

A photograph of a city street at sunset. The sun is low in the sky, casting long, golden shadows across the pavement. Several people are walking away from the camera, their figures silhouetted against the bright light. In the background, there are classical buildings with columns and ornate facades. The overall atmosphere is warm and urban.

Collaborative Pathways: Engaging Citizens and Stakeholders under the EU Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission

Benchmarks and Best Practices

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CITIZEN ENGAGE UNDER THE CITIES MISSION: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PILOT CITIES PROGRAMME OF THE MISSION PLATFORM

Urban Challenges and the European Cities Mission

Urban areas are responsible for over 70% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions due to concentrated energy-intensive economic activities. At the same time, Europe is the most urbanized region in the world, with about 75% of the population living in urban areas. Recognising this dual challenge, the European Commission launched in September 2021 the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, a groundbreaking programme that aims to achieve Europe's first 100 climate-neutral cities by 2030. These cities can then serve as blueprints for urban climate neutrality in the 2050 horizon.

The Pilot Cities Programme of the Mission Platform (implemented by the NetZeroCities consortium) took a significant step forward in the implementation of the Cities Mission. 104 Pilot Cities from the EU and countries associated to Horizon Europe were selected, under three consecutive cohorts, to spearhead innovative decarbonisation strategies. Pilot Cities are testing solutions for rapid decarbonisation over a two-year period, covering sectors such as mobility, energy, buildings, waste management, governance, climate finance and policy innovation. Citizen engagement emerged as a cross-cutting theme, present horizontally under many pilot activities.

This prominent place for citizen engagement shows a deep awareness on the side of cities that achieving climate neutrality by 2030 demands more than just technological innovation and policy development: it requires active and meaningful citizen engagement. The ambition is to make a transformative shift towards inclusive and participatory urban governance.

The analysis below performed by the UrbanizeHub team shows that Pilot Cities aim to actively involve citizens in designing and implementing climate actions, with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of decarbonisation efforts while fostering resilient and cohesive urban communities.

THE APPROACH TO CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN THE NETZEROCITIES INITIATIVE

This ambition implies a paradigm shift where traditional engagement is re-imagined, moving beyond merely disseminating information or soliciting feedback on municipally-driven processes and decisions. Such methods alone are insufficient for achieving a sustainable, climate-neutral society. Instead, local governments commit to a proactive role in initiating and nurturing novel relationships with urban actors. They also adopt a collaborative mindset based on acknowledging that no single entity can independently navigate the transition to climate neutrality.

Along these lines, Pilot Cities call for the commitment, creativity and drive of citizens and local stakeholder organisations, encompassing their varied experiences, expertise, resources and investments. This mobilisation of the entire urban ecosystem is essential, requiring the integration of both individual and collective initiatives while creating conditions that enable all stakeholders to take action. As a result, an inclusive ecosystem for change significantly enhances the effectiveness of the climate transition process. Equally important, activating such an ecosystem requires sustained awareness and consideration of citizen and stakeholder participation and engagement. The manner in which insights, decisions and actions are executed—with or without collaborative input—will determine the inclusivity and readiness for change within the local ecosystem.

Through their activities, Pilot Cities are demonstrating how citizen involvement drives transformative change, offering actionable models that are being replicated and scaled to advance climate neutrality across Europe and beyond. This strategic focus cements the recognition that urban decarbonisation and resilience depend on inclusive participation and behavioral shifts across diverse stakeholder groups.

The analysis looks at how Pilot Cities embed citizen engagement as a cornerstone of their systemic transformation model, with urban residents as both the primary beneficiaries of climate action and its key drivers. Their everyday decisions, community initiatives, and active participation in governance processes are collectively shaping the success of decarbonisation strategies.



Under the first two cohorts of the Pilot Cities Programme, citizen engagement is delivered through four approaches:

- A. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS**
- B. DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND TOOLS**
- C. COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES**
- D. AWARENESS AND EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS**

1. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS

Public participation mechanisms are integral to building trust and inclusivity in urban climate governance. These tools involve direct citizen interaction and collaboration in policy and project development, ensuring that strategies reflect community needs and aspirations. Below is an alphabetized list of cities (Cohort 1 and Cohort 2), implementing at the moment impactful public participation initiative.

- **Athens:** Citizen participatory urban planning through consultations to co-create inclusive and effective policies
- **Bucharest:** Co-creation workshops focus on designing inclusive green spaces, ensuring accessibility and alignment with community preferences.
- **Bratislava:** Conducting neighborhood-level workshops on climate resilience projects.
- **Eilat:** Public discussions center on tourism and waste management, fostering a shared vision for sustainable practices.
- **Espoo:** Climate planning workshops empower local communities to contribute to climate action strategies tailored to their unique contexts.
- **Gozo:** Public forums and mobility tracking initiatives invite residents to actively participate in discussions on transport and mobility solutions.
- **Klagenfurt:** Workshops and the Smart Climate Lab under the Mission 2030 initiative encourage dialogue and innovation, engaging citizens in co-creating sustainable solutions.
- **Paris:** Facilitating neighborhood councils for urban greening initiatives.
- **Mannheim:** Facilitating citizen panels for policy evaluation and feedback.
- **Marseille:** Citizen labs provide an experimental space for addressing energy challenges and enhancing climate resilience.
- **Stockholm:** Neighborhood-level workshops apply a systemic approach to develop localized solutions for decarbonization.
- **Vilnius:** Public consultations provide a structured platform for gathering citizen input in the planning of low-emission zones, promoting inclusivity in decision-making.

1. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS



Espoo, Finland



Paris, France

2. DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND TOOLS

Digital platforms enhance citizen engagement by offering interactive, scalable, and data-driven tools that empower residents to monitor, contribute to, and adopt sustainable practices.

- **Bucharest:** The carbon footprint assessment platform in Bucharest helps citizens evaluate their environmental impact and provides insights to encourage more sustainable daily decisions.
- **Copenhagen:** Integrating citizen feedback into green infrastructure planning via online portals.
- **Lahti:** Engaging residents through carbon footprint tracking apps and incentive schemes.
- **Lisbon:** The One-Stop-Shop for Energy in Lisbon centralizes resources for citizens, simplifying energy efficiency projects and renewable energy adoption.
- **Klagenfurt:** Interactive tools in Klagenfurt raise awareness of climate challenges by engaging residents in public spaces through innovative digital displays and activities.



University Klagenfurt, Austria

- **Porto:** Porto's gamification apps use interactive challenges and rewards to promote sustainable practices such as recycling and energy conservation.

- **Riga:** Digital tools inspired by Doughnut Economics in Riga visualize urban sustainability goals, balancing ecological and social priorities.
- **Stockholm:** Stockholm's integrated emission dashboards combine data from various sectors, helping citizens track the city's progress toward climate neutrality.
- **Tallinn:** Using digital twin technology for citizen involvement in urban planning.
- **Vilnius:** Tools in Vilnius collect citizen data on low-carbon habits, enabling evidence-based policymaking that reflects local behaviors.
- **Warsaw:** Implementing participatory mapping tools for planning green corridors.

3. COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES

Community-led initiatives empower residents to take ownership of climate action, fostering grassroots innovation and leadership. These projects enable citizens to develop and lead tailored solutions that address their specific needs while contributing to broader decarbonization and sustainability goals.

