

# SCHOOL ON PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY



**ENGAGE CITIZENS IN  
DECISION MAKING**  
Council of Europe  
School on  
Participatory Democracy

**ATHENS, GREECE**  
4-8 December 2024

Prepared by  
ISIG  
Institute of International  
Sociology

**2024**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Council of Europe School on Participatory Democracy is a flagship initiative aimed at strengthening the principles and practices of participatory and deliberative democracy across Europe. By equipping public authorities and civil society organisations (CSOs) with the skills and tools to engage citizens in decision-making, the School promotes inclusive governance and builds trust between institutions and communities.

Through interactive learning, the programme introduces participants to Council of Europe standards, innovative tools, and best practices in citizen engagement. Each edition of the School focuses on creating a network of practitioners who can apply these principles in their local contexts while contributing to a broader European movement for participatory democracy.



From 4 to 8 December 2024, the School on Participatory Democracy held its Athens edition, bringing together civil servants and CSO representatives from Greece to explore the theory and practice of participatory policymaking.

Organised by the Division of Democratic Institutions and Civil Society of the Council of Europe, in cooperation with Andreas Papandreu Foundation and Symbiosis SPS, and the support of the Hellenic Adult Education Association and the Symi Network, this edition was designed as an immersive and dynamic learning experience.

Under the theme “Engage Citizens in Local Decision-Making!”, the Athens edition offered a mix of presentations, interactive workshops, case studies, and discussions. The programme introduced participants to key Council of Europe instruments, including the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation and the Civil Participation in Decision-Making Toolkit, and specific tools such as CivicLab, UChange, Citizens’ Assemblies, Participatory Public Space Planning and DECIDIM.



## PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Cornelia **PERLE**  
Council of Europe



### ONLINE PREPARATION

On 21 November 2024, participants attended an online session introducing participatory democracy concepts, discussing challenges, and completing a task to align the training with their experiences.



### IN-PERSON TRAINING

The five-day Athens (4-8 December 2024) training combined theory and practice, focusing on inclusion, public consultations, and key issues like climate action, led by experts sharing best practices and case studies.



### FOLLOW-UP AND NEXT STEPS

A Training Needs Assessment (Jan 2025) will shape tailored training sessions from February to June, concluding with a closure meeting in Summer 2025.



# COUNCIL OF EUROPE STANDARDS AND TOOLS

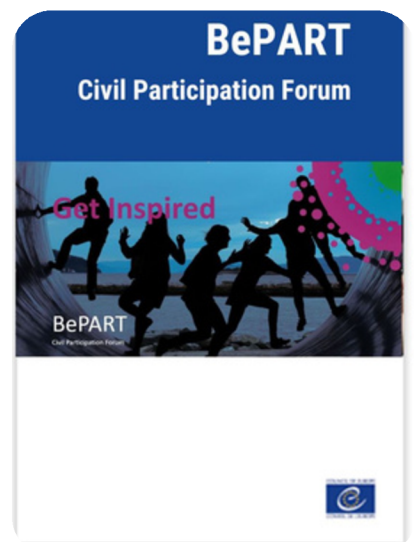
## Civil participation: a foundation for democracy

Citizen participation is vital for a healthy democracy, fostering trust, dialogue, and better decision-making.

The Council of Europe provides standards for member states regarding participatory and deliberative democracy and practical innovative tools to bridge gaps between citizens, NGOs, and public authorities, ensuring equal opportunities for all voices, especially marginalised groups.

These tools strengthen democratic systems by promoting open dialogue, sustainable reforms, and trust in institutions, making civil participation the cornerstone of renewed governance.

The Council of Europe provides expert, methodological, consultative and advocacy support in the implementation of the civil participation instruments listed below and notably **Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on deliberative democracy**.



# ATHEN'S EDITION - THE WORK SESSIONS

## WEDNESDAY, 4TH DECEMBER 2024

### Session 1 – Welcome Addresses

Kick-off the event with insights and inspiration from key speakers.

