



**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
	Innovation on an existing experience	
Type of experience	Participatory budgeting	
	Urban planning	
	Council	
	Workshop/meeting for diagnose, monitoring, etc.	
	Audience/forum	
	Poll/referendum	
	Citizen jury	
	E-government/open government	
	Citizen initiative	
	Others (say which one): Empowerment of Citizenship	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



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Territorial area	All the territory	X
	District	
	Neighbourhood	
Thematic area	Governance	X
	Education	X
	Transport	
	Urban management	X
	Health	
	Security	
	Environment and/or urban agriculture	
	New social movements and associationism	X
	Culture	X
	Housing	
	Job creation	
	Decentralization	
	Local development	X
	Training/learning	X
	Economy and/or finances	
	Legal regulations	
	Social inclusion	X
	All	
Others		

2ND PART: DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE (4 pages maximum)

Objectives

Main objective of the innovative experience: Community empowerment

Having become aware of the growing sense of distrust of the population in relation to the functioning of the local administration and the way in which the scarce public resources are managed, our main objectives aim to combat the growing illiteracy, especially of people without schooling, and the lack of a culture of civic participation. It is a civic commitment that we take on with each of our community members, promoting more transparency, closeness, rigor and interaction with citizens.

The main cement of community life is, in our perspective, trust. And to bring that trust back to the community, it is necessary to invest in building that belief among all and empowering citizens to be the best allies in our path towards a good and democratic governance. But it is not enough to proclaim this passion and purpose; it is an investment that has to be done on a daily basis, because it is necessary to see democracy as a garden that requires daily work and care.

As politicians, 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, and never as owners or "landlords." Once we assume and accept this, citizens come to know the elected and political representatives, address them personally, share, communicate, and express themselves. They are given a voice and it is heard. A relationship of trust and hope is developed, which will be the foundation of a healthy and sustainable local democracy.



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This 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 having the community making it happen. And this should not be achieved through single, isolated acts or initiatives, but by promoting meaningful contributions for and evolutionary society, hand-in-hand with our citizens. To give response to these challenges, we aim to trigger a sense of empowerment within our citizens in order to insure continuous involvement and action, so that each individual can find their way and purpose within its community. Only through this continuous work can we keep the democratic machine going.

How have you achieved this objective?

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

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

Not only that, but also sensitize our citizens to the topics of human rights, gender equality, and promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence.

At the same time, other topics we intend to explore better and develop further with our citizens are identity, belonging and ownership. Only by providing and giving access to information, can people get to know its Municipality, history and patrimony. By learning about those aspects, only then can the community get to know, understand, respect and value the territory they live in. We cannot expect for individuals to be sensitized, to care and to enjoy their living space if they do not know anything about it. The citizen who is informed, respects and values these things, will be able to communicate, transmit and transfuse those very same values, mindset and information. This is how we have been working towards our objective.

To what extent has this objective been achieved?

Our greatest achievements obtained are, without a doubt, the consequences and changes seen in our citizens and community. We believe that in society everyone should have an active role, so we have developed our activities for people of all ages in mind. With this, we have registered an increase in participation from children as young as 6 years (through the Participatory Youth Budget). This impact is very important to us, as we believe the education towards citizenship and civic literacy should start early on.

This project and its initiatives have also been relevant because they have allowed us to establish a more direct contact with the public, thus listening to their wishes, 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 transparent both to the employees of the Municipality, as well as its citizens. This unlimited access to the files, allows Citizens understand and see whether their elected representatives are focusing on the needs of the citizens and how it is being managed in 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. This is not new in the history of democracy, however, our community, our society, the European Union, is confronting new challenges which not necessarily require the input and/or intervention of the latest technology, but the return to a more direct dialogue and process of co-governance.