- **Espoo:** Renewable energy programs initiated by citizens in Espoo highlight the effectiveness of community-led efforts in accelerating clean energy adoption.
- **Gozo:** In Gozo, student-led mobility projects channel youth creativity into developing innovative, sustainable transportation solutions.
- **Helsingborg:** Helsingborg's urban prototypes for green energy serve as testing grounds for community-driven renewable energy ideas, ensuring their practicality and scalability.

- **Klagenfurt:** Climate-neutral neighborhoods in Klagenfurt demonstrate the power of resident-led planning to create sustainable and low-emission communities.
- **Lund:** Stakeholder-driven renewable energy solutions in Lund foster collaboration between citizens, businesses, and local authorities to drive clean energy projects.
- **Madrid:** Establishing citizen-led renewable energy cooperatives.
- **Naples:** Running public debates and consultations on urban regeneration projects.
- **Rome:** Building citizen networks to support sustainable food systems.
- **Zagreb:** Empowering communities to lead energy transition workshops.

4. AWARENESS AND EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS

Education and awareness campaigns play a critical role in fostering long-term behavioral shifts. By equipping citizens with the knowledge, tools, and motivation to act, these initiatives help build a foundation for sustained climate action. Below is an organized list of cities implementing impactful awareness and education campaigns:

- **Bilbao:** Engaging local artists to visualize climate futures and educate the public.
- **Bucharest:** Public workshops and participatory design labs to educate citizens on net zero solutions.
- **Klagenfurt:** Climate literacy training programs in Klagenfurt empower residents to understand and respond to the challenges of climate change effectively.
- **Lisbon:** The Climate Innovation Academy in Lisbon equips participants with the skills and tools needed to develop innovative solutions for resilience and sustainability.
- **Hamburg:** Hosting participatory design labs to educate citizens on renewable energy solutions.



Stockholm, Sweden

- **Marseille:** Energy efficiency awareness campaigns in Marseille target diverse audiences, fostering a culture of conservation and sustainability.
- **Stockholm:** Educational campaigns in Stockholm focus on the intersection of health and climate, emphasizing the mutual benefits of sustainable practices.
- **Trondheim:** Public awareness initiatives in Trondheim center on waste-to-energy projects, promoting circular economy principles and their environmental benefits.
- **Vilnius:** Education campaigns in Vilnius encourage low-emission behaviors, raising awareness about the importance of reducing individual and collective carbon footprints.

IMPLEMENTATION OF TOOLS AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

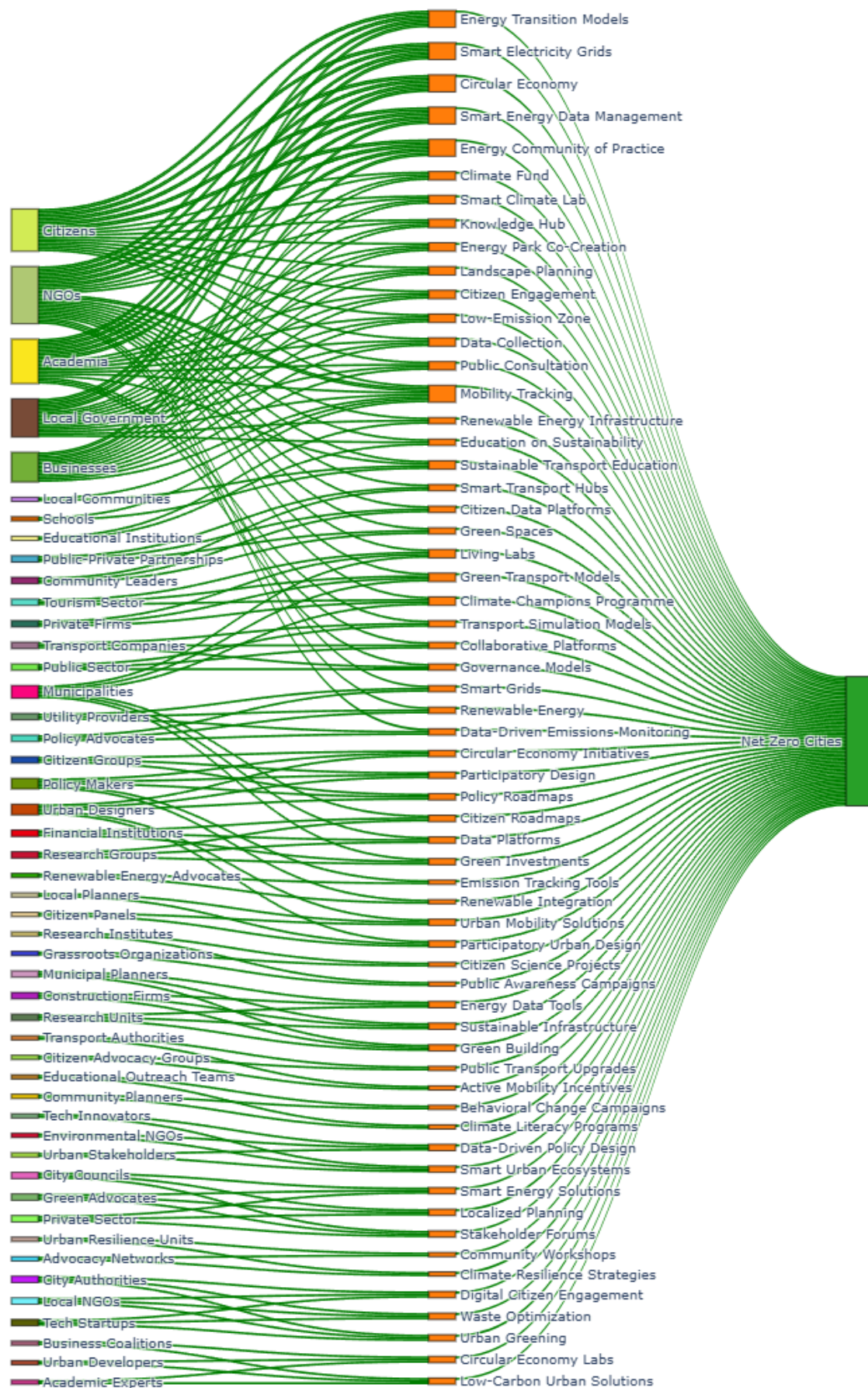
This mini guide emerges from a comprehensive analysis of the inaugural and subsequent cohorts of the NetZeroCities Programme, meticulously examining the initiatives of participating municipalities to elucidate the *instruments, methodologies, and stakeholder engagements* **pertinent to citizen involvement**. The analysis delineates five principal stakeholder groups, each harnessing distinct competencies and expertise to deploy specific tools and methodologies. For instance, local governments implement policy frameworks and regulatory instruments; academic institutions contribute research-based methodologies and data analytics; businesses introduce technological innovations and financial mechanisms; and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) alongside community groups engage in advocacy and grassroots initiatives. By systematically scrutinizing these interrelations, the guide aspires to augment the effectiveness and inclusivity of climate neutrality endeavors within urban milieus.

1.TOP-TIER CATEGORIES WITH BROAD INFLUENCE

Stakeholders like Citizens, NGOs, Academia, Local Governments, and Businesses appear prominently, each connected to numerous tools and strategies. They are central to achieving net-zero transitions.

