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Executive Summary of the Evaluation of Vilnius Citizens' Assembly

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Overview

This report presents a summary of the Vilnius Citizens' Assembly (hereafter "the Assembly") evaluation. **The Assembly was initiated by the Vilnius City Municipality and implemented as a part of the Cities Programme, launched by the international organisation *DemocracyNext*.** Through this programme, *DemocracyNext* supported three competitively selected cities in implementing deliberative democracy initiatives. During the Vilnius Assembly, which **took place between 24 September and 10 December 2025**, residents selected by civic lottery worked together to formulate recommendations aimed at ensuring that "*Vilnius residents choose public transport, walking, or cycling more often, regardless of where they live*". Of the **54 residents selected, 43 agreed to participate in the Assembly, with an average of around 30 participants attending each session**. The Assembly programme consisted of an opening event, **five Assembly sessions**, and a closing event dedicated to the presentation of recommendations. The Assembly followed the classical structure: the initial sessions (I–II and part of III) focused on learning about the topic and building a common knowledge base; this was followed by deliberation and the development of recommendations (part of III and IV), and finally by their refinement and voting (V). In total, **the Assembly participants produced 24 recommendations**. Information on their implementation is to be provided through two reports prepared by the Vilnius City Municipality, the first of which was published in April 2026.

The independent evaluation of the Vilnius Citizens' Assembly was commissioned by the Vilnius City Municipality and *DemocracyNext*. Drawing on *OECD* guidelines, the evaluation was structured around three dimensions: **the design of the Assembly, the deliberative process itself, and the Assembly's impact** (the full evaluation matrix is provided in the Annexes of the report). To ensure the robustness of the evaluation, **a mixed-methods approach was employed**. This included three surveys of Assembly participants (conducted at the beginning, midpoint, and conclusion of the process), two representative surveys of Vilnius residents (before and after the Assembly), 48 semi-structured interviews with Assembly stakeholders, and document analysis. This summary presents the key findings relating to each evaluation dimension and outlines the main recommendations for decision-makers seeking to institutionalise deliberative democracy practices in Lithuania.

Design of Vilnius Citizens' Assembly

Based on interview data and document analysis, the **Assembly's governance structure was grounded in international good practice and partially adapted to the local context**. Building on the governance structure elements identified by *DemocracyNext*, the governance structure of Vilnius Citizens' Assembly consisted of an initiator (formally, the Mayor of the City of Vilnius; informally, the Office of the Chief Architect), an implementing body (Vilnius Development Company), an advisory group of independent experts, and a team of facilitators. However, no dedicated project team, oversight group, or content group was established, although some of the functions typically performed by the latter were partially fulfilled by the independent experts. The fact that the Assembly was implemented on the initiative of only a few individuals, rather than through a broad coalition of stakeholders, placed a considerable burden on them throughout both the preparation and

implementation phases. This may have also contributed to lower levels of stakeholder engagement during the later stages of the Assembly and the implementation of its recommendations.

Interview and participant survey data indicate that the **Assembly's mandate was understood in broadly similar ways by different stakeholders, primarily as a mechanism for contributing to improvements in the city's mobility policy**. For example, when asked why they had decided to participate, the majority of respondents highlighted the importance of issues affecting the city (87%) and the desire for local government to take their views into account (84%). According to some participants, facilitators, and observers interviewed, the Assembly was used primarily as a **means of legitimising decisions already being considered by the Vilnius City Municipality**. Furthermore, some organisers and facilitators also viewed the Assembly as a **learning tool for deliberative democracy**.

Survey and interview results suggest that the **Assembly question was formulated through a process involving a range of stakeholders. Its breadth and openness created opportunities for meaningful participant engagement, although the formulation process itself was lengthy and complicated by insufficient coordination**. Some stakeholders described the question as broad and complex, although this perception was more closely related to the way the issue was examined and the design choices adopted within the Assembly process. Views differed regarding the suitability of a citizens' assembly for addressing mobility-related challenges. Some stakeholders considered it an appropriate method for tackling complex issues, most viewed citizens' assemblies more generally as a useful approach to public decision-making. As many as **97% of respondents agreed that assemblies should be organised not only on mobility issues but also on other topics**. When discussing the limitations of the method, representatives of different stakeholder groups pointed to the limited expertise of ordinary citizens, which may reduce their critical approach to ideas presented during the Assembly and consequently heighten the risk of manipulation or politicisation.

