

PARTICIPATORY AND
DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY IN VALJEVO

THE PROBLEM OF AIR POLLUTION IN VALJEVO



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CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES AND AN ATTEMPT AT THE INSTITUTIONAL INCLUSION OF CITIZENS IN THE FORMULATION OF 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, which have become widely institutionalized over the last twenty years at local and national levels as well as at the level of the European Union, is to re-establish trust in political processes and institutions. There is also a tendency to empower citizens to take part in the process of formulating policy suggestions that match the public interest through public deliberation, i.e. through an inclusive discussion with experts and political decision-makers.

The second citizens' assembly held in Valjevo gathered a sample of citizens with different perspectives and sociodemographic backgrounds within an inclusive discussion on the topic "THE PROBLEM OF AIR POLLUTION".

The citizens' assembly was carried out through a deliberative process, the aim of which was to provide 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 VALJEVO WENT THROUGH SEVERAL KEY PHASES:

1. BRIEFING PRIOR TO THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

Before 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 involved in the project. Inclusivity of different perspectives within the materials was achieved by sending them to the relevant parties – 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 for which the topic was most relevant, were divided into four smaller discussion groups, within which they exchanged views, opinions and arguments and considered possible suggestions with the assistance of neutral moderators.

ASKING EXPERTS

The next step was the gathering of all participants in the first plenary session in which - beside the citizens - experts as well as civil associations advocating different positions also took part. The citizens were given an opportunity to ask questions regarding the topic at hand, problems or suggestions for their solution through their group representatives, and those answers were used for further joint work on the 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 DECISION-MAKERS

In the next step, in another plenary session, the citizens had an opportunity to ask the political decision-makers, representatives of authorities or relevant institutions who are in charge of implementing decisions or who can directly influence their acceptance or rejection.

FINAL POLICY SUGGESTIONS AND GROUP VOTE

After the second plenary session, the citizens worked on the final formulation of their suggestions, again within smaller groups.

Within each group, three or four main suggestions were selected through majority vote 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, concrete suggestions formulated by the citizens themselves were put to vote. The suggestions were the following:

- Transparency, regular and active reporting, raising the alarm when the air is excessively polluted and giving advice on the possible protective measures. It is desirable to introduce more detailed measuring of pollution - primary and secondary particles, air, but also water and soil.
- Media communication could be even more active, so that the problem is further clarified and resolved faster.
- It is necessary that the various relevant parties join forces, and the commitment of local authorities to finding solutions is of special importance.
- It is necessary to further empower households by subsidies for switching to district heating (free or in installments) and to balance the heating charges.
- The capacity of the heating plant should be utilized, and as many institutions as possible should be connected to it. Especially the facilities of "Krušik".
- Direct measures should probably also be considered, and there should either be a total ban on coal or a ban on poor-quality coal.
- Modern building construction is expected to provide an ecologically adequate heating, so the investors are expected to connect new structures to the heating plant, as well as to secure green areas around buildings.
- It is necessary to improve the energy efficiency of the existing units, so subsidies are advised for the insulation of old buildings.
- A lot is expected from the renewable energy sources and the potential of thermal water, biogas and biomass should be tested.
- Given the high level of the pollution generated by cars, the share of motor vehicles

in traffic can be reduced through an improvement of public transport, the introduction of bicycle paths and pedestrian zones.

- Finally, it should be insisted upon that the legal framework for all the participants (government, industry, individuals) as well as mandatory environmental regulations is established, and that the relevant authorities are held responsible.

INDIVIDUAL VOTE RESULTS

Expectations are highest when it comes to the biggest polluters, so it is necessary to create an expert register of polluters, institutions and economic entities at the official level which are required to urgently switch to a more environmentally friendly way of working - for example, through district heating.

There is an essential need and responsibility to inform the citizens when high levels of pollution are present, and health institutions are expected to provide specific information on how the citizens can protect themselves.

Although a free heating connection is desirable, subsidies are seen as more realistic in order to stimulate more adequately the transition to district heating - some kind of help and benefits need to be supplied to households as well. While it is clear that these are big steps, they are considered indispensable for solving the problem.

Restrictive legal measures, such as a coal ban, or corrective, remedial measures, such as installing filters or creating green surfaces are seen as a minor contribution in situations in which damage has already been done.

The potential of geothermal waters is a reason for optimism, but it is clear that this is a long-term plan and that more concrete measures need to be taken beforehand.

For the process itself, it is remarkably significant that approximately 80% of the participants stated that their involvement in these assemblies greatly deepened their understanding of the issue, about 85% of the participants responded that the comments of the experts helped them gain a better understanding of the problem, and about 77% of the participants stated that after this discussion they understand better those they disagree with.

Unfortunately, the comments of the decision-makers were of little or no help whatsoever to 50% of the participants when it comes to understanding the issue. Among other things, this was influenced by the lack of answers to the questions posed by citizens in the

plenary sessions which were of particular importance to them, the time limit or the improper response rate.

Nevertheless, participation in public civic life and the policy proposal-making process brought clear satisfaction to 80% of the participants, who expressed this satisfaction through grades ranging from 8 to 10. This satisfaction, together with the citizens' sense that their participation in political processes is meaningful, constitutes a great democratic potential.

Despite the fact that the organizers of these citizens' assemblies cannot directly influence decision-makers, all insights from this process and all suggestions will be used for further and wider deliberation. All scientific findings from this research will serve to improve democratic practices in the country. All the questions, suggestions and proposals put forward by the citizens during the citizens' assembly will be transferred to the decision makers and participatory deliberative democracy will be advocated in public through a further promotion of this democratic institution.

INITIATIVE AND ORGANIZATION

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

The planning and implementation of the citizens' assemblies took place through the cooperation of the Scientific Committee, which comprised the following 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 were launched and led by Irena Fiket, Academic Project Coordinator on behalf of ACT WB, and Gazela Pudar Draško, Director of the Institute for 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 VALJEVO

THE PROBLEM OF AIR POLLUTION

"There are environments where the air is polluted but the people are unaware of it, so pollution can only be recorded through measuring, but in Valjevo, when you go outside, you can see the smog. And you will feel it. And in five minutes, it will be as if you were in a drying chamber." Male citizen, aged 30-60



CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY IN VALJEVO

THE PROBLEM OF AIR POLLUTION IN VALJEVO

Valjevo is one of the cities with the worst air pollution in Serbia. The air in Valjevo has been excessively polluted for years, as the unacceptably high registered levels of harmful particles show. There is no complete register of the main polluters, but major sources of pollution include the heating plants, individual fireplaces and Krušik – about which there still isn't enough information available, and which, according to experts, stands out as the dominant polluter.

In addition to the fact that pollution can be felt through breathing or noticed with the naked eye, civil associations have started to raise awareness about it, which prompted the town authorities to come up with a proposal of measures to reduce pollution a couple of years ago. There is still no systematic report on the implementation of these measures, which should involve the identification of all polluters and plans to solve the problem.

This Citizen's Assembly is organized in order for citizens to express their needs, opinions and proposals and obtain clear information on air pollution and plans for its solution.

THE POLLUTED AIR IN VALJEVO DIRECTLY IMPACTS THE LIVES OF CITIZENS

Citizens are continuously affected by the problem of air pollution: they are directly at risk, they do not possess information about the possible personal protection measures and long-term consequences, and they are forced to change their habits - spend time at home or leave town.

Since the systematic measuring of pollution¹ started in 2012, the air in the town of Valjevo has been classified as third-category - excessive pollution! This means that the harmful particles PM10 and PM2.5 suspended in the air are constantly above the limit values.

