



Doc. 13350

04 November 2013

Good governance of large metropolises

Report¹

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

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Summary

It is widely recognised, and set out by European standards, that good urban governance should involve strong mechanisms of citizen participation. In this respect, large metropolises are “lighthouses” of local democracy where both innovative approaches and challenges become more visible than elsewhere, not least because of the particularly complex urban and social situations they face.

In particular, in view of the current financial crisis and its impact on local authorities of all sizes, the Parliamentary Assembly should invite member States to provide a national framework which is favourable to maintaining and developing strong mechanisms of citizen participation as a core element of sound local democracy.

National interests in developments occurring in large metropolises should be made transparent and local stakeholders given a say. Their institutional and financial set-up should provide local authorities with sufficient resources, allowing them to dedicate qualified staff to participatory mechanisms, to involve citizens in the broadest manner possible, to develop educational programmes on democratic citizenship and to promote the use of communication technologies and social media. The international exchange of good practice, between large metropolises as well as with smaller municipalities, will be essential for making good progress in this field.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 12371](#), Reference 3717 of 8 October 2010.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. Good governance of metropolitan areas encompasses all forms of co-ordination and regulation that contribute to increased efficiency and transparency of the political and administrative system and that effectively increase the liveability of an urban region. For many years, citizen participation has been recognised as a particularly valuable element of good democratic governance at the local level.
2. Nevertheless, the Parliamentary Assembly is concerned about the need to uphold high standards of democracy and to maintain social cohesion in urban areas, especially in the current times of budgetary difficulties and austerity programmes at all government levels, which make involving citizens and inhabitants in decision-making processes all the more important.
3. Confronted with the multiple challenges of urban growth and redevelopment, large metropolises face particularly complex situations when it comes to democratic governance and citizen participation. Metropolitan areas are therefore amongst the “lighthouses” of local democracy, where developments and innovations, but also obstacles to participation become more visible than elsewhere.
4. The three case studies of Berlin, Istanbul and London have shown that public resources allocated to participation mechanisms are under threat and that citizen consultation is sometimes sacrificed or neglected. Moreover, many citizens confronted with unfavourable economic situations and social exclusion have other priorities than taking ownership of the public space surrounding them.
5. Against this background, the Assembly invites all member States of the Council of Europe to continue to promote good governance at all levels of government, to pay particular attention to large metropolises as democratic “laboratories” and to create legislative and institutional settings that facilitate and foster citizen consultation, participation and involvement at the local level. In this context, the Assembly welcomes the efforts of the Armenian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, in particular in organising, along with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Conference on “Participatory Democracy at Local Level” on 19 June 2013 in Yerevan, where the issue of citizen participation in decision-making processes at local and regional level were addressed.
6. Good governance at the local level should follow the principles set out by the “Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at the Local Level” as adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in March 2008. Standards related to the participation of citizens in local public life are also provided in Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2001)19 on the participation of citizens in local public life, as well as more recent texts aimed at fostering participation of different social categories (young people, people with disabilities, etc.).
7. The Assembly, for its part, has for many years underlined the importance of citizen participation mechanisms as an essential part of democratic processes. Most recently, the Assembly insisted on the importance of freedom of assembly and speech by adopting [Resolution 1947 \(2013\)](#) on popular protest and challenges to freedom of assembly, media and speech.
8. With a view to consolidating and promoting good democratic governance and citizen participation at the local level, not least by learning from experiences made in some of the large metropolises, the Assembly calls on member States to:
 - 8.1. create a legislative and institutional framework for local democratic structures and processes in a way that allows for effective local self-government of large metropolises;
 - 8.2. foster and promote approaches of good governance of large metropolises, in particular by implementing existing European standards and organising exchanges of good practice at both national and international level (including through local government associations);
 - 8.3. whenever there is increased national interest in the development of metropolitan areas (as is often the case for capitals or cities which are economic motors), ensure that this interest is made transparent and that local authorities and, through them, local citizens affected by developments are fully recognised as stakeholders in the development process;
 - 8.4. give priority to upholding and further developing participatory mechanisms at the local level by allocating sufficient resources, designing appropriate procedures, allowing for the qualification of staff and raising awareness amongst citizens of the various possibilities of getting involved;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 1 October 2013.

8.5. along with organising transparent citizen consultation concerning urban developments which are initiated by public authorities or private stakeholders (top-down approach), foster and develop participatory mechanisms in which citizens themselves can be actively involved in local development by expressing their concerns, stimulating developments that correspond to their needs and actively engaging in their local communities (bottom-up approach);

8.6. conceive and implement specific awareness-raising and education programmes on democratic citizenship involving young people from an early age in order to help them become interested and active citizens of their communities, irrespective of their level of education or social strata;

8.7. promote the use of communication technologies and social media in citizen participation at the local level (dedicated websites, social networks, e-mail, local television) whenever appropriate.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Donaldson, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Good democratic governance is a challenge at all political and administrative levels. However, being confronted with the multiple challenges of urban growth and development to a greater extent than smaller municipalities, large metropolises are facing particularly complex situations when it comes to good democratic governance. Subsequently, as regards both development and governance issues, they very often prove to be places of innovation where new working methods are conceived and tested on the ground.
2. For many years, citizen participation has been considered an important element of democratic governance and decision-making, in particular in a context where political and administrative information has become more easily accessible for many, not least thanks to information and communication technologies, and where younger generations are increasingly aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens.
3. The Council of Europe and its different bodies, including the Parliamentary Assembly, have underlined the importance of citizen participation for many years and promoted the concept through different binding and non-binding instruments. In compliance with these European standards and thanks to the multiple exchanges of good practice between European local authorities of different sizes and in various forums, citizen participation has, to a greater or lesser extent, become an integral element of urban development policies in most Council of Europe member States.
4. In my report, I will look into governance approaches of several metropolises of Greater Europe in order to identify “good practices” in terms of citizen participation. The objective will not be to present participatory models and methodologies in detail or to promote specific mechanisms, but to identify the experience of big cities which may be useful for others.
5. Counted amongst the largest metropolitan areas of Greater Europe, Istanbul and London (estimated at approximately 12.5 million and 7.8 million inhabitants respectively in 2010), followed by Berlin on a smaller scale (4.4 million inhabitants in 2010), shall serve as examples in this report.

