

# DESIRE TO PARTICIPATE

The case of **IMZ – City wide Assembly Initiative** and **Self-organised districts and local communities in Maribor, Slovenia**



*In times of ever-growing dissatisfaction with possibilities, created by existing forms of democratic participation, and diminishing participation by the people in them, an accusation occurs about said people's alleged apathy and unwillingness to participate in those democratic processes.*

*Is that accusation true?*



***No man is an island,  
Entire of itself,  
Every man is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main.  
If a clod be washed away by the sea,  
Europe is the less.  
As well as if a promontory were.  
As well as if a manor of thy friend's  
Or of thine own were:  
Any man's death diminishes me,  
Because I am involved in mankind ...«***

John Donne: *No Man Is An Island*

# IMZ – City-wide Assembly Initiative

## General goals:

1. Active political involvement
2. Commitment to non-partisan, grassroots politics
3. Civilian supervision
4. Changing the political decision-making system
5. Creating a broad people's movement
6. United we stand strong. **We must interconnect popular struggles at home and abroad against the corrupt system!**

# IMZ – City-wide Assembly Initiative

## Specific goals

Residents of the Municipality of Maribor are at our best when involved in our local environment. Because of our grasp of the social environment, political situation and our immediate contact with said environment, we have, when united, greater influence and greater role to play on regional and state level. We must band up, form connections and thus:

1. RECOGNISE THE TROUBLES OF FELLOW HUMANS
2. OBSTRUCT THE ARBITRARY WILLFULNESS OF PEOPLE IN POWER
3. ACT DIRECTLY
4. CO-DECIDE OUR FUTURE

**Activation and self-organisation of the people in their local environment**

# **ASSEMBLIES OF SELF-ORGANISED DISTRICTS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN MARIBOR**

## Activation and self-organisation of the people in their local environment

- Do we know our neighbours?
- Do we know elected representatives in our community?
- What are the communal needs?
- Do we know how to name and clearly present our needs?
- How do the rulers satisfy our needs, and do they at all?
- Where to send our questions and demands?
- What can we do ourselves?
- Does anybody listen to us?
- Is anybody interested in our opinions?

## Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities

- COMMUNAL AGREEMENT
- STRUCTURED DEBATE
- CONSENSUS
- DIRECT ACTION
- INTERCONNECTING COMMUNITIES





## Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities

- **1st assembly held in Nova vas district in spring 2013, by now over 50 assemblies have been held there**
- **10 active assemblies, covering 11 city districts and local communities**
- **About 500 people are actively trying to improve their living and working conditions**

# Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities – ACTIVITIES

## 1. Recognising communal needs:

- Most self-organised districts have work groups dedicated to environment and infrastructure
- People jointly walk around their community
- Budgetary proposals for communal investment in fiscal year 2015/16



# Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities – ACTIVITIES

## 2. Joint search for solutions:

- Discussing representatives of various organisations in charge of problematic areas (waste management, energy providers, waterworks, infrastructure department, education, elected representatives...)
- Public presentations of planned projects
- Public forums on specific problems
- Research and enquiry by work groups
- Finding competent locals



# Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities

## – ACTIVITIES

### 3. Pressuring decision-makers

- Letters, calls, visits
- Suggestions (using public space for communal needs, public order, council for protection of the users of public goods)
- Petitions (against tearing down and then rebuilding functional communal buildings, for much needed road expansion)
- Directly asking the responsible parties at the assemblies
- Public forums on specific problems



## Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities – ACTIVITIES

### 4. Direct actions

#### Drawing a zebra crossing



## Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities – ACTIVITIES

### 4. Direct actions

#### Building a safer path to school



## Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities – ACTIVITIES

### 4. Direct actions

Changing empty storefronts on Gosposka (gentlemen) street into exhibition spaces



## Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities – ACTIVITIES

### 4. Direct actions

#### Fixing walkways by the stream





## Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities – ACTIVITIES

### 4. Direct actions

#### Cleaning the surroundings of Youth residences



## Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities – ACTIVITIES

### 4. Direct actions

#### Fixing an abandoned basketball court



## Assemblies of the residents of self-organised communities – ACTIVITIES

### **5. Interconnecting communities**

- City-wide work group for infrastructure
- City-wide work group for environment and preservation of natural and cultural heritage
- Joint work group for extension to Proletarskih brigad road (5 assemblies)
- Joint work group for trees (3 assemblies)
- City-wide work group for budget monitoring

## IMZ outside of assemblies

- Initiative for adoption of participatory budgeting
- Proposal for changes in the Local self-management act
- Radio programme ‚Uglašene četrti‘
- Lectures for the purpose of informing and empowering residents (critical thought, media communications, knowledge of legal proceedings, ...)
- Plenums, press conferences, ...

***... has anyone been mentioning apathy?***