Co-funded by the European Union

Urban Agenda for the EU

Cities of Equality Partnership



Reflective Guidebook

on equity-attuned participation for cities

What is the Cities of Equality Reflective Guidebook?

Public participation in local governance is linked with increased policy legitimacy and improved implementation, yet certain demographic groups (e.g. those with lower income or educational attainment, the differently abled, ethnic minorities) remain consistently underrepresented in the process. Through the Cities of Equality partnership, we have observed that cities being more inclusive and equitable in how they approach participation is as much about mindset as it is about process. We have also seen there is no one perfect way to achieve this, but a variety of factors that are important, and that can be improved by cities. This involves understanding what is important, reflecting on the current situation and practice, and identifying how best to improve in different areas.

This reflection guide is a collection of core factors, principles and thinking practices to support cities and urban practitioners to understand and implement more inclusive participatory activities. It is based on the work of the Urban Agenda for the EU Cities of Equality Partnership. Content has been collated from the debates and exchanges between members and examining case studies of good practices from within the Partnership. It is intended to provide useful perspectives on what to think about and how to approach this challenge, linked to concrete examples that have been shown to work in practice.

Several case examples are included from the partnership to illustrate practices linked to core themes. References to these examples are included in the text, where an illustrative point is made in one or more of the case example documents, which will help provide a more concrete and real world example of the principles.

The four case examples are from:

City of Komotini (Greece)
National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ANCT) (France)
City of Heerenveen (Netherlands)
City of Barcelona (Spain)

This guide aims to equip policymakers and urban practitioners with key principles for increasing participation in cities and support them in reflecting on local strengths to build upon, and areas where further attention is needed to increase inclusion and equity in local participative processes. The guide doesn't attempt to give a step-by-step approach, but to offer insights and provocations to aid reflection and assessment of your process, current approach, and future ambitions for inclusive and equitable participation.

Structure of the Reflective Guidebook

This guidebook is broken into four sections:

Chapter 1 – Context

Looking at what participation looks like in cities, what we mean by equitable participation, and the backdrop and importance of this.

Chapter 2 – what works: the Success Factors

Setting out nine Success Factors that we observe in successful examples of inclusive and equitable participation, and why these factors are specifically important for excluded groups.

Chapter 3 – The Success Factors in practice

Looking at the interplay between different factors and how these aspects are illustrated by the accompanying case examples.

Chapter 4 – Practical tools to aid your reflection and planning

Sharing some practical tools and exercises to use in your own city context, to help explore your current approach and plan future work on this theme.

Guidebook produced on behalf of the UAEU Cities of Equality Partnership
by Ian Graham, EUI Expert, October 2026

CHAPTER 1 – Context

The participation imperative in cities

We see that **participation is now viewed as an essential way of working for cities**, rather than an option. Once a way to work with certain enthusiastic groups, or neighbourhoods with a strong sense of civic activism, participatory working has increasingly become key to **bridging the gap between citizens and government**, ensuring greater trust exists, and that decisions better represent the communities they affect.

The City of Barcelona, as one of the partners in the Cities of Equality partnership, makes **the case for participation** by saying, "*citizen participation not only complements and enriches representative democracy, but also contributes to advancing towards participatory democracy. Incorporating citizens' voices into the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies helps strengthen the legitimacy of decisions, improve their quality, and move towards more transparent and co-responsible forms of governance, with broader social consensus and stronger public policies.*" More equitable and inclusive participation is a clear extrapolation from this: if participation is not equitable, and is exclusive to certain groups, its ability to strengthen the legitimacy of decisions and to help restore trust is greatly reduced.

Context for equitable participation in decision making

Many urban residents have **limited opportunities to participate in, and influence, local decision-making**. Barriers such as declining trust in government, social polarisation, rising cost-of-living pressures, overwork, inaccessible processes and other factors can prevent residents from helping shape their city. Some groups, particularly **educated middle-class residents, are better positioned to engage** in formal local governance, leading to **unequal civic participation and uneven representation of interests**.

Beyond these demographic differences, participatory practices often lack an intersectional approach that considers age, gender, socio-economic status, interculturality, disability and other factors. They may also lack co-creative elements, reducing participation to consultation rather than shared decision-making.

