**12TH** "BEST PRACTICE IN CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION" Award
AWARD APPLICATION FORM

## 1ST PART: BASIC DATA

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Title of the experience: ***A More Enlightened Community, a More Participative Community*** | | |
| | | |
| Name of the city/region: *Valongo* | | |
| Country: Portugal | | |
| Institution presenting the candidacy: *Municipality of Valongo* | | |
| | | |
| Start date of the experience: ***January 2014*** | | |
| End date of the experience: ***Not applicable - ongoing*** | | |
| Type of candidacy | *New experience* | X |
| Type of experience | *Empowerment of Citizenship* | X |
| | *Others* | X |
| Objective of the experience | *To achieve higher levels of equality in terms of participation and to incorporate diversity as a criteria for inclusion* | X |
| | *Community empowerment* | X |
| | *To empower non-organised citizens* | X |
| | *To increase citizen's rights in terms of political participation* | X |
| | *To connect different tools of participation within a participatory democracy "ecosystem"* | X |
| | *To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the mechanisms of participatory democracy* | X |
| | *To improve the quality of public decision making through the mechanisms of participatory democracy* | X |
| | *To improve the evaluation and accountability of the mechanisms of participatory democracy* | X |
| Territorial area | *The whole territory* | X |
| Thematic area | *Governance* | X |
| | *Education* | X |
| | *Urban management* | X |
| | *New social movements and associationism* | X |
| | *Culture* | X |
| | *Local development* | X |
| | *Training/learning* | X |
| | *Social inclusion* | X |

# 12TH "BEST PRACTICE IN CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION" Award
AWARD APPLICATION FORM

## 2ND PART: DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE
## Objectives

### Main objective of the innovative experience:
*Choose one of the objectives mentioned in part 1, the one that you think is the most important.*

### Community Empowerment

*Having become aware of the population's growing sense of distrust in relation to the functioning of the local administration and the way in which scarce public resources are being managed, our main objectives are directed towards combatting increased illiteracy, particularly among people without schooling, and the absence of a culture of civic participation. It is civic commitment that we are taking on here, with each of our community members promoting greater transparency, closeness, rigour and interaction with citizens.*

*The main binding factor of community life, from our point of view, is trust and in order to bring that trust back to the community it is necessary to invest in building belief among all citizens and empowering them to be the best allies in our path towards good and democratic governance. Yet it is not enough to proclaim this passion and purpose; this is an investment that must be made on a daily basis, because we have to understand that democracy is like a garden that requires daily work and care.*
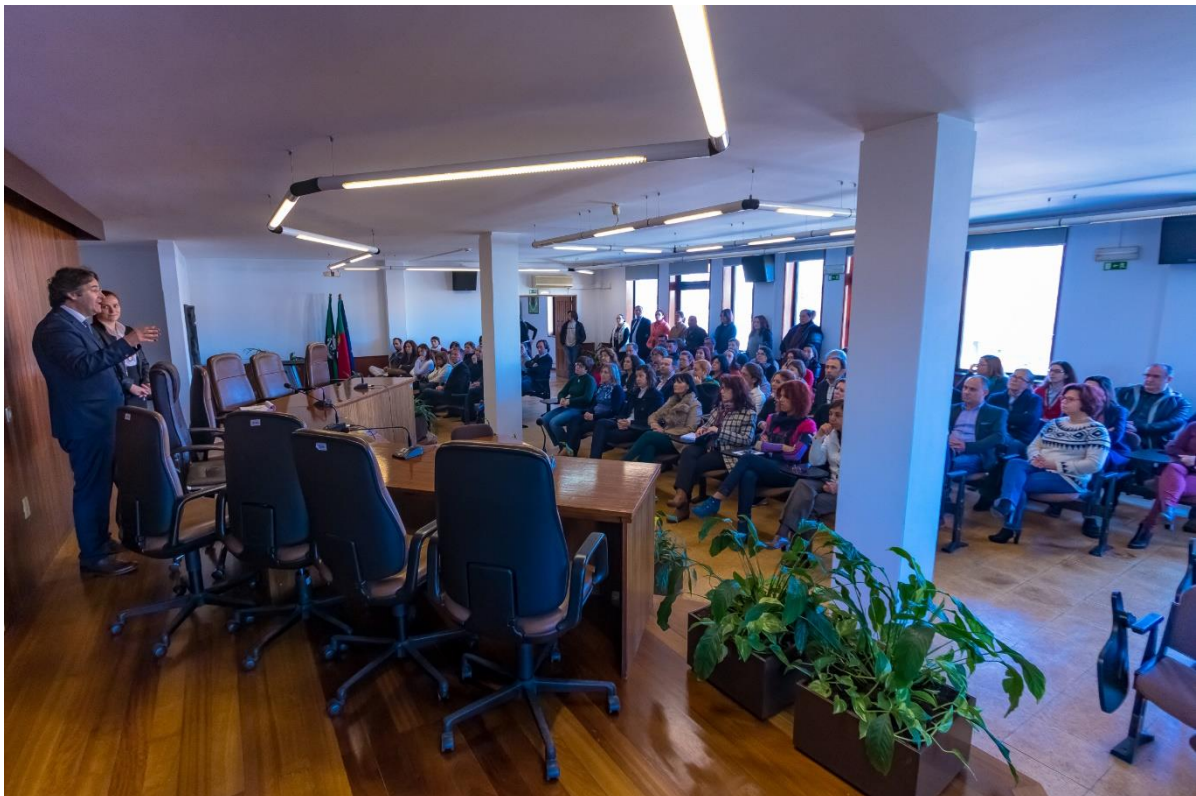


