

Participation mechanisms

How to make sure your idea is heard and successfully implemented? Define your goal, evaluate the available resources (time, human resources, technical resources) and your strengths/weaknesses - this way you will understand which participation mechanism is most suitable for implementing a specific idea.

Social – Promote on social media

Social media allows you to attract wide attention, interest, advertise, popularize ideas, start debates, inform, organize, etc. Messages on social media influence public opinion and beliefs, and they can also be a very powerful tool for creating pressure on decision-makers. Social networks are global, and also provide diverse forms of messages.

Pros

- Quickly create messages, easily change and customize them.
- Possibility to reach a wide target audience.
- Ability to focus on a specific target audience.
- Low cost.
- Multimodal messages.

Cons

- Interpretation of the message by the recipient, especially in the uncritically thinking part of society, lack of media literacy.
- Inability to control published content, its distribution, and the influence of manipulators.
- Low attention span.
- A large amount of information, messages are changing rapidly.
- The impact of algorithms.
- Formation of echo chambers.

Example

#MeToo is a social movement against sexual violence, sexual harassment, and rape. The movement encourages people to share their experiences using the hashtag #MeToo.

The phrase was originally used on social media around 2006, but the hashtag #MeToo has been used since 2017 to draw attention to the scale of the problem. After multiple sexual assault allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein were made public in October 2017, the hashtag for the movement began to spread rapidly on social media.

Questions

1. What is the purpose of using social media?
 - a) For the election of the Prime Minister
 - b) To make legislative changes
 - c) To promote or support ideas**

2. What is needed to use social media as a participatory tool?
 - a) Must be educated as a journalist or marketing specialist
 - b) Must have a social media account and basic digital skills**
 - c) Become an influencer

3. Which statement is true?
 - a) Social media offers the use of hashtags, visualizations, symbols that reflect support for an idea, problem**
 - b) Social media content in the European Union is censored, according to the president's beliefs
 - c) Social media messages are informative and do not influence people's opinions and actions

Discussion – Starting a public discussion

A discussion is a face-to-face or online conversation in which two or more people express and listen to each other's opinions, ideas, and arguments on a specific topic. The purpose of a discussion can be various: to solve a problem, to reach a common conclusion, to gain a deeper understanding of a topic, or simply to share experiences and opinions. Discussions are one of the basic elements of a democratic society, which reduces the polarization of society. Methods similar to discussion are debates, discussion circles, etc., which ensure conversation and exchange of opinions.

Pros

- Diverse shapes and channels.
- The opportunity to engage a specific target audience.
- The opportunity to discuss issues in depth, to react to what is heard.
- Personality, loyalty, responsibility.
- Reducing stereotypes, prejudice, polarization.

- Changing the beliefs and actions of those involved.
- Increasing public knowledge and awareness.

Cons

- Lack of democratic literacy in society, disrespect, unwillingness to hear a confrontational opinion.
- Time resource.
- Insufficiently safe environment.
- Formation of echo chambers.
- You must be a skilled discussion leader, eliminating logical errors and manipulation.
- Lack of public knowledge.
- The dominance of emotions over facts.

Example

Currently, discussions are taking place in society about the construction of wind farms, various climate-related issues, animal rights, etc. Discussions are often initiated by NGOs in the specific field, which encourage the public to actively express their opinions on specific issues.

Questions

1. What is the purpose of discussions?

- a) **Ensuring democratic processes**
- b) To impose one's own opinion
- c) For immediate results

2. What are the prerequisites for the discussion?

- a) We criticize each other and use positions of power in conversation
- b) We convince ourselves of our righteousness
- c) **We communicate respectfully, even if we disagree with the other person's opinion.**

3. Which statement is true?

- a) **Discussions with dissenters are a way to break out of the filter bubble**
- b) Discussions are most often a waste of time
- c) Only anonymous discussions are meaningful, because then people say what they really think.

Action - do an action, demonstration, picket, flash mob

The purpose of the action is to draw public attention to a specific problem. The purpose of the action determines the type of action - support or protest action. Actions (for example, demonstrations, flash mobs, pickets) are a way to publicly express one's opinion, trying to influence public opinion or government policy, or participants take direct action, implementing the desired changes themselves.

Pros

- Effective, unifying, engaging.
- The opportunity to achieve widespread media attention, especially with visually strong messages.
- What remains in memory is slogans and events.

Cons

- An uncontrollable crowd.
- Possible violations of safety regulations.
- Formation of echo chambers.

Example



Freedom for the Chickens! campaign – a march in which people demand a ban on keeping laying hens in cages. In Latvia, animal rights activists and LGBTQ community campaigns are most often held. In 2017, several campaigns against the use of animals in the Riga Circus took place, which contributed to amendments to the Animal Protection Law.

Questions

1. What is the purpose of doing an action?
 - a) For a quick and effective solution
 - b) For a constructive presentation of the problem

c) To attract attention

2. What is needed to implement an action?

- a) A clearly formulated message
- b) Support from politicians
- c) Confidence that the action is supported by the majority of society**

3. Which statement is true?

- a) Holding protests is a common practice in a democratic society - freedom of assembly**
- b) Actions can only be implemented by large non-governmental organizations
- c) Actions are not suitable for shy and introverted people

Voting

In a democracy, power belongs to the people, the people elect representatives of their interests in local governments, the Saeima and the European Parliament. In Latvia, participation in elections is not mandatory, voters must be over 18 years of age and voter turnout is considered low. For more information, see www.cvk.lv. However, citizens are invited to vote not only in elections, voting as a participation mechanism is used in a variety of situations to clarify the opinion of the majority.