- **Citizens:** End-users influencing policy uptake, behavior change, and local initiatives. They ensure legitimacy and widespread adoption of interventions.
- **NGOs:** Advocates and implementers linking community needs with technical solutions. They support engagement, awareness campaigns, and sustainability programs.
- **Academia:** Knowledge generators and data analysts informing policy, literacy, and tool development—from climate modeling to advanced energy management.
- **Local Governments:** Shape policies, manage public services, and guide urban planning. They connect to many tools, from public consultation to green investments.
- **Businesses:** Innovators and financiers scaling sustainable solutions. They drive implementation of smart energy, green infrastructure, and waste optimization.

Net Zero Cities: Relationship Between Stakeholders, Tools and Methodologies, and Objectives (Cohort 1, 2)



2. POLICY MAKERS AND URBAN PLANNERS AS CONNECTORS

Collectively, the secondary categories— policy makers, urban designers, and local/regional planners —often do link *community input* and *new technologies* with *governance models*, *participatory design*, *circular economies*, and *policy roadmaps*.

3. SECTOR-SPECIFIC GROUPS WITH SPECIALIZED IMPACT

Finally, Utility Providers, Financial Institutions, and Renewable Energy Advocates may have fewer connections but equally play crucial roles in *enabling large-scale transformations*—*providing specialized tools* like smart grids, emission tracking, and *green investments*.



Hence, in the mission of net-zero transition, the most impactful emerge to be **Citizens**, **NGOs**, **Academia**, **Local Governments**, and **Businesses**. They bridge policy, technology, community engagement, research, and investment, making their involvement essential to holistic urban positive changes. The synergistic collaboration, fosters comprehensive and inclusive approaches, ensuring that transitions are both **effective** and **equitable**.

GOOD PRACTICES GUIDE AND BENCHMARKS

CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT

GOOD PRACTICES GUIDE AND BENCHMARKS

Public engagement and participation are two very dynamic and evolving constructs that encompass the diverse modalities through which citizens collaborate on, intervene in, oppose, or deliberate over issues of personal and communal significance. In recent years, the role of the public in climate action discourse has expanded, leading to the emergence of novel knowledge co-creation practices and deliberative decision-making processes. It is increasingly recognized that meaningful public engagement in climate action necessitates well-informed, equitable, and inclusive processes.



Reflecting this paradigm, a subset of cities from Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 of the NetZero Cities Programme, has adopted exemplary practices by engaging a broader spectrum of stakeholders simultaneously in rapport with the citizen engagement objective. These initiatives underscore the importance of substantial involvement, robust stakeholder collaboration, but most important: **adapted citizens engagement and participatory processes**.

GOOD PRACTICES GUIDE AND BENCHMARKS

Cohort 1

CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT

MANNHEIM

Germany
310 000 inhabitants

NANTES

Nantes Metropole, France
665 204 inhabitants

LEUVEN

Belgium
100 772 inhabitants

City: Mannheim

Country: **Germany**

Population: **310 000 inhabitants**



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Methodological Overview of the Project

Mannheim's commitment to climate neutrality by 2030 is exemplified through its participation in the **CoLAB** – Committed to Local Climate Action Building initiative. This project emphasizes citizen engagement and behavioral change to reduce consumer-related emissions, aiming to create a livable, green, healthy, and climate-neutral city. Central to this effort is the development of the House of Change, a platform designed to connect various stakeholders and inspire sustainable actions.

Three Layers of the Program

1. Social Layer:

- **Tools:** House of Change platform, citizen assemblies, educational campaigns
- **Focus:** Facilitating citizen behavior change towards sustainable lifestyles, fostering community participation in climate action, and enhancing individual and collective well-being

2. Spatial Layer:

- **Tools:** Urban planning integrating sustainable mobility solutions, development of green infrastructure
- **Focus:** Transforming urban spaces to support low-carbon transportation, increasing green areas to enhance environmental quality, and promoting sustainable urban development

3. Administrative Layer:

- **Tools:** Climate City Contract, policy frameworks supporting renewable energy adoption, interdepartmental collaboration mechanisms
- **Focus:** Establishing clear roadmaps for achieving climate neutrality, aligning municipal policies with sustainability goals, and ensuring cohesive action across various government departments

NGOs Involved:

- **ifeu** Institute Heidelberg: Provides expertise in environmental and climate research.
- **Creative Climate Cities:** Specializes in communication and participation strategies.
- **wechange:** Focuses on project design and monitoring.
- **Scaling4Good:** Offers insights into scaling sustainable solutions.
- **ClimateView:** Assists in visualizing climate action plans.

Additional Stakeholders:

- **City of Aachen and City of Münster:** Partner cities collaborating on the **CoLAB** initiative.
- **Mannheim's Climate Action Agency:** Provides expertise in civic action, environmental education, and communication.
- **Local Businesses and Universities:** Engage in co-creating sustainable solutions and participating in the House of Change platform.
- **Citizens:** Actively involved as co-creators in the **House of Change**, participating in challenges, events, and sustainable lifestyle practices.



CoLAB Committed to Local Climate Action Building **THE PROJECT "House of Change"**

Mannheim, a historic German city known for its innovation, is now at the forefront of a transformative mission to achieve climate neutrality by 2030. As one of 112 cities participating in the European Union's mission for 100 climate-neutral and smart cities, Mannheim is leveraging its rich industrial heritage to tackle modern challenges through its Pilot Cities Programme. This program explores accelerated pathways to decarbonization over a two-year period while focusing on citizen empowerment and systemic transformation. Mannheim's legacy is rooted in technological ingenuity. It witnessed the invention of the bicycle in 1817 and the first automobile in 1885. Over the years, the city played a pivotal role in Germany's industrial development, hosting significant advancements like the electric elevator and the world's first rocket-powered aircraft.

Today, Mannheim remains a cultural and economic hub in the Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region. With nearly 2.4 million residents, it is recognized for its progressive infrastructure and world-class academic institutions, positioning it as a key player in sustainable urban development.

While Mannheim has made strides in transitioning to sustainability—30% of its district heating is powered by renewable energy—the city acknowledges significant hurdles, particularly in:

- Decarbonizing heating and electrical systems.
- Increasing renewable energy adoption.
- Transforming its transport system.

The overarching goal is to extend renewable energy in district heating to 75% and achieve climate neutrality by 2030.

The CoLAB Pilot: Citizen-Centric Transformation

The city's transformative journey is anchored in the CoLAB Pilot Activity (Committed to Local Climate Action Building). This initiative, involving Aachen, Münster, and several scientific and civic partners, emphasizes citizen engagement and behavior change as central pillars.

Key Objectives of the CoLAB Project

1. **Empowering Citizens:** CoLAB recognizes that simply providing funding isn't enough. Citizens must actively participate in shaping a green, healthy, and climate-neutral future.
2. **Behavioral Insights:** The project delves into understanding how daily decisions—from commuting habits to consumer choices—impact emissions.
3. **Collaborative Approach:** Partners include academic institutions, environmental researchers, and civic organizations to design, monitor, and visualize impactful solutions.