*As politician, we have the power, and consequently the responsibility, to be the mediators of this exemplary democracy. As politicians, we must act as "tenants" of this public and community responsibility, never as its owners or "landlords." Once we assume and accept this, citizens come to know their elected and political representatives, address them personally, share and communicate with them, learn to express themselves. They are given a voice and that voice will*

*be heard. A relationship of trust and hope will be developed, which will serve as the foundation of a healthy and sustainable local democracy.*

*This having been said, the objective is not to do something on behalf of the community, that is, not to do something for the community* per se*, but to have the community make it happen. And this should not be achieved on the basis of individual, isolated acts or initiatives, but by promoting meaningful contributions for an evolutionary society and working hand-in-hand with our citizens. To provide a response to these challenges, we aim to trigger a sense of empowerment within our citizens in order to ensure their continuous involvement and action, so that each individual can find their way and purpose within their community. Only through this continuous work will we be able to keep the democratic machine going.*



## How have you achieved this objective?

*We consider this to be an ongoing project, where the objective, albeit always the same, is not seen as a final destination that we are trying to reach, but as a philosophy for the overall process and the path that we are tracing.*

*This having been said, we have been putting this objective into practice by developing activities and events that promote the acquisition of knowledge and the skills needed to safeguard responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.*

*Not only that, but we are also fostering awareness among our citizens of topics such as human rights, gender equality, and promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence.*

*At the same time, other topics that we intend to explore better and develop further with our citizens include both identity and belonging and ownership. Only by providing information and making it accessible can people get to know their municipality, history and heritage. And only by learning about these aspects can the community discover, understand, respect and value the territory they live in. We cannot expect individuals to become aware of, care about and enjoy the space they live in if they do not know anything about it. A well informed citizen will respect and value these things, and will be able to communicate, transmit and transfuse those same values, mindset and information. This is how we have been working towards our objective.*

## To what extent has this objective been achieved?

# 12TH "BEST PRACTICE IN CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION" Award
## AWARD APPLICATION FORM

*Our greatest achievements are, without a doubt, the consequences and changes that can be observed in our citizens and community. We believe that everyone in society should play an active role, so we have developed our activities with people of all ages in mind. In this way we have registered an increase in participation by children as young as 6 (through the Participatory Youth Budget). The impact of this is very important to us, as we believe that education promoting citizenship and civic literacy should start at an early age.*

