

BUILDING A BETTER CITY!

**SELF-ORGANIZED DISTRICTS
AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES**



INICIATIVA MESTNI ZBOR
Initiative for citywide assembly

WHO WE ARE:

We are a group whose aim it is to promote non-partisan political self-organization at the city district level in the Municipality of Maribor. We are convinced that the civil revolt and various actions of civil disobedience in Slovenia must be followed by new, creative and far-reaching steps towards a kind of development that will empower us to effect change in our streets, districts, local communities, cities, the country and, finally, the world.

The People should play the primary role in shaping and influencing development policies in our cities and nationwide, rather than leaving them in the hands of city councillors and parliamentarians. We are the ones who should be representing our common interests. However, since politicians obviously understand their role in society quite differently, it falls to us to put them in their place and present to them our positions and demands, and in doing so take over the responsibility for the functioning of our communities, the municipality and the entire country.

We believe that the solution lies in self-organizing, debate, education and sharing information. This will enable us to critically, directly and creatively respond to the degeneration of our political and social system.

We have to regain the co-determination and co-management that was taken away from us at the local, municipal as well as national level. We can achieve this by exerting pressure on the ruling structures in various ways - but most effectively through direct democracy.

MAIN PRIORITIES:

To never again allow the usurpation of the people's mandate and to prevent those in power from committing unconscionable acts: the elimination of the commons, and with it the destruction of our lives, our environment and the legacy of past generations. In order to achieve that, we need to set up self-organized districts and local communities in the Municipality of Maribor.

By taking this step, we will create a public venue for people to meet, debate, inform each other and self-organize in order to fight all sources of oppression. By creating new forms of cooperation, we wish to build trust among people, which will enable us to jointly tackle local, national and global challenges.

Because mass debates are usually not very productive, popular assemblies must be carefully moderated so that district and local communities can effectively reach CONSENSUS and make inclusive decisions.

Reaching CONSENSUS will be the greatest challenge at the assemblies. Decisions will not be reached in an easy way, e.g. voting by acclamation, show of hands or the majority overruling the minority (as is done in city councils and in Parliament). The goal of reaching consensus will require that the participants do not repeat themselves but instead build on and contribute to what has already been said.

The moderators, in a bid to reach consensus, should take special care to structure the debates in a way that will lead to consensus decisions.

Once decisions have been made, ways must be found to implement them. This is the most effective way in which the communities can influence and co-determine the development of their city, state and, finally, the world.



GENERAL GOALS:

- 1 By means of **active political engagement**, we aim to **put a stop** to systemic bribery, cronyism and nepotism, as well as end the old ways of political decision-making that led to this predicament.
- 2 **Committing to non-partisan, grassroots politics**, i. e. bottom-up politics, which means co-determining and co-managing urban development policies as well as preparing the community for future direct political participation and co-management.
- 3 To **monitor and call attention to** the problem of corruption and abuse by those in power. To find real-life solutions by putting pressure on those responsible for addressing the needs of a community, with special attention to the most vulnerable members of society.
- 4 To **change the system** of political decision-making. This requires an active and informed community which will formulate its own policies and proposals, publicly champion them, demand their implementation and itself take part in their implementation.
- 5 To **create a broad people's movement** that will enable us to achieve our common goal: creating a new social reality and changing the rules of the game so that government will serve the people and not the other way around. This probably means following the principles of self-management.

- 6 To **fuse the people's struggles** at home and abroad into one struggle against the corrupt system in Slovenia and Europe. We realize that this is our only chance to create a different system, one in which people will be able to live a dignified existence.

SPECIFIC GOALS:

- 1 For residents (counting also the undocumented ones) of the Municipality of Maribor, the easiest option is to be active and participate at the local level through various forms of self-organization. Because of the close contacts we maintain with our local communities, we have developed a good understanding of our social fabric and political situation. Therefore, we must have more say in shaping policies on the regional and national level.
- 2 We must first recognize the pressure that is being exerted on people by either the authorities or capital in their own neighbourhoods, and then we must take steps to remedy these injustices. When necessary, we have to respond to these injustices through civil disobedience, as we must be willing to take action against those who seek to suppress us.
- 3 We must be quick to identify those who abuse their positions of power, expose them, and, if the situation warrants it, bring them to legal justice.

- 4 We must be quick to recognize any destructive or repressive action that stands in the way of our common. We must spread the word about such injustices and fight against them.
- 5 We must promote the message that the local community is the entity that first recognizes local-specific problems, prioritizes the issues that need solving and sets the guidelines for future action. Waiting for the municipal or national authorities to come in and solve such problems has so far turned out to be ineffective, as we have waited in vain for years for the authorities to respond to the needs of the people.
- 6 To achieve all this, we must be vigilant and keep tabs on the actions, policies, projects, plans and programs in our own local communities as well as nationwide. We have to actively respond to these events. We need to make sure that all beneficial projects are done properly as well as stop any harmful projects or plans. If necessary, we must physically stop the implementation of the latter.
- 7 Guidelines for future action need to be distilled from all the political activity that takes place in a community. People need to identify with these guidelines and be ready to put them into practice, e.g. co-management as a pathway to the final goal of self-management.

PRINCIPLES AND METHODS

The assemblies must be held at least once a month:

- They are held at the same location and the same time frame - at 5 PM in the winter and 7 PM in the summer.
- Free-of-charge venues intended for public use must be located in each separate city district, and free use throughout the entire year must be negotiated.
- Venue structure should allow us to set up chairs in a circular configuration (as is customary for such forms of meetings or assemblies), and should provide adequate technical equipment (such as video projector, sound system and so forth), so the assemblies could run smoothly and without interruptions.
- All the participants of the assemblies take part in informing their neighbours about the assemblies in their city district.