*Speakers: George Papandreou, Despina Syrri, Cornelia Perle*

### Session 2 – Council of Europe School on Participatory Democracy

Discover the concept, objectives, and standards of participatory democracy.

*Speaker: Cornelia Perle*

### Session 3 – Participatory Democracy in the Greek Context

Explore the unique challenges and opportunities for participatory democracy in Greece.

*Speaker: Alexis Kokkos*

### Session 4 – The Council of Europe Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation – Part 1

Learn about the key principles and practical applications of civil participation.

*Speaker: Daniele Del Bianco*

## THURSDAY, 5TH DECEMBER 2024

### Session 5 – Civil Participation in Decision Making Toolkit

Dive into the tools and strategies for effective civil participation.

*Speaker: Ramona Velea*

## FRIDAY, 6TH DECEMBER 2024

### Session 6 – CivicLab Consultation Tool

Discover an innovative methodology for fostering inclusive consultations.

*Speaker: Dako Muradashvili*

### Session 7 – UChange Game Methodology

Engage with this dynamic participatory tool through simulation and hands-on learning.

*Speaker: Mellis Türker*



## SATURDAY, 7TH DECEMBER 2024

### Session 8 – Citizens' Assemblies

Learn how to design and apply citizens' assemblies for inclusive policymaking.

*Speaker: Nabila Abbas*

### Session 9 – Public Consultations and Citizen Engagement in Public Space Planning

Explore strategies to effectively engage citizens in shaping public spaces.

*Speaker: Natalya Chernogub*

## SUNDAY, 8TH DECEMBER 2024

### SESSION 10 – DECIDIM

Discover the opportunities of this digital platform for empowering citizen participation.

*Speaker: Ljubisa Vrencev*

### Session 11 – Application of Participatory Democracy Tools

Collaborate in group work to apply tools and create actionable solutions.

**8 trainers**



**28 participants**



# FRAMING CIVIL PARTICIPATION IN GREECE

Athens, Greece 2024



Participatory democracy in Greece faces significant cultural and institutional challenges. Citizens often feel disengaged, with widespread mistrust in political and social institutions, as highlighted by a 2024 study from diaNEOsis. Factors such as economic insecurity, demographic decline, and climate change exacerbate feelings of disconnection.

Trust in government and political institutions is alarmingly low, with positive views not exceeding 9%.

Cultural traditions also hinder participatory practices. Greek society historically prioritises in-group loyalty, rooted in the Ottoman era, fostering mistrust towards out-groups and innovation. This social dynamic, coupled with bureaucratic inefficiencies and resistance to reform, reinforces disengagement from public affairs.

However, an emerging "reformist culture" inspired by Enlightenment ideals and liberalism seeks to challenge clientelism and promote responsible citizenship.



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## CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR CIVIL PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The session focused on the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation by the Council of Europe, offering participants an in-depth understanding of the principles of participation—such as transparency, inclusivity, and accountability. Through a series of group exercises and individual reflections, these principles were discussed not only as theoretical guidelines but as practical tools for monitoring and evaluating participation practices.

### MAIN RESULTS AND TAKEAWAYS



Participants gained valuable insights into applying the principles of participation to real-world contexts.

The session highlighted the importance of these principles as benchmarks for assessing participation efforts and ensuring their sustainability.

### KEY MESSAGES INCLUDED



- Recognising the values of participation principles as essential for fostering reflective and effective participatory processes.
- Understanding how to use these principles as concrete points for monitoring and evaluating participatory practices.
- Exploring methods to enhance the long-term sustainability of participation initiatives through continuous assessment and improvement.



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### TRAINER



**Daniele Del Bianco**, PhD in Sociology, is a university lecturer and director of ISIG with over 20 years of experience in international and public governance issues. Specialised in participatory approaches to governance and organisational leadership, he is an experienced trainer dedicated to fostering meaningful civil participation.