*This project and its initiatives have also been relevant because they have allowed us to establish a more direct contact with the public, enabling us to listen to their wishes, receive feedback, ideas and criticism.*

*Initiatives such as "TAClaro! – Transparency, Accountability And Communication In Local Public Administration", "Open Week of Accountability", the online publication of the "Transparency Sheets", the Participatory Youth Budget of Valongo "OPJV" and the Internal Municipality Participatory Budget "I Matter!" have also allowed for a more rigorous and detailed description of costs, the administrative process has become more clear and more transparent, for both the employees of the municipality and its citizens. This unlimited access to the files allows Citizens to understand what their elected representatives are doing, see whether they are focusing on the needs of the citizens and how the municipality is being managed overall.*
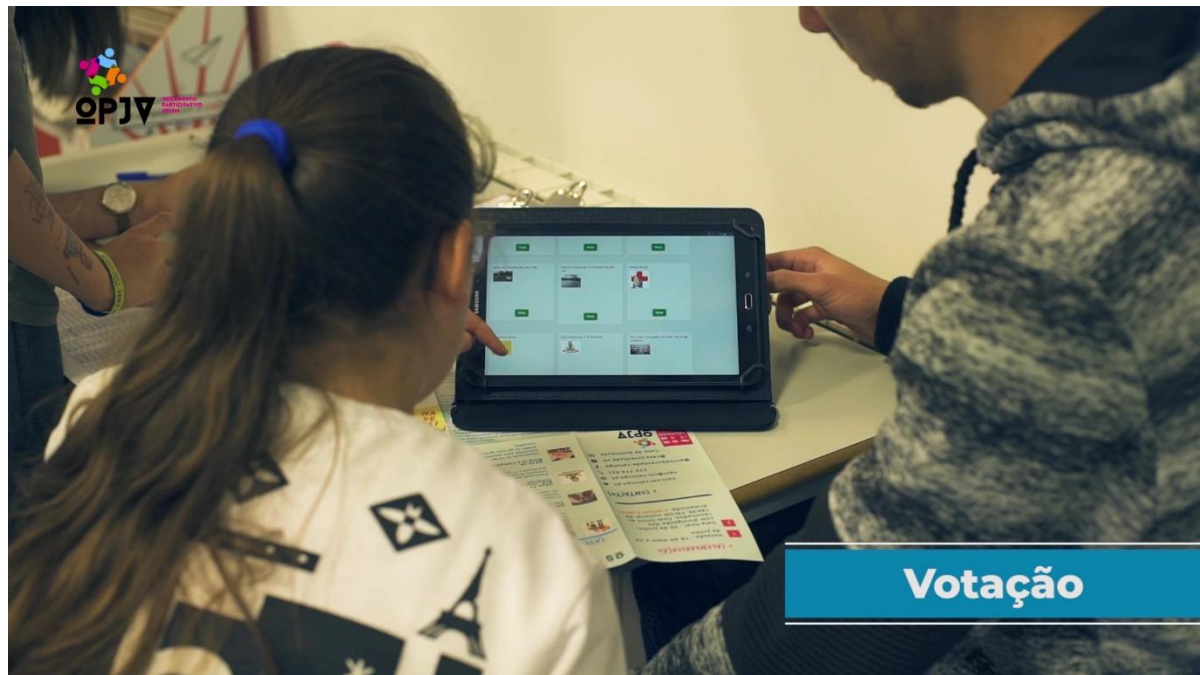


## Dimensions of the experience

### Which is the most innovative aspect of the experience?

*For us, the innovation lies in building and adapting the current methodologies and processes of governance hand-in-hand with our citizens. While this is not new in the history of democracy, our community, our society, the European Union are all confronting new challenges that will not necessarily require the input and/or intervention of the latest technology, but rather a return to more direct dialogue and a process of co-governance.*