As a result, local policies may attract weaker public support and produce unintended negative effects for certain groups whose needs aren't sufficiently considered. **Inclusive participatory processes are essential** if local government services and policies are to reflect the needs and priorities of residents. Places shaped by only part of the population are less likely to serve those voices that are least heard. **Mistrust** between government and citizens needs to be overcome to boost participation. This work responds to the unequal civic and political participation of local groups in social, economic and environmental matters, and the resulting inequalities in opportunities and outcomes.

The nature of participation in cities

Equity-attuned participatory governance is still an emerging and developing field. A **clear paradigm is needed** for this type of working to be effective. There are good practices and cities recognise the benefits of greater participation of citizens for creating better long-term changes. A challenge in moving to this is **different actors have different understanding** and experience of participative working. It can be hard for both cities *and* citizens to start working collaboratively where the traditional relationship has been transactional and one of 'service provider' vs 'service recipient'.

Much participatory practice exists at local level in cities, often without reference to a wider programme or policy on participative governance, but instead **driven by local advocates** of the approach, who see the benefits to community cohesion and social impact it brings. At grass-roots level, participatory approaches are **widely used on small scales**, although observationally this is **less systematic** as a strategic choice and more due to the experience and motivation of an individual to employ this type of approach.

Cities of Equality vs Equality in Participation

Participatory approaches by their nature are **designed to include** new voices. Our focus here is on how cities can ensure those new voices are an inclusive representation of the society and issues they are working on. From the analysis, discussions, and case examples, we see **that cities CAN approach this from two angles**, with a clear but subtle distinction:

1. **Participation as a tool for equality** – achieving greater equity and inclusion of outcomes in cities, reached as a result of using participatory processes; and
2. **Participation as an equality policy** – setting participation as a principle and a right, and therefore setting an inherent role in boosting the inclusivity of participatory processes themselves, as a systematic inclusivity improvement.

These two are not mutually exclusive and indeed can complement one another. However, we observe that many city **practices focus on either one angle or the other** and in general, we observe more situations which focus on participation as a tool rather than on participation as a policy i.e. fewer cities focus on systematically increasing the inclusivity of participation overall – the focus more often stems from a desire or need to help (and hence include) a certain target group on a certain topic or issue. Ultimately, cities can use both and, done strategically, one can reinforce the other. However, making the distinction and being clear on impact of the different angles is important when seeking to achieve greater participation, and in particular where the aim is to create more inclusive and equitable participation.

We have also seen that **participation of citizens is easier to achieve where the topic and issue is particularly important to them directly**. Whereas *systematically* making participation in governance more open and inclusive is typically harder and requires cities to stretch their participation mindset and skills even further. Conducting inclusive and equitable participation activities is essentially a more advanced version of participative working, since it requires greater nuance, strong capabilities, and often greater effort to involve typically excluded groups in a meaningful way. At the same time, it offers benefits and value to local authorities, local stakeholders and citizens, in terms of increased legitimacy and more representative decisions.

The added complexity of inclusive practices

In this sense, moving to **equitable and inclusive participation adds an additional level of complexity** to the 'standard' participation approach. This shouldn't discourage but sharpen the focus. Those who are new to participatory working in general need to be aware of how quickly they can adapt to the increased complexity and nuance of making their participation more equitable and inclusive as well. Within the case studies we have examined from the Cities of Equality partnership, achieving greater inclusion in participatory processes is frequently highlighted as an ongoing challenge and needs ongoing focus.

The important consideration here is for cities to decide **how much and how quickly they wish to develop their participatory working** approaches, and what their aspirations are for inclusion. Cities should be clear about the aims and aspirations and the timeframes over which they wish to create changes, then plan accordingly.

This is not to detract from cities' achievements. It highlights that approaching the topic of 'improving equity of participation' in a systematic way is less common in cities. It is highly beneficial but requires commitment. It is about **being clear on the benefits**, and being **deliberate about the changes and improvements** to make.

CHAPTER 2 – what works: the Success Factors

What are the Factors we see in successful examples?