2. Large metropolises and main challenges of good governance and citizen participation

6. “Metropolis”, a term often used synonymously with other notions describing major cities (global city, megacity, etc.), originates from the Greek word *mitrópoli* meaning “mother city”. A metropolitan area is generally described as a densely populated urban region covering a large territory, in which a central city is interconnected with surrounding urban units, for example through labour and service relations. Given that practically all metropolises have expansive urbanised surroundings, the two terms of “metropolis” and “metropolitan area” will be used synonymously in this report
7. Due to their characteristically high density of population and their various urban functions, for example as central locations for business enterprises, administrative institutions, educational facilities or cultural services, the authorities (and inhabitants) of metropolitan areas are confronted with a multitude of political, technical or social issues on a daily basis, such as road traffic, public transport, sanitation services, environmental quality or social services. This also contributes to the fact that metropolitan areas are often perceived as motors for social and economic development for the whole country.³
8. In parallel to physical urban development, the administrative organisation and functioning of large cities needs to continuously evolve in order to ensure that effective and efficient responses can be given to complex tasks and challenges, and, not least, to guarantee continuous support to local government by the local electorate. However, the current economic crisis puts the budgets of local authorities under extreme pressure, sometimes making it impossible for them to even fulfil their mandatory responsibilities or deliver basic services in a satisfactory manner. In this respect, the issue of citizen participation becomes a particular challenge, both in terms of financial responsibility when it comes to maintaining relevant (and sometimes costly) institutions and procedures, and in political terms when it comes to gaining citizen support for major urban projects sometimes involving unpopular decisions by the local government.
9. The fact that citizen support is required for the smooth implementation of major urban projects today may be illustrated through two concrete examples: Whilst the development of the London Docklands, managed by the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) in the 1980s, was undertaken with

3. Basic definitions provided by: www.metropolen.de.

limited citizen participation,⁴ the inhabitants of the German city of Stuttgart, in the face of urban and commercial development around the main railway station of the city, have recently started claiming their right to participation at a moment when the planning and construction process had already well progressed, forming a true protest movement.⁵

10. Several determinants further contribute to the complexity of citizen participation in metropolitan areas: they are, in most cases, not governed by a single local authority but through a two-tier system of local government, and the number of stakeholders inclined to influence urban development is generally higher due to the higher density of private companies (and their financial interest in certain developments) and civil society organisations, which are often better organised in bigger cities.

11. Furthermore, the issue of local democracy of metropolitan areas is closely linked to national interests and policies: in view of the large population of these areas, decisions taken locally very often concern a greater part of the national population, such as in France, where the population of the Paris metropolitan area represents around 18% of the national population.⁶ In most cases, metropolitan areas are also the capital city of the country, which provides them with a specific role and influence in the national political and administrative system.

12. These and other determinants lead to the fact that there is an increased interest to study and promote the experience of metropolitan areas across and beyond the national territory through various available channels, such as governmental action, international urban networks or activities by associations of local and regional authorities. Such dynamics could finally contribute to a “learning process” having a positive impact on the overall standards of democracy in a given country. Amongst international networks, the “Metrex” network has gained in prominence in recent years, and all three metropolises covered in this report participate in it more or less actively.⁷

3. Good governance and citizen participation: general concepts

3.1. Global definitions and challenges

13. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has defined governance in general as “the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences”.⁸ According to another United Nations definition, “good governance” promotes equity, participation, pluralism, transparency, accountability and the rule of law. Institutions and processes to be considered “good” and “democratic” therefore need to be transparent, free of corruption and accountable to the people. The greatest threats to good governance come from corruption, violence and poverty, all of which undermine transparency, security of participation and fundamental freedoms.⁹

14. Good governance within metropolitan areas encompasses all forms of co-ordination and regulation that contribute to an increased efficiency of the political and administrative system and increase the liveability of the region. Widespread criteria for the evaluation of local governance structures and processes are the principles of transparency, participation, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency, coherence and sustainability,¹⁰ though lists of criteria may vary slightly according to the socio-economic and professional context.¹¹

4. Diller, Christian and Kolloge, Christoph (ed.), *Waterfront-Development & ereignisorientierte Stadtentwicklung* [Waterfront-Development & event-oriented urban development], Institut für Geographie, Giessen, 2009.

5. Schuman, Michael, “What Stuttgart train station tells us about the global economy”, *Time* magazine online, 9 October 2010, <http://business.time.com/2010/10/09/what-stuttgart-train-station-tells-us-about-the-global-economy>.

6. According to the population estimate by the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies INSEE on 1 January 2012, Source: www.insee.fr.

7. www.eurometrex.org.

8. UNDP: *Governance for Sustainable Human Development*, New York, 1997.

9. United Nations Global Issues: “Governance”, www.un.org/en/globalissues/governance.

10. Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe: *Good governance in European metropolitan areas*, explanatory memorandum, CG(13)6 Part 2, Strasbourg, 24 April 2006.

11. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) lists the following six basic principles for good governance which are said to be widely accepted: participation, decency, transparency, accountability, fairness, efficiency. Source: UNECE, *Guidebook on promoting good governance in public-private partnerships*, New York/Geneva, 2008, www.unece.org.

