

FROM DIALOGUE TO TRANSFORMATION


Citizen action space as a blueprint for
democratic innovation in the Euro-Med

Our Common Future

Author

Inspiring **Knowledge** Driving **Action** Uniting **Cultures**

Executive Summary



The Citizen Action Space (CAS), implemented during the ALF Forum 2025 in Tirana, offered a pioneering model for civic engagement, intercultural exchange, and participatory democracy. By designing an immersive and decentralised environment that encouraged open dialogue, creative expression, and co-creation, the CAS demonstrated how participatory mechanisms can amplify diverse voices, especially those of youth and underrepresented communities. Through five interactive focus sessions and ongoing installations, CAS generated policy-relevant insights into how dialogue can translate into collective action. This paper analyses the CAS methodology, distils its key outcomes, and proposes concrete policy recommendations to scale similar participatory spaces across the Euro-Mediterranean region as part of a broader democratic renewal.

Introduction



The Euro-Mediterranean region faces interlinked social, environmental, and political challenges that test traditional models of governance and civic participation. Climate crises, rising inequality, cultural polarisation, and democratic fatigue are no longer isolated phenomena but interconnected dynamics that require inclusive and participatory responses. In this context, the Citizen Action Space (CAS), co-developed and facilitated during the ALF Forum 2025 in Tirana, emerges as a timely intervention that reframes civic engagement not as a linear process of consultation but as a multidimensional and co-creative experience.

Hosted across two days (19-20 June 2025), the CAS brought together artists, activists, researchers, cultural practitioners, and civil society leaders from across the Euro-Mediterranean to explore a range of participatory practices. These included storytelling, illustration, spoken word, letter writing, collaborative design, and video dialogues. Each of the five focus sessions was led by national networks (Portugal, Lebanon, Estonia, Denmark, Luxembourg), creating a decentralised and culturally rich programming structure. The CAS served not only as an open forum for dialogue but also as a laboratory for civic imagination and social innovation.

Importantly, the CAS did not function in isolation but built on and fed into other ALForum discussions, particularly the panel on "Youth Uniting the Mediterranean – Transnational Citizens' Assemblies for Climate Action." The feedback loops between structured discussions and the more fluid, participant-led CAS format enabled the emergence of proposals rooted in empathy, creativity, and lived experience. This contribution draws on direct observation, documentation, and participant feedback to unpack how CAS facilitated civic learning, fostered solidarity, and generated bottom-up insights relevant to Euro-Mediterranean policymaking.

Approach & Results



The CAS was organised around five core focus sessions, each employing distinct participatory methodologies while addressing shared regional themes such as interculturality, migration, activism, sustainability, and democratic innovation. Its methodology combined structured facilitation with open formats, creating a hybrid environment that welcomed spontaneity without sacrificing thematic coherence.

1. Illustrating Interculturality (Portugal): This session demonstrated how visual storytelling can bridge cultural divides. Artists from across the region illustrated their understanding of intercultural dialogue, both individually and collectively, engaging the audience in co-creation and reflection. The diversity of artistic approaches highlighted the multiplicity of perspectives on shared Mediterranean heritage and identity.

2. Echoes of Change: A Story Booth for Civic Engagement (Lebanon): Participants shared personal testimonies on civic action, migration, and activism. These stories then served as inspiration for subsequent speed-exchange sessions: participants were invited to propose topics for the one-on-one exchanges, and the theme for each round was determined through voting. The booth reinforced the value of storytelling as a democratic tool, elevating voices often marginalised in policy dialogues.

3. Spoken Word Stage (Estonia): This open mic format gave participants the space to perform poetry, songs, and literature. The session became a platform for catharsis, humour, and solidarity, where civic concerns were articulated through the performative power of language, music, and gestures. The format was especially effective in creating a valuing space with a certain suspense, as participants were able to volunteer to perform spontaneously.

4. Words Across Borders: A Space for Connection and Reflection (Denmark): Combining proverbs, graffiti, and performance, this session invited participants to explore the diversity of cultures united within the Anna Lindh Foundation. Activities such as reflecting on sayings or engaging in musical improvisation within a circle encouraged both introspection and expression, while fostering a sense of transnational connectedness.

