

EUARENAS CITY OF THE FUTURE

Democracy across Europe has experienced immense challenge, change and uncertainty in recent years - from the war in Ukraine to the rise of populism to decreasing levels of public trust in governance institutions and processes.

Set against the backdrop of these issues, EUARENAS has investigated how cities and urban spaces can support democracy. Specifically, EUARENAS has explored how participation and deliberation in democracy and decision-making can be increased, and how voices and communities who are excluded from such arenas can be more actively involved.

Between 2021 and 2023, EUARENAS ran a range of future-thinking activities in cities across Europe, exploring the future of local democracy in Europe. Over 400 residents, academics, activists, civil society leaders, policymakers, local government officials and many more, have been involved in these activities. This visualisation brings together their ideas about how participation and deliberation in local democracy could be enhanced, and presents them as the EUARENAS City of the Future.

Recommendations
 Cities wanting to strive towards more equitable local democracies should:

1. Address structural barriers to participation
2. Build relationships of trust
3. Invest in formal and civic education
4. Make decisions for the long-term



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Find out more at www.euarenas.eu

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 **EUARENAS**

ILLUSTRATION BY LIZZY DOE

EUARENAS CITY OF THE FUTURE ACTIVITY SHEET

STRENGTHS

Use the space below to note down the key 'strengths' of the EUARENAS City of the Future vision in enhancing participation and inclusion in local democracy.

WEAKNESSES

Use the space below to note down the key 'weaknesses' of the EUARENAS City of the Future vision in enhancing participation and inclusion in local democracy.

OPPORTUNITIES

Use the space below to note down the current 'opportunities' where you live for people to implement the ideas in the EUARENAS City of the Future vision.

THREATS

Use the space below to note down the current 'threats' where you live that could prevent people from implementing the ideas in the EUARENAS City of the Future vision.

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ILLUSTRATION BY LIZZY DOE

The Future Is Now

The City is based on liberating structures that are not only visible in the City's built environment but also within the relationships between people, organisations and institutions.

At the heart of the City is a sprawling park. This landscape is a hive of activity. Crafted between the trees is sheltered learning space. A University Professor is delivering a talk on the opportunities and threats of artificial intelligence. The learners are working together with the Professor to decide how they share and use this knowledge. Nearby, people have gathered in the outdoor community cinema space watching an animated fictional film about a child with Autism who goes on an adventure to a new City. By the side of the river, a bandstand is housing musical performances from newcomers to the City - the sounds filter through the surroundings.

In a prominent square in the City is the City Hall. Large bi-folding doors open its ground floor space to the public, seamlessly connecting the pavement into its interior. Within this space are various seating areas and information displays about what is happening in the city and how people can be involved. The information is in text and audio, with technology translating into a variety of languages used by the City's population. Civil service professionals are talking 1-2-1 with residents in the space, using the information in the space and portable digital tools to help them navigate the various processes and services that will help them address the challenges they are facing. Appointments are not needed in this space and the opening hours extend beyond usual office hours.

In the square outside a demonstration led by young people is taking place. They are protesting against surveillance methods proposed by the City's administration. Speakers have been invited to use the public platform stage in the square to present their perspectives. Above, the windows of the City Hall are open so the ideas and concerns can flow into the building. A number of politicians have come out from the City Hall and are talking with the young people who are a part of the demonstration. Shoppers stop to listen to the talks as they go about their daily business, and some decide to sit down and talk to other residents. Nearby, a water fountain and public lavatories provide the means for people to stay a little longer than they'd imagined.

Across the river, a woman using a wheelchair takes the lift down to the metro station. As she is buying her travel ticket, she is offered a reduced fare for participating in a short survey about plans for revising the metro service. Outside, a digital display is showcasing recent actions taken by the local administration based on engagement with residents and local news from different communities. The display uses minimal text, communicating largely through visuals. There is an option to scan an icon to hear the updates as audio descriptions or as a fuller text report in a variety of languages. Similar displays, voting mechanisms and incentives are incorporated throughout the City's public transport system.

In a corner of the City are a set of unused industrial buildings, reminders of the City's past. Within them a group of residents are experimenting with how they can be repurposed or temporarily used to meet the needs of the City's people. In one building, a temporary art gallery has been set up with work from independent artists. Outside, on a picnic table with parasol, a human library activity is taking place exploring migration. It is disrupted momentarily by a resident who feels the activity is excluding them and their stories. A Convenor intervenes and talks to the person about this. As you look at the industrial buildings, you realise that they gradually move from the ad-hoc into more longer-term usages. A formerly 'pop-up' clothes swap shop now has a permanent residence, a community café that uses locally produced food is open at regular times and an education space has been decorated by local residents. Gradually, the buildings are coming back to life and people are working together to find solutions.

This vision for the future is not out of reach. The ideas in it are already starting to happen around us. We need to mainstream them and embed them into our cities. The future is now.



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