THE 'HOUSE OF CHANGE': A PLATFORM FOR TRANSFORMATION

The **House of Change**, a virtual platform central to the project, connects citizens, businesses, and local authorities. This hub:

- *Offers Resources:* Information, advice, challenges, events, and exhibitions.
- *Promotes Sustainable Practices:* Through playful, interactive "seven doors of change," citizens unlock keys to more sustainable decisions.
- *Incentivizes Action:* Examples include free public transport as a reward for reducing car use.
- *Supports Co-Creation:* Citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders collaborate on projects.

The platform is complemented by physical and digital tools in Aachen and Münster, further aiding citizens in adopting climate-conscious habits.

Behavioral Science at the Core

CoLAB relies heavily on behavioral science to:

- Understand decision-making processes.
- Identify key points where interventions can lead to lower emissions.
- Develop tools, like apps, that simplify climate-friendly choices.

For example, by targeting parents who drive children to school, the project engages public transport companies to provide attractive alternatives, such as improved infrastructure and pricing.

Mannheim's Role: A Facilitator of Change

The city administration sees itself as a facilitator rather than an enforcer. The project's design includes feedback loops to refine strategies based on citizens' responses. Through workshops, consultations, and experiments, Mannheim gathers valuable insights into citizen values and norms, enabling better policymaking.

- *According to project spokesperson Agnes Schönfelder, "The most important thing the city can do is simplify the way for citizens to make sustainable choices."*



Mannheim, Germany

Outcomes and Future Vision

As Mannheim enters the second year of the Pilot Cities Programme, it continues to refine its **CoLAB** project and expand the **House of Change**. The city aims to lead a systemic shift in climate action, proving that collaboration and innovation can drive sustainable urban futures.

By placing citizens at the heart of its mission, Mannheim exemplifies how collective action can turn ambitious climate goals into tangible outcomes. The project stands as a model for other cities striving for a greener, more inclusive future.

City: Nantes

Country: **France**

Population: **665 204 inhabitants**



© Nantes, France

Methodological Overview of the Project

Nantes Métropole has initiated a "carbon neutrality" citizen challenge aimed at assisting households, students, and employees in reducing their carbon footprints. The program offers workshops and activities designed to educate and empower participants towards achieving a carbon-neutral lifestyle. Participants can register on an online platform to assess their current carbon footprint and monitor their progress across various sectors, including mobility, housing, consumption, waste, digital usage, and industry.

Three Layers of the Program

1. Social Layer:

- **Tools:** Workshops, study visits, festive events, and an online platform for carbon footprint assessment.
- **Focus:** Addressing psychosocial barriers to sustainable behavioral changes by providing information, fostering community engagement, and promoting lifestyle adjustments.

2. Spatial Layer:

- **Tools:** Community events and local organizational involvement to animate challenges within the metropolitan area.
- **Focus:** Encouraging sustainable practices in daily activities related to mobility, housing, and waste management within the local context.

3. Administrative Layer:

- **Tools:** Governance and policy reforms, social innovation initiatives, and participatory democracy mechanisms.
- **Focus:** Enhancing public policies and stakeholder collaborations to effectively support the transition towards a carbon-neutral territory.

NGOs Involved:

Local organizations that have been facilitating citizen challenges over the past 12 years, focusing on waste reduction, energy efficiency, and sustainable food practices.

Additional Stakeholders:

- **Citizens**
- **Academia and research institutions**
- **Public and private sector entities**
- **Local authorities**



A Model for Citizen-Led Climate Transformation THE PROJECT “Together Towards Climate Neutrality”

Nantes, an iconic Atlantic port city located at the estuary of the Loire River, is redefining urban climate action by making community engagement the backbone of its sustainability strategy. As part of the NetZeroCities initiative led by EIT Climate-KIC, Nantes Métropole is expanding its efforts to achieve climate neutrality by 2030 through its project, "Together Towards Climate Neutrality." This innovative initiative scales up over a decade of citizen challenges while introducing a systemic and participatory approach to sustainability. Nantes Métropole has long held a dual focus: environmental stewardship and social cohesion. With a local climate plan in place since 2007, the city has targeted a 50% reduction in per capita CO₂ emissions and energy consumption by 2030. The strategy integrates:

- **Citizen Engagement:** Enabling residents to actively participate in shaping climate policies.
- **Social Cohesion:** Strengthening community ties through shared values like health, mobility, and food.
- **Renewable Energy:** Increasing reliance on sustainable energy sources.

The project is an evolution of Nantes' long-standing climate initiatives. Since 2011, the city has organized annual citizen challenges to promote sustainable practices, focusing on themes like zero waste, energy efficiency, and sustainable food. These efforts successfully catalyzed individual behavior change and concrete energy savings. However, the city realized that these programs often engaged only the same environmentally conscious individuals.

The broader population, particularly those less familiar with sustainability, remained largely untouched. This insight led Nantes to embark on a new journey: to scale up its citizen challenges and make sustainability accessible, relevant, and appealing to all. At its core, the project embraces the principle that climate action should not feel like an obligation or punishment but should instead offer a sense of joy, purpose, and ownership. To achieve this, the city redesigned its approach, incorporating a wider variety of activities and engaging a broader demographic. For example, one challenge invites participants to cycle to an organic farm, merging sustainable mobility with education about local agriculture. Another workshop teaches residents how to cook vegetarian meals, highlighting the environmental benefits of reducing meat consumption while also promoting health. These activities show how interconnected aspects of daily life—mobility, food, and education—can be addressed holistically to reduce emissions and improve quality of life.

Behavioral Science at the Core

Nantes' project is grounded in a deep understanding of human behavior and decision-making. The city recognizes that individual choices—such as commuting by car or preparing meals—are shaped by a mix of habits, social norms, and structural constraints. To drive meaningful change, Nantes has designed its challenges to address these behavioral factors in three key ways:

- **Empowering Participants with Knowledge:** Workshops and activities provide residents with practical tools and resources to make sustainable choices, such as understanding the benefits of a plant-based diet or learning how to reduce household waste.
- **Creating Positive Associations:** Challenges are framed as enjoyable, community-driven experiences rather than obligations. Activities like group cycling or collective zero-waste projects foster a sense of camaraderie and achievement.
- **Removing Structural Barriers:** By collecting feedback from participants, Nantes identifies obstacles—such as the lack of affordable public transport or accessible recycling facilities—that hinder sustainable behavior. These insights are used to shape policies that simplify and incentivize green choices.

The city's use of the **DECLICS app** enhances this behavioral approach. The app allows participants to calculate their carbon footprints, track progress, and access practical resources. By making sustainability measurable and actionable, Nantes empowers residents to see the direct impact of their efforts.

Nantes' Role: A Facilitator of Change

Rather than imposing top-down mandates, Nantes positions itself as a facilitator of systemic transformation. This role involves coordinating partnerships, providing training, and fostering a supportive environment where residents and organizations can co-create solutions.



Nantes, France

1. **Decentralized Implementation:** Nantes works with partners like Nantes University, SAMOA, and Dirigeants Responsables de l'Ouest to recruit participants and run challenges. These partners tailor activities to the unique needs of their communities, ensuring relevance and inclusivity.
2. **Training and Support:** The city trains these partners to lead challenges effectively, ensuring consistency and quality. This collaborative model allows Nantes to expand its reach while maintaining a focus on local adaptation.
3. **Policy Integration:** By systematically gathering data from participants, Nantes refines public policies to address structural, financial, and legal barriers. This ensures that climate action is not only aspirational but achievable for all.

