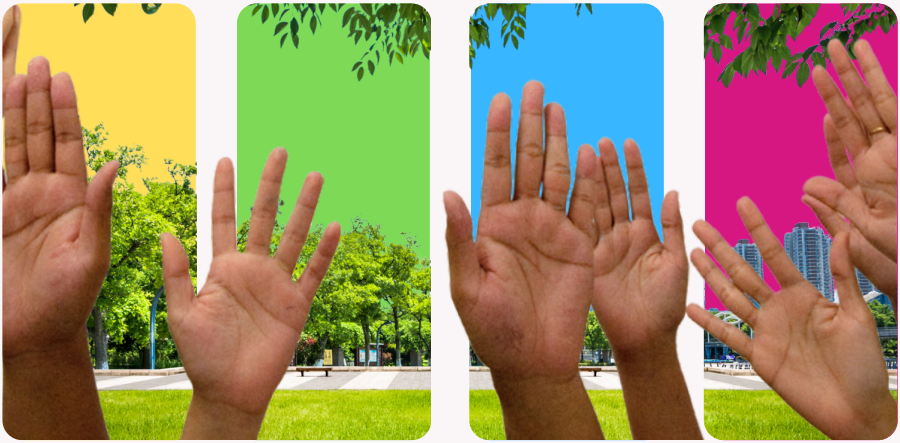
Iceland Liechtenstein Norway grants

Mirror Mission Cities Hub Romania

TOOLS FOR CLIMATE TRANSITION

Best-practice guide for public participation



UrbanizeHub

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CITIES TOGETHER!

2025

TOOLS FOR CLIMATE TRANSITION
Best-Practice Guide for Public Participation

This guide has been created and published as part of the project called *Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities: Planning, Piloting, Inspiring* (2024-2025) in collaboration with M100 Mirror Mission Cities Hub Romania.

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Iceland Liechtenstein Norway grants

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Working together for a green, competitive and inclusive Europe.

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Photo: wirestock

Foreword

What makes a city thrive in the face of climate change, inequality, and uncertainty?

More and more, the answer isn't found in technology alone — but in people. In how they're invited to be part of the decisions that shape their future. In how they're treated not just as users of the city, but as partners, co-creators, and catalysts of transformation.

This guide begins from that belief: that real change happens when we collaborate. But this idea didn't emerge overnight.

It's part of a broader story — one that spans decades, across Europe and beyond. In the decades after the industrial revolution, cities boomed. They became engines of economic growth, but also of pollution, sprawl, and inequality. For a long time, governments responded reactively — tackling problems only once they became crises. In the 1970s, the now-famous "Limits to Growth" report warned that infinite growth on a finite planet was simply not possible. It was one of the first signs that something had to change.

Since then, our thinking has evolved. We've moved from managing damage to imagining something better. From minimizing harm, to building systems that are sustainable — and then going further, toward regeneration. We now speak of a just and green transition: a way to shift our economies, infrastructures, and societies toward climate neutrality, without leaving anyone behind. This is not just about cutting emissions. It's about transforming how we live, how we move, and how we take decisions together.

In this context, cities matter more than ever.

Cities today are home to more than 70% of Europeans — and produce over 70% of global CO_2 emissions. As urban populations continue to grow, the way we plan, build, and govern our cities will decide much of our planet's future. But this also means cities are full of potential. They concentrate talent, resources, innovation, and civic energy. They can become living laboratories — places where citizens, local authorities, businesses, and universities come together to test new ideas, pilot new models, and scale what works. Cities are not just sites of challenge. They are spaces of possibility.

That's why the European Union has placed cities at the center of its climate and innovation agenda. Through the Mission for 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030, coordinated by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), cities are supported to become climate pioneers — developing ambitious action plans, involving citizens, and creating local alliances to cut emissions and improve quality of life. These cities, and the hundreds that will follow, are showing that transformation is possible when we work together.

At the same time, the New European Bauhaus (NEB) — an initiative of the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) — brings in a cultural and creative dimension. It invites communities to reimagine how our surroundings can be not just sustainable, but also beautiful and inclusive. NEB projects transform public spaces, housing, and neighborhoods through participatory design and local knowledge. In both programs, participation is not a box to tick. It's a condition for success.

The message is clear: to meet our climate goals, we don't just need hard infrastructure — we need soft infrastructure, too. Relationships. Dialogue. Trust. Mechanisms that make collaboration real and fair. This is the foundation of what's increasingly called collaborative governance: a way of shaping decisions together, across institutions and communities, sectors and scales.

This guide is an invitation to learn how.

It contains two companion texts: one focused on public participation, the other on public-private partnerships. These aren't abstract frameworks. They are built on real-world practices already shaping cities across Europe. They offer tools, methods, and ideas that can be adapted in small towns or capital cities alike.

Whether you are a public servant, a local organizer, a planner, a student, a researcher, or simply a curious resident — this guide is for you. It is a starting point for understanding how collaboration works, why it matters, and how you can take part.

Because the transition to climate neutrality won't succeed without people. And the best way to bring people along is to give them a real seat at the table.

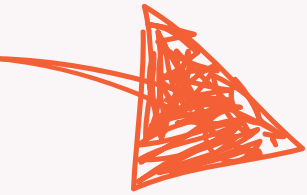
Let's begin — together.

Public Participation

A **deliberative process** through which interested or affected citizens, civil society organisations, governmental actors are **involved in public decision-making**.

Participation is not just about being present – it's about actively listening, exchanging ideas, and staying open to new information and perspectives.

In a deliberative setting, all actors demonstrate a willingness to learn from one another and to integrate diverse forms of knowledge – factual, experiential, and emotional.



Participation implies more than informing the public.

It refers to a spectrum of involvement – from simply receiving information to becoming a co-decider. On this spectrum different levels of engagement relate to power, influence, and responsibility in decision-making.



A European Landscape: Public Participation Overview

Public participation in the European Union is recognised as a cornerstone of democratic governance and sustainable development. In recent years, the EU has made substantial efforts to institutionalise citizen engagement, especially in the context of green and digital transitions. However, participation levels, formats and effectiveness vary across countries, regions and sectors.

According to Eurostat, in 2022, only 12.3% of the EU adult population (aged 16 or over) reported participation in formal voluntary activities. This includes activities carried out within structured organisations such as associations, charities, or political parties.

Education appears to be a key determinant of participation: while only 6.6% of people with primary education took part in formal volunteering, this figure rose to 11.2% for those with secondary education, and 19.5% for those with tertiary education. This pattern holds true across nearly all EU member states, reinforcing the idea that civic engagement remains closely tied to socio-economic status and opportunity structures.

Age is also a key factor. The highest rate of formal volunteering is found among young people aged 16–24, where 13.8% reported participation in structured volunteer activities. However, informal volunteering—such as helping neighbours, local initiatives, or community actions without institutional affiliation—is more common among people aged 25 to 64, with rates ranging between 15.2% and 15.5%.

Volunteering typically involves offering time and effort to support others or contribute to a cause, often through structured activities like helping in NGOs or community services. When considering public participation in Europe, we can take this one step further and talk about active citizenship.

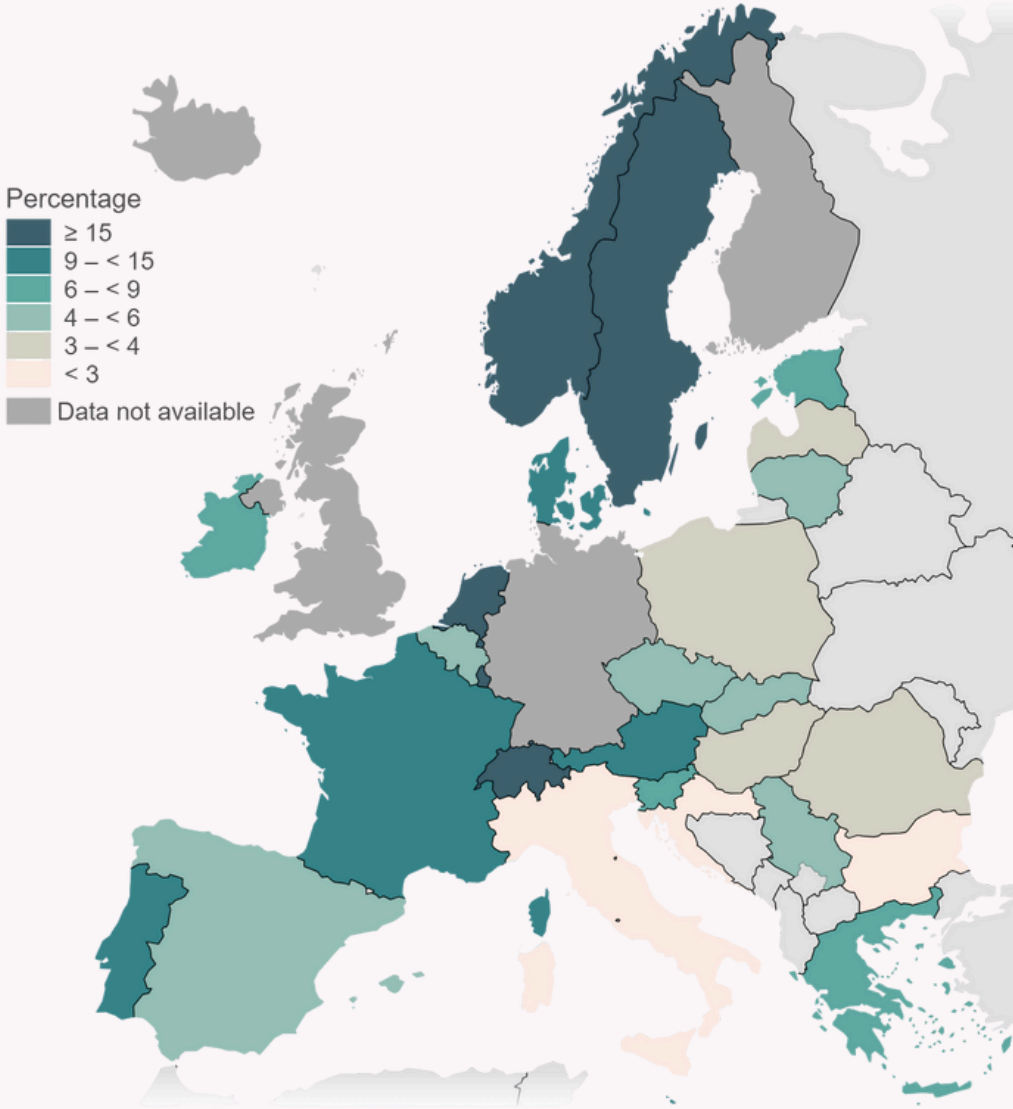
Active citizenship refers to people engaging in democratic life — such as signing petitions, joining protests, or taking part in local decision-making — with the aim of influencing policies or shaping their communities. Where volunteering helps people, active citizenship helps shape decisions.

Here, the numbers are generally lower: the highest rates are among people aged 25 to 54, where between 9.1% and 9.5% reported taking part. Citizens aged 75 and over consistently show the lowest levels of participation in all three categories.

The geography of participation also reveals some counterintuitive trends. While we would expect higher civic engagement in cities—often hubs of activism and social movements—formal volunteering is actually less common in urban areas than in towns, suburbs, or rural regions. In contrast, active citizenship is more prevalent in cities, while formal volunteering is more common in rural areas than in cities. These differences may reflect not only access to organisations and activities, but also social networks, cultural norms, and how civic infrastructure is distributed.

The difference in citizen engagement and participation across the EU stems from the complex mix of historical traditions, civic culture, institutional trust and the strength of local democratic institutions.

Active Citizenship Mapping (2022)



Source: Eurostat (dataset code ilc_scp20)

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © OpenStreetMap
Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 04/2025

HIGH ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP **Over 15% of adult population**

Countries: Luxembourg (21.6%), Netherlands (17.8%), Sweden (20.0%), Switzerland (26.0%), Norway (39.3%)
Drivers: Strong civic traditions, transparent institutions, and high levels of trust in governance.
Cities: Amsterdam, Oslo, and Zurich are recognised for mainstreaming participation in climate action planning, mobility reforms, and digital democratic innovation

MODERATE ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP **5 - 15% of adult population**

Countries: Austria (12%), France (11.9%), Denmark (9.8%), Portugal (9.3%), Estonia (7.7%), Greece (6.3%), Spain (5.6%), Belgium (5.4%), Czech Republic (5.2%)
Drivers: Participatory budgeting, EU project funding, and digital engagement tools
Cities: Lisbon, Ghent, Vienna, and Tallinn are testing co-creation and community-led planning in mobility, energy, and climate resilience

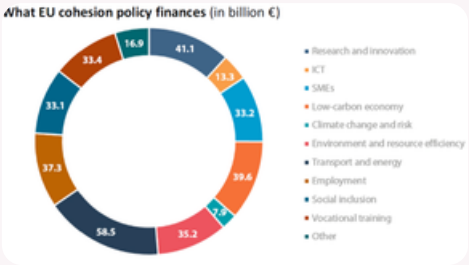
LOW ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP **Under 5% of adult population**

Countries: Slovakia (4.1%), Poland (3.6%), Romania (3.1%), Croatia (2.9%), Italy (2.2%), Bulgaria (1.9%)
Drivers: Strong local leadership, experimentation, and digital engagement tools
Cities: Cluj-Napoca, Krakow, Rijeka have been involved in Living Labs and co-creation initiatives under EU programmes

A European Landscape: Frameworks enabling participation

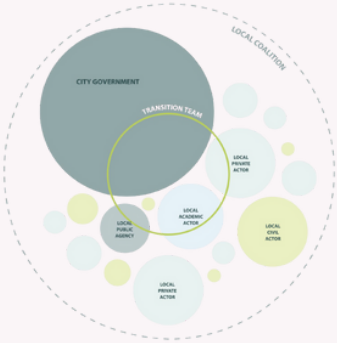
Across Europe, the transition toward greener, more resilient cities is no longer seen as a purely technical or top-down process. EU institutions increasingly recognize that this transformation must be democratic, inclusive, and locally grounded. Citizens are no longer treated as passive recipients of policy — they are considered co-creators of the urban future. Public participation is now a core requirement for the success of the European Green Deal and the long-term legitimacy of climate and social policies.





