Citizens’ engagement in cross-border regions

The experiences of the TEIN4Citizens project

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Why is citizen’s engagement in CB regions important?

- Citizen’s seam not to be interested in politics anymore (or not in politics in the way it was/is done today) but they want to be engaged, to have their say, to be heard.
- Politicians don’t seam to have a concrete vision of the realities of the field anymore (at least it is what many citizens think) and need to re-connect with citizens.
- Citizen’s in CB regions were and are -even more since the Covid Crisis begun- aware of their need of crossing border and enjoying free movement.
- CB Institutions have almost no visibility even if they daily work and fight for a better life for citizens in CB regions.

> Citizen’s engagement is an answer to these three challenges.
Added value of citizen’s engagement

- Citizen’s engagement enable politicians / administrations / CB institutions to
  - know what is important for citizens
  - share information and views directly with citizens
  - make better decisions

- Citizen’s engagement enable citizens to
  - have their say and be heard by politicians /administration / CB institutions
  - Influence the decisions, have impact
  - Get information, a better understanding of politics and have more trust in politics

➢ Citizen’s engagement is a key factor of success for democratic life in the 21st century!
TEIN4citizens
Engaging civil society in cross-border regions for the future of Europe

- 680 participants from 24 European countries
- 772 answers to online surveys
- 5 forums with citizens, politicians and experts
- 2 students projects
- 9 project partners from 5 cross-border regions

Co-funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union
5 forums at 5 borders

- Human Rights, Civic Rights, Entitlements and Obligations: What does it mean to be an EU citizen?
- Old and New Minorities – The Relevance of Identities for Border Regions in Today’s EU
- Cross-border identity and engagement of civil society in twin cities
- Multilingualism and Identity in the 21st Century Europe
- Mobility, Environment, Culture, Identity & Multilingualism - Borderless in Europe?
Methods

Forum
- Group discussions
- Experts input
- Personal stories / testimonies
- Associations and NGOs involved
- Political representatives & MEPs

Report
- Forum report in 8 languages
- Dissemination and communication at borders represented in project and beyond

Online survey
- Have your say!
- Involve larger European audience
- 8 languages

Dissemination
- Final report
- Dissemination of results to local, regional, national and European political representatives

Communication
Challenges

- Selection of participants/citizens
- Reaching out to citizens not already involved
- Citizens’ awareness of already existing instruments/projects/initiatives
- What happens to the results and citizens’ recommendations?
- Intercultural aspects
  - Language
  - Organisation
  - Methodes
- Adaptation to COVID 19 pandemic
Main conclusions

- High level of motivation
- Subject specific conclusions:
  - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5uadrlVutmT-7W1z5B XFsg
  - https://transfrontier.eu/tein4citizens/
- Lack of visibility of the EU institutions and communication
- Access to EU funding
- Facilitate more active participation in projects and discussions
- More commitment to action at all levels -> responsibility of local, regional, national as well as European authorities and politicians
Voices from citizens

“There is no EU-migration policy. We should prepare for more crises in the future”

“Our framework of rights comes with the weight of the EU.”

“We need access to information about corruption, transparency of government spending, EU funds included.”

“It is very difficult to see how the peace and reconciliation process can continue in its current form outside of the EU and its underlying values of peace.”

"The youth has a key role.”

“Visions of the future of Europe: Keep the border OPEN but be aware of the security aspects”

"Central governments often marginalize the meaning of cross-border cooperation."　

„Engage women into politics“

"Getting used to the otherness is very important as well as tolerance"

“We have a lot of EU instruments but most people aren’t aware of them”

“Being part of a global society also often means being part of a minority”

"The EU institutions as well as local and regional authorities should take measures promoting transparency and civic participation."
Which topics can be discussed with the citizens?

- **Two main rules:**
  - Citizens are not “idiot” and can discuss about many different topics
  - The chosen topic has to be “open”: it means there is room for discussions and proposals of the citizens

- **But we have also to keep in mind**
  - Citizens’ are better to be engaged when the topic is concrete / when it has something to do with their daily lives / when they can really make proposal and contribute to decisions
  - Some topics can be address only to a specific target group (i.e. employment is not a topic for 65+)
Who organise?

