PARTICIPATORY AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY

Organisation of the traffic mobility in Belgrade
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLIES

**SUMMARY:** CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLIES AND AN ATTEMPT AT INSTITUTIONAL INCLUSION OF CITIZENS IN FORMULATING POLITICAL DECISIONS ................................................................. 4

1. **BRIEFING PRIOR TO THE CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY** ........................................................................ 4

2. **DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FORMULATED DURING THE CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY** ........... 5

3. **EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND FIRST POLICY SUGGESTIONS** .................................................. 5

**INITIATIVE AND ORGANIZATION** ................................................................................................. 7

## THE CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY IN BELGRADE .................................................................................. 8

**ORGANIZING TRAFFIC MOBILITY IN THE CORE CENTRAL CITY AREA** ................................. 9

**INCLUSION OF THE CITIZENS IN THE DISCUSSION ON THE EXPANDING THE PEDESTRIAN ZONE** ................................. 10

**BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY IN BELGRADE** .......... 10

1. **CITIZENS** ................................................................................................................................. 10

2. **ACTIVE CITIZENS, INITIATIVE REPRESENTATIVES** .......................................................... 13

3. **EXPERTS** ............................................................................................................................... 13

4. **DECISION-MAKERS AND THE AUTHORITIES** ...................................................................... 14

## THE PROCESS OF (DELIBERATIVE) DISCUSSION ....................................................................... 14

**DELIBERATION IS A FREE SPACE FOR EXPRESSING ATTITUDES, EXCHANGING VIEWS, ASKING QUESTIONS, KEEPING INFORMED, AND JOINT WORK ON POLICY SUGGESTIONS. DURING THE ASSEMBLY SESSION ITSELF, THE PARTICIPANTS WENT THROUGH ALL THE PHASES OF THE PROCESS** ......................................................................................................................... 14

1. **ATTITUDES REGARDING THE EXPANSION OF THE PEDESTRIAN ZONE PRIOR TO THE DELIBERATION PROCESS** ......................................................................................... 14

2. **ARGUMENTS AGAINST COMPLETE EXPANSION OF THE PEDESTRIAN ZONE** .................. 15

3. **ADVANTAGES AND ARGUMENTS FOR EXPANDING THE PEDESTRIAN ZONE** .................... 16

4. **DIALOGUE BETWEEN CITIZENS AND EXPERTS** ................................................................... 16

5. **KEY TOPICS DISCUSSED WITH THE EXPERTS** ....................................................................... 17

6. **REFLECTIONS ON THE PLENARY DISCUSSION WITH THE EXPERTS** .................................... 20

7. **KEY TOPICS DISCUSSED WITH DECISION MAKERS** ............................................................ 20

8. **REFLECTING ON THE PLENARY DISCUSSION WITH THE DECISION MAKERS** .................... 21

9. **POLICY SUGGESTIONS** ........................................................................................................... 22

10. **INDIVIDUAL VOTE RESULTS** .................................................................................................. 23

## POTENTIAL OF THE CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLIES ........................................................................... 25
CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLIES

CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLIES AND AN ATTEMPT AT INSTITUTIONAL INCLUSION OF CITIZENS IN FORMULATING POLITICAL DECISIONS

SUMMARY

In an attempt to test, for the first time, the possibility of conducting innovative participatory institutions in the context of the Serbian society, two citizens’ assemblies were organized in Belgrade and Valjevo, on 21 and 28 November fostered by the Jean Monnet Network ACT WB - Active Citizenship in the Western Balkans, managed by the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory at the University of Belgrade.

The aim of such participatory and deliberative models of democratic institutions, whose institutionalization has become widespread in the last twenty years, both locally and nationally, and at the level of the European Union as well, is to re-establish trust in political processes and institutions. Likewise, there is a tendency to empower citizens to take part in the process of formulating policy suggestions in the public interest through public deliberation, i.e., inclusive discussion, together with experts and political decision-makers.

First citizens’ assembly held in Belgrade gathered a sample of citizens with different perspectives and sociodemographic background within an inclusive discussion on the topic “ORGANIZING TRAFFIC MOBILITY IN THE CORE CENTRAL CITY AREA”.

The citizens’ assembly was carried out through a deliberative process whose aim was to provide an exchange of information, arguments, opinions, and suggestions, through a dialogue within which heterogeneous attitudes and opposed opinions were appreciated. The results of the deliberation process consist of concrete policy suggestions made by the citizens who took part in the process.

THE DELIBERATION PROCESS IN BELGRADE WENT THROUGH SEVERAL KEY PHASES:

1. BRIEFING PRIOR TO THE CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY

Prior to the citizens’ assembly, all participants received carefully balanced informative materials in order to familiarize themselves with different sociopolitical perspectives and attitudes regarding the topic.

The first versions of the informative materials were created by research associates included in the project. Inclusivity of different perspectives within the materials was achieved by sending
them to relevant actors - citizen initiatives, experts, and decision-makers - to be scrutinized and commented on, before they were distributed to the participants. All comments that arrived were accepted and included in the final version of the informative materials.

2. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FORMULATED DURING THE CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY

EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND FIRST POLICY SUGGESTIONS
Citizens, the representatives of the population which the topic mostly refers to, were divided into four smaller discussion groups, within which, assisted by neutral moderators, they exchanged views, opinions, and arguments, and considered possible policy suggestions.