We have seen that there are nine Factors present in successful examples or inclusive participation. These are:

1. Putting **citizens at the heart** of the purpose and the process
2. Building **mutual trust and motivation** for participants
3. A **connector role** to bridge the gap between government bodies & citizens
4. Meeting people **where they are** (physically, and conceptually – how ready are they)
5. Specific **approaches to include hard to reach** citizens (transport options, childcare, language support etc.)
6. An open **ecosystem of partners** involved in decisions and debates
7. **Increasing ownership** of the processes for citizens
8. A longer-term programme to create **behaviour/culture change** among all involved parties
9. A **system for monitoring** who gets involved and whether there are gaps from certain groups

Most of these apply to participation processes in general, not just in the inclusivity context. However, there are specific reasons and aspects why they matter for the more excluded or less civically active groups. These reasons are explained in this section. The four case examples which accompany this guide then provide concrete examples of these Factors in practice. References to these cases are included with each factor to guide you.

Putting citizens at the heart

Having a **clear focus on citizens needs and benefits** is the foundation on which all meaningful participation is built, and even more so in the case of individuals and groups who do not naturally get involved.

Understand needs is key, as is designing and executing the process in a way that not only opens opportunities for people to engagement, but also actively supports the take up of those opportunities. This is crucial for bringing all groups into the participatory process in a balanced, meaningful and equitable way.

For excluded groups, this is important because...

- their **needs tend to be deprioritised** in urban governance and they have worse access to basic services and other important factors for a good quality of life, compared to more privileged groups – therefore to reduce inequality, the needs and wishes of these groups should inform the goals of the participation process.
- Similarly, since **they face systematic barriers** to taking part in participation processes, the way the participation process is structured should be informed by this, and consider their (in)abilities to take part meaningfully within their capacities and contexts.

Building mutual trust and motivation

Working together in a participatory process requires a certain degree of **respect and trust between participants**. In all our case examples and analysis of the discussions throughout the Partnership, we clearly see trust being core to success in terms of participation – whether that is trust in government, trust in people, trust in the process, or trust in citizens.

Linked to that is the **need to be motivated** to participate – and that motivation will be stifled if there is a lack of trust. Creating effective working relationships is always important, but to increase inclusivity of workings and bring previously excluded individuals into the process requires a change in trust and motivation on both sides.

For excluded groups, this is important because...

- many have a **history of exploitation or of having their needs de-prioritised** at the hands of authorities. Developing long-term relationships with local government staff members can help to overcome this, including transparency around possible outcomes, about the progress of participatory processes, and by demonstrating visible results from the process of participation.
- Motivation may come from **seeing real positive benefits** for the community, including co-benefits that were not even imagined as part of the original program (e.g. strengthened local social networks, service improvement)

A connector role

The role of the "connector" is key to bring people together and facilitate **building bridges** between different, often disparate groups. This is a broader role than an external facilitator who supports the process.

Learning the skills and local context to do this well takes time, so it's hard for municipalities to jump straight in from nothing. **External skills are a big enabler**; but also create financial and technical dependencies. Skills transfer hasn't featured in our case examples as a specific function of the external role, but is something for cities to consider.

For excluded groups, this is important because...

- They often have **histories of bad relationships** with local authorities, and the connector role is someone who is familiar and **they trust, and can act as an intermediary**. It is also useful for minimising power imbalances that are present, and facilitating more open and inclusive conversations.
- This connector also has **nuanced local knowledge of the participation setting**, which in more peripheral or marginalised neighbourhoods may not be as well-known or visible to local authorities. The role therefore adds invaluable context and insight to enable the process of participation to include more groups and individuals, including those who experience barriers to participation.

Meeting people where they are

This concept applies equally to **physically** where people are engaged in the city, and also **conceptually** in terms of how familiar they are with this type of participatory working and how ready they are to engage with that. This principle does work both ways, and requires a balance, but the role falls on cities to make the first move towards engaging with the target audience 'where they are'. This **requires new thinking** and **different approaches** and can challenge established norms of 'how we do things here'. It also requires empathy and an open mind – on both sides.

For excluded groups, this is important because...