These particles include a mixture of smoke particles, soot, dust and acid alongside heavy metals. They are extraordinarily small, less than 10 or 2.5 micrometers in size and easily pass through the nose, but they don't stay there - they penetrate further into the lungs, to the bronchioles and alveoli.

¹ The informative material was compiled by Biljana Đorđević (Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade). The introductory part was taken from the informative materials. Only a summary of the information that the participants got acquainted with is presented here.

According to legal regulations, a maximum of 35 days a year of exceeding the limit values is allowed. In 2018, excess pollution was registered for 170 days, and in 2019 for 132 days. The highest number of days was recorded during the winter months.

Air pollution can cause allergies, respiratory infections, heart disease, stroke and lung cancer, even death in humans and harmful effects to other living organisms. Toxins from the air reach the soil and agricultural areas, where they enter the surface and underground water streams and pass into the food chain through flora.

Such air directly impacts health, as can be concluded from the data from the Health Care Center in Valjevo, according to which circulatory diseases are the cause of two thirds of mortality in 2018, whereas respiratory diseases cause the death of every 17th person - which puts respiratory diseases at the third place in terms of mortality. As many as 40% of preschool and 30% of school children suffer from these diseases!

THE PROBLEM HAD PUBLIC RESONANCE AND ANIMATED MANY ACTORS: ABOVE ALL CIVIL ASSOCIATIONS AND LOCAL MEDIA, AS WELL AS TOWN AUTHORITIES TO A CERTAIN EXTENT BY VIRTUE OF THEIR LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY.

Given that excessive levels of pollution were registered, the town authorities were legally obliged to develop the "Air Quality Plan 2016-2021" and the "Environmental Protection Programme 2016-2025". The local online portal "Valjevskaposla.info" ("Valjevobusiness.info") continuously reported on the matter, and the group "Da Valjevo prodiše" ("Let Valjevo Breathe") works on raising citizens' awareness through performative arts, while the organization "Lokalni front Valjevo" ("Local Front Valjevo") has, among other things, fostered the organization of a public debate in the town assembly after having collected more than a thousand signatures of the citizens of Valjevo. Seventeen measures for reducing pollution were formulated within the public debate and they overlap with the aforementioned plan and programme. The measures can be divided into the following areas:

- Monitoring and reporting (creation of a register of polluters, forming a team of experts)
- Reducing the pollution (heating and gasification as well as measures that support these processes; redirecting of freight traffic and changes in traffic regimes at the most polluted spots; areas with limited traffic and parking policy)
- Energy saving (thermal insulation)
- Attenuating the consequences of pollution (introducing green oasis; regular

cleaning and washing of streets)

- Increase in funding and mechanisms of control over it (environmental protection fund)

However, a systematic report on the implementation of these measures has not yet been prepared.

In 2019, an official but incomplete register of 22 polluters was compiled. Also, no decision has been adopted, nor have funds been provided for the implementation of any of the anti-pollution measures.

This failure of action encouraged the "Local Front Valjevo" to organize a series of protests, but civic activism has since declined due to the pandemic.

THERE ARE VARIOUS VIEWS OF THE PROBLEM, AS WELL AS SUGGESTIONS AND SOLUTIONS

Various sources have been identified as the main sources of pollution, but opinions about which polluter is the biggest diverge. The main sources of pollution include:

- Heating plants
- Individual fireplaces, i.e. residential heating devices and systems where fossil fuels are used (oil, tires, secondary raw materials)
- Obsolete power plants, such as the power plant of the Krušik Weapon Factory, but also the Krušik Foundry

Possible solutions for these sources would include switching to district heating and gasification (switching to gas). So far, some of the solutions have been implemented: the Valjevo heating plant has switched to gas, the General Hospital of Valjevo has switched to district heating, and the town has provided remote connection for households. However, the response rate was poor - possible reasons might be that citizens were insufficiently informed, but also that the price of the connection is unaffordable (or at least not until it was reduced by 50% prior to the start of the heating season 2019/2020).

There were also proposals to subsidize the purchase of pellet boilers (SPREG), insulation and carpentry replacement (windows and doors).

To this date, however, there is no transparent and clear information on what is being done about the problem of air pollution in Valjevo, as well as what specific measures could be taken to alleviate or solve the problem. Local authorities and civil associations differ in their views on what the main sources of pollution are and what the possible solutions

should be, how sustainable they are and how much they would cost, as well as who would be responsible for their execution. All the listed facts provided the grounds to organize the citizens' assembly in Valjevo with the goal of obtaining coherent information on air pollution, encouraging decision makers to take responsibility for implementing the adopted plans and measures, and coming up with new proposals and policies through a joint discussion with all the participants.

INVOLVING CITIZENS IN THE DISCUSSION ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF AIR POLLUTION

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY IN VALJEVO

People of different basic and specific demographic backgrounds took part in the citizens' assembly: engaged and non-engaged citizens, experts and representatives of decision-makers.

CITIZENS

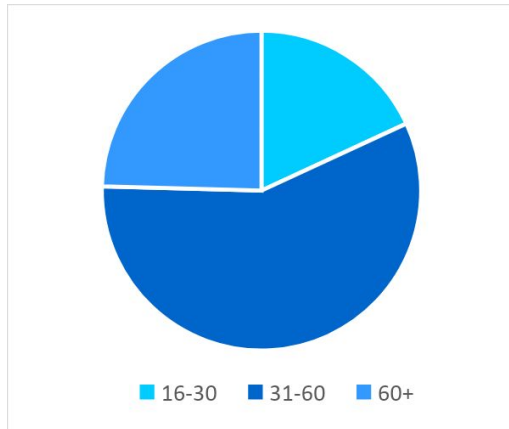
When it comes to citizens, there were 33² participants in total, divided into 4 smaller discussion groups, 8 participants each. Every group included:

- 6-7 "regular" citizens, representatives of the households heated in different ways
- 1-2 "active" citizens, representatives of the organizations which had expressed publicly their attitudes and organized public reactions to air pollution.

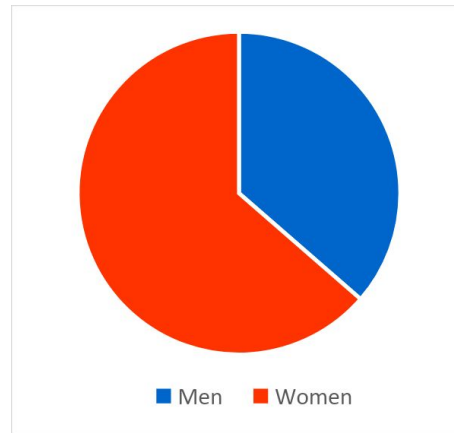
Each group was heterogeneous with respect to the basic demographic background: sex, age and education level.

² The planned sample included 40 participants, but due to the epidemiological situation and the conditions of online discussion the number was reduced in order to reach sufficient diversity within the sample, as well as to provide enough space for all the participants in the dialogue.