It is a challenge in CB regions as citizens of each side need to feel concerned. Therefore we recommend to:

- Clearly define the geographical area
- Have “each side” represented in the organisation (i.e. 2 cities)
- Involve CB institution when they are not in charge of the whole organisation
Who participate?

- Organisers should decide who is their target group and set up selection criteria (age, gender, level of education, place of living, socio-professional category etc.)

- 2 main options for the recruiting process:
  - Random selection
    - From a resident register, telephone database or other (in some country it can be expensive) – this has to be done on each side of the border (it can not be done on a CB basis)
    - What if a selected person is not willing to join the debate?
  - Open invitation
    - Motivated participants
    - Always the same participants?

- Of course politicians as well as representative of the administration and or experts should be there too…or not? (Risk that politicians “talk too much”, How to ensure that citizens can talk freely?)
Communication

• Citizens do not feel enough informed about citizens’ engagement possibilities
• Citizens who are informed - and even they want citizens to be engaged - are not always motivated and have other priorities

➢ How to make sure citizens are informed? Especially in times when citizens are overwhelmed with information

• Before the event, if registrations are open, we recommend to:
  • Adapt the communication to the target group
  • Use many different communication facilities (social media, internet, local press, local TV, city magazine, etc.)
  • Use relays (associations, civil society organisation)
• During the event, pay attention to the languages (evt. provide translation)
• After the event, it is important to communicate on the results
Communication 2

- How to motivate participants?
  - Attractive topic
  - Attractive setting
  - Clear rules
  - They can REALLY have their say
  - REAL perspectives that the ideas/opinions expressed will be taken on board by politics, that they can have an impact
  - Feedback
  - Side events

- Pay also attention to the motivation of the politicians!
Which format?

• Short or long term engagement? (depending on the topic and what is expected from citizens)
• Surveys / Dialogs / Mix?
• Online / Onsite / Mix?
• Small / Big groups / Mix?
• Geographical area covered
• Timing
Which format – Focus on Online Dialogs

Focus on Online Citizens dialogs:
- has been successfully implemented since the covid crisis started
- was an opportunity to meet and discuss
- no time wasted to “get there”

BUT
- What about citizens who are not familiar with digital devices?
- What about citizens that connect online because it’s “easy” but do not participate in the debate?
- What about the informal discussions?
- What about cohesion?
Rules have to be clear from the beginning

It is extremely important that citizens don’t get frustrated and feel considered

- citizens don’t have to be overwhelmed with dialog proposals
- citizens have to understand what is their role (get information, make proposals, co-decisions?)/ the possibilities they have (speak, write, during the event, after the event)
- citizens have to be informed about the context (documents, input of experts or the administration / the organisers)
- citizens have to understand how CBC works (at least regarding the topic they will discuss) in order to understand how their proposals will be analysed and might be implemented
Funding

• It is a real problem especially in CB territories
• External funding - but then topics / timing are already set up (and not always in adequation with local realities)
• Internal funding - most of the time relatively low and must be coordinated on both sides of the border.
Moderation is VERY IMPORTANT - Before the event, during the event and after the event

- **Moderation -especially during the event- should**
  - be neutral
  - be intercultural
  - be bilingual (or with translation)
  - create a pleasant atmosphere
  - introduce the rules, objectives, programme
  - don’t join the discussion
  - structure the discussions
  - give the chance to everyone to have their say
  - be attentive
  - pay attention to time

- **Moderation is nothing without technical support!**
And then?

- Evaluation of the participants on following elements: global impression, methods, CB character, content of the discussion, relevance of the topic, chance to exchange, information and exchange with experts/administration/politicians, quality of the proposals, were the rules clear, technical aspects

- Feedback during or at the end of the dialog (citizens make some proposals without knowing that a similar offer already exists)

- Report to the participants just at the end or shortly after the dialog (to validate the proposals)

- Report for other citizens of the area (to validate the representativity of the proposals?)

- Internal report: Can the organisers “do something with the proposals” - What? - Feedback

- Report for lobby purpose

- Feedback after few month / one year to the participants: What has been done with their proposals?
Thank you for your attention!

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