Considering international practice, the scale of the issue, and the number of participants involved, the **duration of the Assembly appears appropriate, although the time allocated to deliberation and recommendation drafting was somewhat limited**. According to the participant survey, the majority of participants (63%) considered the overall duration of the Assembly to be appropriate, while the remainder were more likely to feel that too little time had been allocated. When evaluating individual stages of the programme, 63% of participants considered the time allocated to the learning phase to be optimal, 50% considered the time dedicated to the deliberation sessions to be optimal, and 44% considered the time allocated to recommendation drafting to be optimal. Moreover, a substantial proportion of participants considered the time allocated to the deliberation and recommendation drafting stages to be insufficient (41% and 47%, respectively). These findings suggest that, **as the balance between the time initially allocated to learning, deliberation, and recommendation drafting was altered during the Assembly, the latter phase appeared somewhat time constrained**. This challenge was further compounded by the evolution of the Assembly question during the process, which expanded the scope of deliberation, increased the number of recommendations requiring consideration and thus, the amount of time needed for their deliberation.

Assembly participants were selected through a civic lottery. Six selection criteria were applied: gender, age, ethnicity, educational attainment, residential district, and the mode of transport most frequently used for everyday travel. In total, **54 residents were selected. However, participant numbers declined at several stages:** some invitees declined participation during the registration process, while others dropped out during the Assembly and participated only sporadically in individual sessions. Following the first reduction in numbers – from 54 selected residents to 43 who agreed to participate – the participant group remained broadly representative. **As participation declined further during the process, diversity within the group was maintained, although certain social groups became underrepresented.** Overall, 88% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the Assembly included representatives of different social groups. A somewhat smaller proportion (69%) agreed or strongly agreed that these groups were represented proportionately, meaning that no group was significantly over- or under-represented relative to the wider population of Vilnius. Interview and survey findings suggest that, from a demographic perspective, the **most notable gap concerned the representation of young people.** From a discursive perspective – measured in terms of participation in discussions and self-representation – the voice of residents who primarily rely on private cars was less prominent. It is also noteworthy that, due to the element of self-selection inherent in participation, Assembly members on average were more civically active than the Lithuanian population. For example, participant surveys indicate that the proportion of Assembly members who had made charitable donations in recent years was 38 percentage points higher than in the wider population, while the proportion who had engaged in volunteering was 31 percentage points higher.

More than half of respondents (61%) awarded the maximum score when assessing the inclusiveness of participation conditions, using a seven-point scale where 1 represented “conditions were created only for certain groups to participate” and 7 represented “conditions were created for everyone to participate”. The average rating was exceptionally high (6.5). Participants received financial compensation for their involvement, and interpretation and catering services were provided. **Organisers were also prepared to offer support to residents facing practical barriers to participation,** such as childcare responsibilities or home care for a family member. However, due to the lack of funding this **support was communicated on a needs basis rather than being publicly announced.** Although no participants ultimately made use of such support, there is likewise no evidence that the limited visibility of these arrangements discouraged participation in the Assembly.

Summary of Recommendations for the Design of Citizens’ Assemblies:

1. Clearly define and agree in advance on the roles and responsibilities of all actors involved before, during, and after the assembly. Ensure a separation between the initiating and implementing bodies by appointing an assembly organiser (e.g., an independent non-governmental organisation) or establishing a dedicated unit within the institution.
2. Establish an oversight group and/or project team that includes city decision-makers, politicians, and other stakeholders involved in the implementation of recommendations from the early stages of assembly planning (i.e., develop a governance structure that takes into account not only the specific characteristics of the assembly but also the broader governance context).