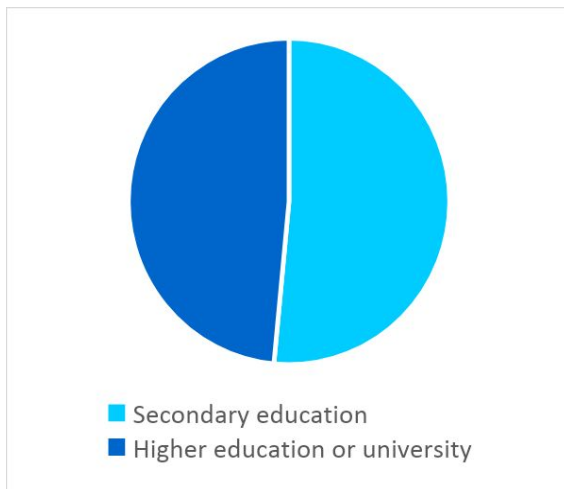
Age



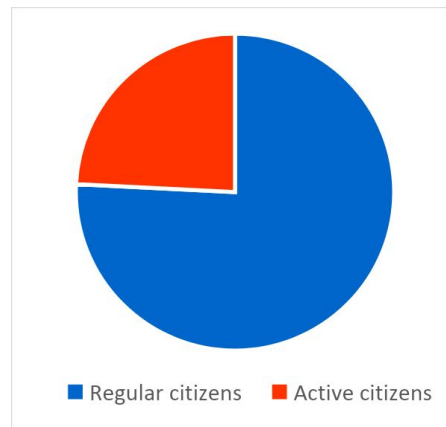
Sex



Education



Engagement



Basic demographic structure:

N=32

AGE	No	%
16-30	6	18.2
31-60	19	57.6
60+	18	24.7

GENDER	No	%
Men	12	36.4
Women	21	63.6

EDUCATION	No	%
Secondary school	17	51.5
Faculty	16	48.5

ENGAGEMENT	No	%
„Regular“ citizens	25	75.8
„Active“ citizens	8	24.2

AMONG THE „REGULAR“ CITIZENS, THERE WERE THOSE WHO COULD BE ADDITIONALLY AFFECTED BY THE PROBLEM OF AIR POLLUTION, OR BY THE MEASURES AND SOLUTIONS FOR OVERCOMING IT, INCLUDING:

- Parents of dependent children (aged 10-12)
- Household members that use individual fireplaces fueled by pellets
- Household members that use individual fireplaces fueled by coal or wood
- Household members with the heating systems connected to the plant
- Household members that use electrical heating systems
- Household members on the outskirts of Valjevo
- Low-income household members
- Employees of Krušik

ACTIVE CITIZENS, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INITIATIVES³:

- "Lokalni front Valjevo" (Local Front Valjevo)
- "Lokalni odgovor" (Local Response)
- "Eko Gerila" (Eco Guerilla)

In addition to the participants in the above categories who discussed the topics in small groups, representatives of various areas of expertise, civil associations and decision makers took part in the plenary sessions.

EXPERTS

- Vladimir Đurđević, Faculty of Physics, University of Belgrade
- Dragana Đorđević, Institute of Chemistry, Technology & Metallurgy
- Jelena Đuričić, Institute of Chemistry, Technology & Metallurgy
- Aleksandar Jovović, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, University of Belgrade
- Marija Petrović Marković, "Valjevska posla" Portal
- Jovan Grujić, Organizations „Eko Gerila Valjevo" and SPREG Fair
- Ognjan Pantić, Belgrade Open School

³ An invitation was sent to Andrija Petrović from the organization „Da Valjevo prodiše" (Let Valjevo Breathe), but he did not attend.

DECISION MAKERS⁴

- Milica Spasenić, Occupational Safety and Health Service at Krušik
- Ljubomir Radović, Representative of the Local Front Valjevo in the Town Assembly

THE PROCESS OF (DELIBERATIVE) DISCUSSION

ATTITUDES AND REACTIONS REGARDING AIR POLLUTION PRIOR TO THE DELIBERATIVE DISCUSSION

The continuously contaminated environment has immediate and lasting effects on the citizens of Valjevo. In this regard, the citizens' perception of the situation, their attitudes and concerns can be observed through several key points:

- People worry a lot about their health
- Air pollution affects the organization of everyday life, new forms of behaviour develop as people spend more time at home or leave the town
- There is no official and easily accessible information on the immediate harm to health, major polluters, planned and taken measures
- Civil associations raise awareness
- Local government is perceived as quite inert, and the initial requirements for connecting households to district heating are not stimulating
- The need for a comprehensive solution is evidently urgent.

CITIZENS FEEL THAT THEIR HEALTH IS AT RISK

The situation in the town is described as cataclysmic: the problem is visible to the naked eye, it creates tangible respiratory problems and permanently damages health. Information on pollution levels is not readily available on a daily basis and there is no clear awareness either of the consequences or of the protective measures. Many personal testimonies concerning direct respiratory issues were presented at this civil assembly:

"You can see the sun when you're outside the town, but here in town it's gray. The problem is very visible." Female citizen, aged 30-60

⁴ Invitations for the assembly were also sent to Aleksandar Purić (Department for Urbanism, Civil Engineering, Traffic and Environmental Protection), to a representative of the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency and to Zoran Stepanović (Public Services Company JKP Toplana), but they didn't respond. The invitation was accepted by Đorđe Pavlović (delegate of SPS) and Branka Antić (Health Centre Valjevo), though they didn't show up at the Citizens' Assembly.

"I am allergic and I do not go out in the streets anymore. There is also a problem of airing, you get more bad smell, smog, soot, what not." Female citizen, aged 30-60

"I am asthmatic and every year my condition gets worse and the number of air pumps increases." Female citizen, aged 30-60

"You can feel the soot, the tingling in your nose. It simply stinks. It's a silent killer, if we consider the long run. But no one has ever considered the long run, 15-20 years." Female citizen, aged 16-30

"No airing, that's what they are asking now. There's nothing clean entering our homes from the outside..." Female citizen, aged 60+

THE PROBLEM AFFECTS THE FLOW OF LIFE: PEOPLE SPEND TIME AT HOME OR LEAVE THE TOWN

Beside health, excessively polluted air affects other forms of behavior. People cover their noses, they avoid going outside, they don't air their homes, and for some time now internal migrations can be observed - people move from the center to the outskirts of Valjevo, but they also consider moving out of town. In the extreme scenario (the actual one if nothing changes), the question arises: will the town end up completely abandoned, or will everyone who remains become ill?

"I'm very comfortable with these corona masks. I normally wear a scarf, and when I pull it over my nose, you can see exactly what we breathe in. Am I supposed to leave the town at the age of 50-60, because I can't breathe in it?!" Female citizen, aged 30-60

"I go outdoors, I try to keep out of Valjevo as much as possible, but the children will pay the price. With their health. My son had asthma, we cured him, but there are still small issues." Female citizen, aged 60+

NOT ENOUGH OFFICIAL INFORMATION

As citizens have different views on who the major polluters are, the big question remains: who are the big polluters? The official answer to that question is unknown, because the register of polluters is incomplete. There are various assumptions: individual fireplaces, vehicles, Krušik Power Plants, but the position of the town could also be blamed alongside the additional air trap created in the town by the construction of the settlement Kolubara 2.

"We don't know what pollutes us." Female citizen, aged 30-60

"I think that the biggest problem is individual fireplaces, and that the most realistic thing is to do something about that first." Female citizen, aged 30-60

"Road traffic has been in focus for 10 years. Krušik appears only in 2016. And individual fireplaces seem to be only second-order pollutants." Active female citizen, aged 30-60

"Valjevo was considered second in former Yugoslavia in terms of the number of cars, after Maribor." Active male citizen, aged 30-60

"Valjevo does not have its own natural filtration. It is closed on all sides. Especially since the settlement Kolubara 2 was built." Active female citizen, aged 30-60

"The single biggest polluter is the Krušik Power Plant. Almost everything is already known about that, except how it will change!" Male citizen, aged 60+

CIVIC INITIATIVES ARE RECOGNIZED, BUT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS SEEN AS RELATIVELY PASSIVE - ONE FEELS HELPLESS, BECAUSE NOTHING HAPPENS AT THE MACRO LEVEL.