ASKING QUESTIONS TO THE EXPERTS
The next step was gathering all participants in the first plenary session, in which experts and civic associations that advocate different positions also participated, besides the citizens. Through their group representatives, the citizens were given an opportunity to ask questions about the topic at hand, the problems, or suggestions for their solution, and the answers were used for further joint work on the policy suggestions.

FURTHER WORK ON POLICY SUGGESTIONS
Backed by the information and knowledge they acquired through communication with the experts, the citizens continued working on the development of their own suggestions within the same smaller groups.

ASKING QUESTIONS TO THE DECISION-MAKERS
In the next step, in another plenary session, the citizens had an opportunity to ask questions to decision-makers, the representatives of authorities or relevant institutions, those in charge of implementing decisions or those who can directly influence their acceptance or rejection.

FINAL POLICY SUGGESTIONS AND GROUP VOTE
After the second plenary session, again within the smaller groups, the citizens worked on the final formulation of their suggestions. Within each group, through the majority vote, three or four main suggestions were selected, and presented to all the participants of the citizens’ assembly in the conclusive plenary discussion.

3. POLICY SUGGESTIONS AND VOTE RESULTS
Immediately after the end of the assembly, specific policy suggestions formulated by the citizens themselves were put to vote. The suggestions were as follows:
• Instead of the big pedestrian zones, micro pedestrian zones should be introduced (pedestrian streets surrounded by streets open for traffic).
• Trolleybus network should be preserved since it is already operating and represents an ecological type of transportation.
• There should be a special access for the residents’ vehicles, and for the specially authorized persons as well (shop owners, etc.).
• Instead of banning vehicles from the central area, certain encouraging measures should be implemented, which would achieve the same results (less vehicles in the city centre): adequate public transportation, streets adjusted to meet cycling and pedestrian needs, etc.
• Simulations of the suggested solutions should be performed in order for citizens to be able to see for themselves if they would fulfil their needs.
• Either subway should be introduced, or the public transportation should be significantly improved, prior to the conversion into a pedestrian zone.

The final vote results show that there is a strong preference towards keeping the trolleybuses, perceived as an ecological type of public transportation.

Information about all the advantages and disadvantages, and simulations of the plans as well, stand out as basic prerequisites for trusting the plan and decision-makers, and as the only way of convincing the citizens that the plan had been thoroughly elaborated and that it takes into consideration the interests of various groups.

Pedestrianization is usually negatively perceived as an “occupation” of the central area that could potentially pose a great challenge for the urban mobility of various groups.

Micro pedestrian zones are seen as a more adequate solution for a considerable number of the observed problems.

Although there are no high expectations that the public transportation will soon be improved, or that the subway will soon be introduced, these solutions are perceived as the only adequate corrective measures, in case of converting the central city area into a pedestrian zone.

Issuing special permits for an access to the central city area is recognized as an excessively exclusive measure, and thus was not generally approved.

It was stated that encouraging measures are by all means better than the restrictive ones, but considering the crucial importance of other dilemmas, the consideration of specific encouraging measures fades into the background.

What is particularly important for the process itself is that approximately 80% of the participants claimed their participation in the assemblies greatly deepened their understanding of the problem at hand, approximately 85% of the participants said that the expert comments helped them gain a better understanding of the problem, and approximately 77% that after the
discussion they better understood those they disagree with.

Unfortunately, the comments given by the decision-makers, according to 50% of the participants, helped little or not at all in better understanding the problem. Among other things, this was also influenced by the lack of answers to the questions citizens asked in the plenary sessions and were especially interested in, time constraints, or inadequate responses.

However, civic engagement and taking part in the process of giving policy suggestions brings clear satisfaction, 80% of the participants rated it from 8 to 10. This satisfaction, together with citizen’s feeling that their involvement in political processes makes sense, represents huge democratic potential.

Although the organizers of the citizens’ assemblies cannot exert direct influence over the decision-makers, all insights gained in this process and all given suggestions will be used for further and wider deliberation. Scientific findings from this research will serve to improve democratic practices in the country. All posed questions, suggestions, and proposals put forward by the citizens during the assemblies will be forwarded to the decision-makers, and through a further public promotion of this democratic institution, participatory deliberative democracy will be advocated.

INITIATIVE AND ORGANIZATION

This project was carried out in cooperation with the European Jean Monnet Network ACT WB - Active Citizenship in the Western Balkans (https://act-wb.net) coordinated by the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory at the University of Belgrade, together with four more European universities and Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence. Project was also supported by the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade.

Planning and implementing of the citizens’ assemblies took place through the cooperation of the scientific committee composed by the members: Irena Fiket (IPST), Ana Đorđević (IPST), Biljana Đorđević (Faculty of Political Sciences), Ivana Janković (Faculty of Philosophy), Gazela Pudar Draško (IPST) and Jelena Vasiljević (IPST), and the executive organization committee (Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence and MASMI).

Both citizens’ assembly sessions (held in Belgrade and Valjevo) were launched and led by Irena Fiket, Academic Project Coordinator on behalf of ACT WB, and Gazela Pudar Draško, Director of the Institute of Philosophy and Social Theory. Participants of both assemblies were greeted by Sylvie Estriga on behalf of the EU Delegations to Serbia. Discussions within small groups of
citizens were led by neutral moderators.

