**Workshop 2.** ***Good practice examples of community engagement methods***.

Rijeka, Croatian Debut

abstract

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The presentation focuses on the first experimentation of formalized citizens’ participation in the transversal policy making on local level in Croatia: the experience of Citizens’ Assembly of Rijeka, currently in the central part of its work. The objective is to engage citizens in devising new modalities through which the local authority can institutionalize citizens’ participation in the definition of public policies and programs.

Citizens’ Assembly of Rijeka was initiated by the City of Rijeka. It is prepared and coordinated by the Association for Civil Society Development SMART. The financial support is provided the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. It provides a good example of how the Croatian perception and practice of citizens’ participation is changing.

The idea builds on the participative proceedings for the definition of the initiatives to develop in the framework of the program for the European Capital of Culture – Rijeka 2020. Named “Port of Diversity”, the programme concept, guided by the local civil society in close collaboration with the Municipality, put forward and embedded the values of courage, uniqueness, progressiveness and ambition. This provided the culturally progressive terrain from which grew the design of the initiative, for which the NGO SMART, which provides the technical support, sought funding jointly with the City of Rijeka.

The Citizens’ Assembly of Rijeka is an informal body composed of 34 randomly selected citizens of different ages, genders and residential areas, representing a microcosm of Rijeka. The presentation will explain the processes of “sortition” and the deliberative proceedings.

The Citizens’ Assembly of Rijeka was established upon the proposal of the Mayor of Rijeka to address the question: “How can the City of Rijeka improve the system of community-level self-government and enhance citizen participation in the development of the local community?“

The tasks are as follows:

* Familiarize themselves with the system of local self-government and ways of citizen participation in the development of the local community, both in theory and practice.
* Consider and discuss how to improve the system of community-level self-government and increase citizen participation in the development of the local community.
* Collaboratively draft and adopt proposals and recommendations for measures that the City of Rijeka should take to enhance the system of community-level self-government and increase citizen participation in the development of the local community.

The proceedings of the Citizens’ Assembly of Rijeka run for one month, from the beginning of November to the beginning of December 2023. During this period, members of the Citizens’ Assembly are meeting seven times, in discussions facilitated by the colleagues from a well-accredited local NGO with expertise in initiatives promoting active participation of citizens.

Upon the completion of the work of the Citizens’ Assembly of Rijeka, the adopted proposals and recommendations will be published on the City of Rijeka website and forwarded to all relevant stakeholders in the City of Rijeka for review and comments. A detailed response and opinion of the Mayor of the City of Rijeka on the proposals and recommendations will be sent to all members of the Citizens’ Assembly of Rijeka.

The positive elements of this experiment are:

* involvement of “ordinary” citizens, rather than of the activist élite;
* orientation to the future in a transversal approach, not bound by the usual “sectoral” policies.

The weaknesses of the experiment are:

* merely consultative role, with no obligations assumed by the City to follow-up;
* budgetary issues “missing in action”.

Zmergo and other environmental associations, and also local residents’ committees, await eagerly the outputs. The hope is that the citizens’ voice will stimulate higher investment in infrastructural actions for transformative change.