

Concept paper: Citizen Forum

Citizen Forum is a participation tool that facilitates a gathering of active city residents through thematic events (e.g., thematic participatory meetings, creative planning workshops, co-creation, etc.) where active citizens meet and engage in dialogue with each other and with politicians, professional urban/rural planners, NGOs and other decision makers – and thereby create a better image, understanding and cooperation in the city/county or neighbourhood.

As a methodology, a Citizen Forum is a synthesis of many citizen participation tools and techniques – it is a thematic working group, made up of all of the leading stakeholders engaged in or affected by urban/rural development: first and foremost, the citizens, but also politicians, technicians, representatives of interest groups, institutions, associations, NGOs, etc.

What methods/other tools/ techniques can be used while implementing the tool?	Main aims while using the tool
Many citizen participation techniques can be used at the Citizen Forum – conference techniques, such as Participatory Workshop, the World Café, Planning for Real, Future Search, Hands-on Planning, Consensus Forum, Scenario Workshop etc. and non-conference techniques, such as Open Space Gathering, Fishbowl Debate and many others. Tools that can be used are interviews and workshops.	<p>The aim of the tool is to take urban/rural development planning processes to a higher level by involving politicians in participatory planning – and thus ensuring political support, engagement and commitment for various urban/rural development issues in concern. Another aim is to improve the dialogue between the citizens and the public sector.</p> <p>In the context of planning urban green mobility solutions tailored to the needs of a target group of seniors, Citizen Forum facilitates the active, bottom-up participation of silver aged participants and thus ensures that proposed green mobility solutions suit the needs of Silver Agers.</p>
How can the tool be used in each phase of the process (when developing age-friendlier and green mobility solutions)?	
A Citizen Forum can be used across all of the different stages . During planning and development , it can be used to bring all stakeholders (experts and citizens) together to highlight what is important and what is not. During implementation it can be used to raise awareness for the implementers in terms of what is going according to the plan and what has perhaps been implemented improperly or is not working as expected. In terms of evaluation and feedback , it can create accountability in terms of what turned out as expected, what went better, and what (if anything) may have been ignored.	
What is the aim of engagement with this tool?	
As previously noted, a Citizen Forum aims to take urban/rural development planning processes to a higher level by involving politicians in participatory planning. Another aim is to improve the dialogue between the citizens and the public sector. Bringing together private citizens and experts allows them to interact and learn from each other and to shape the process in both direct (feedback of wants) and indirect ways (e.g. a politician sees how much people love something specific, and although it is not asked for, decides to involve it in the opening ceremony).	

For how many people and how is the tool suitable (for one-time use)?	How much effort is required from the participant and what influences that?
A Citizen Forum is suitable for larger audiences, and generally start from 30 participants and up to even 100 participants, depending on planning issues in concern, ambition, technical and staff availabilities.	As a Citizen Forum gathers a wide range of participants (active citizens/active seniors, politicians, professional urban/rural planners, experts, NGOs, etc) efforts expected by participants vary to a great extent. At least one day of presence at the event is required from every participant.
Time needed to <u>prepare</u> using the tool and what influences the time needed?	Time needed to <u>implement</u> the tool and what influences the time needed?
Preparation time for the Citizen Forum is considerable and takes about 1-3 months . It mainly depends on the number of urban/rural development issues planned to be tackled, number of participants to be invited/ensuring that they participate, selecting appropriate techniques for addressing the issues in concern, preparation of presentations, maps, handouts, as well as and taking care of all organizational issues. It also depends on how complicated matters are and how many different competing interests are relevant to the issue.	Citizen Forum events usually are full-day (~6 hours) events and they need specific setup and lots of preparation work (depending on participation techniques selected).
Time needed to <u>summarize</u> using the tool and what influences the time needed?	Price for the user of the tool and what influences the price
Summarizing and analysing the Citizen Forum outcomes can take one or two weeks .	The cost of using Citizen Forum is moderate . Main cost items are associated with organizational fees: rent of premises and technical equipment, hiring facilitators/moderators, stationary costs, catering and coffee breaks, etc.
SWOT on using the tool	
STRENGTHS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent tool to engage the politicians in urban/rural development planning processes and thus build trust among public sector and citizens. • Vast potential – multiple applications for various planning issues at various planning stages. • Suitable for co-design of new (innovative/green) planning solutions. • Facilitates dialogue, exchange and co-creation among the citizens and the public sector, improves the decision-making processes. 	WEAKNESSES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Forum tool is resource-, time- and effort-consuming. • Sometimes representatives of active non-governmental organizations do not represent the views of most of the population.

