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Assessing the effectiveness of governance innovations: A comparative study of ten European cities

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Abstract. The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of governance innovations in enhancing deliberative and participatory democracy across ten European cities. The research, conducted under the EUARENAS Project and funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme, explores the impact of various participatory and deliberative methods in diverse socio-political contexts. Utilizing a case study approach, the analysis includes eleven governance innovations from cities in both Western and Central-Eastern Europe, reflecting a wide array of tools and strategies aimed at improving citizen engagement and local democracy. The findings highlight the contextual factors influencing the success of these methods, emphasizing the importance of cultural, social, and historical nuances. Through a combination of desk-based research, media content analysis, community reporting, and focus interviews, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how participatory governance can be effectively implemented to bridge the gap between political decision-making and citizen needs, fostering a more inclusive and responsive democratic process.

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1. Introduction

For decades, the public sphere has been in crisis, with a growing divergence between the political decision-making processes and the needs and expectations of the general public. This trend has become increasingly evident in Europe, especially following the EU's economic, political, and security crises in the post-millennial era. A general distrust in politics has been further intensified by populist and neonationalist movements, which view the pluralistic and contentious aspects of democracy as a vulnerability (Müller, 2018). This situation has called for the use of a long list of methods and techniques whose goal is the restoration of the public sphere to its essential role as a real virtual space mediating communication between the political and social spheres. The rise of populism and general political disaffection are being countered by waves of local political activism and a growing awareness of the political significance of urban social movements. Cities have become crucial political battlegrounds for advancing social agendas overlooked or marginalized by both national and international politics. Moreover, various forms of citizen participation are transforming the governance cultures of several major European cities. Participation has been treated as a key method for improving the dialogue among citizens and authorities and as a remedy for the shortcomings of representative democracy and its institutions (e.g. March & Olsen, 1995; Bohman, 1996; Gitel & Vidal, 1998; Gastil et al., 2002; Luskin et al., 2002; Kwiatkowski, 2003; Newman et al., 2004; Długosz & Wygnański, 2005; Mulgan, 2006; Warren, 2009; Attoh, 2011; Kaźmierczak, 2011; Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012; Hutter et al., 2018; Klein & Lee, 2019).

In recent years, the use of participatory methods has been supplemented with deliberative methods. They are seen as more representative in expressing social opinions and needs, and as more effective in bridging the divide. Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all methods are equally effective in all contexts. The outcomes of their implementation are not always as desired due to factors such as uneven power relations, unequal access to participation and deliberation, and institutional barriers (e.g. Dryzek & List, 2003; Healey, 2007; Barnes et al., 2007; Sroka, 2008; Fishkin, 2011; Wiśniewska-Paź, 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Rupnik, 2012; Dias, 2014; Kmieciak, 2014; Steiner, 2017; Mantiñán et al., 2019; Jordan, 2019; Radzik-Maruszak, 2019; Jessop, 2020; Marczewska-Rytko & Maj, 2021; Podgórska-Rykała & Sroka, 2022; Sroka et al., 2022; Ufel, 2023).

Effectiveness of local governance generally refers to the extent to which stated objectives are met, indicating that the policies adopted achieve their intended goals and provide solutions to the issues or problems they address. Therefore, the aim of the study is to provide a comparative analysis of the factors influencing the effectiveness of selected innovations in local management, aimed at strengthening participatory and deliberative democracy. The main research question is: Which factors determine the effectiveness of the selected governance experiments?

2. Research area

To achieve the research objective, it was necessary to gather a broad cross-section of analysed in depth cases that would represent the social and economic diversity of cities in Western Europe (WE) as well as in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (Fig.1, Tab.1).
3. Data, classification and methodology

Wide and balanced representation stands for covering a variety of tools/actions, cities/urban arenas, regions/welfare regimes, historical, cultural, institutional contexts for investigation. This variety is essential to grasp context-based nuances when working towards reaching general conclusions, thus improving the transferability of results. While both regions (WE and CEE) are internally diverse, their specific dispositions (including long-standing cultural differences) appear to be more significant than other variables in explaining the differences between the case studies. Second, such a classification shifts the focus from socio-political regimes to the opposition of "established' versus 'new democracies'. While the validity of the latter term in relation to CEE has recently been debated due to the time that has elapsed since the start of transition in the region (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021), it is a useful concept if we wish to observe the differences embedded in the cultural differences that still shape and permeate the public spheres and institutional frameworks in countries formerly separated by the Iron Curtain (Grewal & Voeten, 2015; Ufel, 2023).

More attention was given to localities in new EU member states - cities from the CE and Baltic region in the selected sample and the main reason behind this lies in the relative novelty of participatory and deliberative approaches in cities with experiences of socialism and post-socialism (Ferenčuhova & Gentile, 2016; Golovátina-Mora et al., 2018; Sagan, 2018). This brought up the issue of the culture of co-governance in which the case studies are immersed. This umbrella term means the grounding in and openness to a multi-stakeholder model

Fig. 1. Cities selected for the analysis
Source: own elaboration

of decision-making and responsibility for the common good, in which the community of citizens are active and empowered partners (Fritsch et al., 2021: 28). Overall, the WE case studies tend to represent a higher level of governance culture than the CEE case studies. In the most extreme case of Berlin, this has even led to 'over-participation' - a situation in which the abundance of programmes, methods and tools becomes counterproductive. Participants in focus groups on Quartiersmanagement Pankstraße referred to this phenomenon as the scattergun approach (Gießkannenprinzip).

The final list of case studies (Tab. 1) was determined using four selection criteria: (1) ensuring wide and balanced representation, (2) prioritising localities in new EU member states, (3) assessing relevance to the project, and (4) linking case studies to pilot interventions in the EUARENAS project. A wide and balanced representation aimed to include diverse tools, actions, urban contexts, and socio-institutional backgrounds, thereby enhancing the contextual depth and transferability of findings. Relevance was assessed by the EUARENAS research teams (see: 3. Data collection procedures) using a 1–5 scale based on their expertise.

