

BUILDING A BETTER CITY!

**SELF-ORGANIZED DISTRICTS
AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES**



INICIATIVA MESTNI ZBOR
Initiative for citywide assembly

WHO ARE WE:

We are a group that aims to promote non-party 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 development, which will empower us to facilitate change in our streets, city districts, local communities, cities, the country and finally the world.

The People are the agency that should play the primary role in deciding our common development policies at the city and national level and not some city councilors and parliamentarians. Their role is supposed to be representation of our common interests. However, since the politicians obviously understand their role in society quite differently, it falls to us to remind them of their proper role 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 throughout the entire country.

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

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

MAIN GOALS:

To never again allow the usurpation of the people's mandate for the purpose of unconscionable acts of looting of the common good and with it the destruction of our lives, our environment and the wealth 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 space for people to meet, debate, inform each other and self-organize to fight all sources of oppression. By creating new forms of cooperation, we wish to build trust among the people for the cooperative search for solutions to the local, national and global challenges.

Because mass debates do not usually bear fruit the people's assemblies must be carefully moderated so that district and local communities will be able to reach CONSENSUS and inclusive decisions.

Reaching CONSENSUS is going to be the most daunting task of the assemblies. Decisions will not be reached in an easy way - by count of hands, voting or majority overruling minority (as is done in city councils and in parliament). The goal of reaching consensus will require of every participant in the meetings not to repeat oneself, but instead build on and enrich the argumentation of what was already said. The moderators, in the goal of

reaching consensus, should take special care to structure debates in a way that will lead to consensus decisions.

Once decisions are made, ways will be found to implement them. That is the most effective way in which the communities will 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 the systematic bribery, clientelism and nepotism, as well as end the old ways of political decision making that lead us to this predicament.
- 2 By **building up non-party, grassroots politics** - politics from below - in the sense of policies that co-determine and co-manage the urban development, as well as strengthen the community for future direct political participation and co-management.
- 3 To **monitor and call attention to** the abuses of the wielders of power. To find solutions by pressuring the responsible to fulfill the desires of the community with special attention to the society's most vulnerable.
- 4 To **change the system** of political decision making. This requires an active and informed community, which will form its own policies and proposals, will publicly advocate for them, demand their enactment and itself take a part in their enactment.
- 5 To **create a broad people's movement**, which will be able to achieve our common goal: to create a new social reality and to change the rules of the game, so that the government will serve the people and not the other way around, which probably means following the principle of self-management.

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

SPECIFIC GOALS:

- 1** As residents of municipality of Maribor it is easiest to be active and participate at the local level through various forms of self organization. Because of direct contact with our immediate area, we have a good understanding of its social fabric and political situation, and due to that, we should demand a larger role and influence on the regional and national level.
- 2** We must first recognize the pressures being exerted on people by either authorities or interests of capital in their own neighbourhoods and remedy the injustices. When necessary, we have to respond to these injustices through civil disobedience, as it is impossible to be silent and obedient in the face of an authority that represses us.
- 3** We must be quick to identify local authoritative figures or legal looters and expose the lack of legitimacy of their function, and if situation warrants it, bring them to justice.

- 4 We must be quick to recognize any destructive or repressive moves that stand in the way of the common good. We must publicise them and fight against them.
- 5 We must reinforce the consciousness of the local community, that the entity that most quickly recognises problems, decides on the priorities that need solving and sets the guidelines for future action is itself. Any sort of waiting for the municipal or national authorities to come in and solve such problems has so far turned to be ineffective, as we waited in vain for years for the authorities to recognize the needs of the people and fulfill them.
- 6 To achieve all this we must be vigilant and follow the actions, policies, projects, plans and programmes in our own local communities as well as on the national level. We have to actively respond to these events. We need to make sure that any beneficial projects get done, as well as make sure to stop any harmful projects or plans. If necessary, we must physically stop the implementation of the latter.
- 7 Fleshed out guidelines of future action have to be distilled out of the whole of the community's political action. These have to be the ones that the people are ready and capable of enacting (for example, co-management as the way to the final goal of self-management).