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## CIVIL PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING TOOLKIT

The session introduced the Civil Participation in Decision-Making Toolkit, emphasising its role in promoting meaningful strategic planning for stakeholder engagement and the evaluation of civil participation efforts. The toolkit equips public authorities and civil society organisations (CSOs) with practical methods to integrate inclusive, transparent, and impactful participation into decision-making processes.

### MAIN RESULTS AND TAKEAWAYS



Participants gained practical knowledge of stakeholder mapping and community evaluation, learning how to apply these tools to design more effective participatory processes.

The session demonstrated how the toolkit supports evidence-based, equitable, and results-driven governance.

### KEY MESSAGES INCLUDED



- Categorise and evaluate stakeholders based on relevance and interest to ensure targeted engagement strategies.
- Assess social, economic, and political factors to identify readiness for participation and tailor processes accordingly.
- Establish mechanisms to assess the impact and outcomes of civil participation efforts systematically.



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### TRAINER



**Ramona Velea**, MSc in sociology, is Deputy Director at the Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia. With extensive experience in participatory processes and resilience practices, she has contributed to multiple European projects focusing on community engagement, disaster management, and strategic planning.

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## CIVIC LAB

The session introduced participants to the Civic Lab methodology, a structured, results-oriented participatory process aimed at creating actionable proposals for decisions, policies, and strategies. It emphasised the importance of stakeholder collaboration, bringing together public authorities, individuals, NGOs, and businesses to exchange opinions and build consensus. The methodology's adaptable approach was highlighted, with examples of its on-site and online applications.

### MAIN RESULTS AND TAKEAWAYS



Participants gained both theoretical insights and practical skills in organising consultation events. They explored the methodology's stages and learned about its requirements for achieving successful outcomes.

### KEY MESSAGES INCLUDED



- A methodology ensuring representative and inclusive participation.
- Digital Impact Analysis: A platform to develop, analyse, and predict decision outcomes effectively.
- Adaptable to diverse audiences and settings, whether on-site or online.
- Empowers informed, inclusive decision-making through advanced tools.



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## TRAINER



**Darejan (Dako) Muradashvili**, Head of the Branch Office at the Civil Society Institute in Georgia, has over 15 years of experience in community engagement. Combining her philology background and international fellowships, she is committed to empowering communities and fostering participatory governance.

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## UCHANGE GAME

The session focused on the UChange Game, demonstrating its integration with participatory budgeting and other tools. Emphasis was placed on the tool's capacity to include marginalised groups, develop advocacy strategies, and generate actionable policy recommendations. Participants explored city- and county-level adaptations, along with both online and offline versions. Group exercises deepened their understanding, and a case study from Istanbul illustrated the tool's effectiveness.

### MAIN RESULTS AND TAKEAWAYS



Participants learned to align policy recommendations with critical budget cycles and developed realistic time plans. The session highlighted key steps for achieving effective, sustainable policymaking.

### KEY MESSAGES INCLUDED



- Engaging stakeholders through a bottom-up approach.
- Aligning activities with public budget cycles to optimise resource use.
- Following the UChange cycle to address inclusivity and sustainability.
- Developing advocacy strategies to turn recommendations into actionable policies.
- Using pre- and post-evaluations and SMART problem definitions to strengthen processes.



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## TRAINER



**Melis Türker**, CoE expert, has extensive experience in governance, civic engagement, and sustainable development, having worked with UNDP, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe. She has authored more than 10 publications, including her thesis on sustainable smart cities in Istanbul.

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## CITIZENS ASSEMBLIES

The session focused on Citizens' Assemblies as an innovative mechanism for fostering participation in governance. Participants delved into the structure, advantages, and possible applications of citizens' assemblies across different levels of governance and at various stages of the policy-making cycle. Through interactive group work, participants explored key questions, such as suitable topics for assemblies, how to frame questions for citizens effectively, and how to ensure inclusive recruitment processes.