Awareness of the problem of air pollution is rising among citizens, and it is clear that this problem must begin to be addressed systematically. Civic initiatives are seen as important actors of awareness-raising, local media are expected to put even more pressure on the government, local government seems disinterested, and the national government is expected to finance and control the local government. There is a great eagerness among the citizens to engage in solving the problem, as much as it's possible within their areas of activity and as long as there is relevant support from the decision makers.

"I started following that pollution 30 years ago. Nothing is being done there. Many representatives of the town government come and go, they all promise things, like Santa Claus. People, citizens' assemblies are alright, but only God can help us, if the town government doesn't commit to do it. I fled the town because there is no help here. The town children have fled the town. There is no one here who will raise his fist and go. I fled so as not to see this evil." Female citizen, aged 60+

"Last year, the mayor said that the two-lane streets in Valjevo are busier than the Batrovci Border Crossing." Citizen, aged 30-60

"The media needs to put pressure on the town authorities to get something started." Male citizen, aged 16-30

LACK OF SUCCESS OF PREVIOUS INITIATIVES

Although some initiatives to solve the problem of individual fireplaces can be recognized, such as subsidized connections to district heating, that policy hasn't been adequately

implemented all the way - the offer is still expensive and unaffordable to the local population. Due to the difficult economic situation, short-term personal benefits are preferred to colossal future collective advantages - cheaper (and worse) coal and even the use of harmful household waste for heating!

"The connection costs 1500-2000 EUR, and this is meant for someone with a pension income of 15-30 thousand dinars..." Male citizen, 30-60 years

"People don't have the money to buy good quality coal. Half of them are interested in getting district heating, half of them are not." Female citizen, aged 30-60

"Heating in Valjevo is the most expensive in Serbia!" At 9.30 pm, the heating is turned off. They didn't encourage citizens to give up on the comfort of their individual fireplaces through any benefits or by making it easier for people to connect to district heating." Female citizen, aged 30-60

"Plastic and rubber are found in every household, that's something we call waste. And when it becomes a necessary evil, they use that too (for heating). Fabrics, shoes. Whatever's available." Female citizen, aged 30-60

"There are people who buy that waste, but it's not clear where it ends up. Is it for recycling..." Active male citizen, aged 30-60

THERE IS A NEED FOR COLLECTIVE ORGANIZATION AND PERSONAL INITIATIVE

The vast majority respects the work of independent associations. While we wait for the official and comprehensive solutions from the authorities, there is a need for the further raising of awareness and the need for everybody to join efforts in solving the problem, both among the organizations and among the citizens. This, clearly, is everyone's life problem.

"I'm not informed, I know about perhaps two associations, but why are there 10 of them, why don't they unite?" Male citizen, aged 30-60

"The government in Valjevo is organized in a way that makes it dependent on the government in Belgrade. We are fighting to do something ourselves. We are doing what we think is best, so maybe that's the reason why there are many different organizations." Active male citizen, aged 30-60

"There are several organizations and associations. Each in its own way tried to put pressure on the government and reach out to the citizens to make them aware." Active male citizen, aged 30-60

"We have to start it on our own, because obviously the town is doing little. Or nothing at all." Female citizen, aged 30-60

"It's a complete disaster. We are all aware of everything. Fortunately, we have these ways to communicate among us. I also see that this topic increasingly gets in the focus of social media. It seems to me that the situation is becoming worse and worse." Male citizen, 30-60 years

KEY TOPICS DISCUSSED WITH EXPERTS

Informing the citizens is a key step before action and there are many issues that citizens wanted to hear the experts comment on. The questions can roughly be grouped into the following topics:

- What is the specific impact on health?
- Who are the main polluters?
- What does the data say about the pollution, polluters and possible solutions?
- What is the potential of green areas?
- What can an individual do?

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR EXPERTS AND DISCUSSION

The experts followed all the issues raised in the plenary discussion very carefully and they all tried to share as much information as possible within the given time frame. Some of the questions were posed only within the groups and were not mentioned in the plenary discussion but are listed below, so that they can be answered on some other occasion.

WHAT'S THE SPECIFIC IMPACT THE AIR POLLUTION HAS ON HUMAN HEALTH?

Although it is clear in principle that there are health consequences, there is a great need to find out about what the specific diseases are, who is the most vulnerable and when - at what stage of development and in which season, as well as what protective measures can be taken.

1. What do expert studies say about the consequences of air pollution on human health? In which periods are which populations most jeopardized and what are the proposals for the protection of people?

Jelena Đuričić, from the Institute of Chemistry, Technology & Metallurgy, mentions that Valjevo is the most polluted town out of 11 cities analyzed in the report of the regional office of the World Health Organization, which examined this problem between 2010 and 2015. The report states that the air is polluted 5 months a year and that about 600-700 people die due to exposure to pollution. The biggest problem is the winter period and the heating season, and children, the elderly and the people suffering from chronic health problems are most severely affected. Đuričić warns that the particles also reach the placenta, which means that such air affects the health of children before they inhale the air for the first time!

The following questions were not asked in person in the plenary discussion due to time constraints, but they remain open because the answers are important.

2. How long must the human body be exposed to air pollution before its health deteriorates?

3. How much can a simple face mask help against these particles?

4. How does air pollution affect children who had eczema at the age of 2-3? Will this affect them later in life?

HOW AND TO WHAT EXTENT CAN CREATING GREEN AREAS HELP?

Creating green areas is seen as a well-known and relatively affordable form of ecological development, the first line of defense against polluted air. However, according to the experts, it can only be an accessory and not the principal means to counter air pollution.

5. How much green space would be needed to make the situation better?

6. Which plants are most effective in neutralizing pollution?

7. How does one raise the level of ecological awareness? Planting, creating green areas and parks?

Vladimir Đurđević, from the Faculty of Physics, points out that the problem of air pollution in Valjevo is a large-scale issue and that the focus should primarily be on major polluters. He emphasizes that the existing green areas should be maintained, as they are useful since one part of the pollution remains on the leaves instead of being suspended in air and

the trees absorb water. However, he points out that creating green areas is still "fine cosmetic work" which can be done when the original polluters are finally put under control.

8. What are the effects of air pollution on land and water, how long do they last and how can they be eliminated?

9. What is the connection between climate conditions and air pollution? What is the condition of the ozone layer? Does this also somehow affect air pollution? Are we here dealing with air pollution on a global scale?

10. Is the increasing fog a consequence of air pollution?

Vladimir Đurđević, from the Faculty of Physics, explains that a larger number of foggy days can be an indicator of pollution: *"In order for water to condense in the air or to form small droplets there must be some particles on the surface of which the water will condense, so high pollution helps fog to form more easily."*

WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY ABOUT POLLUTION, POLLUTERS AND POSSIBLE MEASURES?

There is a great need to identify the polluters as one of the first steps towards solving the problem. There is considerable consensus among the participants in the panel that Krušik is one of the major polluters but that its exact impact is not known, and also that the individual fireplaces greatly contribute to the poor air quality.