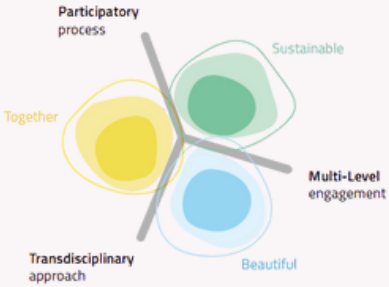
Public participation is woven through major EU strategic frameworks such as the *Cohesion Policy 2021–2027.* This promotes partnership, transparency, and local ownership as essential principles for designing and implementing EU-funded investments and development strategies shaped with people, not just for them.

At the strategic level, the EU Mission for *100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities* by 2030, managed by the European Commission's DG Research and Innovation, mandates that each selected city co-develops its Climate City Contract through stakeholder engagement, citizen participation, and local alignment. Participation is not a communication tool, but a condition for implementation.



NetZeroCities Programme provides experimentation tools and platforms for collaborative governance models to be tested and refined. The programme ties into the National Platforms in order to bring together communities, governments, and experts to co-create, monitor, and evaluate climate actions in real-time.

This participatory ethos extends to urban innovation. The *New European Bauhaus (NEB)*, led by DG REGIO, places citizen engagement at the heart of rethinking the built environment. It also encourages place-based experimentation & co-design. It evaluates projects based not only on their environmental and aesthetic impact, but also on the degree to which they involve residents and diverse groups.



New European Bauhaus
beautiful | sustainable | together

At the funding level, *Horizon Europe*, EU's main research and innovation programme, embeds participation deeper than ever before. Many funding calls now require co-design, co-assessment, and co-implementation strategies to ensure that citizens, communities, and stakeholders are meaningfully involved from the outset. Participation has moved from a supporting role to a core eligibility criterion.

Together, these instruments reflect a systemic shift: collaborative governance is becoming the new standard in Europe's climate and urban policies.



Photo: Wavebreakmedia

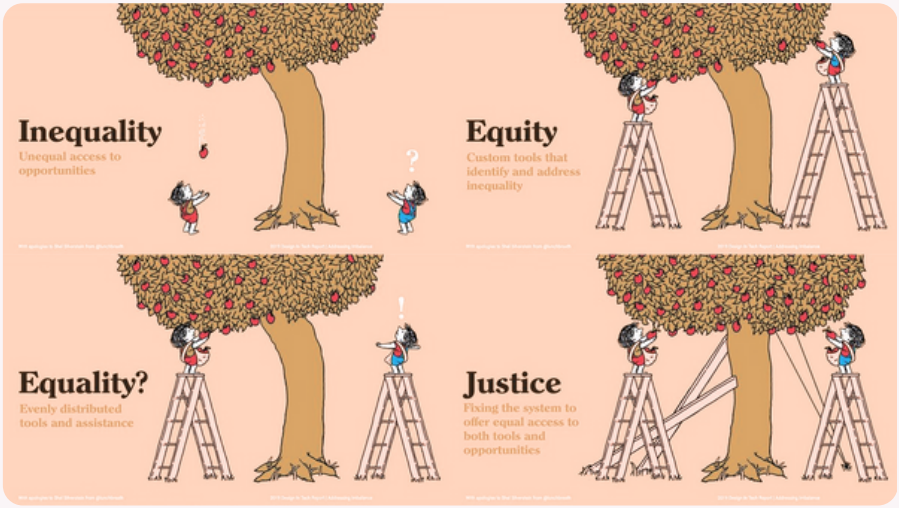
From theory to practice: Why Public Participation Matters

Public participation is not just a democratic formality. It is a tool for redressing systemic imbalances — for ensuring that every voice counts, especially those usually unheard.

It levels the field from inequality to justice:

- Inequality means people start from different places — due to income, education, race, geography, or ability.
- Equality tries to treat everyone the same — but this often ignores underlying barriers.
- Equity goes a step further — it acknowledges these barriers and allocates resources and access accordingly.
- Justice removes the structural barriers altogether, creating a system that no longer requires special adjustments.

Public participation helps move us along this spectrum by creating inclusive processes that amplify diverse voices and redistribute influence.



Equality, Equity and Justice Source: Tony Ruth from Maeda (2019)

The Ladder of Citizen Participation

Public participation is not a binary (you do it or you don't) — it exists on a spectrum. In 1969, Sherry Arnstein proposed a now-iconic framework known as the "Ladder of Citizen Participation." It helps us understand the varying degrees of influence citizens have over decisions that affect their lives.

At its core, the ladder is about power — who holds it, who shares it, and who's excluded from it.

To simplify the full 8-rung ladder, we focus here on three core categories that capture the range of most relevant participatory practices.

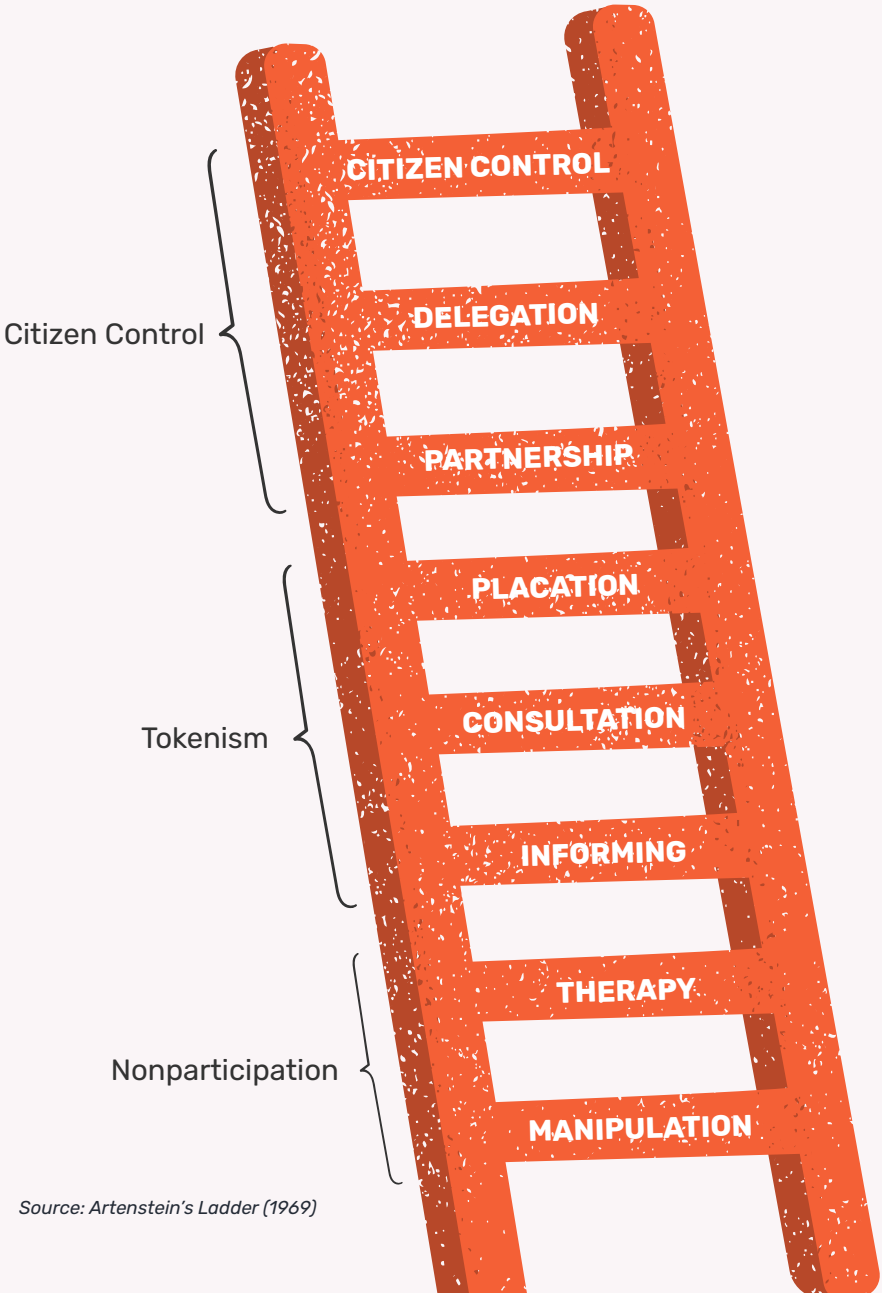
CITIZEN CONTROL	**Proactive role in decision-making**
TOKENISM	**Consultation over decision power**
NONPARTICIPATION	**Focus on education over decision**

Why it matters?

Not all projects can (or should) start at the top. But being honest about the level of participation is essential. Without clarity, even well-meaning efforts risk becoming tokenistic rituals.

Understanding where your project sits on this ladder helps ensure that participation is not just a word — but a real opportunity to influence change.

Degrees of Citizen Participation



Source: Artenstein's Ladder (1969)

NONPARTICIPATION

> ***I participate; you participate; he participates... they profit.***

(French student slogan from 1968)

What it is: Participation in name only. People are involved to be "educated," "treated," or "used" — not to shape decisions.

Common practices:

- Manipulation: Citizens are placed on committees that have no actual power.
- Therapy: The focus is on "fixing" people rather than systems.

In practice: This often occurs when participation is used to legitimize pre-decided plans. It can deepen frustration and erode trust.

TEOKENISM

Citizens are seen. They may even be heard. But they are not heeded.

What it is: Citizens are informed or consulted, but without the power to shape outcomes.

Common forms:

- Informing: One-way flow of information; no feedback channels.

- Consultation: Asking for opinions through surveys or hearings.
- Placation: Citizens may advise, but decisions remain with authorities.

In practice: Often presented as “inclusive,” but without mechanisms to ensure follow-through or accountability. It can lead to participation fatigue.

CITIZEN CONTROL

Participation becomes transformative when it redistributes power.

What it is: Citizens move from observers to co-creators and decision-makers. This level includes real negotiation, shared governance, or even full community-led initiatives.

Common forms:

- Partnership: Citizens and officials share power through joint structures.
- Delegated Power: Citizens have formal authority over parts of a program or plan.
- Citizen Control: Citizens govern the process from start to finish.

In practice: Requires time, trust, and resources, but can lead to more just, inclusive, and sustainable outcomes. Often seen in citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, and community-managed urban projects.

Understanding the Audience

Public participation places emphasis on three key groups:

Citizens

These are individuals or informal groups directly impacted by public decisions.

They may speak as residents, as parents, as commuters, or as youth activists. Participation offers them a path from passive recipients to active shapers of policy.

Civil Society Organisations

Civil society gives structure to citizen voices.

- Community-based initiatives
- NGOs and advocacy groups
- Informal networks and grassroots movements

These actors often help organise, represent, and build capacity for broader public involvement — especially for marginalized groups.

Governmental Actors

These include public authorities at all levels — local councils, planning departments, national agencies.

In a participatory process, they are not just decision-makers. They become facilitators, enablers, and listeners.

Who Is Not Included?

Importantly, public participation is not the same as stakeholder involvement.

Stakeholder Involvement can include private companies, business associations, or institutional partners. It is often interest-based, focusing on how a decision affects an actor's goals or operations.

Public Participation, in contrast, is about democratizing decision-making. It centers the public interest — not commercial or private gains.



Photo: Rawpixel

Who Is Not Included?

Knowing who is at the table (and who is missing) helps structure a fair, inclusive process.

True participation embraces diversity — not just demographically, but in terms of power, access, and lived experience.

Participation is not about inviting the “usual suspects.” It’s about actively seeking out the quiet, the busy, the excluded, and making sure they can — and want to — join the conversation.

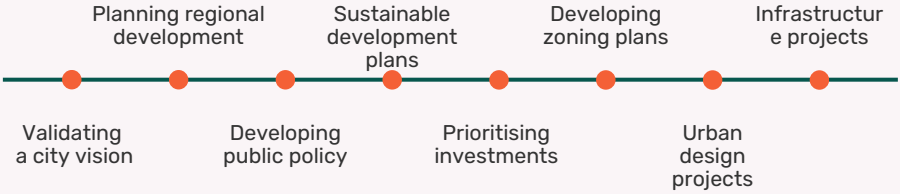
Integration at key project stages

Public participation is not a one-size-fits-all mechanism. It unfolds across levels of governance, within different types of projects, and throughout the planning cycle.

Strategic Projects
Strategic or visionary projects — such as long-term climate action plans or city-wide mobility strategies — require broad engagement. Without public buy-in, even the best strategy risks failure.

Here, participation can:

- Build a collective vision of the future
- Address questions of fairness, equity, ambition
- Ensure the strategy is grounded in real needs and lived experiences

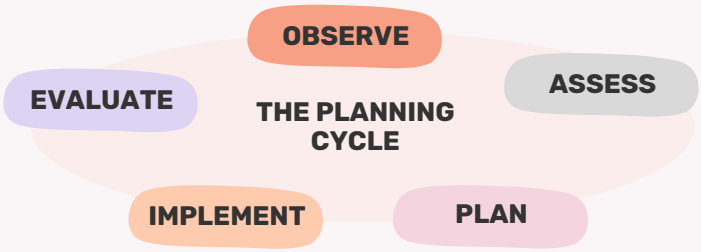


Technical Projects
Even when a project appears “technical” — like infrastructure upgrades or energy retrofits — it still benefits from public input. Why?