3. Communicate openly to both the public and participants about the expectations placed on the assembly, emphasising the level of decision-making at which their input is required (strategic – setting direction, or operational – implementation), what is expected from the recommendations produced, and how these recommendations will be used. To ensure accurate expectation management, it is important to establish in advance a mechanism for reviewing, implementing, monitoring, and ensuring accountability for the assembly’s recommendations, as well as assigning responsibility for these processes.
4. When implementing citizens’ assemblies, ensure an appropriate balance between the time allocated for learning, deliberation and formulating recommendations.
5. Introduce risk management measures to address participant attrition. Several alternatives are possible: 1) Prepare a reserve list of potential participants that exceeds the required number. If attrition occurs at an early stage, additional invitations can be issued; 2) If attrition occurs, conduct an additional recruitment and selection process; 3) Invite reserve participants, informing them in advance that their participation may not be required if all originally selected participants attend, and provide compensation for the time they have set aside. Complete the participant selection process at least one month before the start of the assembly, allowing time to manage the risks arising from participants dropping out early and enabling those selected to adapt in a timely manner;
6. During participant recruitment and communication, introduce additional mechanisms (e.g., targeted communication measures or selection criteria) to prioritise the participation of citizens who are typically less engaged. It is recommended that adequate financial and organisational resources be planned and allocated in advance to support measures that reduce barriers to participation among diverse groups of residents.
7. Ensure a range of registration options for the Assembly, including the possibility of registering in person at Vilnius City Municipality offices or at a local eldership (*seniūnija*) convenient to residents. The experience of Vilnius citizens’ Assembly demonstrated that some residents do not make use of telecommunications or digital communication tools. Therefore, further expanding the accessibility of the registration process is important to ensure the diversity of Assembly participants.

Deliberation at Vilnius Citizens’ Assembly

The **learning process** within the Assembly was delivered through **a variety of formats** and left a highly positive impression on most participants. Overall, the **information provided was considered understandable** (64% of participants strongly agreed and 36% tended to agree with this statement) and **valuable** both for personal development and for participation in the **subsequent stages of the Assembly process** (84% of survey respondents shared this view). Nevertheless, some participants noted that **not all of the information provided proved equally relevant during the later stages of deliberation and recommendation drafting**. It is likely that the perceived lower relevance of the initial presentations – which focused more broadly on the context and general issues surrounding the topic – to the recommendations ultimately formulated was influenced by the introduction of additional thematic directions during the Assembly process.

The materials prepared for participants, as well as the quality, expertise, and credibility of the selected experts’ presentations, were assessed very positively. Across these dimensions, **positive evaluations ranged between 88% and 91% of participants, while 79% expressed confidence in**

the speakers. Although participants offered numerous suggestions for improvement, most considered the **diversity of perspectives represented during the learning phase and the balance between the different viewpoints presented to be sufficient** (76% of respondents held this view). At the same time, the **decision to amend the programme during the Assembly** by including a second presentation from JUDU **demonstrated the organisers' responsiveness to participants' requests**, but also **highlighted the risks** associated with insufficiently prepared interventions, including the potential for **perceived bias or steering**. **Participants** themselves tended to downplay the possible influence of such bias, emphasising that they **felt free to disagree** with the solutions presented, **trusted one another**, and held the **collective competencies** of the participant group in high regard.

During the deliberation and recommendation-drafting phase of the Assembly, a **range of facilitation methods was employed**, achieving an effective balance between plenary discussions and work in smaller groups. The process culminated in a clear outcome: a collective agreement and a jointly developed set of recommendations. The **legitimacy of the process was carefully safeguarded**. Facilitators consistently emphasised **participants' ownership of the process, entrusted them with responsibility for the Assembly's outcomes**, and fostered a **safe and trust-based environment for discussion**. Stakeholders assessed the deliberation and recommendation-drafting process as **highly inclusive**. The **atmosphere created enabled groups with differing** (and at times opposing) **views to engage in open, equal, and respectful discussions**. For example, 94% of Assembly participants felt able to express dissenting opinions freely within the group; 85% agreed that all participants had equal opportunities to voice their views, and an equal proportion believed that participants were willing to listen to the opinions of others. **Facilitators** were generally regarded as **objective and impartial** (91% of participants shared this view), as well as **responsive and attentive**. However, some tension emerged between the facilitators' emphasis on inclusiveness, process quality, and the expectation among some participants for greater efficiency and stronger orientation towards tangible outcomes. As a result of this well-organised and inclusive process, the **Assembly's recommendations were widely perceived by participants as their own** (88% reported feeling proud of the recommendations, while 91% agreed that the overall package of recommendations reflected their personal views).