11. What is the main cause of excessive pollution?

12. Which are the main polluters?

Dragana Đorđević, from the Institute of Chemistry, Technology and Metallurgy, emphasizes that the lignite used for heating is extremely poor in quality, that it contains arsenic, mercury and sulfur and up to 70% of inorganic substances; it develops a large amount of ash, and has a significantly higher moisture content after the 2014 floods. She also reminds that lignite was primarily used as an industrial fuel and that it was only subsequently transferred to households, which do not possess purification systems. According to some estimates, Krušik consumes 50-70 tons of lignite a day, and 85% of households use individual fireplaces, most of which are fueled by lignite. There is an assumption that the toxic emissions from Krušik are even higher in cases when secondary raw materials are produced there, when sand molds containing resin are used, and in addition to this there is a concern that an inadequate gas purification system is used. As an

alternative to lignite, Dragana Đorđević emphasized the potentials of biogas extracted from biomass and thermal water - which the citizens are particularly enthusiastic about.

Aleksandar Jovović, from the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, has understanding for citizens and defends individuals: *"It is not the citizens' fault. They can be uninformed, poor. Every citizen will try to spend as little as possible. The price of the pellets is 200-300 EUR per ton, I think most people can't pay that. Plus they have no insulation in the house. Not to mention a new boiler."*

There is also a need to identify and recommend sustainable heating methods.

13. Which solution is most economically acceptable?

14. Can someone calculate the actual price of district heating, as an investment and as a cost, in comparison to the rate of consumption and price of solid fuel heating?

15. Is it possible to perform energy efficiency studies covering the entire town?

Aleksandar Jovović, from the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, mentions that the economic estimates of investments in reducing pollution exist and that they show that the price of not investing in the energy sector is 30 times higher than the cost of taking care of people's health! He adds: *"When you need to build a plant, you need to have ready money, and when you treat people, that cost is dispersed in the budget and if you don't want to see it, you don't see it."* That calculation demonstrates that: *"Coal (is) the cheapest if you don't include the cost of citizens' lives."* The return on investment is not perceived as quick, and it can be an obstacle to investments. He suggests certain solutions, e.g. that the heating plant should supplant a greater portion of individual fireplaces and thus use all its capacities, or that the local authorities take part in state competitions for public facilities.

Marija Petrović Marković, from the portal "Valjevska posla", states that during the pandemic emergency period this year the pollution levels were not measured for as many as 23 days because the people responsible for measuring were mostly absent due to epidemiological reasons. This will consequently produce distorted results for this year.

16. To what extent does the Stubo-Rovni dam affect pollution?

For the possible influence of the Stubo-Rovni dam, Vladimir Đurđević from the Faculty of Physics states that it is empirically imperceptible and that the changes in the air might be related to limited areas, not to the town more broadly.

The following questions were not posed or answered in the plenary session due to time constraints, and remain open for comments:

17. What should be the priority in conditions of limited resources?

18. What is the quality of the coal you buy? Which is the most caloric one, which is of highest quality?

19. Is there data available on the number of individual households heated by solid fuels, and the amount of coal and wood that is sold annually?

20. How much does the number of cars in Valjevo affect air pollution, in percentages?

21. What types of cars have the greatest impact on pollution?

22. What was happening in SPREG? What progress has been made? What is the price of the heating connection?

QUESTIONS RELATED TO ENGAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS

23. Who is in charge of the environmental regulations implementation and are people being fined?

On behalf of the portal Valjevska posla, Marija Petrović Marković states that in some cases external companies analyzed the emissions of certain public institutions, such as the Institute of Public Health, but that these analyses did not show that these institutions were polluters: *"How will they punish them, if the analysis shows they are not polluters?!"* Here, the question of the process of determining the responsibility of polluters and the question of trust in the analyses performed by private companies that are hired by polluters remains open.

The following questions were not posed or answered in the plenary session due to time constraints and remain open to comments:

24. Do the experts care about provincial cities and towns?

25. Why isn't air pollution measuring performed in wintertime?

26. Did someone threaten the journalist, what data has she collected?

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND OPPORTUNITY TO ACT

Since nothing took place at the macro level, there is a great need to accomplish something on an individual level.

27. What can individuals do to protect themselves and reduce air pollution?

Vladimir Đurđević proposes additional protection for the youngest by installing air purifiers in kindergartens and schools. Marija Petrović Marković adds that the Rotary Club Valjevo will donate 10-20 such devices for the maternity hospital and adds: *"They follow the logic that the first breath babies take should be a breath of clean air."* Of course, there is agreement among the panelists that such devices remove particles but do not create oxygen and their effect is similar to "putting a mask on your face but not curing the disease."

Marija Petrović Marković mentions the individuals' strong need to do at least something: *"We are crying out for urgent solutions even if it helps only a little, an air purifier, green areas. Nothing has been done for so many years."*

Jovan Grujić, from the organization "Eco Guerrilla", mentions that a large part of households switched to pellets this summer, and that additional individual solutions can be filters installed on chimneys and a ban on coal.

Ognjan Pantić, from the NGO Belgrade Open School, also encourages the media to inform citizens about pollution, for instance through weather forecasts.

REFLECTING ON THE PLENARY DISCUSSION WITH EXPERTS

Reactions to the dialogue with experts were extremely positive. The level of interest shown during the dialogue, the data presented, clarifications of the existing dilemmas, specific advice and new proposed solutions are especially appreciated.

Although everyone is aware of the consequences of air pollution, the actual level of pollution looks alarming and mobilizes people to action: to exert pressure on the government and launch individual initiatives.

"I am shocked by this data. If they came out with this data, that the air is polluted for 5-6 months a year, which has effects on human health, and that the mortality from pollution is 3600 people annually, and Valjevo accounts for 20% of that number, and that 1 patient costs the country 100,000 EUR, that is terrifying. All that would push every resident of Valjevo to put some pressure on the authorities. I thought that the first thing I need to do is buy an air purifier."⁵ Female citizen, aged 30-60

⁵ After the Assembly, and in light of the experts' comments, one woman in fact bought an air purifier.

"The only chance we have is that this truth reaches the members of the political party SNS. Because both SNS members and we who are not part of that story are getting sick." Active male citizen aged 30-60

The need to learn more about specific prevention measures is present: how to protect pregnant women, how to protect the elderly?

There are also expectations that major polluters would finally take responsibility.

"All this is interesting, but diffuse. We are dealing here with two problems, Krušik and individual fireplaces, which includes myself. We need to see what can be done about these. For Krušik, the investment of 2,5 million Euros is negligible. It is not negligible only because it is optional. If it were mandatory, it is a small thing for them. Whoever is in the zone must adhere to strict rules. If you are in that green zone, the rules are stricter. If you can bear it." Male citizen aged 30-60

The ideas about the use of biogas, biomass, methane, thermal waters and heat pumps attract special attention and give rise to optimism.

KEY TOPICS DISCUSSED WITH DECISION MAKERS

Citizens are wondering:

- **Is anything being done or planned at all?**
- **How can citizens keep themselves informed?**
- **Information and actions are expected from Krušik.**

Unfortunately, certain representatives of the town authorities and public institutions who confirmed their participation failed to get involved in the civil assembly, which means that most of the questions regarding the local government plans and work remained unanswered.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS AND DISCUSSION

LOCAL GOVERNMENT PLANS AND ACTIONS

Citizens expect information on the actions taken by the local authorities, on the implemented and planned measures, responsibilities of the relevant authorities and allocated funds. Due to the noticeable absence of decision makers we don't have all the answers, but other participants tried to come up with answers in accordance with the available information. Other issues remain open for further addressing.

28. What was done in the last 4 years? Have any conclusions been drawn and any solutions implemented? Which plans should be realized until the end of this year? What is planned for the next year?