15. For many years, citizen participation, in particular, has been considered a valuable element of democratic governance and decision-making. Its positive effects on democracy and in particular individual democratic citizenship have been recognised, as it increases issue knowledge, civic skills and public engagement and contributes to the support for decisions among its participants. Over recent decades many countries have gained experience with one of the four main types of participatory mechanism: deliberative forums, surveys, referendums and participatory policy-making projects.¹² Techniques and working methods for citizen participation can then be further differentiated according to the institutional context in which they are employed. In citizen participation arrangements at the local level, different stages are often distinguished, beginning with the provision of simple information to citizens, followed by consultation and then co-operation, to reach the level of co-decision-making (or even self-administration).¹³

16. However, one of the major challenges as regards democratic processes and procedures in many countries will be to ensure that citizens have equal access to participative procedures and benefit from their positive effects in an equitable manner. In current times of economic and financial crisis, it becomes increasingly evident that poverty and social exclusion (and their numerous expressions) also lead to the actual or perceived exclusion of citizens from democratic processes. This specific issue is currently being examined by another report under preparation in the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development.¹⁴ It is also perceived as a matter of concern by the European Commission, as we could see from the speech delivered by Mr Lászlo Andor, European Commissioner responsible for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, on “Fighting poverty and preserving democracy through social investment” at the Council of Europe Conference on Poverty and Inequalities in Societies of Human Rights (Strasbourg, 21 February 2013).¹⁵

17. It has been known for a long time that “governments must invest adequate time, resources and commitment to building robust legal, policies and institutional frameworks, developing appropriate tools and evaluating their own performance in engaging citizens in policy-making” as “poorly designed and inadequate measures for information, consultation and active participation in policy-making can undermine government-citizen relations” and may be counterproductive if citizens discover that their efforts and feedback have no impact or remain unaccounted for.¹⁶

3.2. Standards for local and regional democracy at Council of Europe level

18. Both citizen participation and more recently, good governance, have been the object of binding and non-binding Council of Europe instruments and texts in recent years. Although major progress has been made towards their implementation and specific assistance is provided through several mechanisms, member States should continue to promote and monitor them, given that governance structures at all levels, including at local and regional level, continue to evolve and may include innovative working methods at any time.

19. Local and regional democracy has been a priority area for a number of consecutive chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. In particular, the issues of citizen participation, direct and indirect involvement of citizens in decision-making processes, as well as new approaches involving the wide use of new technologies in the context of the so-called “e-democracy”, were discussed at the conference organised by the Armenian Chairmanship in co-operation with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on 19 June 2013 in Yerevan.

20. Amongst the main texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers, we can quote Recommendation Rec(2001)10 on the participation of citizens in local public life; Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)2 on the evaluation, auditing and monitoring of participation and participation policies at local and regional level, the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (adopted in 2009, entered into force in June 2012), calling on

12. Ank Michels, Utrecht School of Governance, Utrecht University (Netherlands), “Innovations in democratic governance: how does citizen participation contribute to a better democracy?”, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, June 2011, Vol. 77, No. 2.

13. Handbuch zur Partizipation der Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt [Handbook on Participation of the Senate Administration for Urban Development and Environment], Berlin, February 2012.

14. Report currently being prepared on “The impact of increasing social exclusion on democratic institutions and participation: need for strong action” (Rapporteur: Mr Mike Hancock, United Kingdom, ALDE).

15. Text of the speech available for download at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-13-148_en.htm.

16. OECD Public Management (PUMA) Policy Brief No. 10: Engaging Citizens in Policy-making: Information, Consultation and Public Participation, Paris, July 2001.

member States “to secure to everyone within their jurisdiction the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority”, as well as the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS No. 144) in 1992.

21. The additional protocol to the charter, as a binding instrument, allows supervising institutions and procedures in the framework of the monitoring mechanism ensured by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. However, it remains quite general and does not elaborate in great detail on how, and according to which methods, citizen participation should be carried out, whilst the non-binding texts provide very concrete lines of action and tools for the implementation of citizen participation mechanisms. The latter also take into consideration specific aspects such as gender equality in local politics and the interests of citizens having greater difficulties in becoming actively involved for various reasons.

22. Closely related to these standards and instruments, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has adopted a number of reference texts on citizen participation, notably Resolution 326 (2011) and Recommendation 307 (2011) on citizen participation at local and regional level in Europe and Resolution 332 (2011) on education for democratic citizenship – tools for cities, as well as on good governance, notably Recommendation 188 (2006) on good governance in European metropolitan areas and Recommendation 219 (2007) on the status of capital cities, which have been taken into consideration for this report. Since 2007, activities of the Congress also include, “European Local Democracy Week” (ELDW), an annual European event where local authorities from all the 47 member States of the Council of Europe are invited to organise public events to meet and engage with their citizens on issues of current interest, with the purpose of promoting and fostering democratic participation at a local level.

23. The Parliamentary Assembly, for its part, has never adopted a text relating to citizen participation at the local level as such, but has covered various specific aspects in resolutions relating to the right of migrants, women, disabled people and children to participate in public life or decisions concerning them; texts which shall not be listed in more detail here. It is worth noting, however, that the Assembly adopted its [Resolution 1947 \(2013\)](#) on popular protest and challenges to freedom of assembly, media and speech most recently and subsequent to the popular protest observed around an urban development project in Istanbul (Turkey), as referred to in greater detail below (see chapter 4.3).