THE CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY IN BELGRADE

ORGANIZING TRAFFIC MOBILITY IN THE CORE CENTRAL CITY AREA

„I heard from an expert, when in a big city you do something in one part of the city, that has a domino effect on the whole city.“ A female citizen, age 30-60
THE CITIZEN’S ASSEMBLY IN BELGRADE

ORGANIZING TRAFFIC MOBILITY IN THE CORE CENTRAL CITY AREA OF BELGRADE

AN OVERVIEW OF FORMER EVENTS AND ATTITUDES

Belgrade has been for some time under intensive reconstruction. One of the plans of the city authorities is to expand the pedestrian zone from the central Knez Mihailova Street. Traffic presents one of the biggest problems to Belgrade functionality, and traffic difficulties make everyday life harder for people who live and work there.

Little is known about the expanding itself among the citizens. In what way does expanding the pedestrian zone influence mobility in the city and how does it impact pedestrians, cyclists, car drivers, and users of the public transportation? What do various interested parties think about it, namely citizens who live and work there, and what are the possible solutions?

In order for the needs and suggestions of those who use the central city area in their everyday life could be heard, an online citizens’ assembly was organized on 21 November 2020 in Belgrade. The objective of the assembly was to look into different issues and perspectives concerning the problem of traffic mobility in the central city area, in order to jointly find optimal suggestions and solutions.

All participants had a task to familiarize themselves with the prepared materials in which existing measures and plans at the city level were presented, such as: The Strategy of the Development of the City of Belgrade from 2011, and the project “Identity - Mobility - Ecology” by the City of Belgrade; next, strategic goals, measures, and priorities described and defined in the Strategy of the Development of the City of Belgrade by 2021, and in the document “Sustainable Mobility for Interactive Development of the City”. Throughout the materials they were able to gain an overview of the different attitudes, as well as the previous reactions of all interested parties: central city area dwellers, independent experts from the field of architecture, and civil associations “Pedestrians are not Marathon Runners” („Pešaci nisu maratonci“), “Streets for Cyclists” („Ulice za bicikliste“), and “Dorćol Neighbours“ („Komšije sa Dorćola”).

KEY ARGUMENTS FOR EXPANDING THE PEDESTRIAN ZONE STATED IN THE PREPARED MATERIALS:

- **ECONOMIC AND FUNCTIONAL ADVANTAGES**: improvements to the commercial and touristic part of the city, and the affirmation of the cultural and historical identity.
- **ECOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS**: displacement of vehicles from the core central city area and promotion of green solutions, expanding pedestrian and bike paths.
HARMONIZATION WITH THE EUROPEAN REGULATION AND PRACTICE (Europe 2020 Strategy), without legal constraint of organizing a public debate.

KEY ARGUMENTS AGAINST EXPANDING THE PEDESTRIAN ZONE STATED IN THE INFORMATIVE MATERIALS:

- **ECONOMIC AND FUNCTIONAL DISADVANTAGES**: long distance from the public transportation stops, aggravated access to residential and business facilities, aggravated waste management, aggravated access of medical assistance vehicles, and lower appeal of the whole area due to these conditions.
- **ECOLOGICAL DISADVANTAGE**: higher pollution in the central city area due to traffic congestions in the surrounding areas.
- **DISCREPANCY WITH THE PRACTICES** of developing pedestrian zones in other European cities.
- **UNDEMOCRATIC AND UNTRANSPARENT IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECTS** - citizens are not familiar with the plan, nor were they previously consulted.

INCLUSION OF CITIZENS IN THE DISCUSSION ON EXPANDING THE PEDESTRIAN ZONE

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY IN BELGRADE

People of different demographic backgrounds took part in the citizens’ assembly, i.e. the ones most affected by expanding the pedestrian zone, both engaged and unengaged citizens, experts, and decision-makers.

CITIZENS

When it comes to the citizens, there were 32 participants in total, divided into 4 smaller discussion groups with 8 participants. Each group included:

- 6-7 “regular” citizens - representatives of the citizens who live or work in the core central city centre area, and are not officially involved in expanding the pedestrian zone, and
- 1-2 “active” citizens, representatives of the organizations who had expressed publicly their attitudes and organized reactions regarding the expansion of the pedestrian zone.

“Regular” citizens represent the population which could be particularly affected by the expansion of the pedestrian zone and they are, primarily, people who live or work in the previously defined area bordered, by the streets Cara Dušana, Brankova, Francuska, Kolarčeva and Prizrenska.

1 The planned sample included 40 participants, but due to the epidemiological situation and online discussion, the number was reduced in order to reach sufficient diversity within the sample, as well as enough space for all the participants to dialogue.
An effort was made to appropriately include all socio demographic categories, but considering that the citizens’ assembly was held online due to unfavorable epidemiological situation, this was a limiting factor for the people who were less versed in new technologies, and did not have appropriate conditions for using the online platform.
Basic demographic structure:

### Age
- 16-30: 11 (34.38%)
- 31-60: 18 (56.25%)
- 60+: 3 (9.38%)

### Sex
- Men: 20 (62.50%)
- Women: 12 (37.50%)

### Education
- Primary school: 13 (40.63%)
- High school: 12 (37.50%)
- Faculty: 19 (59.38%)

### Involvement
- "Regular" citizens: 25 (78.13%)
- "Active" citizens: 7 (21.88%)

N=32
In addition, the representatives of the citizens whose life could be additionally affected by the expanding of the pedestrian zone, and by the consequences of reorganizing surrounding traffic were also included, such as:

- Parents with children from 10 to 12 years of age
- People with physical disabilities
- Elderly people
- Shop owners and workers in facilities within the defined area
- Workers and managers of cultural institutions (both public and private, such as museums, libraries, galleries, and other).