29. Who is responsible? Does the local government feel responsible?

Ljubomir Radović, a representative of the Local Front and a councilor of the Town Assembly, emphasizes that nothing is being done about air pollution, that the plan from 2015 does not imply anyone's responsibility and no budget has been used for the purpose of implementing the measures since 2016, even though some plans might have been made. He emphasizes that instead of a single measuring station there should be multiple measuring locations equipped for different particle sizes.

30. When will the measured results be available?

31. Is there coordination between the offices within the town administration that deal with construction, urbanism and ecology?

32. How are state funds for environmental protection distributed to local governments?

33. Should local governments be invested with greater powers regarding environmental protection?

34. What happened to the mobile station donated by the British Embassy? Why are the devices for measuring PM particles turned off and why is the institute asking for funds to provide measuring of particles if those devices belong to the local government? Why was the company that measures PM2.5 particles changed?

Marija Petrović Marković adds, on behalf of the portal "Valjevska posla", that PM2.5 particles are calculated algorithmically, and that the Vatrogas Institute based in Novi Sad, which conducts it, won the project because it bid one million and two hundred thousand dinars less than the local Institute for Public Health. Marija points out as a problem that the tenders are held in November, which has again this year led to an interruption in the measurements at the most critical moments. The device itself belongs to the town of Valjevo and the Institute of Public Health.

The following questions also remain open for comments.

35. What actions is the Health Center in Valjevo taking?

36. Why is the district heating price up to 2 times more expensive than that of the individual heating system?

37. Are there regulations that prevent the whole town from becoming covered in concrete?

THE OPERATIONS OF KRUŠIK

Regarding Krušik and the extent to which it contributes to air pollution, there are two key issues in solving this problem: what is being done to prevent it and who can influence what's being done. There is still no clear information or evidence from the discussion itself that this problem is being addressed in a focused manner, but the fact that the Town of Valjevo can cast its vote in this regard sparks optimism.

38. Does Krušik respect the Law on Health and Safety at Work? Have they introduced any measures to protect employees and citizens? Are workers and citizens warned and protected from the harms of air pollution?

Milica Spasenić, from the Occupational Safety and Health Service at Krušik, points out that Krušik follows the Law on Occupational Safety and the Law on Environmental Protection, and that workers are warned about the chemical hazards but not about air pollution, because this is a problem of the whole town. She also states that the project for the new boiler room was completed, and that it was submitted to the Ministry for funding.

39. To what extent can Valjevo, as a shareholder, influence decision-making in the Management Board of Krušik?

Ljubomir Radović from the "Local Front Valjevo", a councilor in the Town Assembly, points out that, although the town of Valjevo has a 22% share in Krušik (which accounts for almost ¼ of the pollution), that share is represented by no one at the Krušik shareholders' assembly, which would be crucial for championing the interests of the citizens. He adds that it is important, for a start, to get information about the exact influence of Krušik. Although finances are mentioned as an obstacle to regulating pollution, it is pointed out here that Krušik was mentioned in the context of different scandals involving amounts of money higher than necessary for the reparation of the power plant.

REFLECTING ON THE PLENARY DISCUSSION WITH DECISION MAKERS

The poor response rate of the decision-makers discouraged the citizens of Valjevo, reaffirming the citizens' view of the decision-makers' lack of initiative or responsiveness to solving the problem of air pollution. However, there is still a will to start from the first possible concrete steps in order to solve this problem.

"Since those in charge didn't show up, everything is crystal clear." Male citizen aged 30-60

"In my opinion, the absence is the ultimate sign of bad manners. If they weren't able to attend, they could have still sent their opinions in writing." Citizen aged 30-60

"One can start from that 22% share, from a single representative." Citizen aged 30-60

POLICY PROPOSALS

After several hours of discussion, the citizens came up with several specific needs and proposals.

MAIN TOPICS

Citizens want, as a starting point, to receive accurate information and specific advice on protective measures. There are several proposals to regulate heating methods, and there is a great need for legal regulation of (non)environmental behavior of all the participants. Among the proposals that the participants worked on, the following major topics stand out that require further addressing:

- Transparency, regular and active reporting, warning when the air is excessively polluted and advising on protection measures. It is desirable to introduce more detailed measurements - of primary and secondary particles, air, but also water and soil.
- Media coverage could be even more active, so that the problem is clarified further and resolved faster, and different parties are expected to join forces, while greater commitment is expected from the local authorities.
- It is necessary to further empower households by subsidies aimed at switching to the district heating systems (free or paid in installments) and readjustments of the heating charges.

- The capacity of the heating plant should be taken advantage of, and as many institutions as possible should be connected to it. Especially Krušik.
- Direct measures should probably be considered, and the use of coal – either total use or the use of poor-quality coal - should be banned.
- Modern building construction is expected to provide an ecologically adequate heating, so the investors are expected to connect new structures to the heating plant, as well as to secure green areas around the buildings.
- It is necessary to install filters for purification of hazardous gases at the present facility sites, so that the emission is kept under control, as little as possible to non-existent.
- It is necessary to improve the energy efficiency of the existing units, so subsidies are advised for the insulation of old buildings.
- A lot is expected from the renewable energy sources and the testing of their potential (thermal water, biogas and biomass) is proposed.
- Given the high level of pollution generated by cars, the share of motor vehicles in traffic can be reduced through an improvement of public transport, the introduction of bicycle paths and pedestrian zones.
- Finally, the establishment of a legal framework for all the participants (government, industry, individuals), mandatory environmental regulations and the determination of responsibility of the relevant authorities should be insisted upon.

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR VOTING

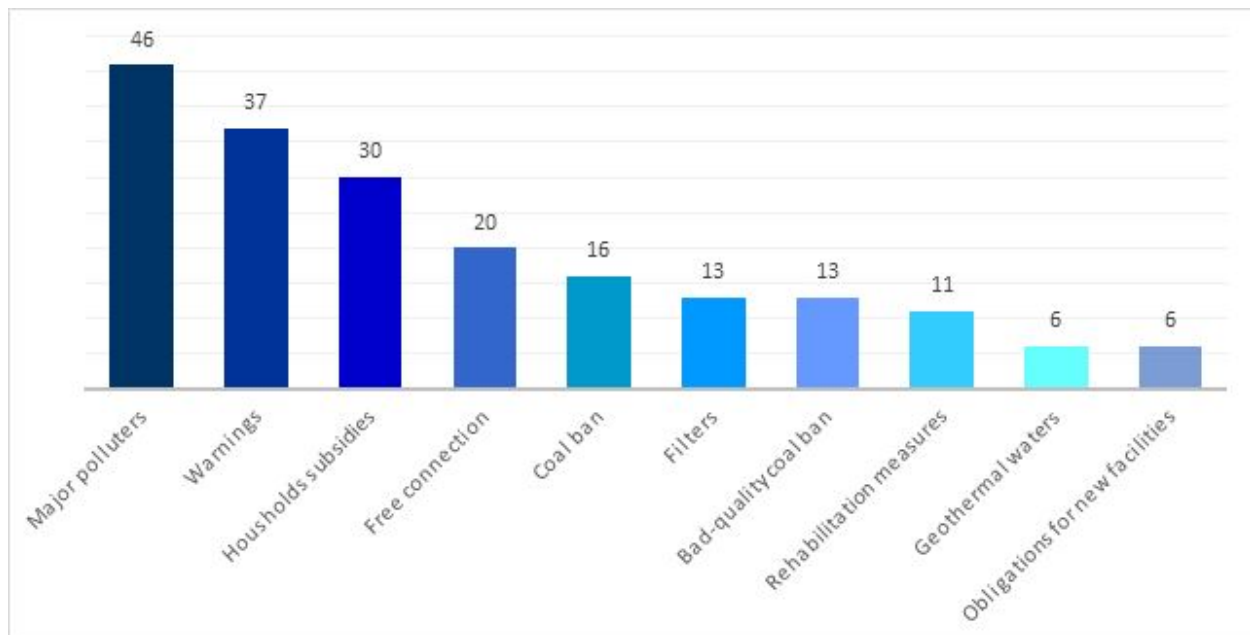
After the civil assembly, specific proposals were singled out:

- **WARNINGS** Regular warning of the citizens whenever the toxic substance values are high and informing the citizens on how to protect themselves
- **SUBSIDIES FOR HOUSEHOLDS** Subsidize the households' transition to district heating (connection), as well as heating prices
- **FREE CONNECTION** Provide free connection to district heating for households
- **MAJOR POLLUTERS** Institutions and businesses need to urgently switch to district heating (including major polluters such as Krušik)
- **GEOTHERMAL WATERS** Examine the possibilities of using geothermal waters to solve the heating challenges

- **FILTERS** Introduce filters to eliminate harmful gases from the emissions of major polluters
- **BAD-QUALITY COAL BAN** Prohibit the use of poor quality coal - lignite
- **COAL BAN** Prohibit the use of coal
- **OBLIGATIONS FOR NEW FACILITIES** Introduce an obligation for new facilities to use heating methods with lower polluting capacity (plan to be connected to a heating plant or to use heat pumps)
- **REHABILITATION MEASURES** Implement remedial measures: introduce air purifiers into the institutions such as kindergartens and schools; wash the streets regularly and expand the green areas

These suggestions were put to individual vote among all participants immediately after the assembly. They ranked the first 3 suggestions they would support the most. Each suggestion got 3 points for the first rank, 2 for the second, and 1 for the third.

INDIVIDUAL VOTE RESULTS



Expectations are highest when it comes to the biggest polluters, so it is necessary to create an expert register of polluters, institutions and economic entities at the official level which are required to urgently switch to a more environmentally friendly way of working - for example through district heating.

There is an essential need and responsibility to inform the citizens when high levels of pollution are present, and health institutions are expected to provide specific information on how citizens can protect themselves.

Although a free heating connection is desirable, subsidies are seen as more realistic in order to stimulate more adequately the transition to district heating - some kind of help and benefits need to be supplied to households as well. While it is clear that these are big steps, they are seen as indispensable for solving the problem.

Restrictive legal measures such as a coal ban or corrective and remedial measures such as installing filters or creating green surfaces are assessed as a minor contribution in situations in which the damage has already been done.

The potential of geothermal waters gives rise to optimism, but it is clear that this is a long-term plan and that more concrete measures need to be taken first.

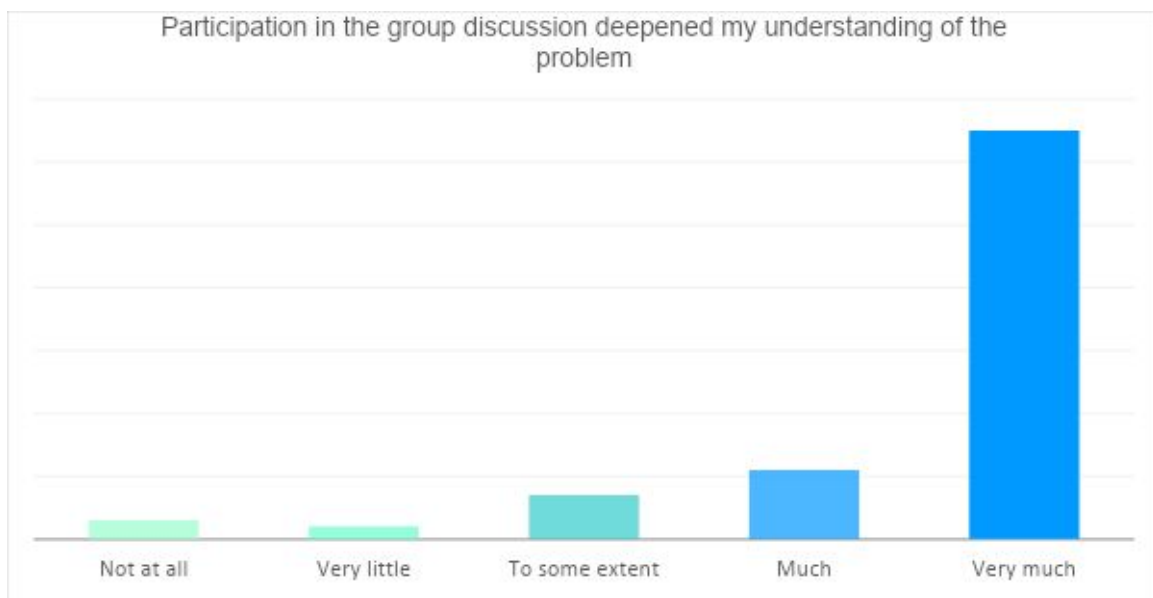
POTENTIAL OF THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES

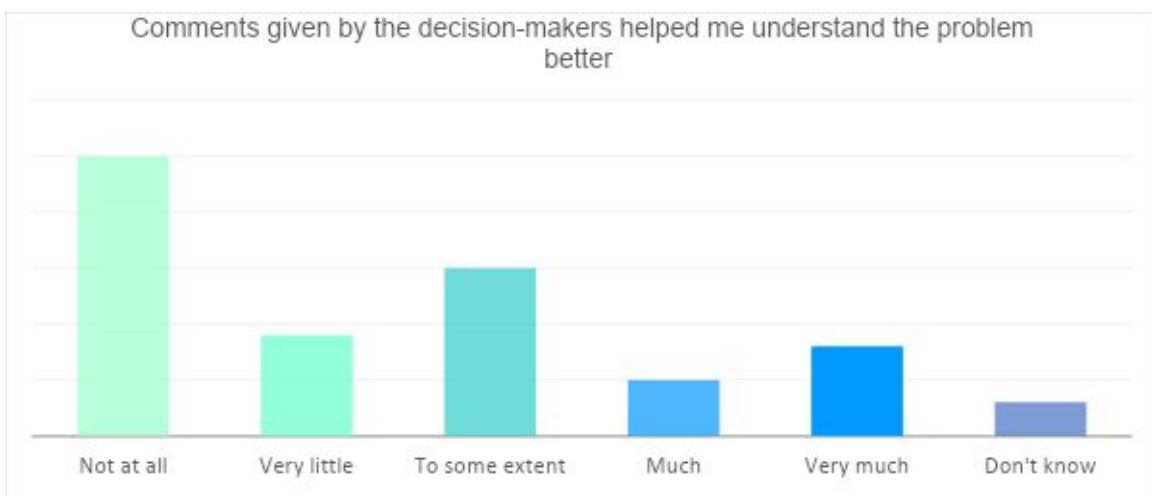
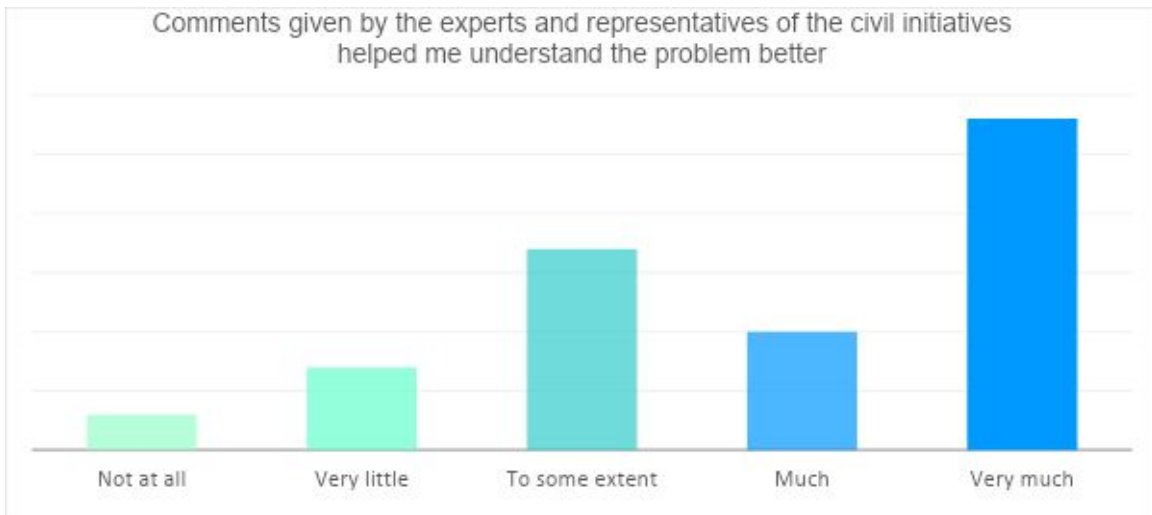
The essence of citizens' assemblies is the inclusion of many parties, deliberation and the formulation of policy suggestions that suit the interested parties.