- Physically – feelings of comfort, belonging, and being welcome are very important for those who are not used to taking part in formal governance processes, like public participation. Hosting events in familiar and non-threatening community spaces, rather than e.g. City Hall, reduces the barriers for the non-usual suspects to feel comfortable joining.
- Conceptually – An inclusive participatory process has to align with the needs, priorities and capacities of the people it wishes to involve. Excluded groups may have more fundamental concerns that are not aligned with what the local government proposes to work on. E.g. a city may want to work on climate adaptation, but local people are more concerned about housing costs. Understanding and working with the starting point for communities is crucial to success. This doesn't have to mean 'always work on what they want to' – but acknowledge the impacts of their wants and needs and design the approach accordingly.

An open ecosystem of partners

Having a range of perspectives, resources, skills and experience is always of value in dealing with complex social challenges. This needs to **go beyond simply having relevant people** working on the challenge, but working *together* in a coordinated way.

For systematic change, this also needs to go beyond a project team with a specific task, into a more organic ecosystem of people and organisations, that is **flexible and can evolve** and adapt over team, keeping pace with the change on the ground. This includes being open to changing partnerships, changing processes, and even changing priorities over time. Deep relationships that are formed can be particularly powerful in effecting change.

For excluded groups, this is important because...

- the inclusion of local NGOs, service providers etc, is important for capturing the reality of a place, and these community partners have good connections to people who may otherwise not take part in participation processes – thus they can informally represent some of the key challenges and needs, without overburdening individuals with intensive participatory engagements.
- reducing inequality requires holistic solutions, which in turn requires cooperation between different government departments, local community partners, and the excluded groups themselves. It is rare that one person or organisation will be able to deliver the solution on their own – partnership working is key.

Specific approaches to include hard to reach citizens

As mentioned earlier, **certain groups are harder to reach** than others. The nature of some specific needs – and also some specific barriers experienced – means that bespoke approaches are sometimes needed if certain groups are to be a) reached, and b) brought into the processes.

It is important to recognise that **one approach does not work for everyone**, and to achieve more inclusive participation may require multiple approaches in parallel.

For excluded groups, this is important because...

- classic participation approaches are not working to include these groups. Key considerations are to mitigate participation barriers via materials and events in commonly-spoken languages, accessible time and venue, on/off-site childcare, using simple language and easy-to-understand materials, travel reimbursement or vouchers, among others.

Increasing ownership of the processes for citizens

Linked to motivation is the issue of ownership and agency. We see that people are often more motivated to engage in a process when they have **more personal ownership** of the process and the result. However, we must also note that not everyone has the same interest and ability to get deeply involved in a process.

Consequently – and linked to the previous factor above – we need to find ways of **increasing people's ownership** and agency in city governance processes but **in appropriate ways** for their needs, whilst in parallel, acknowledging that not everyone will wish or be able to take these opportunities. But the opportunities should be available.

For excluded groups, this is important because...

- it can be much harder to meet the needs of those who want to engage but who are not used to or not easily able to take ownership in the way that other groups can. This can be due to education barriers, physical location, physical or mental health difficulties etc.

A longer-term programme to create behaviour/culture change among all involved parties

Many of the programmes we see have been **developing a culture over many years** and not over a single project (although the impact of a well-run participatory project on expectations and attitudes to involvement can be notable). Systematic change can be 'a slow burn' not a quick fix – culture takes time to change, trust takes time to build, behavioural norms take time to change.

Having a clear strategy which acknowledges and works with this context can be helpful, bridging the gaps between projects and activities, and having an eye on the longer term change that needs longer lead times to achieve.

For excluded groups, this is important because...

- They often have a **history of distrust and feelings of being let down** or ignored by authorities. Building trusting relationships and harvesting the fruits of participatory processes takes time, and is not a linear progression.
- Short, squeezed processes are more likely to be top-down to fulfil project KPIs **without addressing core concerns** and developing these trusting relationships – it takes time to gradually bring the more excluded groups into the participatory process.
- **Internal municipal staff and local politicians** also need support to change and adapt with the circumstances. **'Institutional inertia'** means that processes and mindsets can change slowly, and need sustained and systematic drivers to stop things from rolling back.

A system for monitoring who gets involved and whether there are gaps from certain groups

This is crucial for tracking and **demonstrating the impact** of any process of change. It is harder to demonstrate the impact of a particular change or process without good data and insight on the process and the results.