*Through this approach, citizens have, little by little, gained more courage for getting involved and participating in sessions and activities promoted by the municipality. We know that many still shy away from anything that is technology related, or remain sceptical as a result of recent situations such as fake news or the leaking of personal information. While the internet and all its associated*

*technology has proven to be a powerful communication tool, at the same time it has also been exposed as a rather fragile instrument that has led citizens to adopt a more detached, "long-distance relationship" so to speak, with the municipality.*

*We want to dismantle that tendency of detachment by promoting activities that encourage, stimulate and support a more balanced relationship, both technology-wise and more "in loco", thus fostering a sense of trust and empowerment among our citizens.*

## To what extent is the procedure transferable?

*Our umbrella project "A More Enlightened Community, a More Participative Community" has been up and running for 4 years and is perfectly replicable, as long as it is adapted to the reality and necessities of the community and the municipality that decides to embrace it. All of the initiatives within this project are also transferable. Just as we have been striving for a more balanced communication with citizens, based on both technological and "face-to-face" contact, nowadays many other municipalities are investing in online channels of communication and information. However, just like us, they feel they are becoming distanced from their citizens and, as a result, we believe that many local authorities are, at some point, benefitting from the practice of this initiative. They may not be doing this consciously, or with the same level of transparency, but it is present.*



## Which has been the level of co-responsibility?

*The conception of this project was the result of local studies and brainstorming, between the different divisions of the municipality. After pinpointing the challenges and possibilities, we started with the implementation of a new accounting methodology and municipal budget, the accounting system itself and an SIG platform package, which were the catalysts of the evaluation process. Because, from this point on, the grand majority of the processes and activities are submitted and unfold from there. The budget, costs, numbers and overall information is then shared homogeneously with our co-works and citizens, allowing them to intervene.*
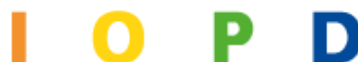
*The process then undergoes a "full circle", meaning each individual and their action have a differentiating weight in the whole and, if we elected representatives do not do our work as mediators of exemplary citizenship, and therefore exemplary democracy, we will already have contributed negatively to that shared circle of co-responsibility.*

*We have been able to measure the weight/level of co-responsibility by analysing the continuously growing numbers of participants in the different activities that have been promoted under this umbrella project. In the case of the Participatory Youth Budget of Valongo, although the number of projects, participants and votes have been registered and listed since its execution, with the introduction of the platform in 2015, we can inform you that, since then, 4,103 participants have been registered. This year alone, we have had 105 project proposals submitted by children, some as young as 6, young people and adults up to 30 years of age. The winning projects were conceived by the community and for the community.*

*And this is exactly what we want to convey, that each one of them plays an essential part in the community, whether they be the local gardener or an already reformed citizen, all of their contributions matter.*

## Which evaluation and accountability mechanisms were used?

*Those initiatives dedicated to transparency and the sharing of information, namely "TAClaro! – Transparency, Accountability And Communication In Local Public Administration", "Open Week of Accountability", the online publication of the "Transparency Sheets", the Participatory Youth Budget of Valongo "OPJV" and the Internal Municipality Participatory Budget "I Matter!", required the introduction of a new accounting and finance system.*

*This new system was implemented the same year we gave way to this project and, since then, has allowed for a better overview, for local representatives, employees of the municipality and citizens. The registration and description of costs is more rigorous and detailed. All of these initiatives have allowed for a more rigorous and detailed description of costs and, as a result, the administrative process has become clearer and more transparent.*

*The introduction of this culture of transparency and communication has had an impact on the technical actions taken by the local authority and the policy it pursues. Today the municipality, along with all of the services involved, are more disciplined and rigorous with regard to the organisation of resources, have a better understanding of the annual evolution of the budget/costs, have a more organized base for the information that we now use to support decisions, as well as an increased interaction with the communities of our municipality.*

*This is also reflected in our Participatory Youth Budget Platform, where both the number of projects submitted and the number of votes registered have grown each year.*