The research included case studies from 10 cities of different geographical locations, sizes, economic structure, and socio-cultural backgrounds. Altogether 11 different governance innovations are analysed, since two of them are based in the same city – Wrocław (Table 1).
Although each case studied represents an individual and highly contextualised socio-political event, detailed analysis allows elements of common experience to be identified. The knowledge gained can be used in the process of learning best practices in participatory and deliberative methods. The diversity of the democratic innovations studied, as well as the cultural, social and political contexts in which the innovations were implemented, made generalisations difficult. At the same time, however, this diversity provided a wide range of cases, ensuring cross-sectional overview in the results obtained.

3. Research methodology

A detailed comparative analysis of the case studies required a comprehensive set of data. Therefore, a two-step procedure of data collection was adopted, consisting of four parts. It began with a desk-based research of the existing documents (Part I) and media content (Part II) related to the selected case-study participatory and deliberative processes. Once the first step was completed, it was followed by field research designed to provide all relevant information missing from the existing sources of information. In this second step of data collection, two qualitative research methods were employed. Community Reporting (Part III) that served to investigate the experiences of local communities engaged in or affected by the case studies. Next, the bottom-up perspective was complemented with a polyphonic account of different groups of urban actors gathered during Focus Interviews (Part IV) (Fig. 2). Sample size varied in each case study from 5 to 15 people, depending on the specifics of the analysed process.

The case study research teams consisted of experts residing in the country or city where the case studies were located. These experts either spoke the native language of the study participants and/or conducted academic research related to the respective innovation or process, not only during the project itself but also throughout their professional careers. The experts collaborated with activists and individuals involved in the analysed innovations, who contributed practical knowledge and unique insights from within the communities affected by the innovations or projects.

The review of secondary sources (Part I) aimed at extracting the already existing knowledge on the case studies under investigation. The main objective of this part was to ensure an inclusive representation of perspectives of different actors on the urban arenas, as well as their different experiences, genders, ages, ethnicities, and cultural and social backgrounds. Moreover, the sources not only provided concrete information, but also offered an insight into different types of discourse. This added another

Table 1. Case studies selected for the analysis

Participatory/ deliberative process	City/Town	Description
The Deal for Communities [1]	Wigan (UK)	Since 2011, Wigan Council has been transforming its approach to public health by empowering communities through a citizen-led model and allowing staff to redesign their work to better meet individual and community needs. This new relationship between public services and locals includes transferring council assets to the community, funding community organizations via The Deal for Communities, engaging residents through local initiatives, providing volunteering opportunities, and hosting community events.
Citizen-Jury [2]	Galway (Ireland)	The Citizen Jury was established to simplify bureaucracy and make local governance more transparent. This method was chosen to increase citizen participation due to existing expertise in deliberative techniques. It was first used for environmental initiatives in Ireland at the provincial level in the 1990s.
Quartiersmanagement Pankstraße [3]	Berlin (Germany)	The main aim of the program is to stabilize neighbourhoods and ensure cohesive development across a city. Quartiersmanagement (QM) involves facilitators helping residents create decision-making structures (Quartiersrat), which are elected by locals and manage their own budgets for activities. QM, implemented by private institutions and funded by the program, operates independently but collaborates with local public administration. Its focus varies by neighbourhood, addressing issues like clean-up, intercultural dialogue, inclusion, education, and climate adaptation. A QM is deemed successful when an area is economically stabilised and the QM becomes obsolete.
Borough Liaison Officers [4]	Helsinki (Finland)	The District Liaison Officers initiative in Helsinki, started in 2017, involves designated individuals at the district level to enhance collaboration between city administration and residents. Part of the 'Helsinki Model of Participation and Interaction,' this initiative includes ten measures to boost participatory governance. Seven officers, one per district, plus three focusing on businesses, inform citizens about participation opportunities, improve dialogue with the administration, and organize events. In addition, they facilitate connections between residents, civil society organisations, local politicians, and interest groups, acting as knowledge brokers and mediators, thereby humanising the administration.
Citizens' Assembly [5]	Copenhagen (Denmark)	The Citizen's Assembly method was introduced in 2019. The specific project chosen for collaboration with residents was the Sustainable (Auto-free) Development of the Medieval Centre of Copenhagen, aiming to ensure high levels of citizen engagement in addressing this issue.
Quartiere Bene Comune [6]	Reggio Emilia (Italy)	Implemented in response to the end of the decentralization model in Reggio Emilia, Quartiere Bene Comune led to 27 Agreements with over 730 actors from 2015 to 2019, resulting in 160 social innovation projects serving nearly 14,000 users. The model uses a collaborative protocol involving community dialogue to share a project's life cycle: identifying opportunities, co-designing and co-managing solutions, and jointly evaluating results and impacts.