- Communities understand local dynamics that technical experts might miss.
- Early participation helps anticipate resistance and improve design.
- Co-ownership increases maintenance and longevity of the solution.

Equally, public participation mechanisms can be leveraged based on the needs of each stage in the project lifecycle.

Public participation is not a checklist item to be ticked off during project design. It is a cyclical process that accompanies a project before, during, and after implementation.



Participation must happen:

- Upstream, when problems are framed and options are explored
- Midstream, during design and decision-making
- Downstream, in evaluation, learning, and rethinking the next steps

Some of the most important lessons, critiques, and innovations emerge after a project ends. If participation stops when implementation begins, its value is only partially realized.

Public participation is not only about decision-making — it is about relationship-building. Each project acts as a milestone in this relationship, activating certain objectives and mobilizing specific resources.

But the long-term perspective must go further: it should focus on deepening trust, growing community ownership, and expanding the active role of citizens in shaping the city over time. Participation is not a one-time engagement — it's a long-term investment in democratic capacity.

Public Participation Mechanisms

Public participation doesn't look the same in every context. To make sense of the broad spectrum, this guide focuses on four key categories, each describing a different level of public influence, relationship dynamics, and applicable mechanisms.

These categories align with contemporary governance and practice — from basic outreach to shared control — and help policymakers and practitioners choose the right form of participation for their objectives.

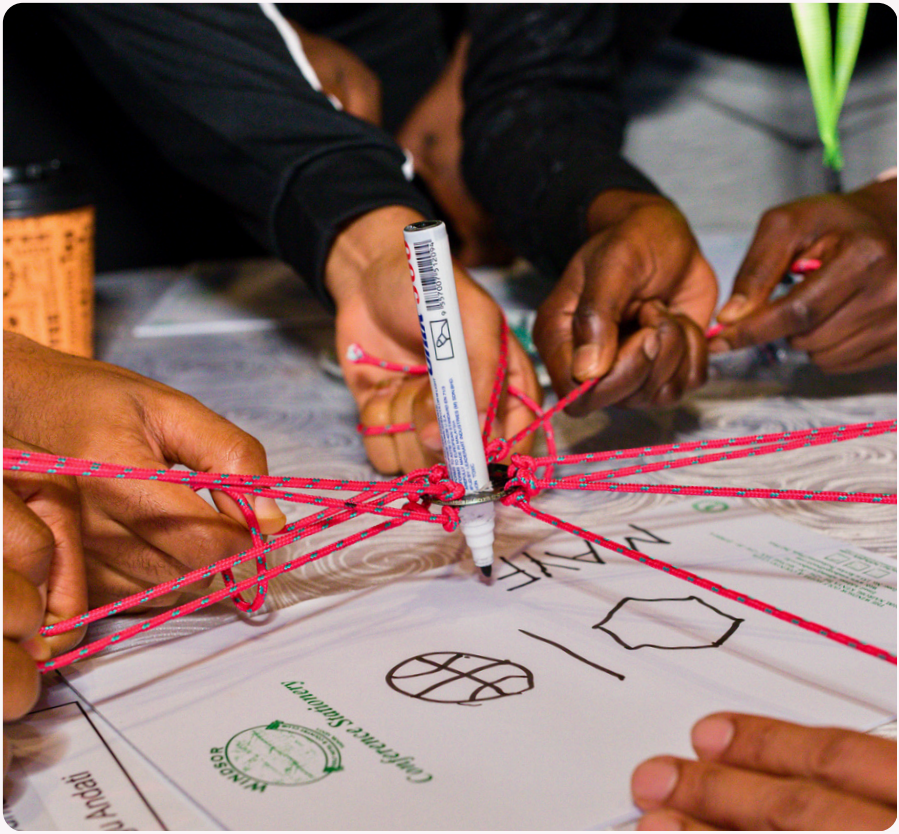


Photo: antonytrivet

INFORMING

Purpose: To raise awareness, improve public understanding, and ensure transparent communication.

Relationship: Minimal engagement. The public is seen as a recipient of information, not a partner in shaping it.

CONSULTING

Purpose: To collect public feedback that can be considered in decision-making. Used to fine-tune pre-existing options.

Relationship: Bidirectional, but still controlled by authorities. The public has a voice, not a veto.

COLLABORATING

Purpose: To co-create solutions, especially when decisions are complex, contentious, or require local legitimacy.

Relationship: Partnership-based. Citizens are actively engaged in framing problems and shaping outcomes.

EMPOWERING

Purpose: To share or transfer power to communities — especially when justice, ownership, or long-term responsibility is needed.

Relationship: Collaborative leadership or full community governance. Institutions step back to make room for citizen-driven processes.

INFORMING

“We want you to know.”



Mechanisms:

- Public Reports & Open Data Platforms
- Mass Media & Press Releases
- Digital Information Hubs (Websites, Apps)
- Newsletters & Push Notifications
- Signage, Posters, Infographics
- Public Briefings or Town Hall Updates

Public Reports & Open Data

Purpose

Enhances government transparency, accountability, and civic engagement by making datasets, policy documents, and performance reports publicly accessible. Facilitates evidence-based decision-making and enables data-driven innovations.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Collecting and publishing government data and performance reports

ASSESS

Analyzing trends and identifying areas for policy improvement

EVALUATE

Tracking the impact of policies and ensuring public accountability

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (residents, journalists, advocacy groups) **–** Using open data for transparency and accountability
- **Government** (public agencies, municipal authorities) – Providing and maintaining datasets for informed governance
- **Academia** (researchers, data analysts) – Conducting policy evaluations and data-driven studies
- **Industry** (startups, businesses) – Leveraging public data for innovation and service development

Mechanisms Used

OPEN GOVERNMENT DATA PORTALS

Public platforms for accessing datasets on urban planning, environment, finance, etc.

PUBLIC PERFORMANCE DASHBOARDS

Visualizing key metrics on governance, sustainability, and service delivery

LEGISLATIVE TRANSPARENCY PLATFORMS

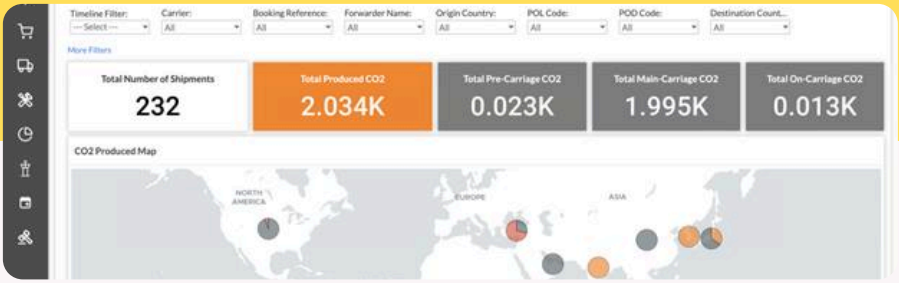
Online access to policy drafts, voting records, and government expenditures

Benefits

- Strengthens democratic accountability through data transparency
- Supports informed civic participation and investigative journalism
- Enables businesses and researchers to develop new solutions using public data
- Improves efficiency in governance through evidence-based decision-making

Challenges

- Ensuring data quality, standardisation, and interoperability across gov. agencies
- Risk of data misuse or misinterpretation without proper contextualization
- Sustaining long-term data maintenance and accessibility
- Balancing transparency with data privacy and security regulations



Source: Logward

Hamburg CO_2 Emissions Open Data

Context

As part of its commitment to transparency and climate action, Hamburg launched the Urban Data Platform in 2014. This initiative aimed to centralize and make accessible various datasets, including those related to CO_2 emissions. By providing open access to such data, Hamburg sought to empower citizens, researchers, and policymakers to engage with and address environmental challenges effectively.

How it works

The Urban Data Platform aggregates CO_2 emissions data from various sectors, such as transportation, industry, and residential areas. These datasets are standardized and updated regularly, ensuring consistency and reliability. Users can access the data through user-friendly interfaces, enabling them to analyze trends, identify hotspots, and develop targeted interventions. The platform also facilitates integration with other urban data systems, promoting a holistic approach to urban planning and sustainability.

Impact

- Enhanced transparency: Citizens and stakeholders have direct access to emissions data, fostering trust and accountability.
- Informed decision-making: Policymakers can utilize the data to craft evidence-based environmental policies.
- Community engagement: Open data encourages public participation in climate initiatives and discussions.
- Research and innovation: Academics and innovators can leverage the data for studies and developing sustainable solutions.

Mass Communication (Press & Social Media)

Purpose

Facilitates large-scale dissemination of information, public engagement, and awareness-building through digital and traditional media channels. Enhances public participation in policymaking and urban governance by ensuring transparent, real-time communication.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Gather public sentiment and issues through media discussions

ASSESS

Analyze media narratives and public feedback

IMPLEMENT

Mobilize public participation and support for initiatives

EVALUATE

Measure the effectiveness of communication strategies

Audiences Involved

- **Civil society** (residents, journalists, advocacy groups) – Using open data for transparency and accountability
- **Local governments and policymakers** (local authorities, public agencies) – Generating and disseminating official statements for information and mobilization.
- **Media organizations and journalists**
- **Industry (startups, businesses) –** Leveraging public data for innovation and service development

Mechanisms Used

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

(Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn)

TRADITIONAL MEDIA

(newspaper, radio, TV)

GOVERNMENT AND NGO-RUN ONLINE PORTALS

CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND BLOGS

Benefits

- Broad reach and accessibility for engaging diverse audiences
- Rapid dissemination of critical information in real time
- Strengthens transparency and public trust in governance
- Encourages feedback loops between policymakers and citizens

Challenges

- Risk of misinformation and opinion polarization
- Unequal access to digital platforms due to the digital divide
- Short attention spans and information overload
- Managing public expectations and narratives in crises





Source: Digi 24 (left), M100.ro (right)

M100 National Platform Campaign

Context

Developed by UEFISCDI, in collaboration with six Romanian ministries through an inter-ministerial effort, and supported by international partners such as RANNIS (Icelandic Centre for Research), NTNU (Norwegian University of Science and Technology), and Nordic Edge as well as national partners including UrbanizeHub, and the Romanian Order of Architects. The initiative is part of a broader effort to accelerate the transition to climate neutrality and align Romania with the strategic goals of the European Union.

How it works

Launched in December 2024, the M100 National Platform was developed as Romania's mirror initiative to the EU's "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities" Mission. Its launch was accompanied by a national awareness campaign—the Climate Neutrality Caravan—which combined media coverage, online communication, and in-person events across the country. This campaign played a key role in bringing the topic of climate neutrality into the national conversation, raising awareness among citizens, mobilizing local governments, and attracting the attention of decision-makers. Beyond technical assistance and strategic coordination, the platform served as a communication and engagement vehicle, building public visibility and momentum for the 13 participating Romanian cities as they began drafting Climate City Contracts and shaping their decarbonization trajectories.

Impact

- Brought climate neutrality into national public discourse, using media coverage, events, and digital channels to raise awareness.
- Engaged citizens and local stakeholders, fostering dialogue and co-creation around sustainable urban futures.
- Increased visibility and political momentum for the mirror mission and the 13 participating cities.
- Positioned climate neutrality as a shared national goal, strengthening public support and cross-sector collaboration.

Digital Information Channels

Purpose

Provides real-time access to information through digital platforms, enhancing public awareness, government transparency, and civic engagement. Enables large-scale knowledge sharing and two-way communication between authorities and citizens.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Disseminating critical information and collecting feedback

IMPLEMENT

Providing digital updates on policy actions and initiatives

EVALUATE

Assessing public response and refining communication strategies

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (citizens, advocacy groups) – Receiving and responding to digital communications
- **Government** (municipalities, public agencies) – Using digital tools to engage and inform citizens
- **Industry** (tech firms, digital media) – Developing and maintaining information platforms

Mechanisms Used

GOVERNMENT OPEN DATA PORTALS

Centralized access to policy documents and public data

MOBILE AND WEB-BASED APPLICATIONS

Platforms for digital participation and service access

INTERACTIVE DASHBOARDS

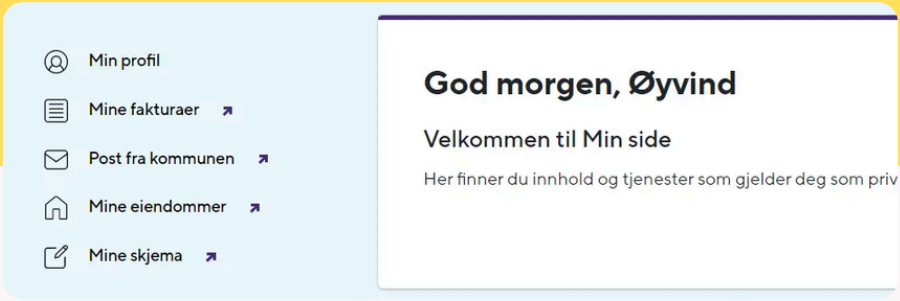
Real-time visualizations of environmental, social, or economic data

Benefits

- Expands access to government services and public information
- Enhances transparency and public trust in decision-making
- Enables rapid response to crises through digital alerts and notifications
- Facilitates data-driven decision-making by integrating public input

Challenges

- Digital exclusion may prevent some groups from accessing online resources
- Risk of misinformation if digital channels are not properly managed
- Data security and privacy concerns in publicly accessible platforms
- Maintaining engagement in the long term requires continuous platform updates



Source: MinSide app

MinSide (My Page)

Context

As part of Stavanger's broader digitalization efforts under the Smart City Stavanger strategy, the municipality developed a citizen-facing digital platform in collaboration with Advania. The initiative aimed to streamline municipal operations, reduce pressure on in-person visits to city offices, and improve access to services. Digitalization was identified as a key priority area within the Smart City Roadmap, and the platform emerged as a practical response to the need for more efficient, transparent, and user-friendly public services.