24. Amongst intergovernmental activities of the Council of Europe, I also wish to recall the various assistance programmes aimed at developing local democracy standards which are offered by the Council of Europe governmental sector, including programmes for “democratic stability” and “capacity building programmes”, the latter being led by the “Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform”. In this context, the “Twelve Principles of Good Democratic Governance at Local Level”, elaborated in 2007 and adopted by the Committee of Ministers in March 2008 as part of the “Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at the Local Level”, assign great importance to citizen participation. Last but not least, it is also worth mentioning the “Code of Good Practice on Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process” published in October 2009 by the Conference of International Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs) of the Council of Europe, which presents some of the principles, levels and methods of citizen participation in an easy-to-understand and user-friendly manner.

25. With regard to existing Council of Europe texts and activities in the field of citizen participation and good governance, I would conclude that central reference texts exist and are sufficient to ensure good standards of citizen participation in Council of Europe member States. Good governance at local and regional level has been largely debated and is being followed up concretely through the Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance and other activities. Subsequent work should continue to focus on the implementation of standards and should help member States to further improve democratic governance and citizen participation at the local level, not least by the exchange of good practices on citizen participation methods and tools.

4. Metropolitan governance in Europe – the examples of Berlin, Istanbul and London

26. The metropolitan areas of Berlin, Istanbul and London served as case studies for the present report. They are presented here in alphabetical order. These cities were chosen as examples to combine a certain (though surely not complete) geographical balance with easy access to information. Examining the situation in London in particular allowed me to bring in some of the experience of my own country, the United Kingdom. Berlin was perceived as a useful example due to the significance that citizen participation at the local level has in Germany. Istanbul had been chosen as an example well before the beginning of the popular protests around Gezi Park and Taksim Square. However, these events further underlined the interest of studying this metropolis in more detail.

4.1. Berlin: the challenge of inclusive participatory mechanisms

The metropolis of Berlin – basic facts

The metropolis of Berlin is Germany's federal capital and biggest city with an estimated population of 4.4 million in 2010. Together with parts of the surrounding region of Brandenburg (which functionally belong to the agglomeration) and according to the national urban classification system, it forms the metropolitan region of Berlin-Brandenburg with an estimated population of about 6 million in 2012. Klaus Wowereit has been Mayor of Berlin since 2001 and was re-elected in 2011.

Institutionally, Berlin is at the same time considered as a local government and a regional government as it constitutes a *Land* of its own with its own regional Constitution. The political and administrative structure of Berlin is based on a two-tier system, including the Senate as a main administration in which a given number of senators are in charge of specific administrative divisions (currently eight senate administrations), and 12 boroughs (*Bezirke*) which have both administrations and political bodies of their own (but without legislative power).

27. In the margins of the meeting of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development held on 14 and 15 March 2013 in Berlin, I had the occasion to study the case of Berlin and was provided with written material by local stakeholders.¹⁷ Berlin has a tradition of citizen participation in various forms and contexts since the post-war period. Explicit requests for more participation were raised in the western part of the city during the late 1960s, followed by efforts made to involve citizens more actively in decisions related to the development of particular urban districts such as the Kreuzberg area. These efforts were pursued in the so-called "sound urban renewal" programmes, carried out first in Western Berlin in the 1980s and later in the 1990s covering the whole of Berlin.

28. From the end of the 1990s, a "Social City" programme, jointly financed and carried out by German federal and regional governments, came into being to support the development of district management offices, district councils and district funds. Since 2008, the city government has been following its new framework strategy on "Social urban development". Berlin also involves citizens through its representative democracy based on a decentralised city organisation which is composed of a central Senate (local council and administration) and 12 borough councils (*Bezirksräte*).

29. In their range of participative elements, the city (and federal region) of Berlin include far-reaching elements such as legislative initiatives, referenda and citizen councils. The authorities also rely on the participation of informed citizens in borough councils and the regular hearing of lobbying and interest groups (amongst other external experts). The citizens themselves may make use of petitions and disciplinary complaints to ensure that their opinions are heard.¹⁸

30. Finally, amongst institutions, the *Berliner Stadtforum* (City Forum of Berlin), a forum for open debate regularly organised between city managers, experts and citizens, has sometimes achieved a prominent role over past decades. It still exists today, although it is of course currently perceived as less innovative and in a context where debate fora in various institutional contexts have multiplied.

31. To ensure that the local administrative staff can accompany citizen participation procedures in an instructed manner, the Senate of Berlin has most recently published a "Handbook on Citizen Participation" aimed at motivating staff to apply participative procedures in their area of responsibility, at making them aware of possible obstacles to overcome and at giving concrete recommendations for action. The handbook has been distributed at national level and thus constitutes one element of exchange of best practice at this level. Moreover, the handbook contains tools for the implementation of citizen participation, such as detailed checklists for municipal decision-makers and staff.¹⁹ It will soon be edited in English and will thus constitute a tool for the international exchange of good practice.

17. In this respect, I would like to thank Ms Katharina Erdmenger, Head of the European Spatial Planning Division of the Federal Ministry of Transport, Construction and Urban Development of Germany, Mr Gilles Duhem, Managing Director of MORUS 14 e.V., a social development association in the Rollberg area of Berlin Neukölln, and Ms Barbara Berninger of the Senate Administration, Head of the "EU and International Affairs Division", who provided most valuable information.

18. Jochen Hucke, *Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt* [Senate Administration for Urban Development and Environment]: *Partizipation der Bevölkerung* [Participation of inhabitants], presentation made to the delegation of the partner city of Budapest on 10 April 2013.

19. *Handbuch zur Partizipation der Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt* [Handbook on Participation of the Senate Administration for Urban Development and Environment], Berlin, February 2012; English edition expected for 2014.