Source: own elaboration

Source: own elaboration

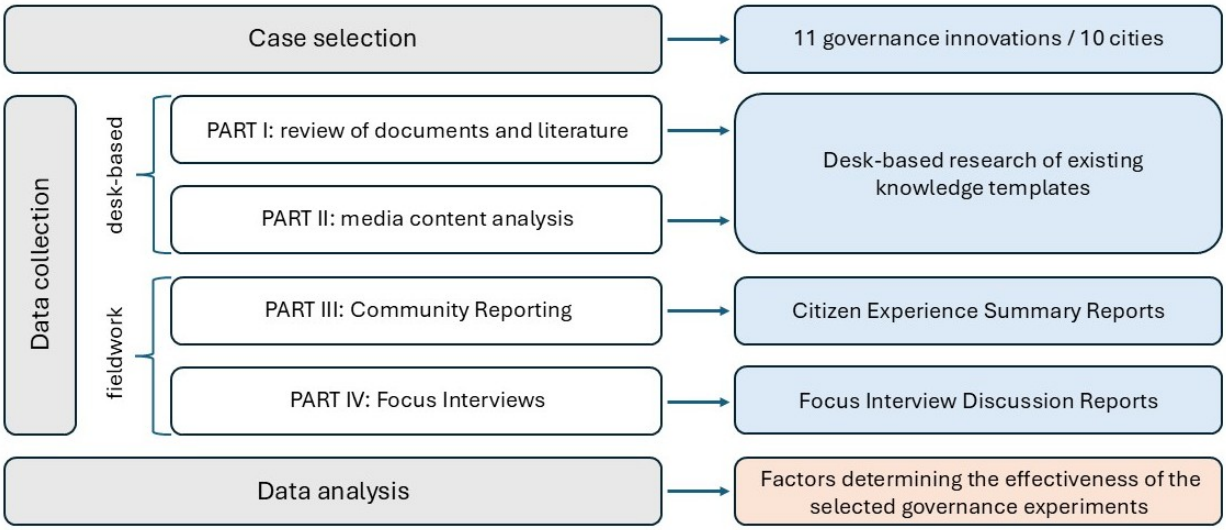

Fig. 2. The research and data collection procedure
Source: own elaboration

contextual layer to the analysis of participatory and deliberative practices at the local level (Fairclough, 1992, 2003; Hastings, 1999). As evidenced by Jacobs (2006), discourse analysis as a methodological tool is particularly useful when applied in research on urban policies, as it has a considerable capacity to generate valuable nuanced accounts. Accordingly, the source materials submitted for review were to be selected from several of the following categories of social domain discourse (Witosz, 2016: 22-23): academic (monographs, articles, reports etc.); legal/administrative (court decisions, acts, resolutions, formal documents etc.); political (transcriptions of public speeches, election leaflets etc.); media (press articles, TV programmes, blog entries etc.); educational (textbooks etc.) and others.

The media content analysis - MCA (Part II) is a method used for an organised and systematic investigation of media pieces, either through a quantitative or qualitative approach. It was first introduced by Lasswell (1927) to study the phenomenon of propaganda in the mass media. MCA may be applied not only to analyse any published or broadcast media content, but it also enables the observation of public reactions to it. Therefore, it is useful both for analysing the ideological input of the media and its actual reception. MCA looks directly at the communication process via texts or transcripts, and hence it is an unobtrusive means of analysing interactions and providing an insight into complex models of human thought and the use of language. However, it also relies heavily upon researcher's interpretation. There was a wide range of analysed materials, including print media (newspapers, magazines etc.); social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs etc.); TV (news, journalistic programmes etc.); radio (news, debates etc.) and other sources. The key to the selection was the relevance of particular outlets and/or media pieces in the context of participatory/deliberative democracy.

The Community Reporting – CR (Part III) is a mixed research technique developed by People's Voice Media since 2007 to support enhancing citizen participation in research, policymaking, service development, and decision-making processes. Central to Community Reporting is the belief that people telling authentic stories about their own lived experience offers a valuable understanding of their lives. Through creating spaces in which people can describe their own realities, Community Reporting provides opportunities in which people can use storytelling to: (1) find their voice – through storytelling we can have our say on topics pertinent to our lives; (2) challenge perceptions – through listening to different experiences than our own, our understandings of the world can widen; (3) be catalysts of change – through taking responsibility to act on what we have learned from other people's experiences we can be part of positive social change.

Community Reporting has three distinct components – story gathering, story curation and story mobilisation – based around the Cynefin decision-making framework for complex environments (People's Voice Media, 2021). Gathering stories, i.e. probing is done by supporting people to tell and share their own and their peers' authentic stories

using digital tools. These stories are experimental knowledge that focuses on what people can learn from their own and other people's experiences of situation. This can involve understanding how people feel about things, how they handle, interpret and respond to specific situations and what is important to people in their lives. These stories are obtained during the so-called dialogue interview, which generally is a conversation between two people (two interviewees) triggered by a researcher with a very general question (the researcher does not interfere or take part in the discussion). The dialogue is recorded for further analysis. When the conversation comes to a natural end, the interview and recording stops. The next step is story curation. The term 'content curation' is broadly used to describe the process for gathering, organising and presenting information in relation to a specific subject. It is used as a way of describing how to make sense of the findings in Community Reporter stories. The CR method helps to work with lived experience stories as a form of data and analyse them with a method rooted in discourse analysis and grounded theory (Brown & Yule, 1983; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Tummers & Karsten, 2012). The method has two phases: (1) vertical analysis: the person/people conducting the analysis reviews every individual story and identifies the topics, content and contextual elements within it; (2) horizontal analysis: once each story has been analysed, the person/people conducting the analysis looks across them for trends and anomalies. This process results in the identification of a key set of trends and anomalies from a collection of stories, without losing the individual voices in the stories. It is informed by Pierre Lévy's (2005) concept of "collective intelligence". The last step of the CR method is the story mobilisation, i.e. connecting the learning from stories to people, groups and organisations who are in a position to use this knowledge to create positive change.

Focus Interview – FI (Part IV) is a qualitative method of research which relies on a planned and moderated group interview and discussion. The participants are sampled from the study population either via a randomized or deliberate selection. According to Denscombe (2007: 115), a focus group 'consists of a small group of people, usually between six and nine in number, who are brought together by a trained moderator (the researcher) to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a topic'. Focus groups are more than a collection of individual interviews. The element of synergy and interaction between the group members plays a significant role in generating the research data. The method enables illuminating the variation of viewpoints held in a population. It is used as a single source of data or in combination with other methods, as it provides data in a social context and is feasible in methodological triangulation or when other methods are suboptimal (Bojlén & Lunde, 1995). The key role of the focus group in our research was to complement the desk-based research, as it was mainly aimed at covering the issues absent from the existing documents analysis. However, it also served to capture interrelations and dynamics between the participants and their potentially clashing perspectives.

The research procedure constructed in this way allowed for the collection of data necessary to conduct a cross-case analysis and achieve the main objective of the study which is indicating factors that affect the effectiveness of the selected participatory and/or deliberative processes.

In order to identify the factors influencing the effectiveness of selected innovations, detailed forms – prepared as part of the conceptual work and completed by individual research teams – were analysed. These forms served to summarise the findings of both the field research (Parts III and IV) and the desk-based research (Parts I and II) conducted for each of the case studies. Each factor influencing the analysed process or innovation – whether identified during the literature/media review or indicated through Community Reporting and/or Focus Interviews – was recorded in the form, along with a justification in the form of either quotations from study participants or excerpts from analysed texts.

