

MOSTAR CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY Information Sheet



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Building democratic
participation in the
City of Mostar



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Information sheet

1. What is a citizens' assembly?

A citizens' assembly is a new form of democracy that allows for making decisions at the level of a city, a country or an international community such as the European Union. A citizens' assembly consists of a randomly selected group of citizens, which is formed taking into account demographic criteria such as gender, age, etc. A group like this is a microcosm of a city or a country. The role of a citizens' assembly is to make a thorough analysis of a given subject, hold discussions of various solutions, analyse pros and cons, and then deliver final recommendations or decisions.

2. What is the point of organising a citizens' assembly?

Citizens' assemblies provide high quality and well thought-out decisions. Thanks to the random selection process and the use of a set of demographic criteria for the composition of the group, it can be assumed that the final recommendation takes into account the common good of the community, providing a good basis for decision-making in matters related to a local community or the whole country.

3. Where have citizens' assemblies been organised before?

Citizens' assemblies, in various forms, have been organised in recent years in numerous countries such as Australia, Ireland, Poland, Canada, Belgium, France, USA and the United Kingdom, both at the local and the national level.

4. What kind of democracy is it?

Citizen's assemblies are a form of deliberative democracy, i.e. democracy in which discussion and deliberation among a group of randomly selected persons is a key component of the decision-making process. Deliberation means weighing the advantages and disadvantages of proposed solutions, their pros and cons, during small-group or plenary discussions. This approach encourages participants to learn about different perspectives and points of view in order to have a better understanding of the impact that implementing particular solutions might have on peoples' lives or the environment.

5. Who runs the citizens' assembly?

It is a good practice to have a Coordinating Team, that is independent from the public authorities that are responsible for the subject at hand, to design and run the citizens' assembly. In the case of the Mostar Citizens' Assembly, the process is initiated and conducted by the Council of Europe. The goal of the Council of Europe is to make this process sustainable and to have it be run by local stakeholders in the future.

6. Why are citizens randomly selected?

Random selection allows assembly members to be independent in their decision-making. They can focus on their task without being distracted by elections, party politics or fundraising campaigns.

7. What happens with the recommendations of the citizens' assembly?

The best practice is to agree on an upfront declaration by local or national authorities that the recommendations of the citizens' assembly will be implemented if they reach a certain threshold of support by assembly members (such as 80 percent). At a minimum, public authorities debate and respond to the recommendations that are presented to them.

8. How is a citizens' assembly different from regular public consultations?

In a citizen's assembly, the composition of the group reflects a number of demographic criteria of the community and, as a result, the citizen's assembly is, in this respect, more representative than regular open public consultations. Assembly meetings begin with a learning phase and presentations are given by experts and non-governmental organisations. This may take many hours in total. The citizens' assembly, therefore, can consider a given subject thoroughly and can deliver quality outcomes that can be trusted.

9. Who can become an assembly member?

In the case of the Mostar Citizens' Assembly, any resident of Mostar who is at least 16 years old can become a member. As a first step, invitations will be sent out to randomly selected households and a final group of 40 assembly members will also be randomly selected from among those who have registered to participate. There is a list of ineligibility criteria though, such as being an elected politician or a high-level civil servant whose work is related to the topic of the assembly. This list of ineligibility criteria is composed to ensure the credibility of the process.

10. What is the role of NGOs in the citizens' assembly?

In the process of the Mostar Citizens' Assembly, there is a special role for all stakeholders, such as institutions, informal groups of residents and non-governmental organisations. They all have the right to propose specific topics to be covered during the learning phase of the assembly and experts to give presentations, and they can also propose their own recommendations. Details on the rights of stakeholders are presented in the assembly rulebook.

11. Are politicians part of the assembly?

In the case of the Mostar Citizens' Assembly, representatives of the mayors and city councillors from all the political coalitions are invited to participate in the Oversight Team, but they cannot become assembly members. As members of the Oversight Team, their role is to ensure that the Coordinating Team adheres to the assembly standards.

12. How long does the citizens' assembly last?

Citizens' assemblies are by definition a long-term process. The meetings may take several weeks or months, depending on the subject, budget and how the process is designed.

13. Why is it worth it for residents to become assembly members?

When a person becomes an assembly member, he or she can influence the development of the city or country. This can be a very empowering experience. Assembly members have an opportunity to learn new things and to meet new people. It may also be worth noting that they receive a stipend for their engagement.

Do citizens' assemblies replace the City Council?

A citizens' assembly organised every year or even 2-3 times per year serves as an addition to the current political system. From the legal perspective, the City Council has to approve the decisions or recommendations of the citizens' assembly.

Who usually commissions the citizens' assemblies?

Citizens' assemblies can be commissioned by public authorities or organised as independent processes. The advantage of commissioning them by public authorities is a potentially bigger political buy-in and thus a greater possibility of implementing recommendations. In some countries, citizens' assemblies are usually organised by public authorities.

What are the benefits for the public authorities from holding a citizens' assembly?

The main benefit of organising a citizens' assembly for a public authority is the possibility to learn what citizens think the best choice for a given subject is after learning deeply about the issues and considering possible options. Citizens' assemblies provide well thought-out recommendations that public authorities can depend on.

www.coe.int/congress

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all the members of the European Union. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 47 member states. Composed of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three committees, it brings together 648 elected officials representing more than 150 000 local and regional authorities.

The Congress

Le Congrès

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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