### MAIN RESULTS AND TAKEAWAYS



Participants gained a nuanced understanding of citizens' assemblies and their role in enhancing participatory democracy. Discussions emphasised practical strategies for implementing assemblies and the broader implications of their outcomes for governance. Citizens' Assemblies were acknowledged as a vital tool for inclusive governance that brings diverse perspectives into decision-making processes.



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### KEY MESSAGES INCLUDED



- Understanding how assemblies can be effectively integrated at different governance levels (local, regional, national) and stages of the policy-making cycle, from problem identification to policy evaluation.
- Highlighting the importance of ensuring transparency, accountability, and trust in assembly processes to secure legitimacy and public buy-in.

### TRAINER



**Nabila Abbas**, PhD in Political Science, is the Research Manager at the Federation for Innovation in Democracy Europe. With a strong academic background, she has taught courses on deliberative democracy and citizen participation and her expertise extends to advising on participatory processes that bridge the gap between citizens and policy makers.

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## PARTICIPATORY SPACE PLANNING

The session focused on equipping participants with practical knowledge and tools for conducting public consultations on urban planning. Trainer Nataly Chornogub facilitated a hands-on workshop, using real public spaces in Athens—Baroutadiko Park and Tritsis Park—as case studies. Participants applied a structured methodology, progressing through pre-consultation, consultation, and post-consultation stages to address key urban challenges.

### MAIN RESULTS AND TAKEAWAYS



Participants gained practical experience in applying consultation methodologies, including stakeholder identification, engagement strategies, and budget prioritisation.

The activity provided actionable insights into balancing diverse stakeholder needs within real-world constraints.

### KEY MESSAGES INCLUDED



- Identify and rank key stakeholders to ensure inclusive consultations.
- Tailor formats to stakeholder needs, from focus groups to online surveys.
- Use visual tools to map proposed improvements and address community priorities.
- Prioritise features based on realistic financial constraints.



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### TRAINER



**Nataly Chornogub** is an experienced facilitator specialising in participatory urban planning and citizen engagement. She has contributed to innovative methodologies in public consultations as part of the Council of Europe project Promoting Civil Participation in Decision-Making in Ukraine.

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## DECIDIM - DEMOCRACY DIGITAL PARTICIPATION TOOL

The session focused on the DECIDIM democracy digital participation tool, offering participants in-depth understanding of the rational, modalities and step by step design of the DECIDIM platform, including a demonstration of the pilot platform set up by Symbiosis to foster participation of migrants in decision making at local level in Heraklion, Crete.

### MAIN RESULTS AND TAKEAWAYS



Participants gained valuable insights and personal experience in using the platform and information on possibilities and main challenges for its functioning, both on the technical level and its usability.

This session empowered participants to get involved in a multi-stage process designed to engage citizens in the policymaking cycle.

### KEY MESSAGES INCLUDED



- How to use DECIDIM for designing effective participatory processes.
- Understanding how to use DECIDIM for monitoring and evaluating participatory practices.



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### TRAINER



**Ljubisa Vrecek** is co-founder of Symbiosis-Council of Europe School of Political Studies in Greece. He has extensive experience with national and international NGOs in various Balkan countries, focusing on local development, intercultural communication, peace building and forced displacement. Vrecek worked with UNOPS, UNDP, Cooperazione Italiana and the International Organisation for Migration.

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# CONTEXTUALISING THE TOOLS



## CULTURAL MENTORSHIP FOR MIGRANTS

The Cultural Mentorship for Migrants project aims to foster inclusion and empowerment within migrant communities through structured and participatory initiatives.

Key objectives include establishing an Advisory Group within the first two months to guide the project's development, ensuring a representativity level of at least 50% within one year, and maintaining openness and accessibility to the broader migrant community through annual evaluations.