All the information gathered by the case study research teams – i.e., the data concerning the identified factors – was subsequently transferred to a matrix and analysed/categorised based on how many participants referred to each factor and in what way (contextual analysis). The factors that most frequently recurred across the analysed case studies were identified as those exerting the most significant influence on the processes or innovations under examination.

4. Research results: Factors shaping effectiveness of the analysed participatory and deliberative processes

As described in the first part of the paper, the analysed cases had different objectives. Some of them focused on specific issues, such as public transport in the city or budget management. However, many

of them did not have a specific theme. In these cases, the main aim of the participatory process was the participation itself and it is particularly difficult to find an ultimate tool for assessing citizen participation.

All the governance experiments analysed were or are affected by various direct and indirect factors that increase or decrease their effectiveness. In spite of the differences characterising the individual participation and deliberation processes studied, what they all have in common is that they follow a certain dynamic. The dynamic includes an initial phase of pre-arrangements, then a phase of implementation and finally an evaluation. During the analysis more than fifteen possible factors that may influence the outcomes of the processes were identified and grouped into three general stages of process implementation: 1) planning and preparation; 2) implementation; 3) closure and reporting, some of which extend throughout the process (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2. Factors affecting effectiveness of the analysed governance experiments at different stages of process implementation

Stage	Factor
Planning and pre-arrangements	Degree of political independence (of the city where the process takes place)
	Political orientation of the local authorities
	Broader political context
	Legal procedures on the state level (level of bureaucracy, complexity of procedures)
	Willingness to share power
	General level of knowledge on the process among the stakeholders/actors/participants (information provided by the organisers)
	Media campaign promoting the process
	Result-oriented approach (hierarchy of goals, focus on constructive solutions not criticism, addressing real problems)
Implementation	Legal procedures on the state level (level of bureaucracy, complexity of procedures)
	Constant evaluation and adaptation
	Communication channels (direct in-person contact)
	Attitudes, skills and knowledge of people running/managing the process
	General level of knowledge on the process among the stakeholders/actors/participants (information provided by the organisers)
	Result-oriented approach (hierarchy of goals, focus on constructive solutions not criticism, addressing real problems)
	Level of citizen engagement (ensuring diversity, accessibility, inclusiveness)
	Level of trust (atmosphere of being heard, citizen ownership of the process, proper status of people taking part in the process, leadership, collaboration with NGOs and neighbourhood associations)
Completion and reporting	Constant evaluation and adaptation
	Legal procedures on the state level (level of bureaucracy, complexity of procedures)
	Communicating results to the citizens
	Willingness to share power
	Implementation of the agreed solutions (when they are implemented as well)

Source: own elaboration

There are eight factors that can be attributed to the stage of planning and preparation. These include very general issues such as the ***degree of political independence*** and ***political orientation of the local authorities***. For example, both national and regional political contexts are mentioned in the case of Budapest, where there were numerous constraints that limited the authority of the Józsefváros district, as local leaders were in opposition to the central government (which has a super-majority in the national parliament). As a result, the central government was able to exert its power and limit the financial and other resources of the county. In addition, the level of civic engagement of the people of Józsefváros was influenced by the ***broader political context*** of Hungary, where citizens are expected to be passive and not involved in the public sphere.

Broad policy issues also relate to the ***state legal procedures*** that can facilitate or hinder civic engagement and the implementation of deliberative actions. The procedures, their complexity and the overall level of bureaucracy were mentioned in the context of the whole process in several of the cases analysed, i.e., Berlin, Helsinki, Reggio Emilia, Gdańsk and Budapest. In the case of Reggio Emilia, the reform of Title V of the Italian Constitution (Law 3/2001) was mentioned, as it promoted the introduction of various forms of active citizen participation in public life. Similarly in the case of Gdańsk - since 2018, due to central regulations, participatory budgeting (PB) has become a mandatory form of public consultation in all Polish cities with county rights (i.e., those that go beyond the rights and obligations of municipalities - in practice, usually the largest cities in the region). In the case of Helsinki, many of the activities and initiatives of Finnish local authorities (municipalities) are guided by the principles laid down in the Finnish Local Government Act, which sets out a number of legal obligations for the municipality. The participation of residents is guaranteed in Chapter 5 of the Local Government Act - Right of participation of the residents of the municipality. Chapter 5, Section 22: "Opportunities to participate and influence" states that "residents and service users have the right to participate in and influence the activities of the municipality. Local authorities must ensure that there are diverse and effective opportunities for participation. However, in the case of Berlin, the issue of slow administrative response was mentioned as hampering deliberative processes, even though there have been many policy decisions to promote civic engagement in society. Procedures are the factor that affects all stages of the processes analysed. For example, the complicated legal procedures of public tenders made it impossible for the agreed changes to be implemented in Gdańsk (some of the PB projects could not be implemented and had to be altered).

Not only top-down procedures, but also the ***willingness of local authorities to share power*** is crucial to the implementation of any participatory process. This factor was mentioned in the cases of Wigan, Galway, Reggio Emilia, Gdańsk, Wrocław (SCP) and Budapest. In the case of Reggio Emilia, there was a significant degree of willingness on the part of political elites and civil servants to delegate decision-making to citizens, and a willingness and eagerness on the part of a significant proportion of citizens to be involved, whereas in Galway some local authority representatives did not see the point of involving citizens. The Deal for Communities in Wigan is an interesting case in which officially an enabling style of leadership was introduced, meaning that leaders gave frontline staff permission to try new things based on their conversations with people using services (Naylor & Wellings, 2019). Conversely, the Deal has also been the subject of criticism from those working in communities. This criticism has highlighted a discrepancy between the statements made publicly and the objectives of the Deal, and the actual impact and implementation of the Deal. For some, the shift in power was not as significant as anticipated.