**ACTIVE CITIZENS, INITIATIVE REPRESENTATIVES**:  

- “Pedestrians are not Marathon Runners“ („Pešaci nisu maratonci“)
- “The Ministry of Space“ („Ministarstvo prostora“)
- “Streets for Cyclists“ („Ulice za bicikliste“)

Beside the participants from the aforementioned categories, who addressed the issue in small group discussions, the representatives of different relevant professions, civil organizations, and decision-makers also took part in the plenary sessions.

**EXPERTS**

- Zoran Rubinjoni, “Centre for Urban Development Planning” (CEP)
- Milena Vukmirović, Faculty of Forestry
- Vladimir Dorić, Faculty of Transport and Traffic Engineering
- Marija Maruna, Faculty of Architecture
- Aleksandar Stanojlović, Architect
- Ana Mitić Radulović, “Center for Experiments in Urban Studies”
- Dubravka Lukić, “Pedestrians are not Marathon Runners“ („Pešaci nisu maratonci“)
- Iva Čukić, “The Ministry of Space“ („Ministarstvo prostora“)
- Zoran Bukvić, “Streets for Cyclists“ („Ulice za bicikliste“)
- Nevena Tarlanović, “Association of the People with Disabilities” Representative

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2 An invitation was sent to the organization “Dorćol Neighbours“ („Komšije sa Dorćola”) but they did not reply.
DECISION-MAKERS AND THE AUTHORITIES³:

- Marko Stojčić, Chief urbanist of the city of Belgrade
- Radoslav Marjanović, President of Stari grad municipality
- Đorđe Miketić, “Heart of the City” („Srce grada“), Stari grad municipal assembly member
- Marko Bastać, “Guardians of Stari grad” („Čuvari Starog grada“), former president of Stari grad municipality

The representative of the EU Delegation to Serbia Sylvie Estriga greeted the participants at the beginning of the citizens’ assemblies in Belgrade and Valjevo. She emphasized that inclusion of the elements of participatory democracy, both on national and European level, can be empowering, and complementary to the representative democracy. Moreover, she reminded that participatory democracy is important for all participants, because it enables appreciating different perspectives and looking into different interests during political decision-making.

THE PROCESS OF DELIBERATIVE DISCUSSION

DELIBERATION IS A FREE SPACE FOR EXPRESSING ATTITUDES, EXCHANGING VIEWS, ASKING QUESTIONS, KEEPING INFORMED, AND JOINT WORK ON POLICY SUGGESTIONS. DURING THE ASSEMBLY SESSION ITSELF, THE PARTICIPANTS WENT THROUGH ALL THE PHASES OF THE PROCESS.

ATTITUDES REGARDING THE EXPANSION OF THE PEDESTRIAN ZONE PRIOR TO THE DELIBERATION PROCESS

From the initial reactions and spontaneous attitudes demonstrated in the first group discussions different needs can be recognized. Citizens believe that there should be more:

- Clearer information regarding the plan
- Inclusion of independent experts, citizens, and clear and many-sided argumentation concerning both advantages and disadvantages of the plan
- Information about the consequences to the everyday life of different people in central city area
- Explanation of what this change brings to the existing and potential issues in the future.

The lack of clarity regarding the plan of expansion leaves room for doubts about general

³ The invitations were also sent to: Goran Vesić (Deputy Mayor of Belgrade), Dušan Rafailović (City Authority’s Secretariat for Transport), Ognjen Petar Todorović (Secretariat for Transport), Gordana Marković (Secretariat for Transport), Miloš Vulović (Secretariat for Urban Planning and Construction), Jovica Vasiljević (Secretariat for Public Transport). Unfortunately, they did not reply to the invitation.
citizens’ welfare, creates distrust in decision-makers and poses various questions concerning the project itself - while there is a clear need for transparency and information.

First of all, many people do not clearly understand the concept of expanding the pedestrian zone, which creates an initial negative approach to the project itself, regardless of them being generally in favor or against the expansion. There are no easily accessible and clear information about the basics of the project, and how it will affect the city life. There is insufficient information about which streets will get closed, how the traffic will be rearranged, how the plan will be carried out, and what possible harmful consequences could take place, and for whom.

“Nobody knows what we get, what we lose, for whom it will be easier, for whom it will get harder.” A female citizen, age 16-30

“Where is it (the plan)⁉️” A female citizen, age 30-60

“I don’t think there is a plan.” A male citizen, age 30-60

“I have a problem with how all this was being done. I am not sure that I have a clear opinion about it, if the pedestrian zone should be build one way or another. What is now being carried out (citizens’ assembly), in a way, outside the institutions, wasn’t carried out institutionally, and now I want to know how the public interest was determined at that time. Apparently, everything was done in citizens’ best interest, but those citizens were never included.” An active female citizen, age 30-60

„We would like it to be lovely, wonderful, but we just have to understand all the aspects of expanding. Who wouldn’t like to go for a walk⁉️“ A female citizen, age 60+

ARGUMENTS AGAINST COMPLETE EXPANSION OF THE PEDESTRIAN ZONE

Besides the resistance due to the lack of a clear and elaborated plan, some additional concerns and personal arguments against the expanding stand out:

- Unwanted change of the city’s identity
- Creating problems in mobility around the city for the elderly, mothers with dependent children, sportspeople, and cyclists
- Increased pollution in some locations particularly busy with road transport

There is a concern that the city’s cultural identity will be redefined, and that Belgrade, an active and vibrant city, will be rendered more peaceful, which will break up and enshroud the micro-environments, areas that citizens rely on as vital parts of the culture and life of the city. This is why there is a need for including independent traffic and aesthetic experts, authorities that would advocate professional principles in decision-making and keep the citizens informed.