- *Elise Lindner, Ecological Transition Project Manager at Nantes Métropole, emphasizes that the city's success lies in its ability to listen and learn from its citizens. Public policy, she argues, must be in tune with the people it serves to achieve meaningful outcomes.*

Outcomes and Future Vision

Nantes' **"Together Towards Climate Neutrality"** project has ambitious goals, but its early progress offers a glimpse into a transformative future.

- **Broader Participation:** By engaging 1,000 households annually, the project aims to involve demographics previously uninvolved in climate action. This includes students, employees, and other residents who may not have considered sustainability as part of their daily lives.
- **Behavioral Shifts:** Through engaging challenges and practical tools, the city fosters long-term sustainable habits in areas like mobility, food, energy use, and waste management. These changes contribute directly to the city's climate neutrality goals.
- **Policy Innovation:** Insights gathered from participants enable Nantes to design public policies that remove barriers to sustainable practices. Whether through improved public transport or new recycling systems, these policies make it easier for residents to adopt green behaviors.
- **Cultural Transformation:** The project is creating a cultural shift where sustainability becomes a shared value. By linking climate action to relatable themes like health and community, Nantes ensures that residents see sustainability not as a burden but as an opportunity for enrichment.



Nantes, France

Looking ahead, Nantes envisions a city where climate neutrality is not just a policy goal but a way of life. By fostering collaboration, empowering citizens, and integrating systemic thinking, the city is creating a replicable model for urban climate action. In the words of Nantes-born Jules Verne, "What one man can think, another man can do." Nantes is proving that collective imagination and action can turn even the most ambitious visions into reality.

City: Leuven

Country: **Belgium**

Population: **100 772 inhabitants**



© Leuven

Methodological Overview of the Project

Leuven aims to develop new tools and capabilities across governance, policy, and finance to support and enable the implementation of the city's energy strategy. The focus is on decarbonizing the heating system, paired where appropriate with retrofitting and deployment of renewable electricity. The development of collective heating systems on a district level, potentially leading to a city-wide heating network, is an essential part of the energy strategy.

Three Layers of the Program

1. Social Layer:

- **Tools:** Distributed leadership and agency, activated through Civic Contracting; place-based participation of apartment-building owners and residents.
- **Focus:** Engaging citizens and stakeholders in the energy transition, ensuring community involvement and direct impact.

2. Spatial Layer:

- **Tools:** Development of collective heating systems on a district level; retrofitting of buildings; deployment of renewable electricity.
- **Focus:** Decarbonizing heating systems and improving energy efficiency in buildings.

3. Administrative Layer:

- **Tools:** Cross-departmental climate planning and execution; blended finance raised and deployed through a municipal investment vehicle.
- **Focus:** Enhancing governance structures and financial mechanisms to support the energy strategy.

NGOs Involved:

- Local NGOs and associations are among the stakeholders engaged in the pilot activities.

Additional Stakeholders:

- **Citizens**
- **Academia**
- **Research institutions**
- **Financial institutions**
- **Public/private partnerships**
- **Businesses**

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT

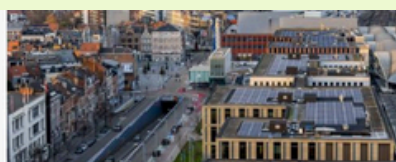
- **Civic Contracting:** A participatory governance tool that allows residents to shape policies and projects affecting their communities.
- **Blended Finance Mechanisms:** Innovative funding models that combine public and private investments, making it easier to implement costly energy infrastructure projects.
- **District Heating Networks:** A scalable solution that can serve as a blueprint for other European cities aiming to decarbonize heating systems.



District heating and urban greening in the C. Meunier street

🕒 **START DATE** 📌 **STATUS**
February 2023

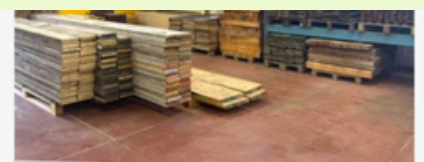
🌟 **LEAD**



A transition fund for Leuven

🕒 **START DATE** 📌 **STATUS**
October 2023

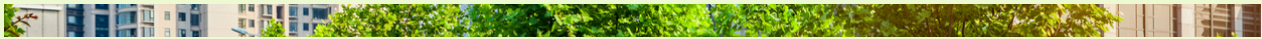
🌟 **LEAD**
Leuven 2030



Leuven as an Urban Resource Centre

🕒 **START DATE** 📌 **STATUS**
May 2024

🌟 **LEAD**
werecircle, Leuven 2030, stad Leuven



Pioneering Pathways to a Climate-Neutral Future **THE PROJECT " Leuven 2030"**

Leuven, a historic city in Belgium, has assumed on an ambitious journey toward climate neutrality by 2050. The "Leuven 2030 Roadmap" outlines a comprehensive strategy to achieve this goal, **addressing environmental challenges and enhancing the city's social and economic fabric**. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emphasizes the urgent need for decisive action to prevent catastrophic climate change. Leuven faces local impacts such as increased droughts, flooding, and heat stress. Recognizing these threats, the city aims to transition to a carbon-free society, seizing opportunities to strengthen the knowledge economy, spur technological innovation, create jobs, improve public health, and expand green spaces. As a signatory of the Covenant of Mayors, Leuven is committed to significant emissions reductions and developing a comprehensive adaptation plan. In 2013, the city co-founded the non-profit organization Leuven 2030, uniting policymakers, knowledge institutions, companies, civil-society organizations, and citizens to support the transition toward climate neutrality with a focus on social justice. Despite stable carbon emissions since 2010 amid population and economic growth, Leuven acknowledges the need for systemic change, shifting from *"doing what can be achieved"* to *"doing what must be achieved"*.

Roadmap as a Guide

Developed in 2018 with urban-planning agency BUUR and local experts, the roadmap guides Leuven to achieve at least an 80% reduction in emissions by 2050. It broadens the scope to include emissions produced directly within Leuven (scope 1), emissions from electricity supply (scope 2), and those beyond the city's borders, such as travel and production of goods and food (scope 3). This comprehensive approach requires reducing emissions by approximately 2,500 kilotons per year, nearly four times the initial target.

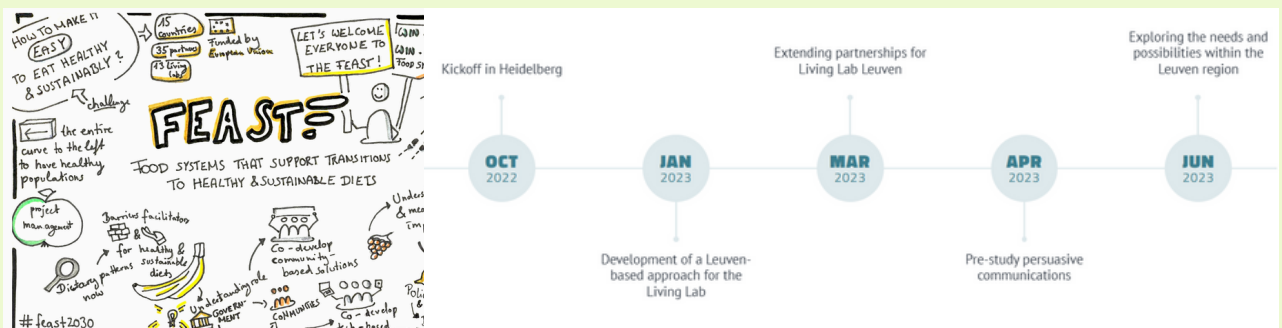
Eight Ambitions

The roadmap is structured around eight key ambitions:

1. **Climate-Neutral Living:** Enhancing energy efficiency in residential buildings through retrofitting and sustainable construction practices.
2. **Climate-Neutral Urban Services:** Improving energy efficiency in non-residential buildings and urban infrastructure.
3. **Climate-Neutral Mobility:** Promoting sustainable transportation modes and reducing reliance on fossil fuels.
4. **Consuming Sustainably:** Encouraging responsible consumption patterns and waste reduction.
5. **Producing Renewable Energy Locally:** Investing in local renewable energy sources to meet the city's energy demands.
6. **Increasing Urban Resilience:** Enhancing the city's capacity to adapt to climate impacts through green spaces and resilient infrastructure.
7. **Achieving Climate Neutrality Together:** Fostering collaboration among all stakeholders, including citizens, businesses, and institutions.
8. **Sharing Knowledge and Innovating:** Promoting continuous learning and innovation to support the transition.

Programs and Project Clusters

These ambitions are broken down into 80 project clusters, organized into 13 programs, each with specific targets and measures. For example, the program on retrofitting residential buildings aims to increase the retrofitting rate to 3%, corresponding to approximately 1,000 homes per year, with at least 60% undergoing deep retrofitting to minimize energy use. Other programs focus on sustainable mobility, green energy production, and enhancing urban resilience.



Involving Everybody in the Transition

Broad support is essential for the roadmap's success. Efforts focus on raising awareness, providing accessible information, and engaging all societal actors, including vulnerable groups, to ensure social justice. Special attention is given to involving young people, who represent the city's future.

Learning and Monitoring

Continuous learning, knowledge sharing, and monitoring are integral to the roadmap's implementation. Leuven commits to evaluating progress, adapting strategies based on new insights, and to be **visible as a way to contribute to the broader knowledge base on climate action**.

Leuven's Role: A Facilitator of Change

Leuven has taken on the vital role of facilitator in its journey toward climate neutrality, placing citizen engagement and collaboration at the heart of its transformation. The Leuven 2030 Roadmap emphasizes the power of collective action, creating opportunities for residents, businesses, and institutions to work together toward a shared vision of sustainability.



Leuven 2030, Belgium

Citizen participation is central to this mission. Through innovative tools like *Civic Contracting*, Leuven enables its residents to co-create solutions that directly address local challenges, such as improving building energy efficiency or adopting sustainable transport. **Neighborhood-focused initiatives** further enhance this engagement, empowering communities to lead projects like retrofitting homes or developing renewable energy cooperatives. This bottom-up approach ensures that solutions are **tailored** to the **needs and aspirations of the people they serve**.

Education and **awareness** are also key pillars of Leuven's strategy. Workshops, public forums, and school programs foster climate literacy, equipping residents with the knowledge and skills to actively contribute to the transition. By prioritizing **inclusivity**, Leuven ensures that vulnerable populations are not left behind. Subsidies and accessible programs make retrofitting and renewable energy solutions available to all, reflecting a commitment to equity and justice in the climate transition.

Outcomes and Future Vision

Leuven's efforts are already producing meaningful results, laying a strong foundation for a sustainable future. The city has made significant strides in improving energy efficiency, with thousands of homes retrofitted to meet modern energy standards. Local renewable energy projects, including solar installations and district heating pilots, are reducing reliance on fossil fuels. Cycling infrastructure improvements have transformed Leuven into a city where bicycles are becoming a primary mode of transport, reflecting a shift toward low-emission mobility.

Beyond these tangible achievements, Leuven's approach has fostered a deep sense of community and shared purpose. Over 10,000 residents have participated in workshops or neighborhood initiatives, contributing ideas and actively shaping the city's climate-neutral journey. Vulnerable groups have been supported through targeted programs, ensuring that the benefits of this transition are felt across all layers of society.



Leuven 2030, Belgium

Looking forward, Leuven envisions itself as a climate-neutral and resilient city by 2050, a global leader in sustainable urban transformation. The lessons learned from its roadmap will continue to inform not only local projects but also broader regional and international efforts. Scaling successful initiatives, such as district heating and community-led energy cooperatives, will be a priority, along with maintaining a focus on social equity. Leuven is committed to fostering a culture of innovation, leveraging its rich academic and research networks to pioneer new technologies and solutions.

At its core, Leuven's future vision is one of inclusivity, resilience, and leadership. The city demonstrates that the path to sustainability is not only about reducing emissions but also about building a thriving community where social, economic, and environmental goals are seamlessly aligned. Through this journey, Leuven sets a powerful example for cities worldwide, proving that ambitious climate action is both possible and transformative.

GOOD PRACTICES GUIDE AND BENCHMARKS

Cohort 2

CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT

PORTO

Portugal
231 800 inhabitants
WAKE UP - Wider Approach to Keep Engaged citizens on sustainable Urban Policies

AARHUS

Denmark
349,873 inhabitants
CO-SHaping Areas in Peri-urban Environments

BUCHAREST

Romania
2nd District of Bucharest Municipality
362 609 inhabitants
Urban Regeneration & Administrative Capacity Building for Sustainable Development & Emissions Reduction (URBANWISE)

City: Porto

Country: **Portugal**

Population: **231 800 inhabitants**



Porto, Portugal

Overview of the Project

The WAKE UP pilot is engaging Porto citizens in sustainable urban practices, focusing on water, energy, mobility, food, and waste. Activities include developing a digital platform for monitoring and optimizing resource use, with gamification to incentivize sustainable behaviors. The municipality is coordinating project management, finances, and sustainability assessments. Stakeholder engagement involves collaboration with citizens, educational institutions, public transport operators, and municipal companies for a comprehensive sustainability approach.

Three Layers of the Program

1. Social Layer:

- **Tools:** Participatory processes, social and solidarity economy solutions
- **Focus:** Engaging citizens, especially children and youth, in co-creating nature-based solutions (NBS) and raising awareness about climate change and sustainable policies.

2. Spatial Layer:

- **Tools:** Territorial and technological solutions, products, and infrastructures
- **Focus:** Implementing NBS in urban spaces to improve environmental quality and promote sustainable urban development.

3. Administrative Layer:

- **Tools:** Collaboration with citizens from local associations, municipalities, and schools
- **Focus:** Ensuring the involvement of various stakeholders in the co-creation process and fostering a sense of ownership among citizens.

NGOs Involved:

- Local associations and community groups: **Águas e Energia do Porto(AEdP), CEiiA, URBiNAT.**

Additional Stakeholders:

- **Municipalities**
- **Citizens**
- **Schools**
- **Academia, researchers and practitioners**
- **Bussiness and Companies**



The Project

The WAKE UP pilot project in Porto is a comprehensive initiative aimed at achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. This project is part of the broader Porto Climate Pact and the European Mission for Climate Neutral and Smart Cities. The primary goal is to engage citizens in sustainable practices, promote behavioral changes, and align individual actions with overarching climate goals. The pilot activities of WAKE UP focus on engaging citizens in Porto towards sustainable urban practices.