Long-term sustainability is prioritised, with plans for project continuity beyond the three-year mark. The initiative also integrates a comprehensive evaluation process, conducted both ex ante and ex post, to assess its impact and effectiveness over time.



## A7 FOR CULTURE: DEMOCRACY FOR CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The A7 for Culture project aims to foster cultural development through democratic principles and community-led participation.

By enhancing participatory decision-making and municipal budgeting, the project ensures greater representation and trust between the community and local authorities, with a defined percentage of the municipal budget to be co-designed.

The initiative prioritises promoting local cultural activities through open, accessible, and non-discriminatory approaches, strengthening the sense of belonging and unity in diversity at the city level.

Through the active organisation of cultural events and participatory policymaking, A7 for Culture aims to renew cultural identity, build local key actors, and lay the foundation for sustainable, community-driven cultural development.

# CONTEXTUALISING THE TOOLS



## YOUTH SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT CENTRE

The project aims to address the specific needs of young people through targeted initiatives focused on skills development, inclusivity, and civic engagement.

The centre will be shaped by a horizontal needs assessment, ensuring that programmes reflect the youth's own priorities. Key objectives include delivering workshops, training sessions, and fostering participation, with measurable outcomes in terms of youth involvement in forums, councils, and advocacy campaigns.

Ultimately, the initiative seeks to empower youth as active citizens, fostering institutional trust, leadership, and advocacy to combat political apathy and promote fairness within the community.



## THEIR VOICE: CREATING VALUE FROM AND FOR FIRST RESPONDERS ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Their Voice project focuses on strengthening the role of first responders in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) through multi-stakeholder engagement, awareness-raising, and policy optimisation.

Key objectives include raising awareness among national decision-makers, such as the Ministries of Family, Civil Protection, and Health, through a series of consultation meetings within the first year, involving experts and departmental heads.

Over 18 months, the Steering Committee will oversee the creation of a White Paper—a set of expert-led recommendations to optimise victim support policies and improve response effectiveness. By fostering dialogue, collaboration, and actionable solutions, Their Voice empowers stakeholders to drive systemic change in combating gender-based violence.

# EVALUATION



## TRAINING CONTENT AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The training achieved its goal of enhancing participants' understanding of participatory democracy and its practical applications. With an average satisfaction rating of 4.5/5, most attendees reported an increase in their knowledge and felt equipped to implement the methodologies in their professional environments.

While the content was generally praised, a few respondents indicated a desire for more detailed exploration of advanced topics, particularly in the application of tools to unique local challenges.



## INTERACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Participants highly valued the interactive nature of the sessions, with group activities and practical exercises receiving ratings above 4.4/5. The collaborative approach fostered meaningful connections between civil society actors and public authorities, promoting mutual understanding and shared learning.

Suggestions for improvement included providing additional time for peer-to-peer exchange and creating more opportunities for participants to co-design solutions during workshops.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Participants highlighted specific tools—notably Citizens' Assemblies and the Civil Participation Toolkit—as methods they intended to integrate into their projects. Common themes included a focus on inclusivity, fostering dialogue, and enhancing transparency in decision-making processes.

Several respondents shared that the training reinforced their confidence in designing participatory processes tailored to their communities. However, challenges such as resource constraints and organisational readiness were identified as potential barriers to implementation.



## OVERALL SATISFACTION

Facilitators were highly praised for their expertise and supportive approach, earning an average score of 4.7/5. The balance between theoretical and practical components was appreciated, with participants noting that it struck a good balance between learning and application.

Some feedback suggested offering more in-depth follow-up sessions to delve into specific tools and methodologies. This could enhance long-term impact and support participants in overcoming implementation challenges.



# A FOCUS ON THE TOOLS

## Civil Participation Toolkit



**Adaptability:** Strong adaptability to diverse local contexts.

This toolkit emerged as a high rated tool, appreciated for its clarity during the training and its immediate applicability. Participants found it highly relevant to their work, especially in improving participatory decision-making processes.

