion based on the work done in this project.

While the initial public space activation was completed and physical design interventions have been implemented, the work to continue building capacity in the community is ongoing. However, the initiative was discontinued with the election of a new mayor in January 2023.

Related Material

- → A Community Playbook for Transforming Public Spaces in Your Neighborhood
- → Safe Places, Active Spaces (Part I) – A Design-Based Approach to Community Safety
- → Safe Places, Active Spaces (Part II) — Building Community Capacity and Maximizing Impact

East Scarborough Storefront - A Community Design Initiative

East Scarborough, Toronto - Canada
2008 - 2014

Task Force Member involved: Zahra Ibrahim

This was a community design initiative that took place from approximately 2008 to 2014 in East Scarborough, Toronto, Canada. The project was initiated by the local community in collaboration with Zahra Ebrahim, Sustainable.TO, and the East Scarborough Storefront, with the impetus coming from a need to close out remaining funds provided by the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario. The project was part of a policy and investment imperative at the local and provincial levels of government to address gun violence in underinvested neighbourhoods

The specific engagement process involved a capacity-building effort to empower the community to articulate their needs and understand the portfolio of professionals required to support them. The architectural firm Sustainable.TO and architecture think tank archiTEXT worked with local youth and design professionals to revitalise a former police station into a community facility. The community developed a master plan for the building and site, created a 7-phase approach to bring the plan to life, applied for a zoning amendment, carried out a full renovation of the building, and oversaw the construction of a bioswale and sports pad in the former parking lot of the police station.

The "Sky-o-swale®" -a green building innovation being patented by the Youth of KGO as part of the Community.Design.Initiative. Image source: East Scarborough Storefront Website

Key stakeholders involved in the project included the East Scarborough community, East Scarborough Storefront, Sustainable.TO, archiTEXT, and the City of Toronto. The project had a direct impact, with the former police station being converted into an entirely new community space, featuring meeting rooms, and a community kitchen. The success of the project inspired larger, more long-term physical improvements in the neighbourhood. It is now designated a Tower Neighbourhood Renewal site by the municipal government, which empowers residents to improve a local apartment tower through community-led design.

The project also informed the Storefront's Connected Community Approach for advancing place-based community and economic development in Toronto's Neighbourhood Improvement Areas and other communities.

Related Material

- → How a community-led design initiative in Toronto is redefining neighborhood revitalization from the bottom-up
- → The City of Toronto: Neighbourhood Improvement Area Profiles
- → East Scarborough Storefront

Community Consultation For Quality Of Life (CCQoL) - Urban Rooms

Reading, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Belfast - United Kingdom
July 2021 - December 2023

Task Force Member involved: Flora Samuel

The "Community Consultation For Quality Of Life (CCQoL) - Urban Rooms" project is a major research initiative funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project, which began in July 2021 has been carried out in four cities across the United Kingdom: Reading, Cardiff, Edinburgh, and Belfast. The initiative is a collaboration with the universities of Reading, Edinburgh, Cardiff, and Ulster, and aims to develop a new, map-based model of community engagement that takes place both online and face-to-face across the UK. The project gathers data and engages in conversation about what does and doesn't work in planning consultation and its current challenges. The overall aim is to allow people to input into digital maps so that the impact of changes to their neighbourhoods can be measured and assessed. The project also seeks to promote the use of maps and open data for democratic decision-making in planning, widen participation to tackle climate change and social justice issues, and develop best practice guidelines for community consultation and engagement. Each pilot focuses on a theme developed in response to its unique context and community.

The specific engagement process involves the setup of Urban Rooms in each city, which serve as places for organisers to get together with individuals, groups, and organisations to involve local people in decision making about their area. The Urban Rooms host digital mapping exercises where residents help create maps of their area to identify aspects important to their health and wellbeing. The project invites residents to participate in a range of different community activities centred around themes such as health and wellbeing, housing, green places, and young voices.

Urban Room pilot, 2019. Photography by Ruth Ward. Image source: Neighbourhood index - Croydon Urban Room

The key stakeholders involved in the project include local advisory groups composed of residents, community organisers, urban planners, and representatives from local authorities, arts, wellbeing, education, housing, and civic societies.

Other stakeholders include various community organisations, housing associations, environmental organisations, planning departments, and youth services.

The project has already had a direct impact in Cardiff where continued engagement has followed. The Urban Room hosted a series of workshops with Cardiff City Planners on ways to improve engagement in a multicultural area like Grangetown. The Cardiff Chief Planner has committed to producing a 'Place Plan' with Grangetown residents, a document that will ensure that the community voice is strong in any future developments of the area.

Related Material

→ Community Consultation for Quality of Life

→ Community Voices Cardiff

→ Not 'Hard To Reach'...The Community Voices Cardiff Local Report

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