How it works

MinSide Stavanger is a personalized digital portal that streamlines interactions between residents and the municipality, providing direct access to services under categories like "My Home," "My Family," and "My City." Users can view customized municipal information, subscribe to updates about local planning initiatives, and directly engage in municipal decision-making processes. The platform enables rapid implementation of municipal policies, as demonstrated by its quick adaptation to distribute free bus tickets in 2023.

Impact

- Significantly increased citizen participation and trust by offering transparent access to personalized municipal information.
- Improved municipal responsiveness and agility, enabling rapid policy implementation (e.g., provision of free public transport within weeks).
- Enhanced civic engagement through real-time updates and personalized notifications about local developments, strengthening community involvement in decision-making processes.
- Set a benchmark in Norway for digital governance, prompting interest and potential replication by other municipalities.

Public Displays & Signage

Purpose

Uses physical and digital signage to communicate essential public information, facilitate wayfinding, and enhance civic engagement. Strengthens place identity and ensures accessibility of important messages in urban spaces.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Collecting public awareness and behavioral responses to signage

IMPLEMENT

Installing signage and public displays for information dissemination

EVALUATE

Assessing effectiveness of signage in public communication and engagement

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (residents, visitors) – Receiving key information and wayfinding assistance
- **Government** (municipal agencies, urban planners) – Designing and maintaining signage systems
- **Industry** (advertising, graphic design firms) – Developing and implementing effective public displays

Mechanisms Used

WAYFINDING SIGNAGE

Public maps and direction signs for navigation

DIGITAL INFORMATION BOARDS

Electronic displays providing real-time updates

PUBLIC ART AND NARRATIVE SIGNAGE

Visual storytelling elements that reinforce place identity

Benefits

- Enhances accessibility and public awareness of key information
- Strengthens urban identity through visual communication
- Improves pedestrian mobility and safety in complex environments
- Facilitates interaction and engagement in public spaces

Challenges

- Risk of visual pollution if signage is poorly designed or excessive
- Requires regular maintenance to ensure accuracy and readability
- Balancing functionality with aesthetic considerations in urban design
- Ensuring inclusivity through multilingual and accessible formats



Source: overdeveloped.eu

"A Good Life is Simple" Campaign

Context

The "A Good Life is Simple" campaign emerged in response to growing awareness that climate action must also resonate at a personal and cultural level. Amid increasing environmental concerns and a rising interest in well-being over consumption, the campaign was launched to connect sustainable living with a fulfilling lifestyle. It was supported by a broader shift in European climate communication strategies, which began focusing more on values, emotions, and everyday actions—creating the right moment for a message that framed simplicity not as a sacrifice, but as a source of joy.

How it works

The campaign utilized visually engaging posters placed in public spaces, each conveying messages that connected simple daily choices to broader environmental impacts. These messages served as gentle prompts, inspiring passers-by to consider how minimalistic living can contribute to a healthier planet and a more fulfilling life.

Impact

- Raised public awareness about the environmental and personal benefits of simpler, more sustainable lifestyles.
- Encouraged individual reflection and behavior change, linking everyday choices to broader climate action.
- Made sustainability visible and accessible, using public space to spark curiosity and dialogue.
- Promoted a positive narrative, showing that a good life can be rooted in simplicity rather than consumption.

Public Briefings & Announcements

Purpose

Provides real-time updates and official statements on policy decisions, emergencies, and public initiatives. Ensures direct, transparent communication between government entities and the public while fostering civic engagement and trust.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Informing the public about ongoing developments and priorities

IMPLEMENT

Announcing policy changes, project milestones, or urgent alerts

EVALUATE

Gathering public reactions and assessing communication effectiveness

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (citizens, community organizations) – Receiving official information and responding to calls for action
- **Government** (local and national authorities, public agencies) – Delivering updates and ensuring clarity on policy matters
- **Media and Industry** (journalists, digital platforms) – Amplifying key messages and facilitating broader dissemination

Mechanisms Used

PRESS CONFERENCES

Live or recorded official statements for public and media consumption

EMERGENCY ALERTS AND PUBLIC NOTICES

Immediate communication during crises or policy rollouts

EMERGENCY ALERTS AND PUBLIC NOTICES

In-person or virtual meetings for direct interaction between officials and the public

Benefits

- Ensures accurate and timely public access to government information
- Enhances transparency and trust in governance
- Allows direct interaction between officials and citizens for immediate clarification
- Strengthens community preparedness and response in emergencies

Challenges

- Risk of information manipulation or misinterpretation by media, political actors
- Requires strategic planning to ensure accessibility and inclusivity
- Potential for public disengagement if briefings lack clear, actionable messages
- Managing misinformation and ensuring message consistency across channels



Source: CGTN

U20 Mayors' Climate Investment Call

Context

Initiated by the Urban20 (U20) initiative—convened by C40 Cities and United Cities and Local Governments—the Mayors' Climate Investment Call was launched during the 2024 U20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Recognizing that cities are responsible for over 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions and are on the frontlines of climate impacts, mayors from G20 cities united to advocate for increased urban climate finance. They called upon national governments and development banks to allocate at least $800 billion annually by 2030 to support city-led climate initiatives.

How it works

The mechanism functions as a collective advocacy platform through which mayors from major G20 cities formally urge national and international financial institutions to accelerate and scale up investment in urban climate action. Through the Investment Call, mayors highlight the need for simplified funding access, locally tailored financing instruments, and increased direct funding to city-level projects. The mechanism also emphasizes collaboration with the private sector, multilateral banks, and development agencies to unlock capital for sustainable infrastructure, clean energy, and adaptation initiatives. By speaking with one voice, cities increase pressure on national governments and financial actors to shift from pledges to practice.

Impact

- Elevated the role of cities in global climate discussions, ensuring urban perspectives are considered in G20 negotiations.
- Highlighted the urban climate finance gap, bringing attention to the need for increased investment in city-led climate solutions.
- Promoted equitable development, advocating for 40% of concessional funding to be directed toward low-income and vulnerable communities.
- Strengthened multilevel collaboration, encouraging partnerships between cities, national governments, and financial institutions to achieve climate goals

Newsletters & Direct Notifications

Purpose

Regularly informs targeted audiences about ongoing projects, policy updates, events, and achievements through tailored and personalized communication. Strengthens ongoing engagement and maintains transparency between public authorities, citizens, and stakeholders.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Disseminating surveys, gathering feedback, and gauging public interest

IMPLEMENT

Communicating project updates, deadlines, events, and milestones

EVALUATE

Sharing results, outcomes, lessons learned, and impact assessments

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (citizens, community groups, NGOs) – Receiving consistent updates, opportunities for participation and results
- **Government** (municipal departments, public agencies) – Coordinating communication and monitoring audience engagement
- **Academia** (researchers, universities, educational institutions) – Accessing detailed project data, results, and analytical insights
- **Industry** (businesses, local enterprises, professional associations) – Receiving targeted updates about initiatives and opportunities

Mechanisms Used

EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

Regularly scheduled digital publications with detailed updates and interactive links

SMS AND MOBILE NOTIFICATIONS

Short, direct, and timely communications for critical or time-sensitive information

SUBSCRIPTION-BASED ALERTS

Customized content delivery based on user preferences

Benefits

- Fosters continuous stakeholder engagement through regular, reliable communication
- Enhances transparency and trust by providing timely and detailed information
- Supports targeted communication, ensuring relevance and minimizing overload
- Enables effective monitoring of stakeholder engagement through analytics and feedback

Challenges

- Managing subscriber databases, ensuring compliance with data privacy regulations
- Balancing frequency and relevance to prevent disengagement or fatigue
- Creating content that is consistently engaging and informative
- Ensuring message consistency across different channels and platforms





Source: placemaking-europe.eu

Placemaking Europe Newsletters

Context

Placemaking Europe is a leading network of urban practitioners, policymakers, and organizations working to create better public spaces across Europe through participatory and inclusive approaches. The network promotes the exchange of knowledge, tools, and best practices in the field of placemaking, with a strong emphasis on co-creation, sustainability, and community-led urban development. As part of its mission to connect and empower those shaping cities, Placemaking Europe launched its regular newsletter to share updates on projects, events, and innovative practices from across the continent.

How it works

Placemaking Europe shares regular updates through its newsletter series, including the Placemaking Europe Update and thematic newsletters tied to specific working groups such as public space governance, mobility, and climate-responsive design. These newsletters deliver curated content on ongoing initiatives, best practices, and urban regeneration projects from across Europe. In addition to regular issues, Placemaking Europe also sends ad-hoc notifications based on emerging topics or upcoming events. Subscribers can tailor their preferences on the website, choosing to follow specific communities or working groups relevant to their interests, which helps foster targeted engagement and knowledge exchange among professionals, local authorities, and community members.

Impact

- Created a consistent communication channel that kept urban practitioners and stakeholders informed and engaged across Europe.
- Facilitated the exchange of best practices and lessons learned, helping cities replicate successful urban regeneration strategies.
- Strengthened connections between local authorities, professionals, and communities, fostering a shared European placemaking network.
- Promoted visibility for local initiatives, enabling small-scale projects to gain recognition and inspire action in other contexts.

CONSULTING

“We want your opinion.”



Mechanisms:

- *Surveys & Online Polls*
- *Public Meetings & Hearings*
- *Focus Groups & Citizen Roundtables*
- *Stakeholder Interviews*
- *Online Commenting Platforms*
- *Participatory Mapping & GIS Tools*

Surveys & Polls

Purpose

Facilitates systematic data collection on public opinions, preferences, and behaviors to inform policy decisions, urban planning, and participatory governance. Strengthens evidence-based decision-making by integrating community perspectives.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Gathering initial insights on community needs and priorities

ASSESS

Analyzing collected data to identify trends and inform decision-making

EVALUATE

Measuring public perception of policies and initiatives over time

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (residents, community organizations) – Providing insights and feedback on public issues
- **Government** (local authorities, policymakers) – Using survey data to shape policies and services
- **Academia** (researchers, data analysts) – Assisting in survey design and interpretation

Mechanisms Used

ONLINE AND MOBILE SURVEYS

Digital tools for rapid and large-scale public opinion gathering

DELIBERATIVE POLLING

Structured surveys combined with informed discussions for deeper public insights

CROWDSOURCED SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

Analyzing public opinions through social media and digital platforms

Benefits

- Provides direct insights into community needs and preferences
- Enhances policy relevance and responsiveness via real-time public input
- Encourages civic engagement by involving residents in decision-making processes
- Enables large-scale and cost-effective data collection

Challenges

- Risk of survey fatigue leading to low participation rates
- Ensuring representativeness and avoiding response biases
- Difficulty in translating survey results into concrete policy actions
- Managing data privacy and ethical considerations in survey methodologies



Meeting to discuss survey results. Source: UrbanizeHub

ReGreeneration Europe

Context

This project was launched under the European Commission's Horizon Europe programme, as part of the EU Missions to tackle key challenges by 2030. Aligned with the "Climate-neutral and smart cities" and "Adaptation to climate change" missions, it supports cities in testing innovative solutions like nature-based approaches. A participatory process is mandatory, reflecting the EU's view that meaningful community involvement is essential for the success and legitimacy of such projects.

How it works

Satisfaction surveys are deployed across pilot cities - Bucharest, Paris, Alverca and Barcelona, to gather local data on resident perceptions, behaviors, expectations, and priorities related to public spaces, greenery, mobility, health, and social interaction

Applied survey to maps citizens' satisfaction level with local environment, public spaces, and quality of life.

Co-creation in three phases using participatory survey and mapping tools such as Furban City with residents, to shape the local interventions

Evaluating the end impact through a final survey that measures change in citizen satisfaction.

Impact

- Tracks change in citizen satisfaction by comparing results with the initial baseline to understand how residents' perceptions have shifted throughout the intervention process.
- Measures the effectiveness of interventions by evaluating whether the nature-based and co-created solutions have meaningfully improved quality of life in the target neighbourhoods.
- Demonstrates the value of participation, as an increase of at least 20% in satisfaction levels proves that engaging citizens in urban regeneration leads to better, more accepted outcomes.

Public Meetings & Hearings

Purpose

Provides a formal platform for citizens to voice opinions, ask questions, and influence decision-making on public policies, urban development, and environmental regulations. Ensures transparency and democratic accountability in governance.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Gathering citizen concerns and feedback on proposed policies or developments

ASSESS

Evaluating public input and stakeholder perspectives before policy finalization

EVALUATE

Reviewing policy outcomes based on public responses and hearings

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (residents, advocacy groups) – Expressing opinions, concerns, and suggestions
- **Government** (municipal authorities, policymakers) – Providing information, addressing concerns, and making decisions
- **Academia** (legal experts, urban planners) – Contributing expert insights on policy implications

Mechanisms Used

LEGALLY MANDATED PUBLIC HEARINGS

Formal events where officials present plans and receive public input

COMMUNITY TOWN HALLS

Open forums for discussion between residents and policymakers

ONLINE PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

Digital platforms enabling broader participation in policy debates

Benefits

- Increases government transparency and accountability in decision-making
- Provides a direct channel for citizens to engage with policymakers
- Allows for early identification of potential conflicts and policy improvements
- Strengthens public trust by demonstrating responsiveness to community concerns

Challenges

- Risk of public hearings being symbolic without meaningful policy influence
- Potential dominance by well-organized interest groups rather than diverse community representation
- Logistical barriers to participation, including timing and accessibility issues
- Turning adversarial, reducing constructive dialogue and consensus-building



Source: Grenoble Alpes Métropole. (2022). Illustration of the Citizens' Convention for Climate.

