



PART 1: BASIC DATA

Title of the experience: “Citizens’ of Ankara Re-assemble!”		
Name of the city/region: Ankara		
Country: Turkey		
Institution presenting the candidacy: The Citizens’ Assembly of Ankara		
Start date of the experience: June 29 th , 2019		
End date of the experience: Ongoing		
Type of candidacy	Innovation on an existing experience	X
Type of experience	Participatory budgeting	X
	Urban planning	X
	Council	X
	Workshop/meeting for diagnosis, monitoring, etc.	X
	Audience/forum	X
	Citizen initiative	X
	Other (specify): Facilitation Methods	X
Objective of the experience	To achieve higher levels of equality in terms of participation and to incorporate diversity as a criterion for inclusion	X
	Community empowerment	X
	To empower non-organised citizens	X
	To increase citizen’s rights in terms of political participation	X
	To connect different tools of participation within a participatory democracy “ecosystem”	X
	To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the mechanisms of participatory democracy	X
	To improve the quality of public decision-making through the mechanisms of participatory democracy	X
	To improve the evaluation and accountability of the mechanisms of participatory democracy	X
Territorial area	All the territory	X
Thematic area	Governance	X
	Urban management	X
	New social movements and associationism	X
	Culture	X



	Decentralization	X
	Local development	X
	Social inclusion	X

PART 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE

Objectives

Main objective of the innovative experience:

The most crucial objective of our endeavour is to achieve higher levels of equality in terms of citizen participation and incorporate diversity as a criterion for inclusion. In Ankara, the capital of Turkey, nearly six million inhabitants live in a vast metropolitan region in Central Anatolia, extremely polarized in political terms due to the twenty-five-year reign of the previous mayor. He had been notoriously known for his autocratic, nepotist, and corrupt administration that eroded community awareness and participatory practices. Establishing an inclusive, trustworthy, and well-organized participatory mechanism to bring together citizens and various stakeholders in Ankara is the real challenge.

How have you achieved this objective?

The single most important means to achieve the objective mentioned above in Ankara was establishing an innovative “Citizens’ Assembly” structure. According to the Turkish Law of Municipalities, a “citizens’ assembly” is a non-profit, non-governmental, autonomous community organization. It is a participatory organization monitoring the elected city council and the mayor by consolidating community participation and citizen initiatives at the street, neighbourhood, district, and metropolitan levels to define local policies and raise community awareness related to sustainable development, liveability, and good governance. In 2019, a new mayor was elected, and one of his major promises was to strengthen participatory governance. For this purpose, a project was launched under the name “Citizens of Ankara: Re-assemble!” with the establishment of a Citizens’ Assembly with three main targets: (1) Persuade and gain the trust of a significant sample of stakeholders in Ankara to become a member of the Assembly using innovative facilitation and organization techniques, (2) Define local policies and strategies for structural problems of Ankara Region with these newly recruited members and pursue enactment of these proposals in the Metropolitan Council, (3) Strengthen community awareness and create concrete solidarity examples among citizens especially in crises.

To what extent has this objective been achieved?

All project objectives were achieved in a year:

- (1) Over 600 stakeholder public, private, and civil society institutions involving universities, associations, foundations, chambers, unions, neighbourhood administrations, public agencies, and municipalities became members of this participatory organization together with over 2000 individual volunteering experts and citizens making The Citizens ‘Assembly of Ankara largest participatory network in Turkey and possibly in Europe.
- (2) The members of the Citizens’ Assembly were organized into 35 working groups and then prepared policy recommendations about sustainability issues related to a bicycle master plan, a climate action plan, increasing urban parks, an education program for people with



disabilities, and celebration of important historical days, all of which were enacted with a unanimous vote in the metropolitan Municipal Council.

(3) A solidarity initiative emerged from the working groups and volunteers in the Citizens’ Assembly of Ankara to raise community awareness in different areas. This initiative became the largest supporting network to the Municipality during Covid-19 Pandemic by supporting mutual aid for the impoverished and fostering neighbourhood-level solidarity campaigns. There was a dramatic increase in community awareness. Today, the Ankara Citizens’ Assembly is seen as one of Turkey’s most promising participatory mechanisms by experts and government officials.

Dimensions of the experience

Which is the most innovative aspect of the experience?