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Through this approach, citizens have little by little gained more courage in getting involved and participate in sessions and activities promoted by the Municipality. We know that many still shy away from anything technology related or remain sceptical due to recent situations such as the fake news, and leakage of personal information. While the internet and all its associated technology proves to be a powerful communication tool, at the same time it proves to be a fragile instrument, as it motivates citizens to keep 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 technologically-wise, both more "in loco" – thus fostering a sense of trust and empowerment with our citizens.

To what extent is the procedure transferable?

Our umbrella project "A More Enlightened Community, a More Participative Community" has 4 years of existence 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 transferable as well. Just as we have been betting on a balanced communication with citizens both through technology and "face-to-face", nowadays many investments in online channels of communication and information are being made by other municipalities as well; but just like us, they feel detached from their citizens. As such, we believe many local authorities practice, at some point, this initiative. They may not do it consciously and not on the same level of transparency, but it is present.

Why do you consider that the experience is feasible?

As mentioned throughout our description and presentation, we became aware of the high levels of civic ignorance prevalent these days, as well as low percentages of votes, growing distrust towards politics and the way governments work. "Low Cost Politics" or "Fast Food Democracy", that is, populist solutions that explore collective and individual fears and inequalities in a very superficial and dangerous ways, have also become more common and popular. These solutions may, on a first appearance, seem more alluring, however, they are often simplified answers to very complex and sensitive questions. These situations, mixed with more global issues such as misinformation ("fake news"), between many others, have contributed to a low percentage of citizen participation and involvement. Despite our previous efforts to contribute to happier citizens, the feedback received in return was reduced.

The opinions and sentiments shared by our internal/municipal employees were also taken into consideration – the work methodology applied until then was described as unbalanced and a lack of communication between the many different divisions.

Taking all these shared opinions, studies and brainstorming together, with this umbrella project we managed to establish a more direct contact with the public (staff and non-staff), thus listening to their wishes, feedback, ideas and criticism.

Initiatives included in this umbrella project 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 and the Internal Municipality Participatory Budget have allowed for a more rigorous and detailed description and share of costs, the administrative process has become more clear and transparent both to the employees of the Municipality and its citizens. This unlimited access to the files allows citizens to understand and see whether their elected representatives are focusing on the needs of the citizens and how it is being managed in overall. The experience, although ongoing, has already proven to have impact in the community, be it in terms of a more homogeneous internal governance, be it in terms of citizen involvement.

How has the experience been coordinated with other actors and processes?

Aside the constant and transversal work with the different Divisions of the Municipality and its co-workers, we promote yearly public meetings open to the community, where the governance



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methodology, budget, activities, between others, are discussed. We also work with local Associations (we organize at least 4 meetings yearly where the members of all local Associations are invited). In these meetings/sessions we discuss the activities that are being planned for the coming semester or year, and, depending on the feedback, the expressed necessities and opinions, we adapt those events and perspectives.

Not only that, but because we are always aiming to learn and grow with and through this project, we have also joined several other Networks, one of which is the National Network of Participatory Municipalities, of which we are members and have, in this mandate, assumed Presidency.

Which has been the level of co-responsibility?

The conception of this project resulted from local studies and brainstorming between the several 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 a SIG platform package, which were the catalyst of the evaluation process. This because, from that moment 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.

From then on, process undergoes a "full circle", meaning each individual and their action have a differentiating weight in the overall – if we, elected representatives, do not do our work as mediators of exemplary citizens 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 several promoted activities under this umbrella project: in case of the Participatory Youth Budget of Valongo, although the number of projects, participants and votes were registered and listed since its execution, with the introduction of the platform in 2015, we are able to communicate that, since then, 4103 participants have been registered. This year alone, we've had 105 project proposals submitted by children as young as 6 years to young people and adults up to their 30 years of age. The winning projects were conceived by the community for the community.

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

Which evaluation and accountability mechanisms were used?

The initiatives dedicated to transparency and share 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 has since then allowed for a better overview, both for the local representatives, employees of the municipality and citizens. The registration and description of costs is more rigorous and detailed. All of these initiatives allow for a more rigorous and detailed description of costs, the administrative process has become more clear and transparent.

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



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