The ***general knowledge of the process among all parties involved*** is another factor influencing the effectiveness of the processes analysed - both in the planning and implementation phases. It was mentioned in eight cases: Wigan, Galway, Helsinki, Gdańsk, Wrocław (CA), Budapest, Berlin and Võru. Interestingly, in Gdańsk, one of the focus group participants stated that citizens are not aware of the basic obligations of the city which makes it easier for the city not to fulfil them. Therefore, the PB funds are often spent on carrying out investment projects that are the responsibility of the city, e.g., pavement repairs should be provided by the city and not via PB. In Wigan, the failure to communicate information about the Deal to the wider community was identified as a critical failure. Similarly, in Berlin citizens did not know how to get involved in participatory projects and therefore did not participate. In Budapest, one of the focus interviewees argued that if it is not clear to participants what the actual outcome of such processes might be, even active citizens may lose motivation or interest in participating in future initiatives.

In addition to organisers and initiators providing information about the processes, the ***informative role of the media and promotional campaigns*** were mentioned in the case of Gdańsk and Galway.

In Gdańsk, weak information campaigns were cited as one of the reasons for the decline in interest in PB in recent years.

One of the most frequently mentioned factors (Table 3) was the ***result-oriented approach*** that characterised both the planning and implementation phases of the processes analysed. In the Budapest case, for example, it was noted that participatory processes sometimes served mainly as channels through which citizens could air their criticisms and were not aimed at finding constructive solutions. In addition, when many participatory projects are carried out at the same time, their quality is lower. In the cases of Galway, Copenhagen and Gdańsk, where similar tools were used, keeping the focus on real solutions to citizens' real problems was identified as a key success factor. In order to reach a common understanding of what the real problem is, it is sometimes necessary for citizens to take part in the process of learning about each other's perceptions and views on the specific issue. In the case of Võru, this enabled in-depth analysis and led to some unexpected solutions.

In addition to the three already mentioned (i.e., legal procedures, general level of knowledge and result-oriented approach), the implementation phase can be influenced by five other factors. ***Continuous evaluation and adaptation*** is the effectiveness factor mentioned in the cases of Wigan, Galway, Copenhagen, Gdańsk, Budapest and Võru. The Office for Community Participation in Budapest has established one of the most advanced continuous evaluation procedures. This ensures that long-term goals are pursued. Not only ongoing, but also ex-post evaluation is a factor that greatly affects the governance experiments analysed. The lack of much-needed evaluation was mentioned in the case of PB in Gdańsk, as the process itself has not changed significantly since its initial implementation.

During the implementation phase, the ***attitudes, skills and expertise of the people who organise/coordinate the process*** can greatly influence both its course and results. Various issues related to the people involved in the analysed processes (organisers, administrators, officials, experts, social work-

Table 3. Factors affecting effectiveness of the processes mentioned across the case studies

Stage	Factor	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]	[10]	[11]
Planning & pre-arrangements	Degree of political independence								✓			✓
	Political orientation of local authorities								✓			
	Broader political context								✓			
	Legal procedures on the state level	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Level of knowledge on the process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
	Result-oriented approach	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Willingness to share power	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	
	Media campaign promoting the process		✓					✓				
Implementation	Legal procedures on the state level	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Constant evaluation and adaptation	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Communication channels	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Organizers' attitudes, skills and expertise	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Level of knowledge on the process								✓			
	Result-oriented approach							✓	✓			
	Level of citizen engagement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Level of trust	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

[1] The Deal for Communities (Wigan), [2] Citizen-Jury (Galway), [3] Quartiersmanagement Pankstraße (Berlin), [4] Borough Liaison Officers (Helsinki), [5] Citizens' Assembly (Copenhagen), [6] Quartiere Bene Comune (Reggio Emilia), [7] Participatory Budgeting (Gdańsk), [8] Office for Community Participation (Budapest), [9] Social Hackathon (Võru), [10] Socialising Cultural Policy (Wrocław), [11] Citizens' Assembly (Wrocław)

Source: own elaboration

ers, managers, etc.) were mentioned in most cases (Table 3). In the context of the Social Hackathon in Võru, the importance of a dedicated and skilled team was emphasised, as they were instrumental in fostering a supportive, inclusive and impartial environment for participants, including those from vulnerable groups, ensuring their needs were met. Mentors not only had to support co-creative service design processes in teams, but also to manage the development of relationships and power relations in teams, to help all voices to be heard, to mediate contradictions and to support teams to find better ways of working together. A humanistic attitude, commitment and professionalism, ability to learn and improve, openness to criticism, strategic thinking, attention to detail, management skills, willingness to go beyond the call of duty and facilitation skills were other important qualities of the actors involved in the analysed case studies. The Helsinki case provided another important insight into the situation of migrants. All Borough Liaison Officers (BLOs) are white Finns, and they may not reach all city residents - a migrant may find it easier to approach a BLO with a migrant background. Thus, not only skills and educational background play an important role in the implementation of participatory processes.

Three of the most frequently mentioned effectiveness factors (Table 3) related to the implementation phase are: ***communication channels***, level of trust and level of citizen involvement. Regarding communication channels, some of the experiments analysed were carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, which provides an additional context for this analysis and highlights the importance of direct personal contacts. As one of the activists who participated in the focus interviews in Gdańsk explained, face-to-face meetings help to better communicate the needs of different groups and build consensus, as online, highly individualistic procedures do not facilitate integration. In the case of Gdańsk, the issue of language skills was also raised in relation to Ukrainian immigrants. A lack of real communication with the council was also highlighted in Wigan. One of the interviewees stated that there was not much interaction, it was all done through social media and there was no such thing as a conversation. However, the case of Galway, where members of the Citizen Jury went out into their communities to engage with the wider public, is an example of good communication practice. The Citizen Jury held listening events in different communities to get more people involved and went directly to other citizens to have conversations. Similarly, in the case of Võru, face-to-face or even one-to-one meetings, where a trusting relationship can be developed, were crucial.

The ***level of trust*** is another factor that affects the effectiveness of the cases under analysis. Among the most frequently mentioned issues related to trust are the listening climate and the sense of being heard (e.g., Galway, Võru), citizens' ownership of the process (e.g., Copenhagen, Gdańsk), inclusiveness (e.g., Helsinki, Gdańsk), cooperation with NGOs and neighbourhood associations (e.g., Reggio Emilia, Wrocław CA), transparency of procedures (e.g., Gdańsk, Wigan).