32. In the case of Berlin, methods of citizen participation seem to be extremely differentiated. They include, for example, the continuous follow-up of developments occurring in specific urban districts by taking into account citizens' ideas and wishes, the participation of citizens in the planning processes of larger urban projects and even their consultation on budgetary procedures and decisions.

33. Recommendations elaborated in Berlin with a view to developing effective citizen participation include an early and comprehensive analysis of problems and the search for alternative solutions, the clear communication of alternatives and non-flexible conditions to citizens, the professional moderation of consultation processes, the identification and support of social groups who cannot easily articulate their interests and the prevention of unrealistic expectations of a decision to be taken.²⁰ A particularly sensitive issue amongst these recommendations is certainly the identification and support of groups who cannot easily articulate their interests. With regard to this aspect, perceptions within the city may significantly vary between stakeholders and participants of development processes in urban areas. An exchange with representatives of a local social assistance association of the district of Neukölln has shown that many citizens do not feel concerned by urban developments in their area.

34. Amongst the local population of the *Rollbergviertel*, which is largely of a migrant background (Kurdish, Turkish and Palestinian from Lebanon), many resources seem to be allocated to family subsistence and bringing up children. Public participation procedures very often do not reach less well educated categories of the population, and certainly do not reach them in time, which means that in many cases people only react when it is too late and when construction works for a new development project begin in their area. New communication technologies such as social media are not the right way of reaching out to these populations, but are rather more easily accessible by the well-educated urban middle class. For the staff experiencing this social context daily, one of the biggest challenges, therefore, is to show inhabitants how to take ownership of the public space surrounding them beyond the private sphere that their attention is most focused on. After long years of experience with the official participation mechanisms of the city of Berlin, local experts therefore considered that these have so far entirely failed to reach out to their local population.

4.2. Istanbul: the challenge of preserving local democratic institutions in the face of larger national interests

Greater Istanbul – basic facts

Istanbul is a fast-growing metropolis split between the Asian and the European continent: whilst in 2010, at a time when the city was European capital of culture, its population was estimated at 12.6 million, the number of inhabitants has reached around 13.8 million according to the latest figures of 2012. The city is represented by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM), which is also one of Turkey's 81 provinces. It is headed by the metropolitan mayor and the metropolitan council (consisting of 39 district mayors and one fifth of district councillors since the latest administrative reform in 2008). Istanbul's urban administration is therefore also based on a two-tier structure.²¹ Below district level, it has approximately 1 000 neighbourhoods called *Mahalle*. Furthermore, Istanbul has 27 000 associations, forming a lively civil society.

Both metropolitan and district municipalities have decision-making powers in so far as the metropolitan administration is responsible for macro-level decisions concerning the entire city, while districts are responsible for decisions related to traditional municipal services. Istanbul is one of three metropolitan authorities introduced following the end of military rule in 1984, the others being Ankara and Izmir. In each case, the metropolitan authority represents an additional tier of government in order to perform strategic functions across the metropolis. Istanbul's metropolitan Mayor is Kadir Topbaş (AKP), elected in 2004 and re-elected in 2009.

35. Istanbul has a long-standing tradition of citizen participation through its 39 districts and more than 1 000 neighbourhoods (*Mahalles*), in which local headpersons have been elected since the 18th century (*Muhtars*). The current institutional setting is an outcome of the democratic and decentralising efforts undertaken since the 1980s.²² Modern participation mechanisms include a compulsory consultation for strategic plans, the consultation of various stakeholders at local committee meetings, and, more recently, the citizens' assemblies, which are semi-autonomous bodies with increasing significance, in particular in small to middle-sized towns. Municipalities also have various possibilities for leading joint projects with voluntary organisations. The significance of the Internet in communicating with citizens is also on the increase in

20. Jochen Hucke, see footnote 18.

21. The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and the Alfred Herrhausen Society (Deutsch Bank), *Istanbul, City of Intersections*, Urban Age, November 2009.

22. Institut d'Etudes Politiques (IEP), Paris, "Governing at the Crossroads", Istanbul, 2012, Study Trip 2012 of the Master on governing the large metropolis.

Turkey, and European Union standards are regularly applied nowadays as regards access to information. In his time as Mayor of Istanbul, and before becoming Prime Minister, Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had also organised citizen participation through the 3 000 mosques of the city.

36. In practice,²³ some of the existing mechanisms meet certain obstacles: In Istanbul, the citizens' assembly could not be established due to the lack of a clear majority and there are claims of regular interference by the national government. The well-known Planning Authority of Istanbul (once employing 500 professionals) was abolished in recent years, some of its competences assigned to competent ministries at the national level and the Istanbul Metropolitan Planning and Urban Design Centre (IMP), a new organisation operating alongside political and bureaucratic bodies of Istanbul. Participation of local stakeholders at the metropolitan level often seems to be restricted to less important issues.

37. This erosion of real participation at metropolitan level seems to have different causes, including certain cultural traditions (for example a tradition of indirect communication via intermediaries to express unpleasant positions), the structure and functioning of political parties in Turkey and a limitation of powers of the local government (namely very little possibilities to impose direct local taxes except for garbage collection tax, thus little margin to raise funds for local priorities). Indirect participation often takes place through oral or written complaints or via cases taken before the court. Many people currently have high hopes for evolving communication cultures (including social media) and the upcoming new Constitution which may lower the current electoral threshold of 10% for new parties to enter deliberative bodies; a measure that would allow for more diversity in various decision-making bodies.