Citizen Convention for Climate

Context

Grenoble Alpes Métropole launched this Citizens' Convention to support its Climate Air Energy Plan and to involve residents directly in shaping local climate policies. The process builds on Grenoble's strong democratic tradition and its recognition as the European Green Capital in 2022.

How it works

100 citizens were randomly selected through stratified sampling, ensuring representation by gender, age, neighborhood, profession, and migration background.
The Convention included five weekend sessions combining:

- Expert presentations on climate topics,
- Deliberative small group discussions,
- Support from facilitators and a scientific committee.
- Broader online consultation was used to gather input from the general public and ensure transparency.
- A steering committee with elected officials and stakeholders oversaw the process.

Impact

- The Convention produced proposals integrated into Grenoble's Climate Plan and the Climate City Contract (CCC) under the EU Cities Mission.
- Strengthened local climate governance through participatory democracy.
- Increased citizen ownership and legitimacy of climate policies.
- Demonstrated how structured deliberation can address complex and technical challenges like decarbonization.

Focus Groups & Roundtables

Purpose

Facilitates structured small-group discussions to gather in-depth insights, generate consensus, and co-develop solutions for policy, planning, and governance challenges. Enhances stakeholder collaboration and mutual understanding in complex decision-making processes.

Project Stage

ASSESS

Analyzing diverse perspectives and refining problem definitions

PLAN

Co-developing strategies and action plans based on stakeholder input

EVALUATE

Reviewing policy outcomes through targeted deliberation

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (residents, advocacy groups) – Providing experiential insights and co-creating solutions
- **Government** (local authorities, policymakers) – Facilitating structured dialogue for policy refinement
- **Academia** (researchers, facilitators) – Supporting knowledge integration and analytical frameworks

Mechanisms Used

THEMATIC FOCUS GROUPS
Structured discussions on specific policy issues with targeted stakeholders

ROUNDTABLE DELIBERATIONS
Multi-stakeholder dialogues to foster consensus and identify joint actions

EXPERT-FACILITATED SESSIONS
Moderated discussions to balance perspectives and drive solution-oriented debates

Benefits

- Enables in-depth exploration of complex topics with diverse stakeholder input
- Strengthens collaboration and trust among different sectors and interest groups
- Provides a flexible and adaptable format for participatory decision-making
- Enhances policy responsiveness by integrating detailed community insights

Challenges

- Risk of limited representativeness if key groups are underrepresented
- Requires skilled facilitation to manage power dynamics and ensure constructive dialogue
- Can be time-intensive, requiring multiple sessions for consensus-building
- Potential difficulty in translating discussion outcomes into formal policy action



Source: The Net Zero Caravan – Engaging Communities for Climate Action.

Net Zero Caravan

Context

The Net Zero Caravan is a mobile, participatory initiative under the Cluj-Napoca 2030 program, part of the EU Mission for 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities. Its goal is to bring climate action closer to citizens by transforming green and public spaces into temporary hubs for community engagement and education.

How it works

The caravan travels across neighborhoods in Cluj-Napoca (e.g., Mănăștur), setting up temporary "urban living rooms" for 4 days in each stop (e.g., Primăverii Park, Colina Park, Rozelor Park, "La Terenuri"). The structure is made from recycled materials (mainly pallets), emphasizing sustainability and circularity. Activities include:

- Workshops (for adults and children),
- Public discussions and roundtables with experts,
- Performances and informal conversations about climate issues.

Impact

- Awareness & Inclusion: It brings climate concepts into everyday spaces, making sustainability tangible and accessible.
- Community Engagement: Encourages citizens to co-create solutions, reflect on behaviors, and take ownership of the transition.
- Cross-sectoral Dialogue: Connects researchers, local authorities, and residents, especially through expert-led roundtables.
- Educational Value: Promotes learning through experience, creativity, and hands-on activities (e.g., workshops on food footprint).

Stakeholder Interviews

Purpose

Engages key stakeholders in structured conversations to gather qualitative insights, assess needs, and develop informed policies. Enhances decision-making by integrating expert knowledge and lived experiences.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Identifying stakeholder concerns, priorities, and perspectives

ASSESS

Analyzing qualitative insights to inform planning and decision-making

EVALUATE

Reviewing stakeholder feedback to refine policies and programs

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (community leaders, advocacy groups) – Representing local concerns and lived experiences
- **Government** (public officials, policymakers) – Integrating stakeholder insights into governance
- **Academia** (researchers, analysts) – Supporting qualitative data collection and interpretation
- **Industry** (business leaders, sector experts) – Providing sector-specific expertise and practical perspectives

Mechanisms Used

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Flexible discussions guided by predefined themes

DELPHI EXPERT GROUP METHOD

Targeted engagement with specialists for in-depth technical insights

FOCUS-GROUP-BASED INTERVIEWS

Small group discussions combining multiple perspectives for deeper analysis

Benefits

- Provides detailed, context-specific insights from key stakeholders
- Strengthens trust and collaboration between decision-makers and communities
- Allows for flexibility in exploring complex issues beyond standardized surveys
- Helps uncover potential conflicts and areas for consensus-building

Challenges

- Time-intensive process requiring skilled interviewers and proper documentation
- Risk of bias if not conducted with a diverse and representative sample
- Requires careful integration into policy processes to ensure input leads to action
- Potential reluctance from stakeholders to share critical insights due to political or institutional concerns



Source: Dmitry Khodyakov on Linkedin

Green Energy Development Indicators

Context

Although Iceland leads globally in renewable energy, its energy system still faces sustainability challenges—particularly in transport, land use, and inclusive planning. This study aimed to develop a stakeholder-driven set of indicators for Sustainable Energy Development (SED), addressing gaps in existing, top-down approaches that lacked local relevance.

How it works

Researchers used a seven-step participatory process, combining:
16 stakeholder interviews and 2 focus groups to define values and goals;
A 2-round Delphi survey to validate and refine SED goals.

- In Round 1, participants were asked to rate the importance of each SED goal on a 5-point Likert scale and provide qualitative comments. They could also suggest missing elements.
- In Round 2, participants reviewed a revised list of goals based on Round 1 feedback. They re-evaluated each goal in light of group-level responses and commentary.

This process allowed for anonymity, reflection, and iteration, which helped surface not only agreement but also tensions—such as over politically sensitive topics like the submarine interconnector.

Impact

- The study resulted in 50+ locally tailored indicators across six themes, capturing priorities like energy equity, nature protection, and public participation—often overlooked in national strategies. It also produced a clear definition of Sustainable Energy Development (SED) specific to Iceland.
- The Delphi process helped build stakeholder consensus, giving policymakers a practical, widely supported set of indicators to guide energy planning. It also offered a replicable model for participatory policy-making in other contexts.

Online Consultations & Commenting

Purpose

Enables large-scale public participation by allowing citizens to provide feedback on policies, regulations, and urban projects via digital platforms. Increases transparency, accessibility, and responsiveness in decision-making.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Collecting initial feedback and identifying public concerns

ASSESS

Analyzing input trends and integrating insights into planning

EVALUATE

Reviewing public responses to policy implementation

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (citizens, advocacy groups) – Providing direct input on policy drafts and urban projects
- **Government** (municipal authorities, policymakers) – Facilitating public engagement and integrating feedback
- **Academia** (data analysts, policy researchers) – Assessing consultation effectiveness and public sentiment

Mechanisms Used

OPEN GOVERNMENT PLATFORMS

Public portals for commenting on proposed regulations and strategies

CROWDSOURCED POLICYMAKING

Collecting and integrating public recommendations into governance

GEO-PARTICIPATION TOOLS

Interactive mapping and spatial tools for localized citizen feedback

Benefits

- Expands participation by reducing barriers of time and location
- Improves policy legitimacy by incorporating diverse public perspectives
- Strengthens government accountability through documented public input
- Facilitates rapid feedback loops for iterative decision-making

Challenges

- Risk of low engagement if digital access is limited or poorly promoted
- Managing and filtering large volumes of unstructured public input
- Ensuring public feedback leads to meaningful policy action
- Potential for online misinformation or manipulation of consultation processes



Source: synAthina 2025 συνΑθηνά

SynAthina

Context

Launched in July 2013 by the City of Athens, synAthina emerged in response to the socio-economic challenges faced by the city, particularly during periods of austerity. The initiative aimed to bridge the gap between the municipality and its citizens by fostering collaboration and harnessing the collective energy of civil society to improve urban life.

How it works

synAthina functions as an interactive civic platform that channels citizen proposals through a structured process of collaboration and support. Ideas submitted online are not only made visible but are actively reviewed and connected to relevant municipal departments, NGOs, or private actors that can help bring them to life. This is reinforced by regular meetings and co-creation workshops, where citizens and officials engage directly to refine proposals and explore implementation paths. The platform also incorporates a feedback loop, allowing institutional learning and adaptation of local policies based on real citizen input.

Impact

- Enhanced Civic Participation: synAthina has significantly increased citizen involvement in municipal affairs, leading to a more engaged and proactive community.
- Policy Reforms: Insights gained from the platform have informed policy changes, particularly in areas where existing regulations hindered community initiatives.
- Replication and Recognition: The success of synAthina has garnered international attention, serving as a model for other cities aiming to foster civic engagement and collaborative governance.

Participatory Mapping & Geographic Info Systems (GIS)

Purpose

Uses geospatial technologies and participatory methods to collect, analyze, and visualize spatial data for community planning, environmental monitoring, and policy development. Strengthens local decision-making by integrating citizen-generated geographic knowledge.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Collecting spatial data on community needs and environmental conditions

ASSESS

Analyzing local knowledge and integrating geographic data into planning

PLAN

Co-designing spatial interventions with stakeholder participation

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (residents, grassroots organizations) – Providing local geographic knowledge and spatial data
- **Government** (municipal planners, policymakers) – Using participatory maps for decision-making and resource allocation
- **Academia** (GIS specialists, urban researchers) – Supporting data analysis and visualization

Mechanisms Used

COMMUNITY MAPPING INITIATIVES

Engaging residents in mapping local assets and risks

GIS-BASED PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

Integrating citizen-generated geospatial data into urban development

CROWDSOURCED GEOSPATIAL DATA PLATFORMS

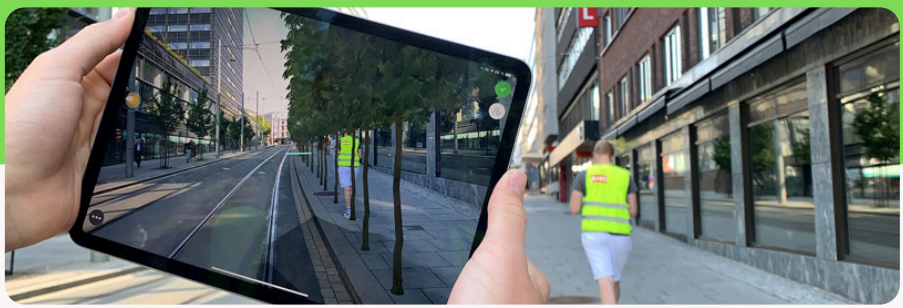
Enabling large-scale public contributions to mapping projects

Benefits

- Enhances community involvement in spatial decision-making
- Provides more accurate, localized data for urban and environmental planning
- Strengthens transparency by making spatial data publicly accessible
- Empowers marginalized communities by visualizing social and environmental inequalities

Challenges

- Requires technical skills and digital literacy for effective participation
- Potential conflicts over data ownership and decision-making authority
- Ensuring the reliability and validation of crowdsourced geographic data
- Integration difficulties between community-generated maps and official planning tools



Source: Sec. Augmented Reality (2023)

Urban Tree Planning Using AR

Context

In 2020–2021, the Municipality of Oslo initiated a participatory project to engage youth in urban planning, specifically in the city's goal to plant 100,000 new trees. Recognizing the importance of involving younger generations in environmental stewardship, the project aimed to empower youth to contribute to urban greening efforts through innovative technologies.

How it works

Five groups of youth, aged between 14 and 16, from eight different districts of Oslo participated in a five-week program that combined education and hands-on activities.
Technology: Using iPads equipped with an Augmented Reality (AR) application, participants could visualize and plan tree placements in their local neighborhoods.
Activities:

- Training Sessions: Youth received instruction on using the AR tools and understanding urban planning principles.
- Field Work: Participants conducted on-site assessments, using AR to simulate tree planting in real environments.
- Documentation: The process was recorded through videos, images, drawings, and interviews to capture the experience and feedback

Impact

- Enhanced Understanding: Participants reported a deeper comprehension of urban planning, architecture, and environmental issues.
- Empowerment: The project boosted youths' confidence in expressing their ideas and fostered a sense of ownership over local environmental initiatives.
- Design Contributions: The youths' proposals influenced the final design plans for tree planting, demonstrating the value of their input.
- Identified Challenges: While AR proved to be an effective engagement tool, technical issues such as imprecise location tracking were noted, highlighting areas for technological improvement.

COLLABORATING

“Let’s work together.”