The most important factor influencing the effectiveness of the implementation phase of the process is the ***level of citizen involvement***, which was mentioned in almost all cases. The general conclusion is that in order to have meaningful processes, many local inhabitants should be involved, regardless of the specific participatory tool used. However, in most cases the conclusion is that participation and the willingness of citizens to take part in such processes is generally rather low. It is also strongly correlated with socioeconomic status. Those with a higher level of education and a better economic position are more likely to take part in participatory processes. Migrants (e.g., Copenhagen, Helsinki, Gdańsk), older people (e.g., Gdańsk, Wrocław CA) and young people (e.g., Võru, Reggio Emilia) are among the most frequently mentioned excluded groups. To ensure inclusiveness, it may be useful to reflect on the experiences of those who have chosen not to take part in participatory/deliberative processes.

There are five factors of effectiveness that can be attributed to the completion and reporting stage of the processes analysed. Three of these - evaluation, legal procedures and willingness to share power – have already been elaborated. The remaining two are related to the results of the experiments: their communication to citizens and their actual implementation.

Communicating the results to citizens is crucial, as not sharing the successes and solutions achieved through deliberation can make citizens less engaged or discourage them from taking part in further deliberative/participatory processes (e.g., Budapest, Gdańsk, Helsinki, Berlin, Wigan). The ***implementation of the agreed solutions*** seems to be an obvious step following the deliberative and participatory processes, but there are still cases where the citizens' recommendations or solutions are not taken seriously or not fully implemented (Gdańsk) due to various obstacles. In Gdańsk, for example, there are several departments (e.g., the Roads and Green Spaces Administration, the Investment Projects Department,

the Gdańsk City Development Directorate) that decide how the final projects will be implemented and how much they will ultimately cost. Moreover, these departments usually act unanimously, which makes the whole process even longer. As a result, there are miscalculations and delays for which the blame often falls on those who had submitted the winning proposals. There have been cases where applicants have been accused of stealing the money and of corruption because the outcome did not match the projects that people had voted for. There is also the issue of the organisational culture of these institutions - it is not easy to work with them, especially for ordinary citizens who are not familiar with all the procedures.

Considering the intricate nature of the cases under analysis, it is perhaps unexpected that a set of eight factors emerges as the most influential determinants of the effectiveness of the participatory and deliberative tools employed. The factors are as follow: (1) legal procedures at the state level; (2) general level of knowledge about the process; (3) result-oriented approach; (4) willingness to share power; (5) communication channels; (6) attitudes, skills and knowledge of organisers/coordinators of the process; (7) level of citizen involvement; (8) level of trust.

5. Discussion

Participation and deliberation are profoundly social experiences because they arise from relationships typical of small, tightly integrated communities and although similar factors seem to affect their effectiveness, they should be perceived as unique social experiences that resist complete standardisation. The implementation of participatory and deliberative processes must take into account the presence and importance of emotions (anger, frustration, fear, but also joy, pride and excitement). These emotions always accompany genuine human engagement and are characteristic of direct interpersonal relationships. Participation and deliberation should be organised in such a way that the emotions of the participants are transformed into a deliberate consensus and decisions based on it. This deeply social, emotional, and relational dimensions of participation and deliberation are also addressed by Barnes, Newman and Sullivan (2007). Ten years later Steiner et al. (2017) examine how emotions, identity, and social cohesion affect deliberation, especially in polarized settings. They reflect on how emotional expression is not only unavoidable but essential in deliberative processes. The emotions, not only the positive ones, are explored in Jordan's (2019) work where the author explores what happens when emotions such as frustration or exclusion arise in participatory processes. It supports the view that emotions are integral and must be acknowledged and ethically managed, rather than ignored.

Another deeply social condition for the successful implementation of democratic innovations is mutual trust between those involved in the process. It is a necessary condition both for involving members of the local community in the initiative and for reaching an agreement that allows the development of a common position. This is corroborated by one of the latest works by Durrant and Cohen (2023) where the authors highlight how deliberative settings like mini-publics must navigate trust, legitimacy, and emotional investment. Their findings suggest that standardised models often fail to capture the emotional depth of these processes, supporting the results of the research conducted.

The social nature of participation and deliberation requires participants to meet in physical space, in a specific place. The tendency to move the processes into virtual space is largely driven by the ease and administrative convenience of the process. It allows the difficult task of bringing people together and conducting debates to be avoided. The time of the pandemic Covid-19 strongly reinforced the trend to conduct procedures online. However, research has shown that participants want and need face-to-face meetings and discussions. Collaboration needs proximity. Moreover, face-to-face meetings create the conditions for resolving conflicts and transforming antagonistic attitudes into agonistic ones, which are essential in democracy. According to Jordan (2019), emotions such as frustration or exclusion which often arise in participatory processes are integral and must be acknowledged and ethically managed, rather than ignored. Conflict, when controlled and not dominating social relations, can become a source of creative solutions and the discovery of new possibilities. The mode of communication, which focuses on direct interactions and takes place in the physical space where stakeholders meet, the level of trust and social commitment, as well as a result-oriented approach, are characteristics of the examined cases of participatory and deliberative innovation that had a significant impact on the success or failure of the implementation of democratic innovations to improve the quality of governance. They can therefore be seen as critical elements in the successful implementation of participatory and deliberative processes. The ease with which conflicts in virtual spaces can turn into hate speech, which is very difficult to overcome, highlights the

important role that physical presence plays in mitigating and resolving conflicts and reaching consensus. This perspective is corroborated by a growing body of research that highlights the centrality of direct, face-to-face communication and trust-building in participatory and deliberative processes. Durrant and Cohen (2023) demonstrate that mini-publics function most effectively when embedded within spatially grounded governance structures that foster interpersonal interactions and cultivate stakeholder legitimacy. Similarly, Jäntti et al. (2023) emphasise that embedding citizen participation in local government requires sustained social commitment and mutual trust, which are best developed through direct engagement in physical spaces. Fishkin (2011) underscores the transformative power of in-person deliberation, noting its potential to foster mutual understanding and legitimate consensus. Furthermore, research on participatory budgeting by Popławski and Gawłowski (2019) and by Davies et al. (2022) reveals that successful democratic innovations are closely tied to transparent, goal-oriented processes supported by meaningful interpersonal contact. These findings reinforce the notion that trust, direct interaction, and shared commitment are not merely procedural considerations but foundational components that significantly shape the success of participatory and deliberative governance innovations.