## CivicLab



**Adaptability:** Ease of use in all context

Participants highlighted the tool's practicality and its alignment with their organisational needs. Suggestions were made for deeper training on advanced features to maximise its utility.

## UChange Game Methodology



**Adaptability:** Challenges in adapting to local contexts.

This methodology was viewed as engaging but less immediately applicable compared to other tools. Some participants suggested integrating it as a supplementary rather than primary tool.

## Citizens' Assemblies



**Adaptability:** Well-suited to local contexts.

This method was highly valued for its structured approach to engaging diverse stakeholders in decision-making. Many participants noted that it was particularly impactful in fostering inclusive dialogue.

## Public Space Planning



**Adaptability:** Moderate adaptability to local contexts.

Rated positively overall, this tool's practical impact was seen as dependent on specific community dynamics. Participants appreciated its potential for urban development but suggested more case studies for better contextualisation.

## DECIDIM



**Adaptability:** Mixed feedback, indicating challenges in universal application.

Participants found DECIDIM to be innovative but noted that its technical nature might require additional support for effective use. Training sessions could benefit from addressing barriers to implementation.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The School on Participatory Democracy successfully delivered a well-rounded programme, equipping participants with valuable tools and insights.

The Athens edition welcomed 28 participants, equally split between civil servants and CSO representatives. These participants were selected based on their roles and potential to implement participatory processes within their institutions or communities.

The Athens edition of the School on Participatory Democracy not only provided participants with practical tools but also fostered a community of like-minded practitioners committed to advancing participatory governance.

This edition continues the Council of Europe's broader mission to promote inclusive, transparent, and accountable policymaking across Europe.

To build on this success, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Expand customisation:** Tailor future training to address specific regional challenges, incorporating localised examples and advanced modules.
- **Deepen focus on tool application:** Provide additional hands-on sessions for tools like DECIDEM, CivicLab and UChange to improve their applicability.
- **Enhance engagement opportunities:** Introduce more peer-led discussions and collaborative problem-solving workshops to maximise participant interaction.
- **Strengthen follow-up support:** Develop post-training resources, such as webinars or coaching, to address challenges in implementing participatory methods.

By refining these areas, future iterations of the programme can further empower participants and enhance their capacity to promote participatory democracy in their respective contexts.





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■ The Council of Europe School on Participatory Democracy is a flagship initiative dedicated to strengthening participatory and deliberative democracy across Europe. By equipping public authorities and civil society organisations (CSOs) with practical tools and skills, the School fosters inclusive governance, trust-building, and citizen engagement in decision-making.

■ Organised by the Division of Democratic Institutions and Civil Society of the Council of Europe, in cooperation with Andreas Papandreo Foundation and Symbiosis SPS, and the support of the Hellenic Adult Education Association and the Sympy Network, the Athens edition took place from 4 to 8 December 2024. Under the theme “Engage Citizens in Local Decision-Making!”, the programme featured interactive workshops, case studies, and discussions, introducing key instruments such as the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation and the Civil Participation in Decision-Making Toolkit.

■ This immersive learning experience highlighted innovative tools—including CivicLab, UChange, Citizens’ Assemblies, Participatory Public Space Planning, and the Digital Democracy Accelerator—designed to bridge gaps between citizens, NGOs, and public authorities. By promoting dialogue and equal opportunities, the School strengthens democratic systems and empowers participants to implement sustainable reforms, making citizen participation the cornerstone of effective and inclusive governance.

**The Council of Europe** is the leading human rights organisation on the continent. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union.

The **Division of Democratic Institutions and Civil Society of the Council of Europe** promotes inclusive, transparent, and participatory democratic governance. It supports collaboration between public authorities, civil society organisations, and citizens, providing tools and expertise to enhance civic engagement and institutional trust. By fostering dialogue and sustainable reforms, the Division strengthens democratic systems and ensures all voices, especially marginalised ones, are heard in decision-making.