Mechanisms:

- *Crowdsourcing Platforms & Civic Tech Tools*
- *Citizen Advisory Boards*
- *Participatory Budgeting Processes*
- *Co-Creation & Urban Design Workshops*
- *Citizen Science Initiatives*
- *Consensus-Building Forums*

Crowdsourcing & Civic Tech

Purpose

Uses digital platforms and open data to gather public input, enhance transparency, and co-create solutions for urban challenges. Facilitates large-scale participation in decision-making and problem-solving.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Collecting real-time data and community feedback

ASSESS

Analyzing public insights to identify priorities

PLAN

Co-developing policies and projects using crowdsourced data

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (citizens, advocacy groups) – Providing data and solutions through participatory platforms
- **Academia** (researchers, data analysts) – Supporting data interpretation and policy recommendations
- **Government** (municipal authorities) – Integrating insights into planning and service delivery

Mechanisms Used

CROWDSOURCED MAPPING

Collecting location-based data on urban and environmental issues

OPEN INNOVATION PLATFORMS

Publicly co-creating solutions for city governance challenges

CIVIC TECH APPLICATIONS

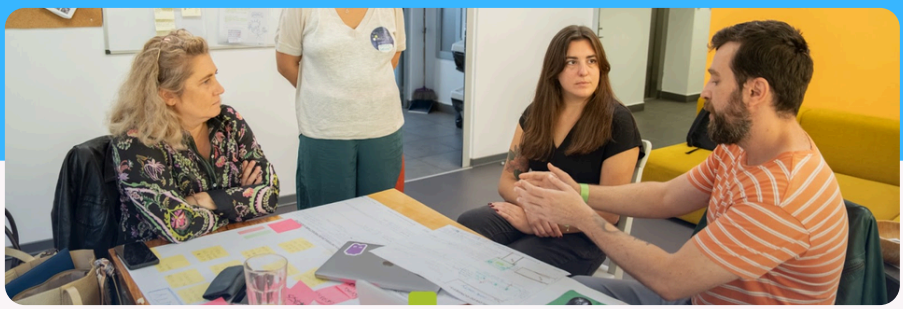
Digital tools for participatory budgeting, service reporting, open government initiatives

Benefits

- Expands citizen participation beyond traditional consultations
- Enhances data-driven decision-making by integrating real-time community insights
- Fosters trust and transparency through open government initiatives
- Accelerates policy innovation by leveraging collective intelligence

Challenges

- Risk of digital exclusion for non-tech-savvy populations
- Potential biases in crowdsourced data requiring validation
- Ensuring public contributions translate into tangible policy action
- Cybersecurity and data privacy concerns in managing public input



Source: UrbanLab for Green Cities (2024)

UrbanLab for Green Cities

Context

In the context of Romania's shift toward a more participatory model of governance, there is a growing emphasis on decentralizing urban development and creating space for citizens to directly shape their cities. UrbanizeHub developed this urban innovation programme —together with UEFISCDI, educational institutions, private organizations, and local governments— to empower communities to take part in decision-making and co-create the future of their cities.

How it works

UrbanLab for Green Cities is a national program that supports local innovation through a structured three-stage process: hackathon, incubator, and pilot projects. From identifying urban challenges to testing solutions on the ground, the program creates a step-by-step pathway for civic transformation.

Centred on three key thematic tracks—urban design, community, and technology—it brings together citizens, local authorities, NGOs, universities, and private companies in a collaborative ecosystem. Through co-creation workshops, mentorship, and capacity-building, UrbanLab empowers diverse actors to generate and implement practical, community-driven solutions. It fosters cross-sector cooperation and strengthens local capacity for inclusive, climate-neutral urban transformation.

Impact

- Created inclusive collaboration spaces that empowered citizens to actively participate in urban planning.
- Enhanced mutual understanding between authorities and communities, leading to more responsive local policies and sustainable development practices.
- Promoted cross-sector partnerships and knowledge-sharing, strengthening the collective capacity to tackle complex urban challenges.
- Improved the quality and relevance of urban projects, reflecting community priorities and expert insights, increasing public support and project success.

Citizen Advisory Boards

Purpose

Facilitates structured citizen input into government decision-making by establishing advisory groups that provide recommendations on policies, projects, and local governance issues. Strengthens civic engagement and accountability.

Project Stage

ASSESS

Evaluating public concerns and gathering expert and resident insights

PLAN

Co-developing policies and strategies with diverse community input

EVALUATE

Reviewing policy outcomes and refining governance approaches

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (residents, community representatives, advocacy groups) – Providing localized expertise and feedback
- **Government** (municipal agencies, elected officials) – Integrating citizen recommendations into policymaking
- **Academia** (urban planners, social scientists) – Supporting data analysis and best practice research

Mechanisms Used

THEMATIC ADVISORY BOARDS

Issue-specific panels for topics such as housing, transport, or sustainability

PERMANENT CITIZEN COUNCILS

Institutionalized structures providing ongoing input into governance

STAKEHOLDER ROUNDTABLES

Regular dialogue sessions between citizens, experts, and decision-makers

Benefits

- Improves the responsiveness of policies to local needs and challenges
- Fosters greater public trust and legitimacy in government decisions
- Encourages long-term civic engagement and participatory governance
- Enhances cross-sector collaboration through structured multi-stakeholder dialogue

Challenges

- Risk of advisory boards being symbolic without real decision-making influence
- Requires sustained government commitment to implement citizen recommendations
- Potential imbalance in representation if diverse community voices are not included
- Logistical and resource constraints in maintaining active and effective boards



Source: Guillaume Bontemps / Ville de Paris

Paris Standing Citizen Assembly

Context

The emergence of the Paris Citizens' Assembly reflects a broader shift in France toward more participatory and inclusive governance. It was shaped by growing public demand for democratic renewal, particularly in the wake of the national debates that highlighted the need to bring everyday citizens closer to decision-making. This momentum created the political and institutional space for Paris to experiment with new forms of citizen involvement. Supported by cross-party dialogue, expert consultation, and civic advocacy, the Assembly was established as a response to calls for more structured, long-term citizen participation in shaping urban policy.

How it works

The Assembly comprises 100 randomly selected Parisians aged 16 and over, ensuring representation across age, gender, education level, and district. Members serve for 12 to 18 months, engaging in thematic working groups on issues like social affairs, environment, and public space. They receive training and collaborate with experts and officials to develop proposals. Notably, the Assembly can submit one legislative proposal annually directly to the Paris City Council, initiate policy evaluations, and set themes for the city's participatory budget.

Impact

- In July 2024, the Assembly's proposal on homelessness was adopted into law by the Paris City Council, marking a historic instance of citizen-initiated legislation.
- Enhanced civic engagement by empowering a diverse group of residents to directly influence municipal policy.
- Strengthened trust between citizens and local government through transparent and inclusive deliberative processes.
- Served as a model for institutionalizing participatory democracy in urban governance.

Participatory Budgeting

Purpose

Enables citizens to directly decide how a portion of the public budget is spent, fostering transparency, civic engagement, and alignment of investments with community priorities. Can be tailored to address specific policy areas, including climate action and social equity.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Identifying citizen priorities and funding needs

PLAN

Allocating resources and designing budget proposals

IMPLEMENT

Executing selected projects based on voting

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (residents, neighborhood groups) – Proposing and voting on projects
- **Government** (local authorities, finance departments) – Facilitating and implementing decisions
- **Academia** (urban planners, economists) – Supporting analysis and evaluation of impacts

Mechanisms Used

THEMATIC PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Dedicated funds for specific areas like sustainability or social inclusion

DIGITAL PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Online platforms for broader citizen engagement in budget allocation

NEIGHBORHOOD-LEVEL PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

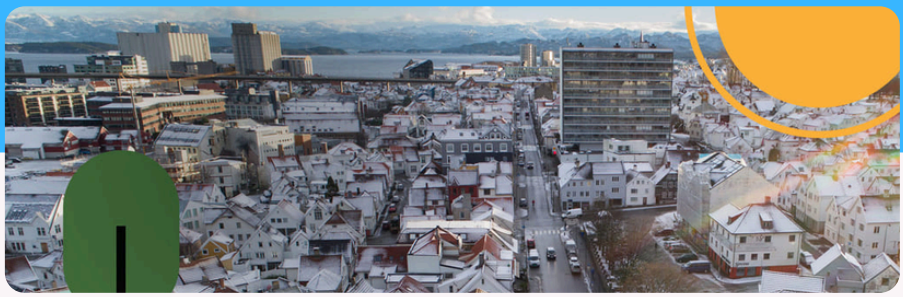
Decentralized decision-making at the community scale

Benefits

- Enhances fiscal transparency and trust in government spending
- Encourages civic engagement and collective decision-making
- Aligns public investments with local priorities and social equity goals
- Can be adapted to address climate action and sustainability initiatives

Challenges

- Requires strong institutional commitment to ensure implementation of selected projects
- Risk of unequal participation if certain communities face barriers to engagement
- Potential for conflicts between citizen preferences and broader policy objectives
- Time-intensive process requiring adequate administrative and technical support



Source: NEB STAR website

NEB Star Stavanger

Context

This initiative emerged as one of the three flagship projects selected in the first round of New European Bauhaus (NEB) funding, reflecting a strong mobilization effort to develop a model that bridges local and regional levels. Led by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), in partnership with the Municipality of Stavanger, Nordic Edge, the University of Stavanger, and 13 other Nordic and European partners, the project was designed to showcase how NEB principles can be applied in practice across scales. It represents a strategic effort to position the Nordics as leaders in integrated, citizen-centered urban transformation.

How it works

NEB-STAR applies the principles of the New European Bauhaus through a hands-on, community-driven approach that includes neighbourhood-level participatory budgeting. In the Pedersgata district of Stavanger, a dedicated local fund was created to support small-scale projects proposed and voted on by the community, enabling residents to directly shape their environment in line with NEB values—sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics. Citizens, local businesses, and artists co-design and implement initiatives such as free public workouts in a container gym or creative lighting installations. This mechanism transforms abstract policy goals into visible, community-led action, strengthening local ownership and urban resilience.

Impact

- Fostered inclusive urban development by engaging local communities in co-creating solutions tailored to their neighborhoods.
- Enhanced collaboration between public authorities, private sectors, and citizens, leading to more holistic and accepted urban transformation strategies.
- Contributed to the development of a detailed roadmap for implementing NEB principles in urban planning, serving as a model for other European cities.
- Strengthened Stavanger's position as a leader in sustainable urban innovation, influencing policy and practice beyond Norway.

Co-Creation & Design Workshops

Purpose

Facilitates participatory urban planning and policy development by integrating diverse stakeholder perspectives through collaborative problem-solving. Enhances community capacity for innovation and adaptation in urban sustainability and climate resilience initiatives.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Identifying local challenges and gathering contextual knowledge

PLAN

Co-developing solutions and design prototypes

IMPLEMENT

Testing and refining strategies with community feedback

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (residents, grassroots groups) – Contributing lived experiences and co-designing solutions
- **Academia** (researchers, design experts) – Facilitating knowledge integration and methodology development
- **Government** (local authorities, urban planners) – Incorporating co-created insights into policy and project frameworks

Mechanisms Used

LIVING LABS

Real-world testing environments for sustainable urban solutions

DESIGN CHARRETTES

Intensive, multi-day workshops to develop actionable strategies

CO-CREATION WORKSHOPS

Iterative sessions integrating technical expertise with community input

Benefits

- Strengthens participatory governance by embedding community insights into policy and planning
- Encourages creative problem-solving through transdisciplinary collaboration
- Builds local capacity for long-term adaptation and resilience strategies
- Enhances legitimacy and public support for urban sustainability initiatives

Challenges

- Risk of unequal participation if workshops do not effectively engage marginalized groups
- Requires sustained institutional support to translate co-created ideas into action
- Potential tensions between expert-driven solutions and community-driven priorities
- Time and resource-intensive process requiring skilled facilitation



Source: NTNU NEB Sessions

NEB Impact Model

Context

The CrAFt NEB Impact Model was developed by NTNU and European partners as part of the first funding call for New European Bauhaus projects. It responded to a growing need for tools that could help cities apply NEB principles—sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics—in complex urban transitions. At a time when local governments sought more integrated and participatory approaches, the model offered a way to align existing indicators, identify co-benefits, and support cross-sector collaboration from early planning stages.

How it works

The NEB Impact Model is a practical tool designed to support stakeholder and citizen engagement in co-creation workshops by embedding the core principles of the New European Bauhaus—sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusivity—into urban development processes. It helps frame discussions around environmental, social, cultural, economic, and governance co-benefits, offering a common language for diverse participants.

By connecting existing indicators to broader transformation goals, the model encourages cross-sectoral collaboration, facilitates shared understanding, and empowers communities to actively shape climate-neutral and resilient urban futures.

Impact

- Facilitated holistic urban planning by highlighting cross-sectoral co-benefits, reducing siloed approaches, and identifying leverage points for systemic change.
- Enhanced stakeholder collaboration and understanding through its flexible and participatory structure, promoting inclusive governance processes.
- Enabled cities to document and communicate the added value of complex urban interventions, supporting better-informed policy and investment decisions.
- Strengthened cities' abilities to implement projects aligned with broader EU climate neutrality goals, creating demonstrable environmental, social, and economic benefits.

Citizen Science & Community Monitoring

Purpose

Engages the public in data collection and monitoring activities to generate scientific knowledge and inform urban planning, environmental management, and policy development. Strengthens local capacity for evidence-based decision-making.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Collecting real-time environmental and urban data*

ASSESS

Analyzing community-generated insights for policy development

EVALUATE

Monitoring policy outcomes and environmental changes over time

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (citizens, volunteers) – Gathering and interpreting local data
- **Academia** (researchers, data scientists) – Providing analytical support and validation
- **Government** (public agencies, municipal planners) – Using findings for policy design and implementation

Mechanisms Used

CROWDSOURCED ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

Citizen-led data collection on air quality, noise pollution, biodiversity

OPEN SCIENCE PLATFORMS

Digital tools enabling public contributions to scientific research

PARTICIPATORY GIS MAPPING

Collaborative mapping of urban and environmental issues

Benefits

- Expands data availability for urban and environmental planning
- Enhances public trust in science and policymaking through direct involvement
- Reduces monitoring costs while improving spatial and temporal data coverage
- Strengthens local communities' role in shaping their environments

Challenges

- Ensuring data quality and scientific validity in citizen-generated datasets
- Addressing biases and accessibility issues in participation
- Integrating community-generated data into formal decision-making processes
- Managing long-term engagement and motivation of participants



Source: BMBF/Plastic Pirates – Go Europe!