Despite the overwhelmingly positive assessment, several weaker aspects of the deliberation and recommendation-drafting process were identified. First, while individual tasks were generally clear, participants sometimes lacked a **clear understanding of the overall process and how its various stages and activities connected to one another**. This was likely related to the fact that the programme was developed and refined throughout the process. For example, participants were uncertain about the point at which new ideas could no longer be introduced for consideration, as well as when and how the minority report with dissenting opinions should be formally presented. Second, many participants regretted that **some of the initial ideas they considered valuable appeared to be lost during the process**. Most attributed this to the **methods employed**, such as the rotation of small groups responsible for drafting recommendations. In these groups, there was a lack of designated communicators or "guides" to ensure continuity as group membership changed. On the other hand, facilitators intentionally rotated participants between groups to foster a stronger

sense of collective ownership over the recommendations. Third, **the additional time allocated to the learning phase reduced the time available for drafting recommendations.** Combined with the **complexity of the issue under consideration and the large number of ideas generated,** this created a trade-off between breadth and depth. For some stakeholders, this contributed to perceptions that the process was simultaneously cumbersome and shallow.

Communication with participants during the Assembly **was evaluated very favourably,** both at the group level and individually. 27% of participants rated the organisers' accessibility, quality of communication, and support as good, while the remaining 73% rated these aspects as very good. Similarly, 24% and 76% respectively provided positive and very positive evaluations of the clarity and accessibility of information. Participants **particularly highlighted the organisers' availability, the comprehensiveness, regularity and timeliness of communication, the use of multiple channels** (including email and telephone), **multilingual communication, and the care and attention** shown throughout the process. However, participants felt **somewhat less informed about developments following the Assembly.** Although 66% indicated that they understood how the recommendations would be used, as many as 31% did not have a clear opinion on the matter. This is also partly linked to the departure of the staff member responsible for communications immediately after the Assembly, which resulted in the disruption of internal communications. At the same time, some participants expressed a desire to remain informed and involved in subsequent developments, a need that had not yet been sufficiently addressed at the time of the evaluation.

The **highest level of participant attrition occurred before the Assembly began,** among individuals who had been selected but either did not ultimately confirm their participation or, having confirmed, failed to attend the sessions. Those who withdrew cited unfavourable personal circumstances, the greater-than-expected level of commitment required, or insufficient capacity to participate. There were also instances where individuals registered primarily to see whether they would be selected. Attrition during later stages was lower, although most participants missed at least one session, and fewer than half attended all sessions (17 out of the 39 individuals who participated at least once). **Participants' engagement was strengthened by a sense of responsibility and commitment,** which was significantly reinforced by the high quality of process organisation and the attention shown by the organisers. Although participants **received financial compensation** (€50 per Assembly session), this **was not identified as a primary motivation for participation.** Rather, it was viewed as **fair compensation for participants' time and may have contributed to greater participant diversity** by making participation more accessible to economically disadvantaged residents as well as those less engaged in civic activities. The evaluation also showed that participants viewed the need for such compensation more favourably at the end of the Assembly than at its outset.

Communication with the wider public was most intensive during the initial phase of the Assembly. An information campaign coordinated by the Vilnius City Municipality's Communications Department, launched alongside the first stage of participant recruitment, disseminated information about the forthcoming Assembly through a variety of channels and encouraged residents to register. Once the Assembly commenced, external communication was **scaled back as a deliberate choice**

by the organisers, who sought to protect participants from external pressure by limiting the amount of information released during the deliberative process. Although these restrictions were lifted after the Assembly sessions concluded, it proved difficult to attract renewed media attention. Various stakeholders associated with the Assembly assessed post-event communication as insufficient and not reflective of the scale, significance, and depth of the process and experiences involved. At the same time, the publicly available information about the Assembly is generally regarded as comprehensive, detailed, and transparent.

