

Going Out of the Town Hall

The Benefits and How They Can Be Achieved

Publication

[Policy Brief](#)

Citation

Piotrowski, Ralph; Susanne Langsdorf and Ania Rok 2013: Going out of the town hall – The benefits and how they can be achieved. [Policy Brief]. Berlin: Ecologic Institute.

From urban gardening and networks of sharing to community-owned wind farms: citizens' initiatives emerge all over Europe in a quest to find new answers to today's pressing challenges. This policy brief explores new forms of cooperation between local governments and these bottom-up initiatives. It argues that getting involved with initiatives helps local governments to be an active player in their community's change dynamics. This cooperation furthermore requires new ways of engaging and participating between the groups.

One possible form of engagement between local governments and initiatives, which can be applied to identify and counter the persistent problems in local communities, is presented in the brief: the "community arena". This governance tool is characterized by establishing a dialogue on eye level and a trustful relationship. The challenges of a community are identified in open-ended processes without a pre-set agenda. To allow for an open process, the actors should meet as individuals – not as representatives of their institutions. In the process, a long-term vision for the community is created. Creating long-term visions can unify even diverse groups, generate new ideas and experiments and serve as a compass for the daily work.

Embracing characteristics of the "community arena" approach can be fruitful for local governments and engaged citizens to jointly develop pathways towards more sustainable communities.

The initiatives' topics are linked to the wider societal challenges of an ageing society in a long-lasting economic downturn, of a global society which puts enormous pressures on the natural environment and still remains deeply unjust. The InContext project has identified framework conditions that enable societal transitions towards an environmentally sound, economically successful, and culturally diverse future.

The policy brief "Going Out of the Town Hall" is additionally published in [German](#), [French](#), [Dutch](#) and [Polish](#).

Other publications of the project InContext include two policy briefs, a [research brief](#) and a [poster series](#) which presents initiatives for a more sustainable lifestyle. The ["Key Messages"](#) [pdf, 1.8 MB, English] are available here.

Languages

Polish
German
French
English
Dutch

Authorship

Dr. Ralph Piotrowski
[Susanne Langsdorf](#)
Ania Rok

Published by

[Ecologic Institute](#), Germany

Year

2013

Dimension

8 pp.

Project

[Individuals in Context: Supportive Environments for Sustainable Living \(InContext\)](#)

Project ID

[2706](#)

Table of contents

1. The times they are a-changing
2. The fun and benefits of meeting people
Why might local governments like to get in touch with the initiatives that develop within their community?
The local government as bystander
Local government as co-pilot
3. Out of the town hall
Taking a vacation from roles in a protected space
Aligning expectations
The guiding power of visions
4. Challenges and constraints
Questions of democratic legitimacy
Accountability for open-ended processes
5. The power of trustful relationships

Keywords

[Consumer Policy](#)
[EU](#)

Transition Management, Sustainable Development, community area, societal transition, Governance, Pilot projects, Case studies, behaviour, environmental psychology, local, community, action research

Europe, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Austria

Source URL: <https://www.ecologic.eu/8668>