PRINCIPLES AND METHODS

The assemblies must meet at least once a month:

- They are convened at the same location and the same time frame - at 5 PM in the winter and 7 PM in the summer.
- Cost-free venues that are meant for public events must be located in each separate city district and free use throughout the entire year must be negotiated.
- The venue should allow us to set up chairs in a circular configuration (as is customary at such meetings, councils, assemblies), and should have adequate technical equipment (such as video projector, sound system and the like), so the assemblies could run smoothly and without interruptions.
- All the participants of the meetings take part in informing their neighbours about the meetings in their city quarter.

Each assembly has three moderators:

- To be able to moderate effectively, the moderators are trained. They guide the meetings along the agreed upon rules which are based on the principles of mutual respect of all participants.

- The moderators guide the assemblies along the chosen agenda points and try to coalesce discussion into decisions reached by consensus. The moderators do not interfere with the arguments of the participants, they merely facilitate a fruitful flow of debate. If moderators are perceived to fail at this task, the participants can replace them at any point.
- the moderators continually rotate their varied tasks (leading the meeting, taking notes, coordinating with assemblies of other quarters, publishing material on the internet). The moderators may change from meeting to meeting, but they are required to be changed at least once a year.
- Moderators encourage participants and guide structured debates based on the fundamental principles, as well as serve as conveyors of information to the wider public, especially when the council decides for public intervention, mobilisation or action.
- If necessary, the moderators take extra effort to inform citizens as to the time and location of the meeting and coordinate the distribution of tasks when a meeting results in decisions to carry out specific actions.
- They try to organize additional education, should the assembly participants indicate a desire for it. They invite suggested experts and other people active in the fields which the assemblies are discussing.

- Should the councils detect any wrongdoings or non-transparencies, they should try to bring in the responsible functionaries from public institutions, so those can answer to the council. The moderators also take an active role in the process of solving such problems.

Fundamental principles for assembly participants:

- If the agreed upon principles are not upheld, the 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 then they have to be excluded from the council. Everyone must strive for a tolerant, democratic and constructive environment, otherwise intellectual fatigue will set in among the participants.
- The assemblies should strive to encompass as wide a strata of the population as possible, regarding gender, age, occupation and similar as it bears repeating as often as possible that the assemblies are based on inclusion and reject discrimination.
- There is no room for personal or particular interests in the assemblies. That 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.

- The moderators take care that each participant is given a fair amount of speaking time so they can make their point and ensure that the debate is heading towards productive, consensual decisions. The assemblies must not devolve into a mere debate among a few participants.
- The assemblies do not operate along the usual political party methods (voting by majority). Instead they strive to reach all decisions by consensus, by responding to the the concerns raised by every active participant. That way the participants are able to reach decisions that encompass everyone's common interest. To achieve this they must be willing to take as much time as it takes for the majority to agree and the minority to not disagree.
- 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 taken note of, furthermore it is expected that the person proposing a certain action will take up at least part of the responsibility to see it come to fruition should it achieve consensual support. If required, every participant joins the effort to achieve the goal.

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

- All the moderators meet and inform each other about the activities going on in different quarter councils once a month.
- A meeting of all moderators and participants of all councils takes place once a year.
- Participants in assemblies support the actions of other councils, as well as those of the city-wide council.



HOW TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS:

- by creating political pressure (public letters, petitions, demonstrations, manifestos, public discussions);
- by creating proposals for change (legal initiatives, referendum initiatives, criminal indictments);
- through solidarity actions;
- through cooperation and support between different assemblies in order to reach common goals;
- by creating new forms of information distribution and communicating political and other issues;
- by creating new ways of expressing and conveying the positions and policies reached at the assemblies;
- by various forms of civil disobedience, such as road blocks, occupation of squares and public buildings, visiting functionaries at home, erecting signs, pamphleting and other similar actions.

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