In any situation, having verifiable data on who gets involved, when and how, and what is the result of that involvement is extremely helpful for assessing how well you are doing and whether you are including the right people and in a meaningful way.

For excluded groups, this is important because...

- it is important to ensure representation from a diverse voices and to know how well this is working in reality, and at which stages of the process.
- Knowing who to focus on means knowing properly who engages and who doesn't, and to what level. When new people are engaged, it is important to know whether they had a meaningful participation, and whether they stayed engaged. Monitoring both the levels and types of engagement gives clarity on whether your process is truly inclusive, and where any gaps remain.

CHAPTER 3 – The Success Factors in practice

The interplay between the Factors

We can see from the above descriptions of each Factor that none exist in isolation. The combine to create a system with different entry points. We improve the system starting from any one of these entry points – but for best effect it is better to start from several entry points, or at least be aware of the interplay between the Factors and the limitations of focussing on only one at a time. Below are a few examples to illustrate this and aid with thinking and reflections on practices and aspirations in your city for more equity-attuned participation.

Throughout this section we highlight the links to the four **case studies** where they are relevant for illustrating a particular aspect.

Long term programme as an anchor

This is where the presence of a longer term programme or strategy can be helpful, in order to take account of the sequencing and prioritisation of different interventions and changes to your participation approach. If there is a long term desire to shift the approach to participation in the city, developing a specific strategy and programme of activity can be a helpful way to give focus and profile to this aim.

There are many ways to do this, and it should be based on your own local customs and processes. The principle is just that a structured approach over the long term will add value. This is seen clearly in **Barcelona**, in the case of the civic management programme. The systematic nature of the programme means they can look ahead to how the approach develops over time, rather than only focussing on the immediate interventions and participations. The **ANCT** also aim to build more systematic change in the approach by supporting municipalities over a longer period of time and with a focus on building capacity and transforming mindsets.

Connectors and building trust

Where there is no established trust, but also no negative associations, interested parties can more easily build up trust themselves. However, in the cases where active distrust exists, as is often the case between excluded groups and government, more work is needed and sometimes there is a need for external support to help build bridges between parties. In this way, a connector role can be key to building trust, both in the process and in each other, by being a neutral, external party.

The external nature of a connector or facilitator role adds an important dimension to the power dynamic in participatory processes. It enables trust to be built by proxy with the connector, who can then use that to help participants build relationships over time, finding common ground and understanding. The DOM Thinker role in **Heerenveen** demonstrates this, as do the the participation specialists in **Barcelona.** In a similar way, **Komotini** has developed strong relationships with local organisations over time, which help connect people and building trusted relationships.

Motivation and specific topic focus

We note above that greater motivation is a factor (for both citizens and city) when working towards inclusive participation from the first angle (seeking equity of specific outcomes). The increase in inclusivity is targeted and based around engagement on a specific issue, which can appeal to the target group and lead to greater motivation to engage. However, it does not follow that the city's participation in any other areas will automatically improve as a result. There may be positive knock-on effects, but this is often more of a 'by-product' than by design. We see such knock-on effects clearly in the case of the city of **Komotini**, where the engagement of citizens on specific issues helped to shape a more inclusive and participation culture in general.

More generally, we see that focussing on a specific topic of importance to a community creates greater engagement and buy-in. This sounds obvious on the one hand, however on the other, we see clearly that it is also important that the issues are identified 'bottom-up' by the community in question, not imposed 'top-down'. In all of our case examples, including **Heerenveen**, **ANCT** and **Barcelona**, the communities are generally identifying the area of focus, not the city officials.

However, there is a related challenge here to consider – about whether the 'community' identified the issue, or a small number of vocal citizens put it forward. Consider that normally a few people will take the lead in this type of process, but it is important to examine whether or not they are truly speaking for the whole community or just a small minority.

Ownership and customised approaches

Ownership is a tricky balance to strike in most cases, and in particular when trying to include vulnerable or more socially excluded groups. The concept of social capital – the ability to get value and practical benefit from social systems and connections between people – plays a big part in this.

Less included groups tend to correlate with having lower social capital and have lower abilities to engage in civic processes, including participatory governance. Such individuals may not actually wish to be directly involved or participate in 'owning' a civic process or asset (in even the loosest sense).