Plastic Pirates – Go Europe!

Context

Originally launched in Germany in 2016 by the Kiel Science Factory, the initiative expanded during the German EU Presidency in 2020 to include Portugal and Slovenia. Since 2022, it has been supported by the European Commission under the Horizon Europe programme and the Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030".

How it works

Plastic Pirates – Go Europe! is a large-scale citizen science campaign engaging school classes and youth groups (ages 10–16) across 13 European countries. Participants collect and document plastic waste from rivers, streams, and coastlines using standardized scientific methods. The collected data is uploaded to a central database, where researchers analyze it to assess pollution patterns and inform environmental policies. The initiative also provides educational materials and resources to support environmental literacy among young citizens.

Impact

- Enabled large-scale citizen monitoring of plastic pollution in rivers and coastal areas, generating valuable environmental data across 13 European countries.
- Fostered youth participation in science and environmental protection, engaging school groups in hands-on research and contributing to awareness and behavioral change.
- Strengthened the evidence base for EU policies on marine litter and zero pollution by integrating locally collected data into broader environmental strategies.
- Promoted transnational collaboration and built a shared culture of environmental stewardship through coordinated campaigns across diverse European regions.

Consensus-Building & Deliberation

Purpose

Facilitates inclusive decision-making by fostering dialogue, negotiation, and agreement among diverse stakeholders. Strengthens social cohesion and ensures legitimacy in policy and urban planning decisions.

Project Stage

ASSESS

Identifying conflicting interests and common ground

PLAN

Co-developing solutions through facilitated deliberation

EVALUATE

Reviewing and refining policies based on stakeholder feedback

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (citizens, advocacy groups) – Representing diverse interests in discussions
- **Government** (municipal authorities, policymakers) – Ensuring policy feasibility and implementation
- **Academia** (researchers, mediators) – Providing frameworks for conflict resolution and consensus-building

Mechanisms Used

DELIBERATIVE FORUMS

Structured discussions for resolving policy disputes and urban planning conflicts

CONSENSUS CONFERENCES

Expert-facilitated negotiations aimed at aligning stakeholder interests

PARTICIPATORY MEDIATION

Collaborative conflict resolution processes that integrate diverse viewpoints

Benefits

- Enhances legitimacy and public trust in decision-making
- Mitigates conflicts by fostering shared understanding and compromise
- Encourages long-term collaboration between stakeholders
- Strengthens local governance by incorporating diverse perspectives

Challenges

- Risk of deadlock if deep-rooted conflicts remain unresolved
- Requires skilled facilitation to balance power dynamics and ensure inclusivity
- Time-consuming process, demanding sustained stakeholder engagement
- Difficulty in translating deliberative outcomes into binding policy actions



Source: Bryapro Photography

Brussels Citizens' Assembly on Climate

Context

The Brussels-Capital Region Government, in collaboration with the democratic innovation platform G1000, established the world's first permanent Citizens' Assembly on Climate in 2023. The initiative responded to a growing recognition that representative democracy often struggles to address long-term challenges like climate change, where political incentives for immediate action are limited. By creating a permanent space for citizen deliberation, the assembly was designed to bring continuity, legitimacy, and long-term thinking into climate policymaking.

How it works

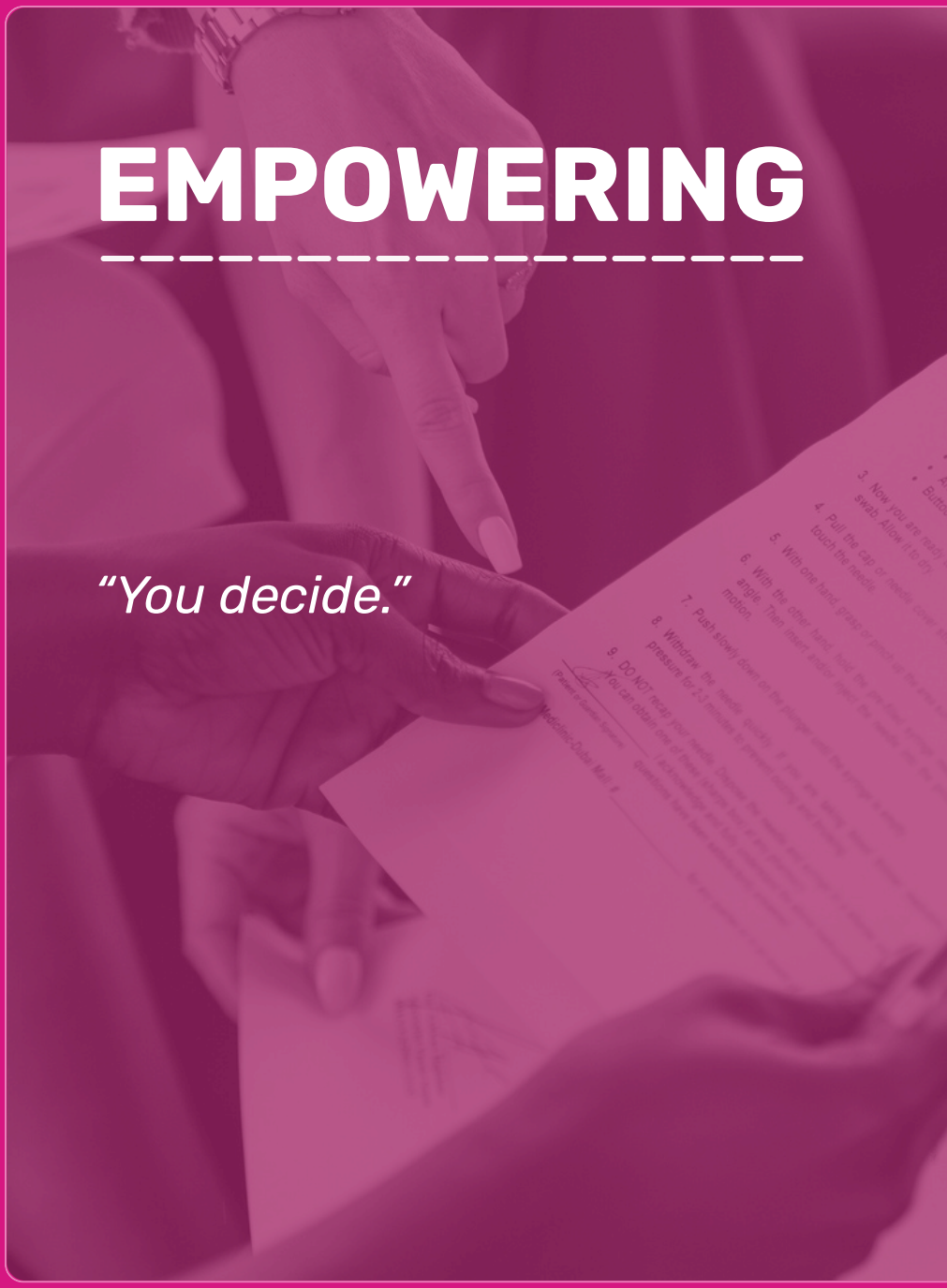
Each year, 100 randomly selected citizens, reflecting the region's demographic diversity, convene to deliberate on a specific climate-related theme. These themes are chosen by a group of 25 citizens from the previous assembly, ensuring continuity and citizen-led agenda setting. Participants receive information from independent experts and civil society organizations to inform their discussions. The assembly formulates recommendations, and a follow-up committee monitors the government's response, with mandatory reports due at three months and one year.

Impact

- Institutionalized citizen participation in climate policymaking, embedding deliberative democracy within the region's governance framework.
- Enhanced transparency and accountability, with the government committed to responding to citizens' recommendations and providing detailed explanations for any decisions not to implement them.
- Fostered social cohesion and trust in public institutions by involving a diverse cross-section of citizens in meaningful policy discussions.
- Served as an international model for participatory climate governance, inspiring similar initiatives in other cities.

EMPOWERING

“You decide.”



Mechanisms:

- *Referenda & Direct Democracy Tools*
- *Community-Led Governance Models*
- *Citizen Oversight Committees*
- *People's Assemblies & Participatory Juries*
- *Community-Owned Assets or Services*
- *Co-Legislation and Policy Ownership*

Direct Democracy Mechanisms

Purpose

Empowers citizens to directly influence policy by proposing, approving, or rejecting laws through referendums, initiatives, and recall votes. Enhances political accountability and strengthens democratic legitimacy.

Project Stage

ASSESS

Analysing public concerns and policy impacts

PLAN

Designing referendums or initiatives based on public demand

IMPLEMENT

Enacting direct votes and executing results

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (citizens, NGOs, grassroots movements) – Driving engagement and mobilization
- **Government** (local and national authorities) – Facilitating and implementing outcomes

Mechanisms Used

REFERENDUMS

Binding or advisory votes on policies

CITIZEN INITIATIVES

Signature-based proposals for new laws

RECALL VOTES

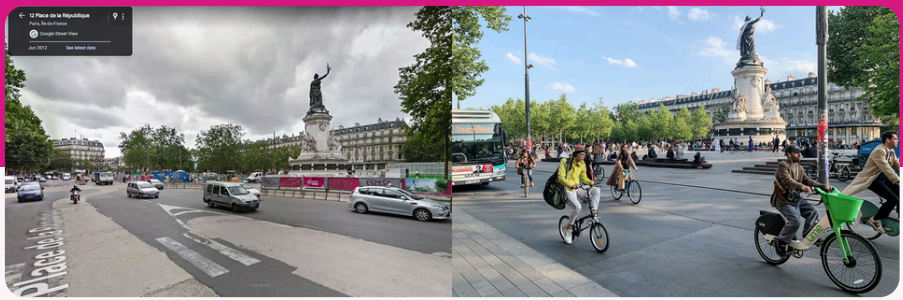
Mechanism to remove elected officials

Benefits

- Strengthens legitimacy of public decisions
- Increases civic participation and trust
- Enhances government accountability
- Encourages policy innovation and responsiveness

Challenges

- Risk of misinformation or manipulation
- High cost and logistical complexity
- Influence of well-funded interest groups
- Requires sustained citizen mobilization



Source: Google Maps and Henry Grabar

Paris Car-Free Referendum

Context

The referendum to pedestrianize 500 streets in Paris was initiated by the City of Paris as part of a broader urban transformation agenda launched in 2014, following a political commitment by Mayor Anne Hidalgo to reclaim space for people, not cars. What began as a top-down vision for a greener, more walkable city has gradually evolved into a shared governance approach, where citizens are increasingly involved in shaping public space. The 2024 referendum marked a turning point in this shift, enabling residents to collectively decide how their streets should be used and signaling the institutional maturity of participatory urban planning in Paris.

How it works

The referendum allowed Parisians to vote on a list of streets proposed for pedestrianization, following a participatory process where residents could nominate streets and contribute ideas. The initiative was supported by public communication campaigns and local workshops to raise awareness and ensure informed voting. Streets selected through the referendum were planned for redesign based on principles of accessibility, safety, and social use—prioritizing pedestrians, cyclists, and community life over car traffic. Implementation involved close coordination with local councils and residents.

Impact

- Empowered residents to directly shape their neighborhoods, strengthening democratic participation in urban transformation.
- Accelerated Paris's shift toward active mobility, supporting safer, greener, and more inclusive public spaces.
- Improved local air quality and reduced noise pollution, especially in residential areas and near schools.
- Set a precedent for citizen-led urban design, reinforcing trust in participatory governance and inspiring similar approaches in other cities.

Community-Led Governance

Purpose

Enables local communities to have direct influence and responsibility over decision-making and management of public resources. Strengthens participatory governance and long-term urban sustainability.

Project Stage

PLAN

Designing governance models and defining roles

IMPLEMENT

Establishing community-led decision-making structures

EVALUATE

Assessing governance outcomes and refining processes

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (local residents, grassroots movements, cooperatives) – Leading and managing governance processes
- **Government** (municipal authorities) – Supporting and institutionalizing community-led initiatives

Mechanisms Used

DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE MODELS

Shifting decision-making to local levels

PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING

Ensuring residents have direct input

COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Structured local representation

CO-MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS

Shared responsibilities between communities and authorities

Benefits

- Increased trust and engagement between residents and authorities
- More responsive and community-driven decision-making
- Long-term sustainability of urban projects
- Strengthened social cohesion and local empowerment

Challenges

- Ensuring inclusion and representation of diverse community voices
- Balancing power dynamics between community groups and institutions
- Obtaining long-term funding for community-led initiatives
- Navigating the legal and bureaucratic frameworks required for implementation



Source: Resilient Rotterdam

The Resilient BoTu Community Program

Context

Initiated by the City of Rotterdam, Delfshaven Coöperatie, and local community organizations, Resilient BoTu 2028 emerged from a decade of collaboration in response to BoTu's socio-economic and climate challenges. With the 2016 Rotterdam Resilience Strategy, BoTu was designated the city's first "resilient district," paving the way for its selection as one of five pilot neighbourhoods for local energy transition. The program reflects a shift toward co-creation and community-led climate action at the neighbourhood level.