38. The recent protest movements around Taksim Square, where an old park (Gezi Park) was to be partly destroyed to make room for new housing and commercial developments, have shown the extent to which national decisions can influence urban developments as well as the importance of a meaningful dialogue between the government and local communities. Based on an existing citizen's initiative, this project sparked extensive citizen protest and violent confrontations with police forces. Although extremist groups joined some of the demonstrations, the majority of protesters (many hundreds of thousands of people at the peak of the movement) took to the streets to express their dissatisfaction with the government's style of governance, the lack of decision-making powers at local level and the use of popular and sometimes historic urban areas for commercial developments.²⁴ The latest development in this affair is the court ruling which blocks the envisaged development but which may still be appealed by governmental authorities.²⁵

39. However, Gezi Park is only one example of many projects which are meant to give a boost to Istanbul's development. About 50 neighbourhoods in Istanbul alone are earmarked for urban renewal projects and 7.5 billion Turkish liras (approximately 2.9 billion euros) were set aside for Istanbul's public development projects in 2012. Sectorial government policies are facilitating such developments, for example through new laws granting the government far-reaching decision-making powers over which local areas are to be developed (sometimes for reasons of earthquake prevention) or opening the Turkish real estate market to foreign investors.²⁶

40. Facing such developments, several experts criticise the lack of coherent urban planning (there does not seem to be any global overview of projects) and the lack of public debate prior to the announcement of major reconstruction projects.²⁷ They also warn that vulnerable populations, including the poor or ethnic minorities, are increasingly being pushed to the edges of the city, thus diminishing social diversity in the city and displacing populations from locations where they had been settled for a long time.²⁸

41. According to some Turkish academic experts, local governance in Istanbul is an expression of the overall political context characterised by an overdominance of State over society combined with a populist political culture²⁹. In particular in big cities such as Istanbul two factors seem to contribute to such populism: the efficient response to vital demands for jobs and housing generated by mass urban migration since the 1960s, and an understanding of democracy reduced in its simplest form to voting.

23. For information relating to current participation practices in Istanbul, I would like to thank Mr Fikret Toksöz, Advisor for the good governance programme within the independent think tank TESEV (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation) for his most valuable contribution provided at the committee meeting in Paris on 3 June 2013.

24. BBC News/Europe, "Turkey protests: Police clear Istanbul's Taksim Square", 11 June 2013.

25. Deutsche Welle (DW), "Turkish court annuls Erdogan's plan to raze Gezi Park", 3 July 2013.

26. *The New York Times*, "Turkey's Opening Comes With Catch", 27 September 2012.

27. *The Guardian*, "Istanbul sees history razed in the name of regeneration", 1 March 2012.

28. Inter Press Service (IPS), "Gezi Park Highlights Years of Destructive Urban Development", 6 June 2013.

42. Moreover, the metropolitan administration of Istanbul follows the “powerful mayor and weak council” model which finally leads to a situation in which city-wide decisions are discussed and criticised in the media and by professional associations only after they have been made. Although such developments regularly fuel complaints about the decision-making process and the strong influence exerted by the central government, much popular support is generated by the fact that fundamental and urgent infrastructural problems are actually being addressed, including by central government measures.³⁰

43. Notwithstanding the overall political context and culture, citizen participation seems to function relatively well in modern Istanbul at district and neighbourhood levels: local citizens’ assemblies regularly involve different groups such as young people, the elderly, women and handicapped people, and even 200 years after their introduction, local headpersons – a very popular function amongst citizens – remain important interlocutors for local people. However, despite all efforts of local administrations to establish city councils and foster stronger ties to civic groups, Istanbul’s biggest obstacle seems to be the fact that the majority of its citizens are either not organised or take part in hierarchically structured “community” groups.³¹

4.3. London: the challenge of citizen involvement for sustainable local communities

Greater London Area – basic facts

Greater London, a metropolitan area of almost 8 million inhabitants today (7.8 million according to official figures in 2010), expected to reach the 10 million threshold by 2020, has had a directly elected mayor since 2000 (Boris Johnson since 2008, elected again in 2012). The Greater London Authority (GLA) is mainly responsible for transport, strategic planning, economic development, environment, safety, housing and leisure for the whole city. The Greater London Assembly is composed of 25 members, 14 of which are elected in constituencies (comprising several boroughs) and 11 of which are “top-up” members.³²

The metropolitan area is divided into 33 boroughs (32 boroughs and the City of London, which essentially represents the city’s financial centre). The boroughs are responsible for providing various social services and other local services such as education, childcare, etc. Across boroughs, there is an overall number of 1 800 local councillors who are elected every four years in their respective wards (next in 2014). The London Councils, which are a joint administrative structure carried by all boroughs, are in charge of specific infrastructure matters such as transport (parking, etc.) or waste collection. It is also their task to negotiate with the Greater London Authority when it comes to matters where responsibilities are contested between the central authority and the boroughs.

44. As regards the capital of my own country, the United Kingdom, I had the opportunity to examine the issue of citizen participation through a fact-finding visit, involving a number of expert meetings, undertaken on 18 July 2013.³³ This has allowed me to get confirmation of the fact that the current financial situation of local government is being perceived as a major challenge by most local stakeholders and sets the conditions for many local development issues, including citizen participation.

45. According to the Local Government Association (LGA), citizen participation is not necessarily a priority for local government in the current economic and financial context. In recent years, central government transfers to local government have been cut by 33%.³⁴ Further cuts up to 10% are expected under the current coalition’s spending plans for 2015/2016.³⁵ Municipal agendas in the United Kingdom are therefore driven by finances and focused on reorganising service provision by combining local authorities in greater economic areas and ensuring front-line services through greater involvement of voluntary services or community enterprises.

29. Erder, Sema (emeritus professor at Bahçeşehir University), “Local Governance in Istanbul”, in: *Istanbul, City of Intersections*, Urban Age (publication by The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and the Alfred Herrhausen Society (Deutsche Bank)), November 2009.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. For seats allocated on a “top-up” basis, votes are counted across London and seats are shared among the political parties in proportion to the votes received; source: “Greater London Authority (GLA)”, website of the London Borough of Hounslow: www.hounslow.gov.uk/index/council_and_democracy/democracy_and_elections/gla_about.htm.