5. From Dialogue to Action: Civic Innovation Across the Mediterranean (Luxembourg): This closing session brought together the CAS's creative outputs. Building on the co-design of future civic action groups and the creation of a solidarity board, participants collaboratively formulated forward-looking principles and committed to new exchange partnerships. The session demonstrated how dialogue can be transformed into operational commitments and lasting networks.

Across all sessions, three transversal installations amplified participant interaction:

- **Innovation Corner** invited contributions to rethinking civic action and democratic governance.
- **Solidarity Board** enabled resource and skill-sharing among participants.
- **Every Life is a Universe** collected personal reflections on the Middle East, especially on Palestine-Israel, cultivating empathy and human-scale understanding of geopolitical issues.

Evaluation data, drawn from participant feedback forms and informal interviews, revealed high levels of satisfaction and emotional resonance. Participants valued the diversity of methods, the horizontal facilitation style, and the opportunity to connect across cultural and linguistic lines. Many expressed interest in replicating elements of the CAS in their local contexts, indicating the model's adaptability and relevance.

Policy Implications & Recommendations



The CAS model offers valuable lessons for policymakers, civil society leaders, and international institutions aiming to renew democratic life in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

1. Recognise and fund participatory infrastructure

Policy frameworks often lack dedicated support for civic spaces that prioritise creativity, emotion, and co-design. Funding instruments (e.g., under Erasmus+, Creative Europe, ENI CBC Med) should include provisions for participatory formats inspired by CAS, which blend artistic expression with policy reflection.

2. Mainstream arts-based civic dialogue

The CAS showed that visual, performative, and narrative arts are not ancillary but central to inclusive policymaking. Public institutions should integrate arts-based methods in their civic engagement strategies, particularly when working with youth, diasporas, and marginalised communities.

3. Support transnational civic learning

CAS fostered intergenerational and cross-cultural learning through informal, peer-based formats. Euro-Mediterranean cooperation schemes should invest in civic learning exchanges that move beyond training into co-creation, shared authorship, and interdependence.

4. Embed storytelling in consultation processes

Institutions tend to prioritise aggregate data and expert opinion over personal narratives. The story booth model demonstrated that individual experiences can reveal systemic blind spots and should be considered legitimate inputs in policy design.

5. Facilitate feedback loops between deliberation and implementation

The CAS acted as a bridge between structured panel discussions and informal civic insights. Future policy events should integrate flexible, participant-led spaces that gather real-time feedback, document grassroots proposals, and translate them into concrete action plans.


6. Reinforce democratic pluralism through decentralised facilitation

The national network-led sessions in CAS decentralised authorship and ensured cultural contextualisation. Institutions should design participatory formats that empower regional actors to shape content and facilitation.

7. Preserve and disseminate participatory outcomes

The CAS produced multimedia artefacts (videos, drawings, written reflections) that should not be lost post-event. Policymakers and cultural institutions should support open-access digital archives to ensure the continuity and replication of such civic processes.

Conclusion



The Citizen Action Space at ALForum 2025 demonstrated that democratic innovation is not only possible but already unfolding across the Euro-Mediterranean region. By creating a space where civic engagement meets creativity, dialogue meets co-design, and diversity becomes an asset, the CAS offered a living blueprint for participatory governance. It reaffirmed that meaningful democracy must be rooted in lived experience, collective imagination, and shared agency.

The experience in Tirana suggests that policy change does not begin only in official declarations or institutional corridors but in the courage to create environments where people feel seen, heard, and empowered to act. Scaling and institutionalising CAS-like spaces across the region could foster the trust, solidarity, and democratic culture urgently needed today.

The CAS stands not only as a successful experiment but as an invitation—to rethink how we engage citizens, how we build futures together, and how we embed creativity and care into the heart of policymaking. Its relevance extends far beyond a single forum and points toward a deeper transformation: from dialogue to action, and from participation to co-authorship of our shared Euro-Mediterranean future.

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