That said, we do see excluded groups getting more involved. This can be achieved, although often can't use the same approach as for people who don't experience social exclusion and have higher social capital. What it looks like for excluded groups to become 'meaningfully involved' often looks different to less excluded groups, and the approaches and expectations to bring them into the process must necessarily be different. As such, *increased* ownership of the process might for some groups be a different process and result.

Barcelona's civic management approach seeks to give groups ownership on their own terms, which increases the motivation and focus to engage. The **ANCT**'s Territoires d'engagement programme also uses customised support to work over an extended period of time to help people to engage and take more ownership of the process.

Specific approaches for certain groups and the monitoring of impact

We see all several of our case examples tailoring their approach to the specific groups in question. The **ANCT**'s Territoires d'engagement uses an approach that mean the municipalities involved are supported to tailor the tools and method to their own context and priorities, to ensure a good fit. Likewise, **Komotini**'s approach of focussing on specific citizen needs when designing both services and engagement methods ensures that their approach works for the groups they need to involve.

At the same time, if you adopt a new approach to include a new group, it's important to be mindful of the impacts of that approach on other groups. If you change your whole participation approach, this could make it harder for other groups to engage, despite bringing new people in. This may be considered to be the best balance overall.

However, there is a careful consideration needed to ensure that the negative impacts are both actively understood and *deliberately* accepted (i.e. not accidentally left there as unintended consequences that are not considered). The new group might be the aim, but it is important consider the negative impacts of the new approach – intended or unintended!

This is where monitoring and tracking of impacts and results is important – if you are not monitoring the effects of your approaches in terms of levels of participation of different groups, it is much harder to assess the impacts (positive or negative) of your participation process.

Part of this can be about tracking who gets involved in the process, which communities or groups are impacted by the outcomes, and whether they were involved in the design. In many cases, this monitoring can be simple counting and tracking, but more sophisticated mechanisms – e.g. with further disaggregation of data and cross-referencing / correlating with other information – can be developed and implemented if you have the right capacity and resources.

Barcelona's Community Balance Sheet is an interesting option that includes looking at the nature and levels of participation in the governance process.

In this case, it's important to note that having the tool alone is not enough. Having people to support communities in carrying out the assessments and monitoring, and to then help them improve the areas identified as less strong is also key. Monitoring is only useful if the resulting insights are used to inform decision and shape the actions that follow.

Key Takeaways – what should we keep in mind?

There is no single perfect approach to achieving more equitable and inclusive participation in cities. Consider the **Success Factors** for inclusive participation, reflect on what you have in place, what is important for you, and **tailor** your local approach to include the right mix of these to work well with your local conditions and aims.

Development of Participation in cities should ideally address both of the two angles identified: achieving **greater equity and inclusion outcomes** in cities, and boosting the **inclusivity of the participatory processes** themselves as a systematic improvement.

Acknowledge that aspiring to more inclusive and equity-attuned participation can be **time-consuming**. You will normally need to build on an existing base of participation and engagement **skills and resources** – it's hard to jump straight in from scratch and there is a learning curve, and a **process of trust building**. That said, if starting out, it is a helpful opportunity to build equality and inclusion principles into your approach from the beginning!

Furthermore, we must be mindful of simply 'moving the exclusions around the system'. Participation can justifiably be considered to be *more* equitable and just if it includes even one additional group that is typically excluded – however, if all other 'excluded groups' *remain* excluded, and the drive to get a specific group involved is targeted, we must ask whether this situation is more inclusive overall or whether it simply changes the *nature* of the exclusions.

We can see that the first angle of **participation as a tool for achieving equity** of outcomes in a specific area is easier to comprehend and is a more common route for cities to approach the topic of equity-attuned participation. Driving greater **participation as a policy for equality** (the second 'angle') is often less of a focus for cities, even if greater equality of outcomes in general might be an aim. Inclusion in participation is often increased on the basis of needs in a specific area or theme, rather than as a cross-cutting principle. This leads us to ask: is the second angle – of increasing inclusivity of participation in general – a reasonable or suitable aim for cities? Or would a better approach always be targeted and topic based, to make it easier to achieve and provide something concrete to deliver and then build upon?