Summary of Recommendations for the Deliberation Phase of Citizens' Assemblies

1. When preparing materials for participants in the citizens' assembly, to identify the needs of different participants in advance (including special needs – such as visual, hearing, neurodiversity) and ensure that the content is accessible and tailored to their needs, as well as to provide appropriate translations and ensure the availability of materials for participating foreigners;
2. Allocate sufficient financial and human resources for the preparation of informational materials for participants (the introductory information pack), including the synthesis of expert insights, presented in an accessible and understandable format. This responsibility should either be assigned explicitly to the organiser or supported through greater involvement of independent experts who are appropriately remunerated for their contribution. It is further recommended that the information pack include guidance on good practice in formulating recommendations;
3. To broaden the pool of potential speakers, it is recommended that, alongside the initial information campaign for the citizens' assembly, an open call be issued to city residents and to experts, civil society organisations, or institutions not directly involved in organising the citizens' assembly, inviting them to propose potential speakers, including both subject-matter experts and representatives of relevant stakeholder groups. The final list of speakers should be compiled based on clear and publicly communicated selection criteria;
4. During the learning process, presentations should also include perspectives from groups represented among assembly participants, even if those groups are present in significant numbers. The experience of Vilnius citizen's assembly demonstrated that it is not enough to simply have representatives of specific groups among the participants; their perspectives should also be given an equal opportunity to be heard in the learning component of the programme;
5. To avoid (or at least not rely too heavily on) learning formats in which different participants engage with different material (e.g., splitting into small groups to attend different presentations). Participants of Vilnius citizen's assembly emphasised the importance of and expressed a need for a "common knowledge base," which cannot be fully addressed through subsequent group discussions among participants who have attended different presentations;
6. Maintain clear, coherent and consistent communication with participants throughout the process, ensuring that they understand both the overall structure of the Assembly and the role of each stage within it. Particular emphasis should be put on key milestones, such as the point at which new ideas are no longer accepted and deliberations focus solely on those already submitted. It is also important to remind participants, not only at the beginning but also at the end of the process, of the procedures available for submitting a minority report, should they wish to do so;
7. Allocate sufficient resources to compensate facilitators adequately for their work. The analysis revealed that facilitators played a crucial role in the success of the process, but a significant portion of their work relied on personal commitment and motivation, with the remuneration received viewed

as symbolic and not reflective of the actual workload involved, including the development of a detailed programme, preparation of materials for meetings, etc. Adequate compensation would help ensure both the quality and future sustainability of such initiatives;

8. Maintain the practice of deliberating recommendations in different participants-led groups, as this was a notable strength of the process. At the same time, greater attention should be paid to ensuring continuity between groups. This could be achieved, for example, by allowing some participants to remain involved in the development of the same recommendation for several iterations, thereby ensuring a consistent transfer of the results and arguments from previous discussions. Such an approach would also help avoid unproductive discussions arising from participants' limited understanding of the previous work;
9. To strengthen the legitimacy of the process in the eyes of all participants, it is recommended to ensure that participants who miss some of the sessions receive consistent and comprehensive updates. This would enable them to better understand the process that took place, the decisions made, and the reasoning behind them, thereby helping to maintain their trust in the process's outcomes;
10. In order to maintain contact with participants and strengthen trust in the process, it is recommended to establish clear responsibilities and allocate sufficient resources for post-Assembly communication. This would reinforce positive practices of citizen engagement and accountability, while also helping to retain former participants as "ambassadors" for the assembly;
11. Make more active use of participants' motivation to remain engaged after the Assembly by providing opportunities to contribute to the implementation of the recommendations as well as to engage in and promote deliberative democracy practices, and other forms of civic engagement. In this context, consideration should also be given to participants' expressed interest in establishing an Assembly alumni network. Public institutions could encourage such a network by involving its members in ongoing communication and the process of implementing the recommendations (network members could represent the Assembly's participants, provide a more detailed explanation of the recommendations and the process that led to them, maintain a constant attention to the process of implementing the recommendations, etc.);
12. Continue to provide mechanisms for compensating participants for their time and commitment in future assemblies. Such compensation can contribute to a more diverse participant profile and reduce financial barriers to participation, particularly for those with fewer resources and less civically active groups;
13. Devote greater attention to public communication not only before the Assembly, but also during the process and, in particular, after its conclusion. It is recommended to provide more extensive information on the progress of the process, the substance of deliberations, participants' experiences, and the outcomes achieved. More intensive communication would enhance the visibility and transparency of the process, create opportunities to showcase positive examples of citizen participation in public decision-making, thus helping to reduce scepticism towards citizen engagement, strengthen trust in public institutions, and narrow the gap between government institutions and society;
14. Ensure that sufficient attention is given to preparing observers for their participation in a citizens' assembly. Observers should be provided in advance with information about their role and the rules guiding their participation, as well as a broader introduction to the Assembly's objectives, process, outcomes of previous sessions, and the tasks relevant to the stage they will be observing. A better

understanding of the process would facilitate more meaningful observer engagement, more consistent adherence to participation rules, and a greater contribution to the overall assembly's goals;

15. Encourage more active involvement of municipal representatives (both on political and administrative level) in the Assembly, both by giving it greater attention (for example, by attending and observing sessions) and by contributing more actively to the process itself (for example, by participating in discussions where appropriate). Such involvement would enable political and administrative representatives to gain a better understanding of the logic of the deliberative process and participants' arguments, while also strengthening institutional commitment to implementing the Assembly's recommendations. It should be emphasised, however, that such involvement must be governed by clearly defined participation rules and safeguards to ensure that the authority of politicians or municipal officials does not exert disproportionate influence over discussions or final decisions.