„We’ll just get wider streets and lots of concrete. We’ll have one planted tree, planted inside the concrete.“ A male citizen, age 16-30

„What you have here is a mediterraneanization of tourist centers, where all that commercial content is communicated as benefiting tourism, but that actually isn’t the only way of
sustaining tourism. “ An active female citizen, age 16-30

There is a notion that the plan is not systematically elaborated, and that it does not solve current problems, while potentially creating new ones. Main concerns include the way in which traffic will be regulated, and whether it will negatively affect mobility around the city. A great question remains: how will this be solved?

„Traffic must get regulated, but it will not be regulated by cutting off people from a highly centralized city. “ A female citizen, age 30-60

There is a concern that the central area remodeling discriminates against and neglects people with different needs. The following categories are recognized as particularly vulnerable and affected:

- Mothers with children, especially with more dependent children unable to walk long distances
- Elderly residents of the core central city area

„How am I to park 3 kilometers away from home with my bags?! That could only work if we relocated all the people who live there, and if only businesses and young people remained. It should be organized in such a way that it suits everyone, not just the young people who can walk. “ A female citizen, age 60+

- Elderly in need of urgent medical assistance
- Cyclists - even if there was a bike path in the city centre, there is still the remaining issue of connection with other city areas
- Those who consider the argument concerning ecological benefits important for the expansion

„We are ranked first, second, or third in the World in air pollution, and that’s definitely not due to gas emissions. “ A female citizen, age 30-60

- Residents in the area who experience problems with noise coming from clubs and coffeeshops, or people coming back home from late night entertainment, expect the problem to aggravate with conversion of the core central city area into a tourist zone.

ADVANTAGES AND ARGUMENTS FOR EXPANDING THE PEDESTRIAN ZONE

The following main advantages are singled out:

- Reduction of noise and air pollution in certain locations
- Expanding the space for free movement
- Creating more green spaces
- Improvement of the cultural city centre area.

A key potential advantage could be an improvement of core ecological environment, since, with displacement of the traffic, noise reduction, and air pollution could be expected to decline in some streets. This advantage is usually recognized by:
• The residents of the streets who face problems with noise coming from busy public or road transport

„Because of the traffic in front of my apartment building, which is like an airport, my hearing got poorer. I would like the expansion because of that health aspect.“ A female citizen, age 60+

• Residents who have unhygienic waste containers in front of the entrance to their buildings
• Beside the expected health benefits, certain benefits for active young people can also be expected
• Cyclists and sportspeople, could have more space for freer and safer movement
• Mothers with babies or children in strollers would get more space on sidewalks, now occupied by outdoor seating of hospitality facilities, or parked cars.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN CITIZENS AND EXPERTS
During the plenary discussion with experts, the citizens brought up specific questions concerning the expansion of the pedestrian zone, and, in line with the time limit, found out more about their attitudes, got specific explanations, as well as possible suggestions. The participants were engaged in dialogue in the plenary discussion, and at the same time through the accompanying written communication (chat).

KEY TOPICS DISCUSSED WITH THE EXPERTS
• The lack of transparency and insufficient inclusion of all relevant parties in designing the plan
• Possible traffic problem solutions
• The true causes of pollution
• The question of plans regarding the green areas

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO THE EXPERTS AND THE DISCUSSION
Each group of citizens had its own representative in the plenary discussion who posed questions to the experts, and all the participants of the panel had an opportunity to answer.

1. Is it possible to include citizens, urbanists, environmental protection experts, as well as traffic experts into solving such problems, while complying with the regulations?

Regarding this question there is unanimous agreement among the participants that all the parties should be included in this and similar projects: planners, experts, citizens, people in charge of implementing and maintaining such projects, as Marija Maruna from the Faculty of Architecture, additionally underlines. Zoran Rubinjoni, from the Centre for Planning Urban Development, reminds the panel that there was a debate concerning the “Sustainable Urban

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4 The questions are stated in the same form the citizens expressed them.
Mobility Plan”, and that the law doesn’t foresee public debates during the planning process. He recommends that public discussions such as this should be introduced in the mentioned process as well.

2. **Is it possible to get a clear and transparent plan for public inspection, together with a simulation of the present situation and the announced project?**

Iva Čukić, on behalf of “the Ministry of Space” („Ministarstvo prostora“), suggests that announcements could be sent via utility bills, e.g., Infostan, and that simulations can be carried out in the form of relatively simple models.

3. **Which mechanism would enable an oversight of all phases of the project, from planning to execution, and even after the project has been carried out, in order to modify the project according to the experience of the users?**

Vladimir Đorić, from the Faculty of Transport and Traffic Engineering, points out that testing certain solutions and behaviors in the city can be observed on holidays or special occasions, such as, for instance, the European Mobility Week.