This is partly about ambition, but also about your starting point. Participation and engagement normally require both effort and capabilities that 'top-down' approaches do not. It takes effort and a particular **mindset and value set**. If a city is newer to participatory working, the maturity of process and mindset might not yet be enough to push for the most inclusive and equitable participation approach. That might have to come later, after the local capabilities and culture have started to develop. Above all, **take a deliberate approach** to improving your participation approach, aiming to **put citizens at the core**. Consider the Factors and how you can work towards strengthening them locally.

CHAPTER 4 – Practical tools to aid your reflection and planning

Diagnosing your situation – a team exercise

The following is a simple 60min diagnostic exercise on the participation in your city.
This activity is focussed on the core factors identified above. However, if you adapt these factors and/or add your own you can use your own version of the list.

The diagnostic is carried out in three stages, with participants mapping the different (pre-defined) elements onto a simple matrix. It is best carried out in small groups – aim for a maximum of four participants per group: if you have five or more people involved, split into groups of 2-4 people before starting. In the small groups, you work through the stages:

How important is each Factor?

Consider the nine factors one at a time:

1. Decide how important that factor element is for you to achieve more inclusive participation.
2. Using postcards or sticky notes, place each factor on a line scale across a large sheet or wall space, from left to right – less important to the left, more important to the right.
3. As you add more factors, you may want to move the previous ones to have the relative importance in the correct order.
4. You can split a factor into two different situations if needed – e.g. if one version of the situation is important but another is less so.
5. Work through until you have a line with the factors prioritised. You can add new factors to focus on if you spot gaps.

How easy or hard is it to put each Factor in place?

The next step is to move the factors higher or lower than the line, depending on how easy or hard you think each would be to achieve. Add this new dimension on the up / down axis in the centre of the sheet. Again, Consider the factors one at a time:

1. Decide how easy the element is for you to put in place in your city.
2. Move the factor higher up the sheet if it is easier to implement; lower down the sheet if harder. Keep it in the same left/right position as you do so.
3. As you asses more factors, again you may want to move the previous ones higher or lower to have the relative 'easiness' correct.
4. Again you can allow participants to rewrite or split a factor into two if there are different cases within it – one easier and one harder. i.e. if it's hard to find one single point on the line to put it. This is more likely in the easier/harder debate.
5. Work through until you have a 2D matrix showing **Importance of the factors vs Ease of implementation for each**.

How will you prioritise?

The final step is to use this as a basis for discussion and future planning.

1. If you have multiple groups, **each group presents their matrix** and explain briefly to the others. It is best if you let all groups share their assessment first, before commenting too much. If you have just one matrix/group, you can skip straight to the next step.

2. **Discuss the assessment**(s) in the matrix:
    a. Where is there a common view on placement of Factors?
    b. Which areas highlighted conflicting views on placement? What was behind those differences?
    c. Are there any points of note that arose from the assessment?
    d. Does anything need revisiting? Is there anything missing?
    e. Note that if you are just one group, you may have covered most of this in the initial building of the matrix.

3. **Can you create a single "agreed" assessment matrix**? i.e. can all the groups agree on a single 'best' version? If not, then what does that tell you? This is normally helpful to understand the Factors on which there are either different approaches to take or different levels of prioritisation – but whatever the reasons, this is helpful to understand.