A recurrent cause of failure in participatory and deliberative initiatives is the excessive politicisation of the process. This can easily undermine the fundamental value of trust. Two contrasting examples in this respect are the cases of Copenhagen and Wroclaw. Due to a highly socially controversial issue that was the subject of the Citizens' Assembly organised by the City of Copenhagen, depoliticising the process was a focus of the organisers' efforts. The success of the initiative was largely linked to such an approach. In Wrocław, however, activists and social movements became disillusioned with the over-politicisation of the process. The organisation of a deliberative assembly was seen as a means of gaining social legitimacy for the pursuit of specific political goals. Another issue is the tendency to use them as activities to fulfil mandatory obligations of the local authority. This results from the indicated tendency to incorporate social innovations into the scope of tasks routinely performed by public institutions. An example of this is Gdańsk, where participatory budgeting has been integrated into the implementation of the statutory tasks of the city authorities. The influence of the organisers, i.e. the municipal authorities, on the thematic scope of the projects allowed in the competition and the way they are implemented, serves to support the obligatory tasks of the municipal authorities and does not always correspond to the expectations and ambitions of the residents. As a result, the initiative loses its social dimension. The declining interest of the general public in participating in them means that the procedures are increasingly influenced by well organised interest groups, which gradually take control of them. The same group of active citizens, already well trained in the preparation of proposals, succeeds in the annual editions of the participatory budget, using up all the funds. This leads to the deterioration of the whole initiative. This dynamic is well-documented in the literature on participatory budgeting and democratic innovation. Popławski and Gawłowski (2019) highlight how local authorities often shape the thematic scope of participatory budgeting to align with institutional priorities, thereby marginalizing grassroots proposals and limiting the initiative's responsiveness to citizens' actual needs. As a result, the participatory process increasingly serves the administrative agenda rather than community empowerment. Similarly Sroka, Pawlica, and Ufel (2022) show that as civic budgets evolve, they are frequently captured by a narrow group of active, well-organized participants who possess the experience and resources to dominate successive editions, while less organized residents disengage. Ufel (2023) expands on this by demonstrating how long-standing structural and institutional barriers contribute to the exclusion of new voices, resulting in a participatory mechanism that operates more as a formalistic ritual than a truly inclusive democratic tool. The digital dimension of these trends is discussed by Davies, Arana-Catania, and Procter (2022), who argue that despite technological advances, participatory budgeting remains vulnerable to elite capture and institutional steering, particularly when municipal authorities predefine acceptable proposal categories. These findings collectively underscore the risk that participatory initiatives, while nominally democratic, can lose their social legitimacy and deliberative character when dominated by entrenched interests and bureaucratic constraints.

Democratic innovations are initiatives taken by public authorities to improve the mode of governance. Whether or not they improve the local governance depends on the true intentions of organisers of the procedures. The 'willingness to share power' as the real intention underlying the implementation of participatory and deliberative innovations is crucial for the success of these initiatives. This was emphasised in more than half of the cases studied. Participation and deliberation serve as tools to decentralise power in decision-making and planning processes. A lack of genuine intention to share pow-

er quickly undermines the value of any democratic innovation that is implemented. The results of the analysis conducted confirm the observations described in the literature which state that an important aspect of the success of democratic innovations is the rejection of a reductionist and utilitarian view of innovation as a mere response to the shortcomings of the neoliberal development model (Zemke, 2023 following Bouchard, 2013). Promoting social innovation and building a collaborative society are viable alternatives to the mainstream model of democracy, which is currently in crisis. A paradigm shift in urban policy from a focus on individual responsibility and entrepreneurship to collective action is essential to achieve meaningful improvements in local democracy.

This emphasis on the intentions of public authorities is echoed in a growing body of scholarship on participatory and deliberative governance. Kübler et al. (2020) argue that democratic innovations are often introduced not to deepen democracy but to improve administrative efficiency or enhance legitimacy, with little interest in truly redistributing decision-making power. As such, the stated goals of participation may mask a lack of genuine willingness to share authority, limiting the transformative potential of these processes. Similarly, Barnes, Newman, and Sullivan (2007) demonstrate through empirical case studies that the success or failure of participatory initiatives is closely tied to how power is negotiated and whether institutional actors are willing to cede control. Fishkin (2011) reinforces this view by noting that deliberative democracy only has a meaningful impact when organisers are sincerely committed to incorporating citizen input into real policy outcomes. Jordan (2019) further cautions that when participatory processes are implemented without authentic ethical commitment or political intent, they risk becoming tokenistic exercises that alienate rather than empower communities. These findings underscore that democratic innovations require more than procedural inclusion; they depend fundamentally on the political will to open up governance and redistribute power, a condition that remains uneven across contexts. Where such intent is lacking, innovations often fail to deliver on their democratic promise and can even reinforce existing inequalities.

In the practice of using democratic innovations, mastery of their implementation methods is crucial. Incorporating participation and deliberation into decision-making and planning processes at an early stage leads to significantly better and more effective results. Therefore, the organisation of the process, the legal embedding of the activity and the attitudes, skills and knowledge of those responsible for implementing the innovation, together with a results-oriented approach, are important. A major challenge to the effective implementation of these initiatives is the issue of non-representativeness of participants. There is a widespread perception that not all potentially interested citizens are involved; often, the same people are repeatedly engaged in different contexts to carry out voluntary activities and participate in co-planning initiatives. The civil society actors who remain active are not always the most representative of the wider civil society. This creates a tension between the imperatives of inclusiveness and effective influence.