Impact of Vilnius Citizens' Assembly

Based on interviews and survey data, **the Assembly's recommendations were generally assessed positively.** Their **main weaknesses were identified as their large number and the resulting lack of specificity,** which may complicate implementation and provide considerable scope for interpretation by those responsible for putting them into practice. At the beginning of the Assembly, almost half of participants (44%) were concerned that the recommendations would not translate into practical actions and decisions. By the end of the process, however, there were 29 percentage points fewer participants agreeing, and 25 percentage points more disagreeing, with the statement that "nothing will come of this". **This shift may be attributed both to satisfaction with the recommendations and the Assembly process itself, as well as to a better understanding of the municipality's mobility-related objectives,** which enabled participants to see how the proposed recommendations aligned with these objectives and, consequently, to expect a greater impact from them. The recommendations were presented to politicians; however, these stakeholders are not involved in the implementation process. Responsibility for implementation lies with a working group composed of employees from the Vilnius City Municipality and JUDU. The precise impact of the recommendations on mobility policy is difficult to assess, as document analysis indicates that some recommendations are closely aligned with the objectives of the Vilnius City Strategic Development Plan 2021–2030. Consequently, implementation of the Strategic Development Plan would address some of the Assembly's recommendations.

Survey results reveal a **multifaceted impact of the Assembly on its participants.** During the evaluation period, **changes in attitudes towards the Assembly's topic were observed only to a limited extent.** While 57% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they had changed their views on the issues discussed during the Assembly, interviewees frequently emphasised that they had deepened their knowledge and broadened their perspectives rather than fundamentally altered their beliefs. This may be related to the fact that a considerable proportion of participants already supported the goals of sustainable mobility before joining the Assembly. Regarding **attitudes towards particular social groups, little change was observed.** A total of 53% of respondents stated that participation in the Assembly had not altered their views of specific social groups (a

further 33% reported that their views had changed in a more positive direction). At the same time, a small increase in interpersonal trust was recorded.

The Assembly also contributed to changes in attitudes towards citizen participation and empowerment. By the end of the process (compared to its beginning), participants expressed increased **satisfaction with democracy and support for it as a form of governance superior to the alternative ones** (an increase of 8 percentage points in both cases), **greater confidence in their ability to engage in decision-making** (an increase of 10 percentage points), **and a stronger willingness to engage in decision making processes** (78 percent of the respondents identified this change themselves). Although the proportion of participants who believed that their involvement in the Assembly would enable them to influence decision-making on important issues increased slightly, participants overall **became somewhat more sceptical about the suitability of citizens' assemblies and similar methods for decision-making at both local and national levels**. For example, the proportion of Assembly participants agreeing that decisions on issues of national importance should be made by a citizens' assembly declined from 66% at the beginning of the Assembly to 44% at its conclusion. A similar, though less pronounced, negative trend was observed regarding decision-making at the local level, where support declined from 61% to 56%. There were no major changes in the attitudes regarding the participants' ability to influence public decision-making.

The Assembly met most of the expectations that politicians, other decision-makers, and organisers had set for it. Tested as a **new method** complementing the existing range of citizen engagement instruments, it **convinced organisers and decision-makers of its suitability for Lithuania**. Assembly impressed them with its **constructiveness, productivity, effectiveness, the quality of inclusive deliberation achieved, and its culture of consensus-building**. It also generated **experience and knowledge**, as well as contributed to an **emerging citizens' assembly "ecosystem"**. At the same time, there was **disappointment at the insufficient attention paid to the Assembly by politicians and municipal administration staff**, although political support and staff assistance were felt in specific situations. Some organisers were also **disappointed by what they considered to be the insufficient public visibility** of the Assembly.