<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to reach, hear and involve those citizens who are seldom heard. • Creating new ideas, movements and actions for a better future for the city. 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political disagreements can disrupt the forum. • Aggressive non-governmental organizations or individuals. • Domination of city representatives (decision-makers, administrative staff, planners, professionals) if the event has been planned improperly.
<p>How to use the tool?</p>	
<p>How to prepare using the tool?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify 4-10 realistic/challenging urban/rural development planning topics to be addressed during the thematic workshops; • Prepare clear and easy-to-perceive descriptions of these topics (presentations, photos, maps, etc.); • Find facilitators and moderators. You may also delegate your city urban planning professionals/experts to conduct the thematic workshops; • Select and invite participants (active citizens, politicians urban/rural planning professionals, experts, NGOs, etc.); • Select and book facilities – large auditorium for general assembly and several (4-10) smaller rooms for thematic workshops; • Prepare well for thematic workshops, rehearse with facilitators/moderators; • If there are different kind of interests among citizen groups, arrange pre-meetings to discuss these issues beforehand; • Set up facilities for plenary session and thematic workshops. <p>How to implement the tool?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction (format – plenary session): explain aims of the Citizen Forum and thematic workshops organized as part of it; • Give participants an opportunity to introduce themselves, e.g. by specific activating methods; • introduce with the methods of the thematic workshops and what will be done with the results of the event; • present selected urban/rural development planning issues to be discussed; • Co-creation sessions (format – parallel thematic workshops): group work on potential solutions to the selected issues; • Presentation of the results (format – plenary session): each group presents the results of their work and draws up conclusions; • Final conclusions (format – plenary session): open, moderated discussion on the issues tackled and solutions found; • Take notes from the thematic workshops, presentation of the results and final conclusions. <p>How to follow-up using the tool?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarise ideas, thoughts and results from the thematic workshops, presentation of findings and conclusions; 	

- Thank the participants of the forum and send summary information;
- Evaluate the process and impact of using the tool;
- Inform citizens of what kind of actions has been done according to the results of the events.

Tips and hints for using the tool with people in silver age

- **Invite wide range of people** – silver age citizens, associations, NGOs, decision-makers, etc. to represent a balanced and inclusive forum audience.
- **Make sure to have refreshments and breaks** – sufficient coffee breaks are important at any event but when you have a large number of silver people attending, make sure to give this special attention.
- **Be careful not to have too long and complex presentations and plans** – it might be a good idea to provide further opportunities for participants to make themselves familiar with the provided information (e.g. on posters) and to ask questions.
- **Choose a barrier-free location that is easy to reach** – if needed, organise transport from elderly activity centres and other institutions.
- **Ensure you have all the resources needed** – suitable facilities, professional facilitators/moderators and/or 4 to 10 team leaders, informative materials, stationary.
- **Citizen Forum can be used to address a variety of sustainable mobility issues** – the forum evaluates the positive and negative experiences previously observed in a given urban area and defines new development scenarios, strategies, objectives and tools (good practice guides, indicator systems, specific projects) to assist in the actual execution of sustainable urban mobility development plans.

More experiences from GreenSAM partners

Read [here](#) how Gdansk used citizen forum to activate people in silver age.



Plenary Session



Thematic Workshop