4. **How to solve the issue of public transport in the core central city area, the access for the emergency services, as well as the connection with other parts of the city?**

5. **Is it possible to direct the creation of the zone towards a hybrid zone ring, with ecological public transport (trolleybuses and eco-buses) combined with pedestrian-cycling zone, and introducing vignettes, where the residents of the zone would be allowed to enter with vehicles?**

Zoran Rubinjoni, from the Center of Urban Development Planning, states that it is planned for the middle transport lane to serve for the public transport from Slavija to Kalemegdan, and that it should be conducted in three phases: in the first phase buses would operate there, in the second, they would be replaced by electric or ecological buses, and in the third phase, a tram would be introduced, which is, with safety precautions, compatible with the pedestrians. Access for the emergency services would be regulated in the same way it has been so far.

According to the words of Dubravka Lukić, who represented the Civil Association “Pedestrians are not Marathon Runners” („Pešaci nisu maratonci“), so far the transportation “Sparrow” („Vrabac“) was introduced in the pedestrian zone, but it is not sufficiently safe for surrounding pedestrians, and does not represent an ideal solution.

Aleksandar Stanojlović, architect, addressing the traffic in the city, points out that the city should be mobile and functional, emphasizing that: "A smart city is the city that enables the citizens to choose which kind of transport they want to use to move around it. “ He also states that the streets are made to be the stage of the city, a place where people would gather and socialize, and where they would be provided with transportation and mobility: „Pedestrian zones, especially in smaller cities, they become zones for sitting, hanging out, coffeeshop zones. Basically, you don’t get a pedestrian zone, but rather a leisure zone, where people just sit around. What’s important is not movement and mobility, but rather enabling citizens to have peace in that area.”
6. What is the solution to the parking problem?

In this part of the discussion, many different opinions could be heard, and it is clear that for now this problem, and the consequences of the expansion, are left without clear suggestions that would acknowledge different needs.

The experts say that for those living in the city centre, the public garage in nearby Fruškogorska Street, the project which was started recently, could potentially help, as well as the public garage at the Student Square, which seems feasible in a more distant future.

Although in this way the needs of the core central city area residents might be met at certain extent, the question of accessibility to the central city area still remains those coming from other parts of the city to visit business facilities, public institutions, faculties, and cultural institutions on this location. They would all be denied accessibility, as Dubravka Lukić clearly puts.

7. How to regulate traffic jams and pollution in the outskirts?

The majority of experts advocate discouragement of road transport in the central city area through different measures, through more affordable public transportation and incentivizing its usage, demotivating parking charges, lower speed limits, and stimulation of more responsible usage of car capacity. Milena Vukmirović, from the Faculty of Forestry, mentions the findings that show approximately 80% of cars during the rush hour are with a single passenger!

Citizens are, however, left without a clear answer regarding the effect of traffic on pollution in the central city area, and do not always accept that as a strong argument for expanding the zone.

„Too much emphasis is being put on air pollution as a consequence of using cars and other vehicles, when there has been a time during the State of Emergency lockdown when Belgrade was the most polluted city in Europe!“ A male citizen, age 30-60

8. Will the experiences of pedestrianizing other European cities like Paris or Ljubljana be taken into consideration?

The participants of the panel point out that Vienna, Ljubljana, and Paris can be taken as examples of European practices; these cities were developing micro-pedestrian zones, or integrating public transportation with pedestrian zones, in order to reconcile comfort and mobility in the central city areas. There is a belief that some of these examples could be useful, adjusted to the local infrastructure, especially considering the lack of the underground transport. There was no time to give more detailed answers to some questions and they faded into the background because of the problems listed above. The following important questions remain open:

9. How will the green areas be organized?

10. How much is yet another reconstruction of the central city area financially profitable and justifiable? Why should the existing public transportation (trolleybuses and buses) be replaced by trams?
REFLECTING ON THE PLENARY DISCUSSION WITH THE EXPERTS

The discussion with experts was in many ways informative, encouraging, and beneficial. New information and suggestions were shared regarding the plans, procedures, as well as global and regional trends. A chance to hear opposing informed views was particularly worthwhile.

„I think it’s great we heard opposing opinions, I’m glad, that’s healthy.“  An active female citizen, age 30-60

The discussion was encouraging as well, because the citizens had an opportunity to hear the opposing attitudes among the experts, and back their own opinions with stronger arguments - or change them in the light of new information and suggestions, and in this way more space is created for joint work on better policy suggestions.

„Everybody liked the opinion they themselves advocate when articulated by the experts. I liked Dubravka Lukić, she literally expressed my own attitudes, but in another way.“  A female citizen, age 30-60

„I even might be convinced that trams are a good option, because of the speed, pollution, and if other cities in Europe also have them in their central area, then, that’s it.“  A male citizen, age 60+

What was also noticeable is the mutual encouragement and mutual respect displayed by the citizens within the same group, as there was an opportunity for almost every personal voice to be appreciated and publicly communicated through the group representative.

However, additional concerns occured due to the overall impression that much is still unknown about the specific solutions, and, more importantly, that the macro-plan of the whole expansion of the zone is still unknown!

„Maybe not even the experts themselves have a complete insight into what is exactly being done. We saw in the prepared materials that the tenders have been initiated, some public money has already been given, and assigned for execution of some works, but we don’t know exactly which ones. People still make guesses: if it were like this, it would be better like that. And, for me, that now causes a new problem in the whole process, but we did hear many valid attitudes and opinions.“  An active female citizen, age 30-60

KEY TOPICS DISCUSSED WITH DECISION-MAKERS

The citizens also had an opportunity to pose questions to decision-makers in the plenary session, as well as to present their suggestions concerning the expansion of the pedestrian zone.

