

Toolkit Citizen Participation

We believe that participation strengthens local government, contributes to local development, and improves conditions of the habitat. It is therefore of great importance that expertise on citizen participation is incorporated in regular decision-making procedures. Compiling and distributing a toolkit of policy instruments in this field – developed in various countries and regions – may contribute to a more sustainable level of citizen participation in local government as well as promote a dialogue between local authorities and civil society organisations.

This Toolkit, a database filled with experiences of participation in local decision-making, aims to contribute towards the development of a positive attitude of local authorities vis-à-vis citizen participation. Presenting the advantages of a participatory approach and coaching local authorities and citizen groups in developing such an approach will do this. One of the main principles underlying our philosophy is reciprocity. Local authorities and civil society organisations everywhere can learn from each other's experiences in the field of citizen participation.

Some important aspects of participation which our website focuses on are:

- The diverse set of actors involved in citizen participation. This includes local government actors (eg. The municipal council, the executive, and civil servants) and civil society actors (NGO's, CBO's, individual citizens).
- The level of engagement of participants. This is often characterised by a 'participation ladder' that lists various forms of participation on a scale from weak to strong, ranging from quasi-participatory approaches to full citizen control. In this website, policy instruments that genuinely enable citizens to influence the decision-making process will be considered.

What makes this Toolkit so special?

- It is the first Toolkit aimed at both public and civil organisations, and co-operatively developed by both sectors. This co-operation creates an inspiring encounter between these two sectors; through the Toolkit, civil servants can learn ideas from civil society members, and organisations and social activists can learn from urban planners. This offers new and innovative ways of learning.
- The internet establishes new low cost ways of information exchange at the global level. The internet and this Toolkit also allow an exchange of experiences and ideas between different regions and cultures in the world.
- The Toolkit will not only present best practices, but will also include difficult experiences. In each case there will be an analysis of critical factors of success and failure.
- This Toolkit is available in English, French and Spanish. We are looking into ways of broadening the language base.
- The Toolkit we present to you is made by practitioners (and intended) for practitioners.
- Last but not least: we aim to stimulate networking through our site. Please use the contact addresses and links provided throughout our site, join in the discussions, and consider joining as a Participant!

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<http://www.toolkitparticipation.nl/index.php>