Politicians, other decision-makers, and organisers assessed the Assembly's **recommendations** as not necessarily new or unexpected, but nevertheless **useful**. However, they also noted **differences in their formulation and challenges this may pose for implementation**. The Assembly was considered to have **justified the resources allocated to it**, and the format was seen as **worth repeating in the future**. However, it was emphasised that this would require not only substantial human, time, and financial resources, but also clear support and commitment from politicians and a wider group of municipal administration staff. The Assembly experience also **increased the motivation of some organisers and decision-makers to involve citizens in decision-making**. Although, in the first months after the Assembly ended, new citizen engagement formats inspired by it could already be observed within the municipality, information about these formats, or about this application of the Assembly experience, had not yet been widely communicated. Given that implementation of the recommendations is still ongoing, and that the outcome of this process

therefore remains unclear, it is difficult to assess the Assembly's broader impact on its organisers and decision-makers. Nevertheless, stakeholders identified one already evident and unexpected positive effect of the Assembly: the **cross-sectoral nature of the recommendations encouraged greater communication, cooperation, and coordination between different municipal departments.**

The Assembly's impact on the wider public of Vilnius residents was assessed through the lens of overall awareness of citizens' assemblies. Data from two representative surveys of Vilnius residents show that, **during the implementation of the Assembly, awareness of citizens' assemblies** as a means for residents to participate in municipal or national decision-making **increased by 10 percentage points**, reaching 24% of city residents. Those who **had heard of citizens' assemblies viewed them very positively** (90%). Compared to those who had not heard of them, they expressed **higher levels of trust in municipal institutions and their decisions** (a difference of 10 and 9 percentage points respectively), were **more satisfied with the functioning of democracy in Lithuania** (a difference of 5 percentage points), and were **more likely to intend to participate in public decision-making processes** (differences ranging from 12 to 19 percentage points depending on the form of participation considered). During the period under study, respondents who were **aware of citizens' assemblies** (unlike those who were not) showed an **increase in satisfaction with the functioning of democracy** (by 6 percentage points, whereas satisfaction among those unfamiliar with citizens' assemblies declined by 5 percentage points) and a **greater sense of confidence in their own ability to participate in public decision-making** (an increase of 4 percentage points). **On the other hand, changes in trust** towards municipal institutions and their decisions **within this group did not differ significantly from broader trends.** Furthermore, when **asked about their willingness to participate in decision-making processes, uncertainty increased more markedly among those familiar with citizens' assemblies than among other groups** (by 10–12 percentage points). These latter trends are likely related to the fact that the **outcomes of the recommendation implementation process remain unclear at this stage.**

Conclusions and Recommendations for the Institutionalisation of Deliberative Democracy Practices in Lithuania

The Vilnius City Citizens' Assembly was **a successful process that reflected international good practice and engaged a diverse range of Vilnius residents in deliberations on mobility policy issues in a transparent and methodical manner.** The Assembly's key strengths included the relevance of the issue under consideration to both residents and decision-makers, high-quality communication with participants, a balanced and impartial learning process delivered through a variety of formats, professional and inclusive facilitation, and active external communication during the early stages of the process.

Nevertheless, the evaluation also identified several areas for improvement. First, the **limited involvement of politicians and municipal staff from the early stages of the Assembly's organisation** creates risks for securing support for the implementation of the Assembly's recommendations and for establishing citizen participation as a meaningful decision-making practice. Consideration should also be given to the **relatively late completion of the participant**

selection process, which concluded only a few weeks before the start of the Assembly. In the context of limited human resources, this constrained the organisers' ability to implement risk management measures in a timely manner when participant attrition occurred among selected residents. While the Assembly participant sample remained representative after the initial decline in participant numbers, continued attrition throughout the Assembly led to the underrepresentation of certain societal groups, particularly young people. Another challenge was the **ongoing development of the Assembly programme during implementation.** While this provided flexibility, it also created opportunities for rushed changes. Finally, **difficulties arose from the large number of recommendations produced (24 proposals in total)** and the resulting imbalance between breadth and depth, with some recommendations lacking sufficient detail while others became highly specific and technical. This may be explained by the broadening of the issue under consideration during the facilitation process, as well as by shifts in the balance between time allocated to learning and time devoted to deliberating and formulating recommendations.

Although further monitoring and a stronger impetus for change (for example, the implementation of another citizens' assembly) will be required to assess the Assembly's long-term impact, several positive outcomes are already evident. These include **the commencement of recommendation implementation, the establishment of accountability mechanisms, strengthened cross-sectoral cooperation within the Vilnius City Municipality (particularly in the field of mobility policy), and increased public awareness of citizens' assemblies in Vilnius.** However, broader cultural or institutional changes that would firmly embed this participatory democratic format are not yet apparent. It is therefore likely that the Assembly's ultimate impact will depend on the continued implementation of its recommendations and the results achieved through that process.