© URBiNAT

The key objective of the WAKE UP pilot activities is to empower citizens in Porto to actively contribute to achieving the city's carbon neutrality goals. This is facilitated by the integrated *digital platform*, which fosters sustainable behaviors across multiple domains. Key areas of intervention include *water, energy, mobility/transport, food, and waste*.

a. Development of a Digital Platform: A user-friendly interface accessible through the “Cartão Porto” (*Porto Citizen Card*) is developed. The platform provides citizens with insights into their carbon footprint across various domains such as water, energy, mobility, food, and waste.

b. Gamification Element: To incentivize sustainable behaviors, the platform also includes gamification elements. This element encourages citizens to participate actively and make sustainable choices.

c. Sustainability and Impact Assessment: The project includes also a sustainability and impact assessment to evaluate its effectiveness. This help in understanding the impact of the project and making necessary adjustments.



d. Replication Facilitation: Finally, the project aims to identify and disseminate best practices to other cities. This help in replicating the successful elements of the project in other urban areas.



Citizen Engagement

The co-creation of this project is a testament to the power of collaborative urban design. It showcases how community involvement, backed by multidisciplinary expertise, can lead to sustainable, impactful urban transformations. The legacy of this project will resonate far beyond the borders of Porto, serving as an inspiration for similar initiatives worldwide.

City: Aarhus

Country: Denmark

Population: 349 873 inhabitants



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Overview of the Project

The CO-SHAPE project in Aarhus, Denmark, is a collaborative initiative between Aarhus Municipality and the Aarhus School of Architecture, aiming to integrate energy production with nature conservation and recreation. This partnership, established in May 2024 for a two-year duration, is funded through the EU's NetZero Cities and Pilot Cities programs. The goal is to develop Energy Park Spørring and explore the possibilities of using architectural planning for a holistic management of the many land use requirements in the future.

Three Layers of the Program

1. Social Layer:

- **Tools:** Co-creation workshops, stakeholder engagement sessions, and public consultations.
- **Focus:** Engaging citizens, private developers, authorities, and architects in the planning and development processes to ensure community involvement and address concerns such as the "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) phenomenon.

2. Spatial Layer:

- **Tools:** Landscape architectural scenario-building, comprehensive planning models, and differentiated urban typology approaches.
- **Focus:** Developing the Energy Park Spørring to integrate various renewable energy sources—such as biogas plants, photovoltaic (PV) parks, Power-to-X technologies, grass protein production, and biochar facilities—across 1,000 hectares. The aim is to harmonize energy production with nature conservation, recreation, and urban quality.

3. Administrative Layer:

- **Tools:** Cross-departmental cooperation frameworks, governance tools for comprehensive planning, and participatory democracy mechanisms.
- **Focus:** Enhancing interdepartmental collaboration within the municipality to streamline planning processes and develop holistic strategies for land use and energy planning.

Academia Involved

The key academic partner, the **Aarhus School of Architecture** contributes research and expertise in architectural planning and landscape integration. The institution is involved in developing comprehensive plans that harmonize energy production with nature conservation and recreational spaces. CO-SHAPE builds upon the postdoc research project at Aarhus School of Architecture, "*Transition to sustainable urban communities*" (April 2024-March 2027), which examines the sustainability transition of cities and urban areas in the City of Aarhus.



Aarhus

Additional Stakeholders

Research Institutions: *Danish Town Planning Institute*- Collaborates on exploring new approaches to sustainable urban transitions, integrating research findings into municipal planning processes.

Citizens (Local Communities and Residents): Actively engaged through co-creation workshops and public consultations, citizens provide valuable input to ensure that the development of Energy Park Spørring aligns with local needs and addresses concerns such as the "*Not In My Backyard*" (NIMBY) syndrome.

NGOs Involved: The project incorporates methodologies from previous initiatives like **REGREEN** (2019-2023), **Invest4Nature** (2022-2026), and **MOSAIC** (2018-2020), which focused on nature-based solutions and citizen engagement.

Business/Private Sector:

- **Private Developers and Energy Operators:** Engaged in the planning and implementation phases, these stakeholders bring technical expertise and investment necessary for the development of renewable energy infrastructures such as photovoltaic parks and Power-to-X facilities.
- Developers and energy companies, such as **Nature Energy**, involved in renewable energy projects like the expansion of the Bånlev Biogas plant. Public/Private Partnerships.

Municipality: The local government plays a pivotal role in facilitating the project, providing governance support, and ensuring that the initiative aligns with the city's climate neutrality goals.



The Project

CO-SHAPE addresses the complex challenges of urban land use and renewable energy production by fostering a co-creation model that actively involves various stakeholders. The project focuses on establishing the Energy Park Spørring, a peri-urban area in Aarhus, to integrate multiple renewable energy sources and sustainable land use practices. Activities include *technical energy planning*, *landscape architectural scenario-building*, and *comprehensive planning*, all aimed at contributing to Aarhus's goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2030.

The key components of the CO-SHAPE project include

a. Energy Park Spørring: The project focuses on developing Energy Park Spørring, a peri-urban area where various renewable energy sources—such as a biogas plant, photovoltaic (PV) park, Power-to-X facilities, grass protein production, and a biochar facility—are integrated over approximately 1,000 hectares.

This integration is achieved through a co-creation model involving citizens, private developers, authorities, and architects.

b. Community Engagement: A core aspect of CO-SHAPE is the active involvement of local communities and stakeholders through co-creation workshops and public consultations. This participatory approach ensures that the development aligns with local needs and addresses personalized concerns.

c. Collaborative Research Partnership: The initiative builds upon the postdoctoral research project "Transition to Sustainable Urban Communities" (April 2024–March 2027) at the Aarhus School of Architecture. This research examines the sustainability transition of urban areas in Aarhus, integrating insights from urban and landscape planning.

d. Holistic Land-Use Planning: CO-SHAPE addresses the increasing demands for land use from sectors like renewable energy, urbanization, water management, nature conservation, and agriculture. By exploring various scenarios, the project seeks to balance energy production with nature conservation, recreation, and urban quality, ensuring efficient and high-quality land use.

e. Governance and Policy Innovation: The project pioneers comprehensive energy planning as a governance tool, facilitating increased local renewable energy production and holistic sector coupling.



Through these integrated efforts, the project's holistic approach serves as a model for similar urban typologies across Europe, demonstrating the potential for integrated planning to address the multifaceted challenges of sustainable urban development.

City: 2nd District of Bucharest Municipality

Country: **Romania**

Population: **362 609 inhabitants**



Bucharest

Overview of the UrbanWise Project

UrbanWise is an initiative implemented within the framework of Bucharest's Sector 2 decarbonisation efforts, operating under the broader umbrella of the NetZero Cities program. This project supports the European Union's objective of achieving climate neutrality in selected cities by 2030 through innovation, community engagement, and governance strengthening. As part of the EU's "100 Smart and Climate Neutral Cities by 2030" Mission and its inclusion in the second NetZero Cities cohort, UrbanWise is deployed as a strategic tool to rigorously test and optimize sustainability solutions tailored to specific local contexts.

Three Layers of the Program

1. Social Layer:

- **Tools:** A Digital Platform for Carbon Footprint Assessment and Sustainable Behavior Change implementation.
- **Focus:** Raising community awareness, educating citizens on low-carbon lifestyles, and encouraging active public participation in policy formulation and project design.