Each assembly is coordinated by three moderators:

- To be able to moderate effectively, the moderators are trained. They coordinate the assemblies in accordance with the agreed upon rules, which are based on the principles of mutual respect of all participants.

- Moderators coordinate the assemblies along the lines of chosen agenda points and try to merge discussion into decisions reached by consensus. The moderators do not interfere with the arguments of participants. They merely facilitate a fruitful flow of debate. If moderators are perceived to have failed at this task, the participants can replace them at any point.
- Moderators continuously rotate in facilitating varied tasks (coordinating assemblies, taking notes, coordinating with other district assemblies, publishing material on the internet). Moderators MAY exchange from one assembly to another, but they ARE REQUIRED to exchange at least once a year.
- Moderators encourage participants to join in and guide structured debates, based on their fundamental principles. They also serve as conveyors of information to the wider public, especially when an assembly decides on public intervention, mobilisation or action.
- If necessary, moderators take extra effort to inform citizens about time and location of an assembly. They coordinate the distribution of tasks when assembly's decisions are to carry out specific actions.
- Moderators organize additional forms of education, should the assembly participants indicate desire for it. They invite experts and other people active in the fields, which assemblies are discussing.

- If assemblies detect any wrongdoings or non-transparencies in activities of public institutions, assemblies should try to call the responsible public servants to answer. They also then take active part in problem solving.

Fundamental principles for assembly participants:

- If the agreed upon principles are not respected, assemblies cannot be considered a legitimate form of decision making.
- Any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, age, gender, religion etc. cannot be allowed, whatever the circumstance! The moderators, as well as other participants, are expected to keep the debate respectful and inclusive. If a person repeatedly violates this rule, they have to be excluded from the assembly. Everyone must strive for a tolerant, democratic and constructive environment, otherwise intellectual fatigue will set in among the participants.
- Assemblies should strive to encompass as wide range of population as possible, regarding gender, age, occupation and similar. It is of great importance to repeat as often as possible that assemblies are based on inclusion and reject all discrimination.
- There is no room for personal or particular interests at the assemblies. It is the way the current governing structures operate and we must end this logic. The main goal of the assemblies is the opposite: finding common

interests in society - at the district, city or national level.

- Moderators ensure that each participant is given a fair amount of discussion time. They also make sure debate is heading towards reaching conclusions, based on mutual agreement of participants or consensus. Assemblies must not evolve into a debate among just few participants.
- Assemblies do not operate along the usual political party principles (voting and decision making principles by raising hands). Instead they strive to reach all decisions by consensus, by responding to the concerns raised by every active participant. That way the participants are able to reach decisions that encompass common interest. To achieve this they must be willing to take as much time as necessary for the majority to agree and the minority not to have any insurmountable disagreement upon the matter.
- Initiatives and activities in the community should be encouraged: civic initiatives, proposals, public letters, roundtable discussions etc., including active response to national and EU directives.

Proposals of the assembly participants:

Every proposal is noted, furthermore, it is expected that the person proposing certain action will take up at least part of the responsibility to see it come to action, should it achieve consensual support. If required, every participant supporting this proposal joins in the effort to carry it out.

Meetings and exchange of information among the moderators at the city level:

- Once a month all moderators meet and inform each other about activities going on in different district assemblies.
- Moderators and participants of all assemblies get together once a year.
- There is mutual support in activities between participants of various district assemblies, the same is expected for the city assembly.



HOW TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS:

- by creating political pressure (public letters, petitions, demonstrations, manifestos, public discussions);
- by creating concrete proposals for change (legal initiatives, referendum initiatives, criminal indictments);
- through various actions of solidarity;
- through continuous cooperation and support between district assemblies in attempt to reach common goals;
- by creating new ways of distributing information, communicating political and other issues;
- by creating new ways of expressing and conveying positions and policies, agreed upon at the assemblies;
- by various forms of civil disobedience, such as road blocks, occupying squares and public buildings, visiting public servants at home, erecting signs, distributing flyers and other similar actions.

HAND SIGNALS:

In attempt to keep debates with many participants running smoothly, and without disrupting the participant currently speaking, we use hand signals.

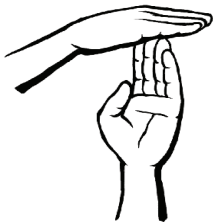
Raised hand:

Raised hand is a universal gesture, signifying a desire to speak. Moderator will notice the raised hand and give the word.



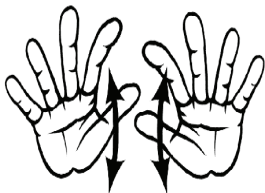
Technical issue:

Forming one's hands in the shape of the letter T means that the person has a technical suggestion. Examples of such would be: »*The issue in discussion is not on the agenda today.*« or »*Could we turn up the lights?*« or similar.



Waving up and down:

Waving one's hands up signifies that the speaker should speak louder. Waving one's hands downwards means that the speaker should slow down or speak more quietly.



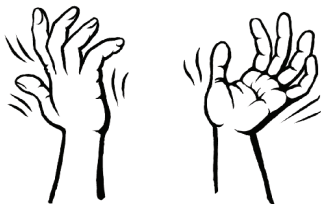
Spinning hands:

Spinning hands forward signifies that the speaker is taking too long to get the point across or is speaking too long. They should hurry up.



Lifting and shaking:

Lifting and shaking hands signifies a silent applause. It has the same meaning as clapping, except this way the speaker is not interrupted.



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