Summary of Recommendations for the Institutionalisation of Deliberative Democracy Practices in Lithuania

In this evaluation, the institutionalisation of deliberative democracy practices is understood as their formal (e.g. through legislation and regulations) and informal (e.g. through prevailing culture and values) embedding within decision-making processes, thus ensuring their sustainable application across different policy areas. Interviews conducted as part of the evaluation revealed a broad consensus among local and national-level decision-makers that the greatest opportunities for applying deliberative democracy practices currently lie at the local government level. Accordingly, based on the evidence collected during the evaluation, the following recommendations are proposed to support the further institutionalisation of deliberative democracy practices in local government:

- 1. Capacity-building and networking.** The development of deliberative democracy practices in Lithuania is currently constrained by a lack of expertise and coordination. There is a shortage of both organisational and methodological competencies, citizen engagement activities in municipalities are often fragmented, and there is a lack of non-governmental or private organisations with experience in implementing deliberative democracy practices. *It is therefore recommended to:* 1) establish dedicated positions or units within municipalities responsible for coordinating citizen engagement practices, building institutional capacity, and providing methodological support; 2) strengthen the national centre of expertise on citizen engagement (for example, the Open Government Unit of the Office of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, which has already applied deliberative

democracy practices and has developed a comparatively strong body of experience in this field). In the context of deliberative democracy, the establishment of a dedicated municipal position or unit would help create a clearer distinction between those commissioning and those implementing participatory processes, thereby reducing risks of politicisation. More broadly, these measures would facilitate the sharing of good practice, the preservation of institutional knowledge, and the development of cooperation networks across multiple sectors and levels of government;

2. **Support for informal institutionalisation.** To ensure the sustainable embedding of deliberative democracy practices in Lithuania, it is important to combine formal and informal forms of institutionalisation. Formal regulation alone may result in the mechanical application of these practices without genuine belief in their value, while reliance solely on informal support risks making their implementation dependent on individual initiative, unevenly distributed across municipalities and institutions as well as marked by limited sustainability. *It is therefore recommended to develop expert-support initiatives similar to the DemocracyNext Cities Programme, which would assist municipalities in organising citizens' assemblies, building successful experience, competences, and strengthening recognition of these practices. Only once broader support and awareness have been established should consideration be given to introducing a minimal level of formal regulation;*
3. **The place of deliberative democracy within the citizen engagement "toolbox".** Citizens' assemblies should be integrated into the existing citizen engagement system as a complementary rather than competing instrument, with their purpose and relationship to other forms of participation clearly defined. *In light of this, and given the considerable organisational and time resources required, it is recommended to:* 1) review the existing range of citizen engagement mechanisms and ensure that introducing new tools does not result in functional overlap with existing practices (e.g. surveys, neighbourhood representatives, participatory budgeting, public consultations, etc.); 2) organise citizens' assemblies no more frequently than once every two years, aligning them with municipal council and/or mayoral terms and focusing on issues of strategic importance; 3) strengthen accountability to citizens by going beyond written reports and involving former participants in monitoring the implementation of recommendations and reviewing progress, thereby increasing trust in institutions and fostering long-term civic engagement;
4. **Strengthening participation skills among younger generations.** The evidence gathered during the evaluation indicates that young people were among the least represented groups within the Assembly. Interviewees frequently noted that one contributing factor is the tendency among younger people to seek rapid results and tangible outcomes, which can be difficult to reconcile with the time-consuming nature of deliberative democratic processes. *It is therefore recommended that deliberative democracy practices be introduced in schools by involving school communities in decision-making on issues relevant to them. This would help develop civic skills from an early age, improve understanding of decision-making processes, and strengthen the capacity to engage in long-term deliberation, while also fostering the values that underpin active citizenship;*
5. **Securing the necessary funding.** The implementation of deliberative democracy practices requires significant human, time, and financial resources, which can limit their wider adoption. At the same time, direct external funding and private-sector support for municipal institutions may raise concerns regarding impartiality and potential conflicts of interest. *It is therefore recommended to consider establishing a national funding mechanism to support the development of deliberative democracy practices in Lithuania through crowdfunding instruments, philanthropic support, public-private*

partnerships, and other appropriate means. Such a mechanism could support not only the organisation of citizens' assemblies but also the piloting of innovative forms of democratic participation and experimentation within municipalities. At the same time, it is essential to ensure the impartiality of funding arrangements by focusing support not on individual assemblies, but on the broader development of democratic innovation and the strengthening of citizen engagement across the country.