Pros

- Of course, a process led by professionals.
- Easy and short process.
- A credible democratic mechanism.

Cons

- Public distrust, passivity.
- Disinformation, the influence of populists.
- Polarization of society.

Example

Questions

1. What is the voting age in Latvia?

- a) 16
- b) 18
- c) 21

2. Who is responsible for organizing elections in Latvia?

- a) President
- b) Central Election Commission
- c) State Chancellery

3. Which statement is true?

- a) Election results have no impact
- b) Participation in elections is a citizen's duty**
- c) Election results do not reflect public opinion

Petition

A petition is a formal request signed by individuals to show collective support for or a rejection of a particular issue or cause. It is one of the simplest and most common participatory tools, allowing people to express their opinion and demand action from decision-makers.

Pros

- Easy to initiate and share.
- Can gather a large number of supporters quickly.
- Raises public awareness of an issue.
- Puts pressure on decision-makers.

Cons

- Limited influence if not supported by public institutions.
- Risk of symbolic rather than actual impact.
- Online petitions can be ignored or undervalued.
- Does not guarantee long-term engagement of participants.

Example

The petition for climate action initiated by Greta Thunberg on the Change.org platform has gathered millions of signatures worldwide, urging governments to take stronger steps to address climate change.

Questions

1. What is the main purpose of a petition?
 - a) To collect taxes
 - b) To gather public support for an issue**
 - c) To elect a political representative
2. What is an advantage of petitions?
 - a) They always guarantee policy change
 - b) They are easy to start and share**
 - c) They are only available to lawyers
3. Which statement is true?
 - a) Petitions can demonstrate collective support for a cause**
 - b) Petitions are legally binding in all countries
 - c) Petitions replace parliamentary debates

Collective Submission

A collective submission is a form of direct democracy. It is a proposal prepared and submitted by a group of people or organizations to influence policy, regulations, or decisions. To present a collective decision to decision makers you need the support of the voters. In Slovenia for example, 30,000 voters can propose a change to the constitution, and 5,000 voters can propose a change or the adoption of a new law.

Pros

- Can give a possibility to the people to directly impact the legislation and the constitution.
- Increases legitimacy through collective support of the voters.
- Even if it is not successful it can influence the decision makers as it is a way of a public support.

Cons

- Time-consuming to prepare and coordinate.
- May require legal or technical expertise.
- Risk of being ignored by decision-makers.

Example

During the drafting of the European Green Deal, many NGOs and civil society groups submitted collective submissions with recommendations on climate and energy policies.

Questions

1. What is a collective submission?
 - a) A personal diary sent to politicians
 - b) A joint proposal prepared by group of people or organizations**
 - c) A voting ballot in elections
2. What is the requirement to present a collective submission to decision makers?
 - a) You require a defined number of signatures**
 - b) You require a support of a party
 - c) You need the money to pay the submission.
3. Which statement is correct?
 - a) Collective submissions represent shared interests and expertise**
 - b) Collective submissions are only symbolic and cannot influence policy
 - c) Collective submissions are used only for local issues

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a democratic process in which citizens directly decide how to allocate part of a public budget. It allows residents to propose, discuss, and vote on community projects. The age limit at which you can start voting varies between municipalities, however, in most cases in Slovenia the age limit is 16 years old.

Pros

- Increases transparency and trust in local government.
- Engages citizens in decision-making about their community.
- Strengthens local democracy.
- Encourages innovative solutions to local problems.

Cons

- Limited to the budget made available by authorities.
- Risk of unequal participation (active citizens vs. marginalized groups).
- Requires strong organizational capacity.
- May raise unrealistic expectations among participants.

Example

The city of Porto Alegre in Brazil is considered the pioneer of participatory budgeting. Since 1989, residents have been deciding on parts of the city budget, which has inspired similar initiatives worldwide.

Questions

1. What does participatory budgeting allow citizens to do?
 - a) **Decide how part of the public budget will be spent**
 - b) Elect political representatives
 - c) Approve national laws

2. Which is a benefit of participatory budgeting?
 - a) **It engages citizens in decision-making about their community**
 - b) It eliminates the need for local governments
 - c) It guarantees all projects will be funded

3. Which statement is true?
 - a) **Participatory budgeting lets residents propose and vote on projects**
 - b) Participatory budgeting is only used in schools
 - c) Participatory budgeting has never been applied in practice

Candidate in the Election

Becoming a candidate in an election is a participatory mechanism that allows individual to actively become a decision maker. It enables citizens not only to vote but also to represent their community and influence policy. In Slovenia, you can become a candidate with the support of a political party or with the support of a certain number of voters.

Pros

- Provides a direct way to influence governance.
- Empowers citizens to represent their community.
- Encourages political diversity and competition.
- Can inspire civic engagement among others.

Cons

- Strong competition, low chance of success for newcomers.

- May expose candidates to public scrutiny and criticism.
- Electoral systems can favour established parties.

Example

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a young activist, ran as a candidate in the 2018 U.S. Congressional elections and won against a long-term incumbent, showing how new voices can enter politics.

Questions

1. What does becoming a candidate in an election mean?

- a) It enables an individual to do whatever he/she wants
- b) It enables an individual to become a decision maker**
- c) It gives to an individual the power to run the police station

Who can become a candidate?

- a) Every adult (18+) individual with the support of a political party or certain number of voters.**
- b) Only politicians can become candidates
- c) Every citizen regardless the age

Which statement is true?

- a) Candidates can directly influence governance if elected**
- b) The candidates can strictly decide only as the party order
- c) Candidacy is limited to online platforms