The innovative aspect of our experience is the extensive use of facilitation techniques as a cheap, effective, humanly, and efficient means of participation. Therefore the fundamental stages of the Project were mainly based on facilitating different stakeholders to establish a successful operating participatory experience. An effective integrated facilitation strategy and methodology helped the Project’s success in the establishment of the Citizens’ Assembly in a relatively short time. The facilitated processes helped to gain the trust of stakeholders, encourage them to express themselves, put forward their ideas about community awareness, and disseminate these ideas in the public sphere. Continuous and vigorous facilitation increased the feeling about freedom of thought, self-actualization, and a sense of community. In this methodology, three types of facilitated processes were devised: (1) “general forums”, in which all the representatives of the stakeholders participated and discussed the establishment, management, and participation to the Assembly, (2) “working group meetings”, in which different themes related to proposals to the Municipal Council were elaborated upon and (3) “focus groups”, in which needs assessment and tools for improving community engagement is tackled. So far, three general forums, over 400 working group meetings, and 200 focus groups were implemented. A facilitation road map is used to establish a voluntary capacity to use facilitation techniques and ascertain priorities of gender equality and participation of disadvantaged groups into consideration. The results of the facilitated meetings were disseminated in memos, policy notes, or reports via email and social media channels for open and accountable participation.

To what extent is the procedure transferable?

Some of the most difficult challenges in a participatory experience are related to the methodology to ensure effective inclusion. Although a participatory process could be seen as an open learning endeavour to ensure the fundamental premises of equality, freedom of speech, and autonomy, an open and accountable framework is needed. This framework should also be cheap, efficient, and easy to implement under pressure. Facilitation techniques and related capacity-building activities used in our experience are among widespread skills found in most countries in our time. Thus, we believe that using facilitation as a means for ensuring widespread participation is highly transferable.

Why do you consider that the experience is feasible?

Three main economic, technical, organizational, and socio-political problems are considered while establishing the Citizens’ Assembly of Ankara:



(1) The socio-political structure of the city of Ankara was highly polarized between different ideologies and political parties because of the 25 year-long autocratic reigns of the former mayor. This problem was overcome by establishing a balanced relationship between all the political parties in the Municipal Council and implementing an open-door policy to all stakeholders in the city by allowing membership to all public, private, and civil society institutions and individuals who apply.

(2) The second problem was about the scale of participation. Since Ankara is a metropolitan city with 6 million inhabitants and coordination of participatory activities with the Metropolitan Municipality was a real challenge. This problem was handled by establishing a balance between the participation of institutionalized stakeholders and the individual citizens through active facilitation and effective communication with the citizens via social media.

(3) There was also a problem with the resources necessary to realize participation of an extensive group of stakeholders. The Municipality provided the initial technical and service support. Later, the Citizens’ Assembly created its solidarity network and resources without any burden on public funds.

How has the experience been coordinated with other actors and processes?

A co-facilitation strategy was used to deal with this problem. A core group of people from municipality representatives and the Assembly’s stakeholders were brought together to form a joint “facilitation road map” showing the tasks of facilitation, participation values and rules, and underlining the commitments and responsibilities of the Municipality, the Assembly, and the Facilitators. Throughout the process, this core group acted as a mediator between the Municipality and the Assembly. Moreover, working groups and thematic groups were formed to deal with urban sustainability problems. All of these groups were coordinated by an elected head and executive committee. The products of the working and thematic groups were openly presented and discussed in the general forums defined above. The advisory decisions about sustainability issues of the city of Ankara are considered in the Municipal Council regarding the reports prepared by these groups of the Citizens’ Assembly. Hence, nearly all operation of the Citizens’ Assembly is based on a carefully implemented coordination structure between the Municipality, stakeholders of the Assembly and the working and thematic groups in the Assembly, in which individual citizens are part of the process.

What has been the level of co-responsibility?

First of all, politically, there was close coordination with the Municipal Council Members. All the participatory activities and advisory decisions were detailedly presented to the political parties represented in the Council. The responsibility to follow up the advisory decisions which the Council enacted was shared with the Council members. Moreover, the horizontal structure of the Citizens’ Assembly provided means to share the responsibility for the operation of the working groups and thematic groups. The representatives of 400 institutional members, out of 600 member institutions in total, are involved fully in these groups. Among these, there are 22 Universities, 18 chambers, 200 associations, 20 neighbourhood organizations, 40 trade unions, 50 women and youth organizations, and 50 workers associations. Also, around 2000 individual citizens are involved in these groups. All the working and thematic groups have autonomous decision-making and organization freedoms, preparing their working guidelines. All the reports and decisions taken by these groups are then freely discussed with all the 600 members in general forums. Therefore, there is a high level of shared responsibility for the working and decision-making structure of the Citizens’ Assembly of Ankara.