33. I would like to thank all the experts who dedicated some of their time to my research (in order of meetings held): Mr Ian Hughes, Head of Programmes of the Local Government Association (LGA); Mr John O’Brien, Chief Executive of the London Councils; Mr Andrew Collinge, Assistant Director of the Greater London Authority (GLA); Ms Nilgun Canver, Councillor of Haringey Borough; Mr George Hallam, Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign; Mr Graham Smith, University of Westminster.

34. *The Guardian*, “Slashing council spending in the 2013 budget will prove a false economy”, 18 March 2013, www.guardian.co.uk.

35. BBC News/UK Politics, “Councils face 10% central government funding cut”, 20 June 2013, www.bbc.co.uk.

46. In this context, participatory services, which are not statutory but discretionary tasks, are expected to fall first in many municipalities and many communities already make less use of traditional instruments such as “citizen juries”. At the same time, local politicians increasingly communicate with their citizens via social media (Twitter, blogs and Facebook), though there seems to be a certain “digital divide” in the use of such tools, which is amongst others determined by levels of income and education.

47. According to the London Councils, all boroughs of London still have a more or less extensive budget dedicated to citizen participation, and mechanisms remain quite well developed across London. Nevertheless, the choice of participation methods has become more limited today given that local governance is more about administering scarce resources to fulfil a great number of statutory duties. Before the financial crisis, citizen participation had sometimes been about letting people participate in public choices via innovative methods. Today citizen involvement is more about making boundaries of action clear to citizens, and local authorities are increasingly facing the dilemma that less citizen participation is possible despite a greater need for informing people in a context of austerity. Many citizens seem to be frustrated because they do not see any results after having been consulted and their participation evidently does not increase the resources available.

48. Good practice in citizen participation in the Greater London Area can in particular be seen in engaging young people in political processes (such as through the youth parliament and youth mayor of Lewisham borough) and in keeping services running through the voluntary sector. In the United Kingdom, citizen participation therefore comprises different concepts: informing and consulting citizens regarding upcoming developments on the one hand and active engagement for the development of the community on the other hand.

49. In this respect, the 2012 Olympic Games have had a very positive effect on co-operation within communities “in the spirit of the Games” and, locally, subsidies have been provided for related projects. However, despite some good practice examples, the current Prime Minister’s “Big Society” approach,³⁶ which includes attempts to set certain local services onto a more voluntary basis, has not been successful everywhere, for different reasons. In the current situation of local finances in the United Kingdom, it will therefore be of utmost importance to generate new income through local growth and to deliver services in a more rational manner; these were, by the way, the objectives of the central government when it introduced the radical budget cuts.

50. As regards the relationship between the central authority and local boroughs, London can be described as a “bottom-heavy” two-tier system where the boroughs have a strong say and the central mayor has less power than in other big cities; the current mayor, moreover, has not made excessive use of the powers he has. His administration, the Greater London Authority (GLA) seems to have quite a clear vision and strategy for citizen involvement at the metropolitan level, based on the awareness that the relationship between the city and its citizens is marked by mutual expectations: whilst some of the city’s concerns remain totally abstract to people, the central authority needs to understand and actively respond to citizens’ concerns (“demand management”).

51. In doing so, methods of liaising with citizens have significantly evolved in recent years: having been largely based on opinion polls in the past, they are now turned towards an “engagement approach”, including “digital engagement” as a cost-effective measure even though traditional methods such as annual debates or question times for local people are still in use. Concrete examples for new methods are the digital platform “Talk London” and the “London City Dashboard”, a website presenting city policies by sector in a transparent manner (backed up by a so-called “Datastore”). Amongst the first target groups of new participation mechanisms have been the numerous volunteers for the Olympics Games.

52. Experiences in Greater London have shown that social media and communication technologies play an important role in achieving “tangible” results. An example is the borough of Barnett, where people can access a “brokerage website” for service exchange within their community. In some areas, gatherings initialised through social media have led on to concrete projects in the educational sector. It has also been observed that people are increasingly mobilising around social media since the “London riots”.³⁷ Community television channels and radio stations play a role in certain ethnic communities (for example a Greek radio station in Barnett), and local politicians regularly make appearances in this context.

36. *The Guardian*, “The ‘big society’ concept has changed the way we provide social care”, 8 May 2013; see also: “The Big Society Network”, www.thebigsociety.co.uk.

37. The “London riots” were a protest movement lasting several days in August 2011, that was sparked in the Tottenham borough of London after a young district resident was shot dead by the police; it subsequently involved many disadvantaged areas of London and other British cities; see also *The Telegraph*, “London riots: the underclass lashes out”, 8 August 2011, www.telegraph.co.uk.

53. The public relations department “engagement team” of the GLA tries to link up in particular with some of the most disadvantaged areas where people have less access to social media. From their point of view, which I very much appreciate in this context, the real difference to be made is that participation must not remain “a box ticked” by local authorities but represent a real approach of people and ensure that their voices be heard. Much attention is currently paid to policies in the field of “demand management” (for example hospitals, fire and police stations). It is important, however, not to raise people’s expectations beyond what is feasible.

54. The representative of the London borough of Haringey confirmed some of the information previously received on the Greater London Area: local citizen participation is still easier for statutory tasks and increasingly difficult when it comes to in-depth exchanges with citizens. Nevertheless, through active partnerships between local stakeholders and the targeted use of communication technologies, much could still be achieved. An example was the partnership regarding the development of local high streets (including elected officials, traders and citizens), which involved a dialogue partly led via the website “Haringey online” (regularly used by more than 2 500 citizens) and through which community control could be achieved over illegal gambling activities whilst limiting gentrification to an acceptable minimum.

