



ORGANISING A DELIBERATIVE PROCESS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

e-Learning Course

WHY DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY?

Deliberative processes strengthen democratic institutions and representation by direct involvement of citizens in the policy making, especially related to complex matters, that are difficult to resolve. Unlike commonly applied participation methods, deliberative processes, such as citizens' assemblies, create space for multiple perspectives, informed, inclusive, and respectful dialogue among diverse members of society. These processes are proven to work especially well in contexts of polarisation, low trust in institutions, or long-term policy challenges.

The [Reykjavík Principles for Democracy](#) of the Council of Europe affirm the need to foster “democratic participation at national, regional and local levels through free and fair elections. As appropriate, “different forms of participatory democracy, **including deliberative democracy**, may be encouraged”.

Deliberative democracy is vital for building trust and ensuring that all voices, especially those typically unheard, can shape the future with respect for democratic principles, including the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#).

Local authorities need to understand the path to involve citizens in decision making through inclusive and transparent deliberative processes, and benefit from guidance on **how to initiate, run, and sustain citizens' assemblies**.

HOW WILL THIS ONLINE COURSE HELP YOU?

This e-Learning course offers a comprehensive framework for planning, organising, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a deliberative process at the local level. The course provides a broad overview of deliberative processes in the local governance context and introduces the terminology, key concepts, scope, principles, values and benefits of deliberative democracy. It also introduces practical steps to consider when organising a deliberative process.

The course explains why commitment to deliberative democracy is important and offers a rationale for local decision makers for commissioning a citizens' assembly.

It offers a different perspective on how local governments can implement deliberative processes to empower citizens and improve policy outcomes. It starts from explaining what citizens' assemblies are and follows the steps which need to be taken before, during, and after the process.

The course will guide you step-by-step through the design, implementation, and follow-up of citizens' assemblies, using real-life examples and tested methodologies developed and implemented in the Western Balkans, South-East Europe and beyond. Real-life examples, will illustrate how local governments can lead innovative and inclusive democratic reforms through citizen deliberation.

This course is based on the guide [How to Organise a Deliberative Process at the Local Level](#) issued by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and it is carried out in the framework of the project [“Promoting deliberative democracy and innovative approaches to citizen participation in South-East Europe”](#) implemented by the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, with the financial support of Germany, and in partnership with NALAS.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this e-Learning course is to equip local authorities with the knowledge, skills and competences to understand what goes into organizing effective, inclusive, and impactful deliberative processes.

The course aims to ensure a common level of understanding of deliberative democracy, through raising awareness of local elected officials, public servants and the entire local community, on what it takes to run a deliberative process and how to keep all stakeholders actively involved in it.

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

- Comprehend the concept, principles and added value of deliberative democracy to local governance,
- Get acquainted with the planning methodology, plan and implement a citizens' assembly cycle,
- Understand how to facilitate inclusion, legitimacy and diversity management and ensure tangible outcomes and impact of deliberative democracy through innovative and structured participatory processes,
- Work on translating citizens' views and recommendations into viable and actionable policies, while ensuring participatory monitoring and evaluation of their implementation.

TARGET AUDIENCES

This course is intended for local authorities and organisations that want to engage citizens in formulating policies through deliberative democracy, especially on challenging issues, with particular focus on citizens' assemblies, including:

- Local decision makers, government officials and staff involved in strategic planning, public service delivery and democratic participation,
- Practitioners from local government associations and representatives of civil society organisations interested in participatory governance,
- Civil society actors and stakeholders engaged in democratic reform or citizen empowerment initiatives.

COURSE STRUCTURE

This course consists of **four modules**:

- **Module One: Understanding Deliberative Democracy.** Concepts, principles, and the rationale for deliberative processes at the local level.

- **Module Two: Setting Up a Citizens' Assembly.** Mandates, roles and responsibilities, budgeting, governance, sortition, planning.
- **Module Three: Running a Deliberative Process.** Facilitation, agenda setting, information provision, drafting and voting on recommendations.
- **Module Four: Follow-up and Institutionalisation.** Policy integration, communication, evaluation, establishment of permanent citizen bodies, monitoring and evaluation.

The course includes paced self-learning (one module per week), an introductory webinar, a mid-course online meeting and a final wrap-up discussion at the participatory closing session.

LEARNING METHODS

This e-learning course is facilitator-guided, based on online learning methodology and tools including a preliminary and final knowledge assessment, PPT presentations, additional readings, case studies, videos, guided forum discussions, written assignments and quizzes.

The course will also create a platform for online, real-time exchange of knowledge and experience on democratic innovation.

These interactive tools will enable you to share your views, discuss with others and receive feedback. Vivid forum and online discussions and exchange of ideas and thoughts will encourage you to connect with other practitioners who work in local governments on enhancing innovative ways of citizen engagement in decision-making at the local level.

For successful completion of the entire course, you will need to dedicate 16 hours of your time, in total, or approximately 4 hours of learning per module, per week.

EVALUATION

To get a certificate of course completion, you should complete all the readings, actively contribute to the discussion forums, respond to the specific assignments and quizzes and complete the preliminary and final tests.

The maximum score for all tasks is 100 points, while the threshold for successful course completion is 70 points.

LANGUAGE

This course is delivered in **English** language in this cycle.

COURSE DELIVERY

The course will be launched on 22 September 2025 by **NALAS**, in collaboration with the Council of Europe and NALAS-member local government associations.

To express interest in this e-Learning course participation, please contact your **Local Government Association** or **NALAS** at: info@nalas.eu

THIS COURSE IS A PART OF NALAS e-ACADEMY

NALAS e-Academy is an online platform that enables dissemination of relevant regional knowledge to each local government employee in the South-East Europe, at the same time offering opportunity for an interesting, creative, step by step learning. NALAS e-Academy provides superb knowledge on a wide range of topics from various areas relevant for local government professionals. Taking advantage of new technologies, the learning experience provided by the NALAS e-academy is affordable, innovative and practitioner-focused.

COURSE FACILITATORS



Dr Damir Kapidžić is a Professor of Comparative Politics and Director of the Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Sarajevo. His research focuses on how democratic and authoritarian practices are institutionalized in contexts of ethnic conflict, power-sharing, and democratic innovation. As a consultant, he designs deliberative processes and promotes citizens' assemblies in co-operation with the Council of Europe and other international actors. Damir Kapidžić is one of the authors of the Guide *How to Organise a Deliberative Process at the Local Level* issued by the *Congress of Local and Regional Authorities* of the Council of Europe.



Andrijana Lazarević is a Teaching Assistant in Comparative Politics at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade, and co-founder of the RESECO think-tank. She holds an MA in European Politics and Crisis Management and is pursuing a PhD on the role of social movements in addressing crises of political legitimacy. Her academic and professional focus is on democratic participation, civil society, and EU integration. She is committed to connecting research with practice to foster inclusive and democratic societies in the Western Balkans.



Natalija Milović is a Technical Advisor on democratic innovations in NALAS. She holds an MA in Political Science, and her academic and professional focus is on democratic participation and good governance in the Western Balkans. Natalija has been involved in the design and implementation of several citizens' assemblies. She is also a member of the Executive Board of the Federation for Innovation in Democracy – Europe. In her work, she advocates for inclusive and participatory approaches that strengthen trust between citizens and institutions.

This e-Learning course is developed as part of the project *“Promoting deliberative democracy and innovative approaches to citizen participation in South-East Europe”* implemented by the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, in partnership with NALAS, and with the financial support of Germany