**Which evaluation and accountability mechanisms were used?**

The stakeholders of the Citizens’ Assembly come from diverse backgrounds and missions from the private sector to voluntary organizations, and universities etc., including disadvantaged groups. Therefore, as a strategy, the evaluation and accountability mechanisms are constituted based on open calls using social media, e-mail, and whatsapp groups to realize full participation of all these differences. A sectoral and thematic balance were taken into consideration in the participation of different stakeholders in evaluation mechanisms. The practical means of evaluating the Citizens’ Assembly’s work is realized through regular monthly evaluation meetings and bulletins. The basic rule is the allowance and encouragement of all the stakeholders to participate in all facilitated evaluation meetings. A detailed stakeholder analysis was made before the meetings to engage those with different communication and learning styles. Gender equality and participation of disadvantaged groups such as disabled, elderly, migrants, and poor were considered in announcements, participation, and facilitation to these meetings. For instance, in every meeting, accessible venues were selected, and simultaneous sign language translation and necessary audio-visual support were provided for the disabled participants. The results of the facilitated evaluation meetings were shared through memos, policy notes, or reports, and these are disseminated via email and social media channels in the form of a bulletin. The feedback coming from the citizens and members of the Assembly about the evaluation meetings are reported in the following evaluation meeting to all participants. All these ideas presented in the meetings are then published as an annual evaluation report.

Summary of the experience

The Citizens’ Assembly of Ankara is an autonomous participatory organization established to consolidate community participation efforts and citizen initiatives at the street, neighbourhood, district, and metropolitan levels to define substantial urban policies and raise community awareness related to sustainable development, liveability, and good governance. Formerly, the scale and the historical experience of the city of Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, made it extremely difficult to establish a Citizens’ Assembly since nearly six million inhabitants live in a vast metropolitan region with thousands of institutionalized stakeholders. The population was highly polarized in political terms because of the twenty-five-year reign of the previous mayor. At the beginning of 2019, a new mayor was elected, and establishing a Citizens’ Assembly was chosen as the fundamental means of increasing citizen participation. For this purpose, a project was launched under the name Citizens of Ankara: Re-assemble!

There were three objectives: (1) Persuade and gain the trust of a significant sample of stakeholders in Ankara to become a member of the Assembly to re-establish the Citizens’ Assembly of Ankara. (2) Define local policies and strategies for structural problems of Ankara Region with these newly recruited members and pursue enactment of these proposals in the Council. (3) Strengthen community awareness and create concrete solidarity examples among citizens, especially in emergencies. The general approach was to devise an innovative facilitation methodology throughout all phases of establishing the Citizens’ Assembly.

The Project reached its objectives in a year:

(1) Over 600 stakeholder public, private, and civil society institutions involving universities, associations, foundations, chambers, unions, neighbourhood administrations, public agencies, and municipalities became members of this participatory organization together



with over 2000 individual volunteering experts and citizens making The Citizens ‘Assembly of Ankara largest participatory network in Turkey and possibly in Europe.

(2) The members of the Citizens’ Assembly were organized into 35 working groups prepared policy recommendations about sustainability issues related to a bicycle master plan, a climate action plan, increasing urban parks, an education program for people with disabilities, and celebration of important historical days, all of which were enacted with a unanimous vote in the metropolitan Municipal Council.

(3) A solidarity initiative emerged from the working groups and volunteers in the Citizens’ Assembly of Ankara to raise community awareness in different areas. This initiative became the largest supporting network to the Municipality during Covid-19 Pandemic by supporting mutual aid for the impoverished and fostering neighbourhood-level solidarity campaigns. There was a dramatic increase in community awareness. Today, the Ankara Citizens’ Assembly is seen as one of Turkey’s most promising participatory mechanisms by experts and government officials. This success was awarded by IAF (International Association of Facilitators) with a “facilitation impact gold award” for effectively using facilitation techniques in citizen participation.