The analysis conducted aligns with a broad spectrum of scholarly literature which emphasizes that the mastery of implementation methods is critical to the success of democratic innovations. Jäntti et al. (2023) underscore the importance of embedding participatory and deliberative practices at an early stage of planning and decision-making, arguing that doing so enhances institutional responsiveness and outcomes. Similarly, Davies et al. (2022) and Sroka, Pawlica, and Ufel (2022) highlight that effective implementation depends not only on process design but also on the legal and organizational frameworks, as well as the skills, attitudes, and knowledge of those tasked with carrying out participatory initiatives. However, despite careful design, these processes often face a major obstacle in the form of non-representative participation. Studies consistently find that the same group of civically active citizens tends to dominate participatory mechanisms over time, resulting in a democratic paradox: while processes become more procedurally efficient, they may lose inclusiveness and legitimacy (Smith & Geissel, 2022; Popławski & Gawłowski, 2019). This recurring involvement of a narrow segment of society not only limits the diversity of perspectives but also reinforces inequalities in access to influence. The tension between effective influence and broad-based inclusion remains one of the most pressing challenges in the practice of democratic innovation, calling for new strategies to broaden participation while maintaining decision-making efficacy.

Another threat to social engagement techniques is the long-term use of unchanged formulas; the longer they are used in an unchanged form, the more they are subject to erosion. One way to maintain their social vitality is to have an open, flexible formula for their implementation that allows for continuous monitoring and updating at the grassroots level. Maintaining broad interest and social commitment ensures constant creativity. This is a challenge to the tendency to bureaucratise proce-

dures and absorb them into administrative processes. The role of leaders is crucial in sustaining social action. However, they too need to change and, above all, act as a link between the local administration implementing the innovation and the community. Routine is destructive to democratic innovation, but its absence is unacceptable to administrative structures. Changes are therefore needed to enable non-standard procedures to function within the standard administrative and managerial order. A silo-like organisation of bureaucracy is not able to deal with the cross-cutting problems that need to be solved by democratic innovations that require the participatory involvement of citizens.

These observations are strongly supported by recent research. Jäntti et al. (2023) demonstrate that the long-term vitality of democratic innovations depends on their institutional adaptability, particularly when participatory methods are integrated into governance through flexible, evolving formats that empower local actors to monitor and reshape processes. Similarly, Davies et al. (2022) note that when participatory practices such as participatory budgeting become routinised within bureaucratic structures, they risk losing their original participatory spirit and become procedural exercises, thereby undermining civic engagement. The challenge lies in reconciling the need for administrative stability with the dynamic nature of civic participation, which demands responsiveness to changing social contexts. This tension is further explored by Agger & Sørensen (2018) and Torfing's (2016) collaborative governance framework, which stresses the importance of intermediary leadership roles – such as facilitators and innovation brokers – that can navigate between bureaucratic requirements and grassroots innovation logics. Without such bridging figures and structural openness, innovations often become stagnant or co-opted by existing institutional routines. Moreover, empirical findings show that a lack of periodic reinvention and openness leads to declining inclusiveness and effectiveness, reinforcing siloed practices that are ill-equipped to address cross-cutting urban challenges. These insights confirm that structural flexibility, continuous leadership renewal, and grassroots responsiveness are essential to sustaining democratic innovations over time.

The results of the research, which can be considered representative of EU countries given the diversity of analysed participation and deliberation techniques and their spatial scope, highlight key aspects of participatory procedures. These features have been widely discussed in literature on the subject, suggesting that despite decades of using these techniques, local democracy is in crisis. The results reveal a clash between the grassroots need for democratic community participation in local politics and the tendency of local authorities to incorporate participatory procedures into their administrative activities from above.

6. Conclusions

A comparative case study analysis was used to assess the effectiveness of governance innovations aimed at improving local democracy. The study of ten European cities identified a number of critical factors that influence the effectiveness of participatory and deliberative processes. These factors fall into three stages: planning and preparation, implementation, and completion and reporting. Despite the varied contexts and aims of the case studies, eight factors consistently emerged as the most critical for process effectiveness:

1. Legal procedures at the state level: the complexity and bureaucracy of legal procedures can have a significant impact on the efficiency and success of participatory processes. Simplified and clear legal frameworks are essential to facilitate civic engagement and ensure smooth implementation.
2. General level of knowledge about the process: awareness and understanding of the participatory process by all stakeholders is crucial. Effective communication and information dissemination by organisers can enhance participation and ensure that all parties are well informed and engaged.
3. Results-oriented approach: a focus on practical and constructive solutions to real problems is essential. Processes that prioritise results and address real issues tend to be more successful in achieving their objectives and sustaining participant engagement.
4. Willingness to share power: a genuine intention on the part of local authorities to delegate decision-making power to citizens is fundamental. Without a genuine willingness to share power, participatory processes risk becoming superficial exercises that fail to produce meaningful results.
5. Communication channels: effective communication, especially direct and face-to-face interactions, is essential. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the limitations of virtual interactions and reinforced the importance of face-to-face contact in building trust and consensus.
6. Attitudes, skills and knowledge of organisers: The competence and commitment of those who manage participatory processes is crucial. Skilled

organisers who are open to learning and criticism and who have strong management and facilitation skills can greatly enhance the effectiveness of the process.
7. Level of citizen involvement: broad and inclusive participation is necessary for meaningful deliberation. Efforts must be made to involve a wide range of citizens, including marginalised groups, to ensure that the process is representative and equitable.
8. Level of trust: building and maintaining trust among participants is essential for successful deliberation and consensus building. Trust fosters a collaborative environment in which participants feel heard and valued.

These factors underscore the importance of context-specific approaches to participatory and deliberative governance. While some factors, such as legal frameworks and communication channels, can be standardised to a certain extent, others, such as the willingness to share power and the skills of organisers, require careful consideration of local conditions and dynamics.

The study also highlights the need for flexibility and adaptability in governance innovations. Processes that remain unchanged for long periods of time are prone to erosion and diminishing effectiveness. Continuous monitoring, evaluation and updating of participatory methods are necessary to maintain their relevance and impact.

Finally, the successful implementation of democratic innovations depends on a genuine commitment to improving governance and empowering citizens. Without this underlying commitment, even well-designed processes may fail to achieve their intended outcomes. Fostering a collaborative and inclusive urban policy environment is therefore crucial to the success of participatory and deliberative democracy initiatives.

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