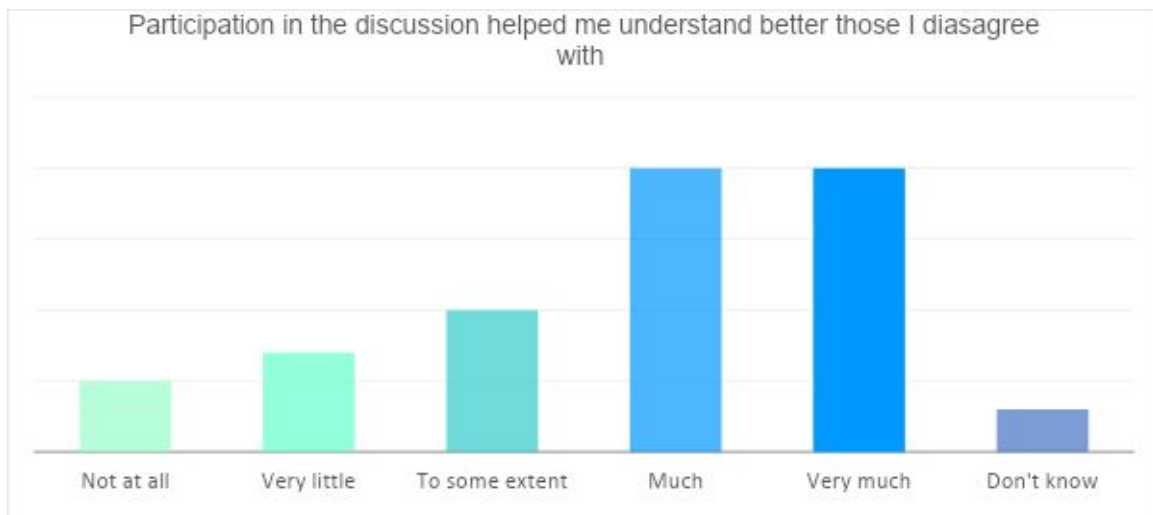
Within this research project, the participants were able to deepen their understanding of the problems discussed, to get acquainted through an inclusive public deliberation with various perspectives and state their own, now informed, suggestion or vote.

Approximately 80% of the participants point out that the whole process has significantly deepened their understanding of the problem, around 85% of them report that the experts' comments helped them gain a better understanding of the problem, and around 77% of them have considerably improved their understanding of those they do not agree with.

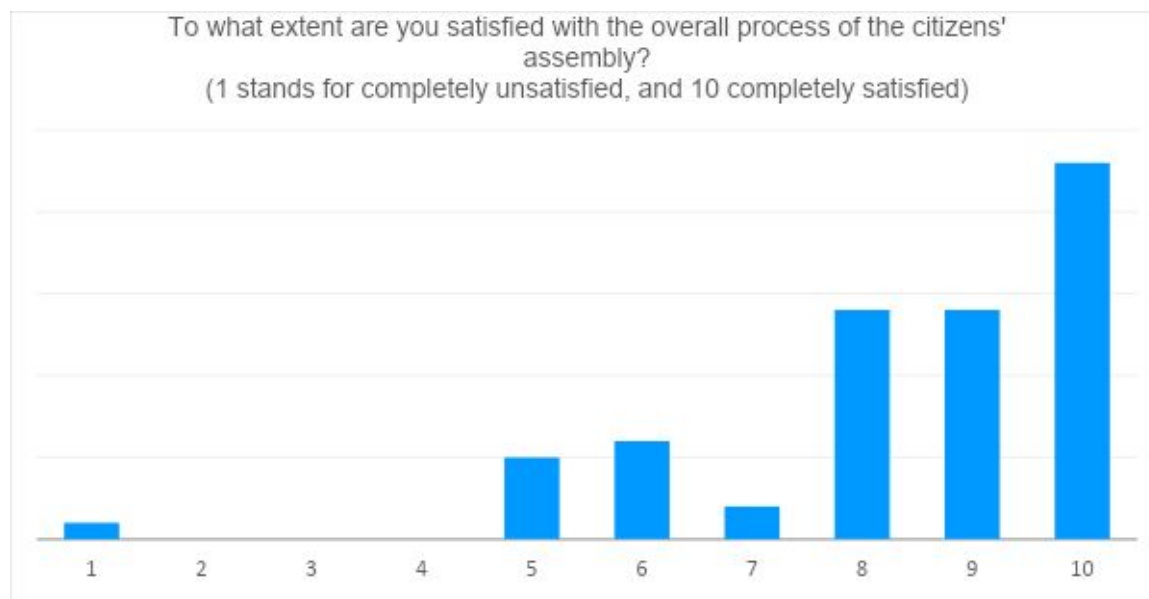
Unfortunately, according to 50% of the participants the comments given by the decision-makers' representatives were of little help in understanding the problem. Among other things, this was affected by the representatives' lack of authority in those aspects in which citizens were particularly interested, the time limit or inappropriate attendance rates.







However, partaking in public civil life and the process of giving policy suggestions brought clear satisfaction to 80% of the participants, who rated their satisfaction level with grades 8-10. This satisfaction can also constitute a great potential for action.



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 further development of participatory deliberative democracy will be advocated by presenting citizens' assemblies via different channels in

the public sphere.⁶

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

„I BELIEVE THAT THIS WAS PARTLY EXHAUSTING FOR YOU, PARTLY INTERESTING, PARTLY ENCOURAGING BUT ALSO DISCOURAGING, CONSIDERING SOME SESSIONS. I WOULD LIKE TO ENCOURAGE YOU HERE, THIS IS JUST THE FIRST STEP, IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO US THAT YOU TOOK PART IN THIS 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 HERE WITH YOU AND THEY WILL CONTINUE CARRYING ALL THIS FORWARD, EVERYTHING THAT YOU SAID AND WE DIDN'T HAVE THE 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 THE FIRST STEP, AND MANY MORE STEPS WILL FOLLOW, BUT WE TRULY BELIEVE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO BACK THIS UP WILL BE ABLE TO CARRY IT FURTHER.“

⁶ Find out about future steps on: <https://act-wb.net/?lang=sr>.