2. Spatial Layer

- **Tools:** Inclusive Green Public Spaces and Sustainable Transportation solutions.
- **Focus:** Enhancing the physical environment by expanding and improving green areas, promoting nature-based solutions, and shifting towards low-emission mobility options. This spatial intervention aims to improve air quality, reduce reliance on personal vehicles, and increase public well-being.

3. Administrative Layer

- **Tools:** A Sustainable Development Strategy supplemented by Detailed Governance Guidelines.
- **Focus:** Strengthening local governance capacities, streamlining policy implementation, and ensuring that long-term planning integrates climate neutrality goals. This includes capacity-building within the local administration to effectively manage data, set targets, and oversee project outcomes.

NGOs Involved

- **UrbanizeHub Romania:** Specialized in **community engagement**, comprehensive awareness-raising campaigns, hands-on co-creation workshops and facilitating participatory urban citizen engagement processes.
- **Climatosfera:** Focused on climate action strategies, providing support in integrating environmental objectives, policy frameworks, and evidence-based methodologies into local planning.



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Additional Stakeholders

- **Citizens:** Central to UrbanWise's approach, residents participate through surveys, workshops, and consultations, ensuring that interventions match local priorities and foster a real sense of collective ownership.
- **Local Government** (City Hall of Sector 2): Acts as the coordinating body, ensuring strategic alignment with EU missions and facilitating the integration of new policies and guidelines.
- **Academia and Research Institutions:** Notably, the Technical University of Construction Bucharest and the University of Architecture and Urbanism "Ion Mincu" contribute data-driven analyses, research expertise, and technical guidance. They help assess interventions' effectiveness, shape evidence-based strategies, and ensure replicability.



The Project

UrbanWise operates as a pilot initiative within Sector 2's decarbonization roadmap, aiming to align urban development with the European goal of climate neutrality by 2030. The project's methodology involves a layered approach that addresses environmental, social, and administrative challenges simultaneously.

By employing participatory methods, UrbanWise ensures that changes—such as the introduction of green corridors, improved cycling lanes, or the retrofitting of buildings for energy efficiency—are not only top-down directives but also co-created solutions reflecting community input.

a. The digital platform for carbon footprint assessment represents a cornerstone of the social layer, granting citizens insight into their personal environmental impact and suggesting practical ways to reduce it.



b. Meanwhile, inclusive green public spaces and sustainable transportation solutions reconfigure the physical environment, making the city more resilient, livable, and attuned to public health and well-being.



c. On the administrative side, UrbanWise focuses on long-term governance reform. By *clarifying responsibilities*, *improving data management capacities*, and *setting up performance indicators*, the project enables local authorities to confidently guide climate action, incorporate best practices, and measure progress over time.



Combined, these efforts ensure that the climate-neutrality agenda is not just a temporary intervention but a sustained, institutionalized shift in how the city plans, invests, and engages its citizens and stakeholders. Ultimately, UrbanWise provides a replicable blueprint for European urban areas navigating complex sustainability challenges. Through its multifaceted approach—integrating community feedback, scientific research, strategic policy frameworks, and cooperative alliances with powerful NGOs — UrbanWise enhances Sector 2’s capacity to meet decarbonization targets. The resulting model demonstrates how cities can translate ambitious climate objectives into concrete, participatory, and enduring urban transformations.

OUTCOMES AND FUTURE VISION

CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT

EARLY RESULTS FROM PILOT CITIES

The NetZero Cities initiative has demonstrated measurable progress across its pilot cities, showcasing the effectiveness of collaborative, systemic approaches to climate neutrality. Pilot cities like Leuven, Mannheim, and Nantes have already begun delivering results:

- **Mannheim's "House of Change"** has empowered citizens to shift toward sustainable lifestyles, supported by behavioral science insights and participatory platforms. Local renewable energy adoption has increased significantly, and the city is refining its governance structures for long-term impact.
- **Leuven's focus on energy efficiency and decarbonization** has led to the development of district-level heating systems and retrofitting thousands of residential buildings, reducing emissions while improving urban infrastructure.
- **Nantes' citizen challenges** have engaged previously uninvolved demographics in sustainability efforts, fostering a cultural shift toward sustainable habits in mobility, energy use, and waste management.



OUTCOMES AND FUTURE VISION

CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT

REPLICATION AND SCALABILITY ACROSS EUROPE

The initiative's success lies in its ability to create scalable models that other cities can adapt. Tools and methodologies developed in pilot cities are designed to be flexible and context-sensitive, ensuring their applicability across diverse urban environments. Key strategies enabling replication include:

- **Community-Centric Frameworks:** Programs like Nantes' community challenges and Porto's gamified citizen platforms can be easily adopted by other cities to promote behavioral shifts at scale.
- **Integrated Digital Tools:** Platforms for carbon footprint tracking and participatory decision-making, such as those in Bucharest and Stockholm, provide replicable templates for citizen engagement.
- **Collaborative Governance Models:** Cities like Aarhus have demonstrated how multi-stakeholder approaches, involving businesses, academia, and NGOs, can streamline urban climate transitions.



The success of replication efforts is already evident as newer pilot cities from the third cohort adopt proven strategies from earlier participants, creating a ripple effect across Europe. This cross-city collaboration strengthens Europe's collective capacity to meet its 2030 climate neutrality goals.

Strategic Vision for 2050

THE 2050 VISION: A CITIZEN-LED FUTURE

Looking ahead to 2050, the **NetZero Cities** program envisions a Europe where urban centers are not only carbon-neutral but also vibrant hubs of citizen-driven resilience, equity, and innovation. This vision places engaged citizens at the heart of sustainable transformation, ensuring that communities are both architects and beneficiaries of the journey toward a thriving, climate-neutral future.

By embracing nature-based solutions, cities will evolve into adaptive, biodiverse, and livable spaces. Green corridors, renewable energy systems, and sustainable infrastructure will be designed and maintained in close collaboration with citizens, ensuring local knowledge and needs shape the urban environment. Citizen participation will drive efforts to reimagine public spaces and enhance biodiversity, fostering a shared sense of ownership over resilient cityscapes. Achieving climate neutrality will be rooted in equity and inclusivity, with citizens actively shaping the policies and actions that impact their lives. Participatory governance models will empower communities, particularly vulnerable groups, to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes. By 2050, cities will prioritize access to resources, education, and opportunities, enabling every citizen to play a role in bridging social inequities and fostering a collective commitment to a sustainable future. Cities will thrive as living laboratories for green technologies and circular economies, where innovation is co-created with citizens. From grassroots initiatives to large-scale urban experiments, public engagement will fuel the design, testing, and scaling of solutions for sustainable job creation and economic prosperity. Collaborations with academia, businesses, and global partners will integrate citizens as active participants in continuous learning, ensuring that innovation aligns with community needs.

By 2050, European cities will stand as global exemplars of sustainable urban living, demonstrating that empowered, engaged citizens are the foundation of climate-neutral transformation. The NetZero Cities initiative will showcase how collaboration, inclusivity, and innovation—driven by the voices and actions of people—can redefine the urban climate landscape. This blueprint will inspire regions worldwide, proving that when citizens join the responsibility of leading, cities thrive.