55. Less educated people, having limited access to social media and finding it more difficult to express themselves, are often engaged through concrete projects of interest to them, such as gardening in public spaces of their neighbourhood. Such projects are also an opportunity to consult local citizens on other development issues as well and to create some continuity in community engagement. Once mobilised, citizens are often approached by local politicians who use these opportunities of joint projects to consult them on other issues as well (such as on food recycling in council estates).

56. Another example of community mobilisation is the “Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign”. Here, up to 10 000 and 20 000 people have been mobilised for various protest events since the end of 2012 (including a visit by the GLA mayor, Boris Johnson), less through social media but rather through traditional campaigning methods (knocking at doors, information stands at local events, promotional leaflets distributed in train stations or schools, etc.). For the time being, the campaign seems to have been successful: whilst the definite closure of the hospital was decided by the National Health Service (NHS) before the summer of 2013, a recent high court ruling judged that the reduction of substantial health services would be unlawful;³⁸ however, according to the latest news, the government intends to appeal this judgment.

57. Finally, many of these most interesting findings concerning London were confirmed by British academic researchers who have identified the following general trends and requirements of validity beyond the United Kingdom:

- The overall level of trust in public decisions seems to be in decline;
- It is when people should be most involved that this is often made most difficult (for example through the financial crisis);
- Not getting people involved may save money for local authorities in the short term, but creates huge, and more expensive, problems in the long term;
- As regards social media, local authorities are still in a learning process, not so much regarding the purpose of using them for participation, but rather regarding data collection and “one-way” transmission of information to citizens;
- Capacity building, a crucial means for improving citizen participation, should take place within a local authority, and hiring external experts for “one-off” events should be avoided if sustainable results are to be achieved;
- Today, good practice examples are rather to be found outside of Europe (in the United States or Latin America; through the “21st Century town meetings”), given that European politicians are anxious to keep control in these times of crisis and austerity;
- Essential conditions to effectively develop citizen involvement are qualifications and political willingness, especially in large metropolises where more resources are generally available; but few leaders of metropolises seem to take up this opportunity.

38. *The Guardian*, “Lewisham hospital cuts plan ruled unlawful by judge”, 31 July 2013, www.guardian.co.uk.

5. Conclusion: creating the framework conditions to facilitate and foster good democratic governance and citizen participation at the local level

58. The three examples of Berlin, Istanbul and London have shown some of the recurring challenges, difficulties and obstacles, but also good practice examples of citizen participation in large cities, which are capitals and/or economic driving forces of their countries. Whilst stakeholders we met in Berlin seemed to be mostly pre-occupied with getting the most disadvantaged groups involved in local development and generating a feeling of responsibility with the community, Istanbul currently faces an evolution of political cultures, which sometimes leads to confrontational situations due to high pressure for urban and commercial developments. In my own capital, London, where local finances have undergone significant changes and reductions in recent years, local partners are looking for new partnerships and tools for citizen participation.

59. Challenges identified in the three metropolises examined therefore vary to a great extent, although this perception may be partly linked to the selective approach of local interlocutors. In any case and to a certain extent, all the major challenges identified seem to be symptomatic for large metropolises in the current times of economic and financial crisis; they therefore deserve some generalisation and help us to draw first conclusions.

60. The very basis of democratic bodies and processes at the local level is the institutional set-up which should, to the greatest extent possible, assign planning competences to local authorities and endow them with financial resources adapted to their responsibilities. Moreover, decisions made by national governments but having an impact at local level should be implemented in the most transparent and accountable manner possible.

61. Citizens should be involved in political decisions both through top-down (public authorities consulting citizens) and bottom-up approaches (including demand management, taking into consideration local citizens' own concerns). Local politicians should avoid developing "hollow" and ineffective participation mechanisms serving their own reputation without truly giving a voice to local inhabitants. Amongst the central determinants of engaged, effective and innovative approaches of citizen participation are political willingness of local decision-makers, capacity building within local administrations, the availability of resources for discretionary tasks like participatory mechanisms and the ability to build up a relationship of trust between local inhabitants and politicians.

62. Fostering social and economic development at the local level is a precondition for dynamic local democracies and citizens to develop an interest in active participation and community involvement. Only citizens who have satisfactory living conditions and are not confronted on a daily basis with the basic challenges of supporting their family, will find their way to engaging with their local community.

63. To get local people involved, accessible and appropriate means of communication need to be employed, which may vary according to age groups and socio-economic categories. There is no use communicating essential developments via the Internet or social media if greater parts of the local population do not consult this medium for that purpose. On the other hand, the use of the Internet should be fostered in the realm of local democracy wherever appropriate (e-democracy, e-participation, etc.) with regard to the younger generation amongst whom the use of such tools is widespread. The right mix of communication tools to get in touch with the local population should be chosen on a case-by-case basis.

64. The international exchange of good practice and awareness-raising measures aimed at the improvement of local democratic processes, also through appropriate national conditions, should be strengthened. Our joint objective should be to promote high standards of local democracy and citizen participation across Europe, including in countries where threats are currently posed by the economic situation of local authorities and citizens, or authoritarian national policies.

65. Good governance and citizen participation at the local level – and in large metropolises as a specific category of local authorities – are central issues of modern democracy and closely related to one of the pillars of the Council of Europe's work. Active participation of citizens in local development involving both citizen consultation in decision-making processes and community engagement, is a key to creating sustainable local communities and ensuring best standards of democracy across Europe.