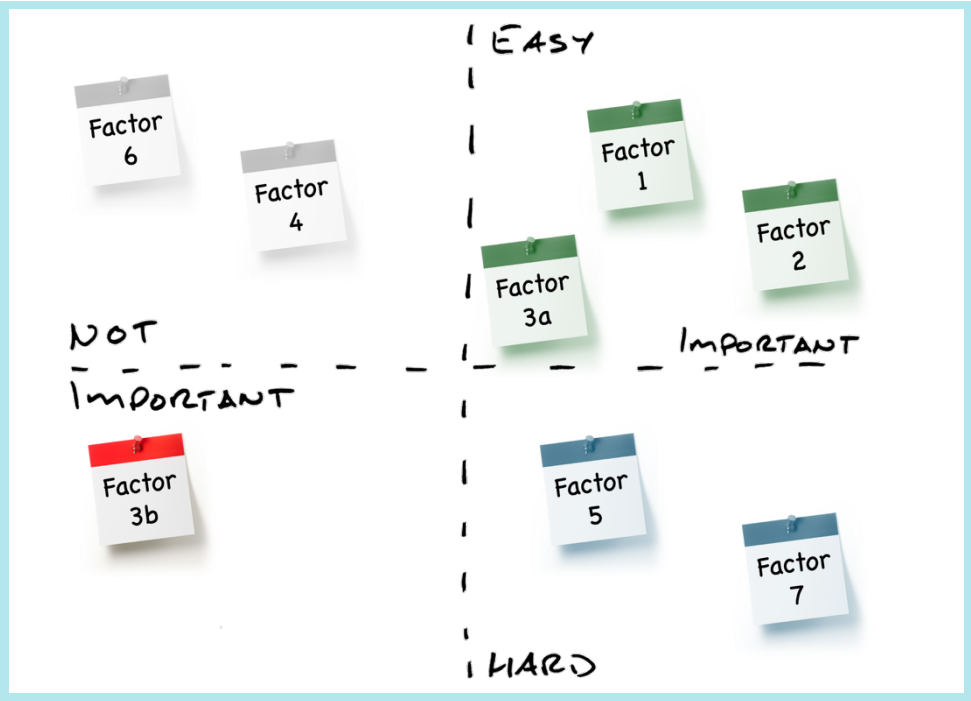


Illustration of a completed matrix

4. **Use the different quadrants** of the matrix to identify where to focus your efforts next:
    a. Factors in the top-right quadrant are more important and easier to implement: these are potentially 'quick-wins'
    b. Factors in the top-left are less important but easier: these could be quick to do but may be a distraction with less benefit
    c. Factors in the bottom-right are more important but harder: these may need a longer term strategy or to be broken into steps, but should be included in your plan if feasible
    d. Factors in the bottom-left are less important and harder: these may take a lot of resources for less benefit – consider de-prioritising in the first instance these or splitting out the bits that offer more benefit.

Note that in reality, for most cities all the factors are important – the activity here is to put more / less importance on them to help prioritise. Step 4 above is done to categorise the Factors by *relative* importance and *relative* ease to each other, so the focus in terms of planning is more about 'which to prioritise first' rather than 'which to avoid completely'. This is a sense-making framework, to help you identify which things to focus on and allocate time and resources to.

Use the results to continue a discussion depending on the time available. Spend the last 10 minutes building an initial set of next steps to take, based on the prioritisation. This should consider how you will make sure the right things are in place to increase the equity and inclusiveness of your chosen participative processes. Keep in mind the factors that might need a longer tern plan beyond the next steps.

How are you doing? – further reflection questions to support your thinking

In addition to the diagnostic exercise above on the Success Factors, there are simple questions and prompts we can put to ourselves to help reflect and think about your current approach to participation. This can be done individually in the first instance but is better when considered as a team or a as cross-city working group.

Where the Success Factors highlight what typically is helpful to have in place, these prompts guide you towards considering your current situation more concretely. The aim of this is to try and focus more specifically on the equality and inclusion aspects of participatory approaches.

Core questions to ask as a self-reflection exercise:

- ? Which **specific groups** do you actively engage in participation activities?
- ? What **type of participation** do you see locally? Where is this on the ladder of participation? And which thematic topics is it used for?
- ? Are your citizens **familiar** with participatory working? Do you have mechanisms in place already which they engage with?
- ? Are municipal or city staff **skilled and comfortable** working in a participatory way with citizens or local stakeholders?
- ? Do you have equitable **representation** in your participatory activities that reflects the socio-economic make-up of the city, neighbourhood, or thematic topic under discussion? Do you always have the 'usual suspects' involved, or a wide and varied group?
- ? Do you actively **identify gaps** in representation? Do you know **how and why** these manifest in practice?
- ? Do you actively deploy **strategies to include** people who find themselves in those "gaps"?
- ? Do you **monitor** the composition / representation in participatory processes? Either structurally, or anecdotally?

These are not looking for 'right' answers, but are intended as prompts to help you consider different elements of the current situation.