- Key reasons and studies for expanding the pedestrian zone
- Expected specific benefits from expanding the pedestrian zone
- Plans and solutions for traffic and mobility
- Project funding
SPECIFIC QUESTIONSPOSEDTO DECISION-MAKERSAND THEDISCUSSION

There is an unanimous agreement among the participants of the panel that it is desirable to include citizens during different phases of the projects in the city, and there are encouraging announcements that it will happen more often. Some questions were answered, and other specific questions will be subsequently sent to the decision-makers.

11. How do they explain legitimacy of the project, given the fact that citizens are not included?
Radoslav Marjanović, President of the Stari Grad Municipality, points out that the municipality plans to inform citizens and invites them to public inspection of the projects in the future.

12. Which research showed there is a need to expand the pedestrian zone? Does that meet the needs of the people living there? What solutions were also taken into consideration besides expanding the pedestrian zone? What is the general urbanistic plan of the city of Belgrade like? What is the standpoint of the team of experts involved in project, or still working on it?

13. Did the creation of the pedestrian zones had the aim to shift the urban living to another area?

14. Will the transport become more frequent and will new lines be introduced as a connection with the central city area?

15. What period is the underground scheduled for, and is that project certain?
Marko Stojčić, Chief urbanist, says that there is the “Sustainable Urban Mobility” Plan (“Plan održive urbane mobilnosti“) which defines traffic hierarchy, positioning the pedestrians on top, then come the cyclists, next is the public city transportation, and, finally the passenger cars. According to that plan citizens will have to turn more towards walking, cycling, and using the public city transportation (which currently accounts for approximately 50% of the city transportation). He also stresses that in Belgrade there are around 650,000 cars, which is a huge number for the existing traffic network, so it is necessary to limit the car access to the central city area. He also adds that there is a plan to build 56 public garages, some of which have already reached advanced phases. Likewise, one of the goals of this project is to shape the city in a polycentric way, which would fulfil the needs for recreation and cultural activities in 10 to 11 secondary and tertiary centers.

Marko Bastać, on behalf of the “Guardians of Stari grad” (“Čuvara Starog grada“), points out that building underground public garages is expensive, and that the underground should have been built first, and only then then the pedestrian zone expanded and the parking lots reduced. He also warns that only around twenty spots will remain in the garage in Vlajkovićeva Street, because the rest is planned for the National Assembly representatives.

While the previous questions were answered to a limited degree, others are still left open:

16. How is the project funded? Is it possible to offer the funding plan to public scrutiny?
17. How will the economic activity increase with the expansion of the pedestrian zone?
18. How will the cultural and historical identity of the city be emphasized?
19. How will the green areas be promoted?

REFLECTING ON THE PLENARY DISCUSSION WITH DECISION-MAKERS

Since it turns out that the plan of expanding the pedestrian zone is almost certain, and since time and circumstances prevented all citizens’ questions and suggestions from being answered, conflicting reactions occurred among the citizens regarding the plenary discussion with the decision-makers.

On the one hand, the morale was abruptly sapped, as well as the enthusiasm about citizens being able, in any way, to influence urbanistic interventions in the city.

„I think that we reached the point of meaninglessness of democracy in Serbia, since the authorities did not take our suggestions into consideration, but rather promoted themselves. I suggest we don’t finish this. Or, to deliver all the suggestions to them.“ An active male citizen, age 30-60

„I feel really great, totally hopeless.“ An active male citizen, age 30-60

On the other hand, this platform and initiative raised awareness of the importance of the participatory democracy, and how valuable it is to create discussion forums like this.

„I suggest we end this (the citizens’ assembly), because that, too, is a kind of resistance. They say the participation is possible when there are positive experiences of the participation, but all the same, we still have to try hard, we’ll get there.“ An active female citizen, age 30-60

Ana Mitić-Radulović, on behalf of the Center for Experiments in Urban Studies supports the initiative and makes a point: „We think that today’s conversation wasn’t a simulation at all, considering the structure of the participants, regardless of the limited attendance, and the fact that not all answers were given now! It isn’t realistic that so many ideas get reflected upon, during a single event, so it is important to realize that the dialogue and the participation are a marathon, especially in our context, and with our “legacy”... Expectations shouldn’t be too high, but we should keep on insisting on the dialogue. Greetings to all the participants and congratulations to the organizers!“

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

MAIN TOPICS

In the concluding session, each group formulated its key policy suggestions, and selected two or three through a majority vote, which they then presented to the other participants in the plenary session. The following suggestions stand out:

- Information about plans and processes should be clear, transparent, and accessible, and communication with citizens active.
- Expert opinions should be incorporated: variety of experts, who would express citizens’ opinion, and several independent studies.
Simulations should be organized, test situations through which the experiences and the challenges could be assessed. Their desirable duration is 6 months, and they should not cost much, but they would be justified by finding the solution which will meet different needs.

Instead of huge pedestrian zones, micro pedestrian streets should be introduced. These should not be important traffic roads, and should have bordering streets open to traffic, which could connect the outskirts with the central city area, both by passenger vehicles and public transportation which currently operates (changing the trolleybuses is an irrational expense, unsupported either ecologically or functionally). Stimulation should be supported, that is using public transportation, instead of discouragement and bans.

**SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR VOTING**

After the citizens’ assembly, specific suggestions were chosen:

- **MICRO PEDESTRIAN ZONES** Instead of huge pedestrian zones, micro pedestrian zones should be introduced (pedestrian streets with bordering streets open to traffic)

- **TROLLEYBUSSES** Trolley network should be preserved, since it is already running and represents an ecological type of transportation

- **SPECIAL ACCESS** Special access should be provided for the residents’ vehicles and people with special permits (shop owners, etc.)

- **ENCOURAGING MEASURES** Instead of banning the access to the central city area, encouraging measures should be implemented (adequate public transportation, streets adjusted to cyclists’ and pedestrians’ needs)

- **PLAN SIMULATIONS** Simulations of suggested solutions should be carried out in order to see if they meet the citizen’s needs

- **METRO/PUBLIC TRANSPORT** The underground should be introduced, or public transportation significantly improved before the transformation into the pedestrian zone

These suggestions were put to individual vote, among all the participants immediately after the assembly. They ranked the first three suggestions they would support the most. Each suggestion received three points for the first rank, two for the second, and one for the third.
On the basis of individual votes, there is a strong preference to keeping the trolleybuses, as a relatively environmentally friendly type of public transportation.

Information about all advantages and disadvantages and simulations of plans stand out as basic prerequisite for trusting both the plan and decision-makers, and is perceived as a civic, argumentative way that can convince citizens that the plan is worked out in detail, with clear benefits, and in the best interests of different groups.

Pedestrianization of the announced zone is usually perceived negatively, almost like an occupation of the downtown area, and something that will present a huge issue for the lives and mobility within the city to different groups. Micro pedestrian zones are seen as a more relevant and convenient solution for a greater number of different needs.

Although there are no high expectations that the public transportation will be improved, or that the underground will soon be built, these are seen as the only corrective measures in the case of actually converting a broader central city area into a pedestrian zone.

Special access for entering the central city area is perceived as an overly exclusive privilege, so this solution did not receive general approval.

Encouraging measures are by all means better than the deterring ones, but considering the crucial importance of other issues, they are seen as a possible solution only after many other problems have been dealt with.
POTENTIAL OF THE CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLIES

The essence of citizens’ assemblies is to include many parties in deliberation, and giving policy suggestions that suit interested parties.

Within this research project, the participants were able to deepen their understanding of the problems discussed, and through an inclusive public deliberation get acquainted with various perspectives and state their own, now informed, suggestion or opinion.

Approximately 80% of the participants\(^5\) point out that the whole process has significantly deepen their understanding of the problem, around 85% of the participants report that the experts’ comments helped them gain a better understanding of the problem, and around 77% better understood those they do not agree with.

Unfortunately, comments given by the decision-makers representatives, to 50% of the participants, were not at all helpful in understanding the problem. Among other things, this was affected by the stated lack of jurisdiction in those aspects where citizens were particularly interested in, the time constraints, or inadequate responses by the decision makers.

\(^5\) The answers of the participants of both assemblies, from Belgrade and Valjevo, are included and displayed here.
Comments given by the experts and representatives of the civil initiatives helped me understand the problem better

Not at all | Very little | To some extent | Much | Very much

Comments given by the decision-makers helped me understand the problem better

Not at all | Very little | To some extent | Much | Very much | Don't know

Participation in the discussion helped me understand better those I disagree with

Not at all | Very little | To some extent | Much | Very much | Don't know
However, partaking in the public civic life and the process of giving policy suggestions brings clear satisfaction expressed by 80% of the participants who rated it from 8 to 10. This satisfaction can also be a huge potential for action.

![Graph showing satisfaction with the overall process of citizens' assemblies]

Although the organizers of the citizens’ assemblies do not directly influence the decision-makers, the whole process, and all the suggestions, will be used for further and wider deliberation. All scientific findings from this research will serve to improve democratic practices in the country. These questions, suggestions, and proposals will be forwarded to the decision-makers, and through presenting citizens’ assemblies via different channels in the civil environment, further participatory deliberative democracy will be advocated.

Gazela Pudar Draško, on behalf of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, also voiced her additional support and stated the point of the first citizens’ assemblies in the city:

„I BELIEVE THAT THIS WAS PARTLY EXHAUSTING FOR YOU, PARTLY INTERESTING, PARTLY ENCOURAGING, BUT ALSO DISCOURAGING, SOME SESSIONS MORE THAN THE OTHERS. I WOULD LIKE TO ENCOURAGE YOU AT THIS POINT - THIS IS ONLY THE FIRST STEP. IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FOR US THAT YOU PARTICIPATED, AND WE WON’T STOP HERE, BECAUSE THIS WHOLE EVENT WAS LAID OUT IN SUCH A WAY THAT NOT ONLY CITIZENS ARE HERE: THE REPRESENTATIVES OF ASSOCIATIONS, INITIATIVES, ACADEMIC COMMUNITY WERE ALSO WITH YOU, AND THEY WILL CONTINUE WORKING ON ALL THIS, EVERYTHING YOU SAID AND WE DIDN’T HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR TODAY. TODAY, FOR THE FIRST TIME, WE WERE ABLE TO TALK SYSTEMATICALLY ABOUT SOMETHING THAT WOULD BE A TRUE PUBLIC DISCUSSION. YOU ARE NOW A PART OF THIS FIRST STEP, WHICH HAS MANY FURTHER STEPS, BUT WE TRULY BELIEVE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO STARTED THIS WILL BE ABLE TO CARRY IT ON. “