How it works

The Resilient BoTu Community Program established new governance structures in Rotterdam's Bospolder-Tussendijken (BoTu) district, shifting decision-making power to local residents. Neighborhood cooperatives and working groups co-designed and implemented projects related to climate adaptation, energy transition, social cohesion, and economic resilience. The Delfshaven Coöperatie, a citizen-driven cooperative, played a central role in managing local energy and sustainability initiatives. Residents actively shaped policies on public space improvements, climate resilience, and local economic development, ensuring broad stakeholder engagement and a shared sense of ownership over the district's transformation.

Impact

- Established a network of grassroots initiatives, including energy collectives that promoted solar installations and community-led employment programs.
- Strengthened trust between residents and authorities, making governance processes more participatory and inclusive.
- Enabled residents to lead urban sustainability projects, ensuring solutions were aligned with community needs.
- Demonstrated a scalable model for community-led governance, influencing other European cities to adopt participatory urban regeneration approaches.

Citizen Oversight & Watchdog Groups

Purpose

Empowers citizens and independent organizations to monitor government actions, hold authorities accountable, and ensure transparency in decision-making processes. Strengthens public trust and reduces corruption risks.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Monitoring government policies, budgets, and service delivery

EVALUATE

Assessing the effectiveness of policies and governance practices

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (citizens, NGOs, grassroots movements) – Driving monitoring efforts and public reporting
- **Academia** (researchers, legal experts) – Providing analytical capacity and oversight frameworks

Mechanisms Used

TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVES

Public disclosure of government spending and contracts

CITIZEN AUDITS

Community-led evaluations of public service performance

INDEPENDENT WATCHDOG ORGANIZATIONS

Monitoring and reporting malpractice or inefficiencies

WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION MECHANISMS

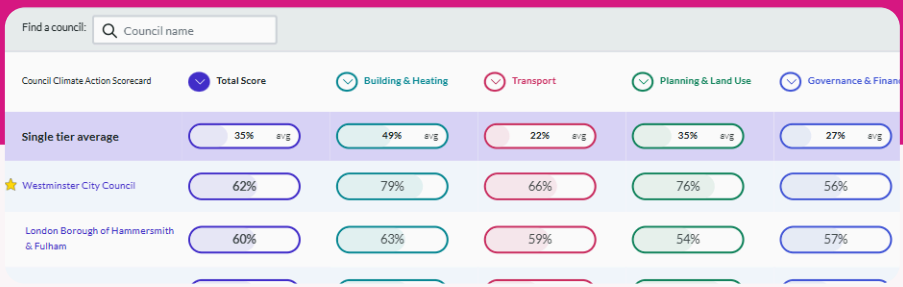
Enabling safe reporting of corruption

Benefits

- Strengthens government accountability and integrity
- Reduces inefficiencies and corruption risks
- Empowers citizens with knowledge of governance processes
- Enhances trust between authorities and the public

Challenges

- Risk of political resistance or legal pushback
- Requires long-term commitment and active participation
- Ensuring neutrality and credibility of oversight groups
- Difficulty in securing sustainable funding for monitoring activities



Source: UK Council

UK Council Climate Scorecards

Context

Initiated by Climate Emergency UK in partnership with mySociety, the Council Climate Scorecards were developed to increase transparency and accountability in local climate action across the UK. In response to the growing number of local authorities declaring climate emergencies, the initiative was created to assess, compare, and communicate how councils are delivering on their climate commitments.

How it works

Climate Emergency UK developed the Council Climate Action Scorecards to assess the progress of UK local authorities toward net-zero commitments. The initiative evaluated councils based on 91 indicators across seven categories, including governance, transport, and biodiversity. The process involved consultations with over 90 organizations and experts, ensuring a comprehensive assessment. The results were published in an accessible online database, allowing the public to compare councils' performance and demand stronger climate action.

Impact

- Created a national benchmark for local climate action, providing the first systematic evaluation of UK councils' environmental policies.
- Exposed gaps in climate governance, pressuring underperforming councils to adopt more ambitious sustainability measures.
- Strengthened grassroots advocacy, equipping environmental organizations and citizens with data to push for policy improvements.
- Increased public engagement in local climate governance, enabling residents to track their council's progress and demand accountability.
- Encouraged policy revisions, with some councils adjusting their climate plans in response to public scrutiny and comparative rankings.

People's Assemblies & Participatory Juries

Purpose

Facilitates democratic deliberation by bringing together a diverse group of citizens, selected by lottery, to learn, deliberate, and make recommendations on complex policy issues. Strengthens inclusivity, legitimacy, and public trust in decision-making.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Gathering diverse citizen perspectives on key issues

PLAN

Designing policy proposals informed by public deliberation

EVALUATE

Assessing policy effectiveness based on public input

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (citizens, grassroots organizations) – Providing insights and collective decision-making
- **Government** (municipal and national authorities) – Institutionalizing and implementing assembly recommendations

Mechanisms Used

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES

Structured deliberation leading to policy recommendations

PARTICIPATORY JURIES

Smaller groups evaluating specific policies or proposals

CONSENSUS CONFERENCES

Expert-informed citizen debates on policy challenges

Benefits

- Integrates diverse perspectives, fostering inclusive decision-making
- Enhances legitimacy and public acceptance of policy decisions
- Helps break political deadlocks on complex issues
- Increases climate literacy and political confidence among participants

Challenges

- Requires strong institutional commitment to ensure recommendations are considered
- Risk of external influence from political or corporate interests
- High costs and logistical complexity for large-scale deliberations
- Time-intensive process requiring sustained public engagement



Source: Margherita Caprilli

Bologna Citizens' Jury on Climate

Context

Initiated by the Municipality of Bologna in collaboration with Fondazione per l'Innovazione Urbana (FIU), this initiative emerged as part of the city's response to the climate emergency declared in September 2019. As the first city in Italy to adopt deliberative citizen assemblies, Bologna introduced this participatory model to involve residents directly in decisions of general interest, marking a shift toward more inclusive and democratic approaches to urban governance.

How it works

In response to declaring a climate emergency in 2019, Bologna established a Citizens' Assembly to directly involve residents in shaping climate policies. The Assembly consisted of 100 randomly selected citizens, representing a cross-section of the city's demographics, including residents and frequent city users. Over nine sessions from May to November 2023, participants engaged in learning, deliberation, and decision-making phases, focusing on key climate topics and identifying barriers within municipal regulations hindering climate objectives.

Impact

- Developed 6 comprehensive recommendations, including over 120 specific proposals, addressing topics such as sustainable buildings, renewable energy communities, green lifestyles, protection of green and blue areas, etc.
- Achieved formal endorsement by the City Council, with approximately half of the recommendations fully or partially approved, ensuring their integration into Bologna's Climate City Contract aimed at achieving climate neutrality by 2030.
- Established a Monitoring Committee of 21 Assembly members, tasked with overseeing the implementation of approved proposals, thereby enhancing accountability and transparency in the city's climate initiatives.
- Inspired the formation of an independent citizens' association, allowing Assembly participants to continue their engagement in climate action and maintain momentum beyond the formal process.

Community-Owned Services & Resources

Purpose

Enables communities to take ownership and management of essential services and resources, such as energy, water, and public infrastructure, fostering local economic resilience and sustainable development.

Project Stage

PLAN

Designing community-led service models and governance structures

IMPLEMENT

Establishing and managing locally controlled services

EVALUATE

Assessing operational sustainability and social impact

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (local residents, cooperatives) – Owners and decision-makers
- **Government** (municipal authorities) – Enabling policy and regulatory support

Mechanisms Used

COMMUNITY COOPERATIVES

Collective ownership of energy, water, or local services

PUBLIC-COMMONS PARTNERSHIPS

Shared management models between community and government

LOCAL RESOURCE GOVERNANCE BOARDS

Oversight and decision-making bodies

Benefits

- Enhances local control and self-sufficiency in service provision
- Strengthens community resilience and economic sustainability
- Encourages investment in locally relevant, sustainable infrastructure
- Promotes equitable access and affordability of essential services

Challenges

- Requires strong financial and operational management capacity
- Navigating complex legal and regulatory frameworks
- Risk of resource mismanagement without proper oversight
- Dependence on sustained community engagement and leadership



Source: Dominique Dhondt (2021)

Føns Local Heating Cooperative

Context

Initiated by Føns Nærvarme a.m.b.a. and supported by the EMPOWER 2.0 project, this initiative enabled the village of Føns to experiment with an innovative, citizen-led approach to local energy transition. EMPOWER 2.0 created the conditions for testing new technologies—such as integrating biomass with ground source heat pumps—in a real-world, community-managed setting. This support not only reduced emissions but also demonstrated how small-scale, participatory projects can drive systemic change. Føns stands as a model for how local experimentation can inform and inspire broader adoption of sustainable energy solutions.

How it works

Føns Nærvarme operates as an energy cooperative, meaning it is owned and managed by the local residents it serves. Each household connected to the system is a member with voting rights, allowing citizens to make decisions collectively about investments, technologies, and tariffs. This democratic structure ensures that energy choices reflect the community's needs and values. The cooperative model fosters long-term engagement, shared responsibility, and trust, making it a best practice in citizen-led energy transition. Through joint decision-making, residents successfully replaced oil boilers with a wood chip plant, later enhanced with geothermal heat pumps, showcasing how local ownership can drive sustainable innovation.

Impact

- Created a replicable model for small-scale energy communities, influencing national policies on decentralized energy solutions.
- Established a legal and financial framework that enables other Danish villages to develop citizen-owned heating cooperatives.
- Demonstrated the viability of volunteer-led energy management, leading to discussions on expanding similar models to other rural areas.
- Integrated into Denmark's broader energy transition strategy, positioning community-led initiatives as key contributors to decarbonization.
- Served as a case study for EU-funded projects, informing best practices for community-based energy governance across Europe.

Legislative & Policy Co-Ownership

Purpose

Empowers citizens and communities to actively participate in shaping laws and policies, ensuring they reflect public needs, protect rights, and improve governance transparency. Strengthens democratic legitimacy and enhances policy effectiveness.

Project Stage

OBSERVE

Identifying governance gaps and public concerns

ASSESS

Analyzing legal frameworks and power dynamics

PLAN

Co-developing policies via participatory law-making

EVALUATE

Reviewing policy outcomes and refining legal frameworks

Audiences Involved

- **Civic Society** (citizens, advocacy groups, grassroots movements) – Driving policy co-creation and oversight
- **Government** (municipal and national institutions) – Institutionalizing participatory law-making processes
- **Academia** (researchers, legal experts) – Providing technical knowledge and legal analysis

Mechanisms Used

PARTICIPATORY LAW-MAKING

Public engagement in drafting and reviewing laws

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER GOVERNANCE BOARDS

Ongoing co-ownership of policy implementation

DELIBERATIVE POLICY FORUMS

Structured citizen-government dialogue on legislative reforms

POLICY TEST ZONES

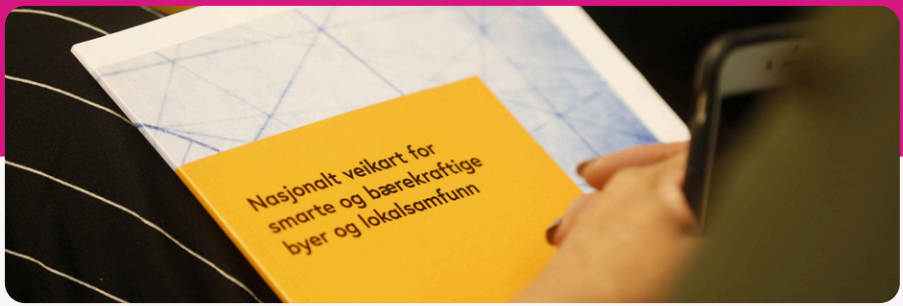
Pilot programs testing citizen-driven legislative innovations

Benefits

- Enhances the legitimacy and public acceptance of policies
- Leads to more inclusive and equitable governance decisions
- Increases compliance with laws by fostering a sense of ownership
- Strengthens legal protections for marginalized communities

Challenges

- Risk of tokenistic participation without real influence
- Complex and time-intensive negotiation processes
- Navigating conflicts between stakeholders with differing interests
- Requires institutional commitment and sustained public engagement



Source: Nordic Edge website

Stavanger Smart City Roadmap

Context

Initiated by Stavanger City Council, developed in collaboration with over 250 stakeholders from public, private, academic sectors, and citizen groups. Stavanger adopted a comprehensive Smart City Roadmap outlining five key priority areas: Health & Welfare, Education & Knowledge, Energy, Climate & Environment, Urban Art, and Governance & Democracy.

How it works

Stavanger's Smart City Roadmap, launched in 2015, established a collaborative framework involving over 250 stakeholders from public institutions, private companies, academia, and civil society. This inclusive approach led to the creation of a dedicated Smart City Office, serving as a hub for coordinating and scaling initiatives across the municipality. Key projects include the "co-creation school," developed in partnership with the University of Stavanger, and the deployment of IoT sensors for monitoring various environmental parameters. These initiatives exemplify how cross-sector collaboration and citizen involvement can drive innovative solutions tailored to real community needs.

Impact

- Enabled strategic, coordinated smart city initiatives across diverse sectors.
- Strengthened cooperation between government, industry, academia, and residents, increasing trust and transparency.
- Stimulated innovation and economic development through digital technology and citizen-driven projects.
- Improved efficiency and sustainability of municipal services, contributing directly to climate-neutral goals.



Photo: Rawpixel

Enabling public participation: Guidelines for key urban actors

This guide is built on real stories and proven tools, but its biggest message is this: there’s no single path to participation. Across Europe, meaningful public involvement starts in different ways — sometimes from city halls, sometimes from grassroots communities, and often from collaborative projects that bridge the two.

Public participation can start with:

- Citizens, like in Paris, where residents voted in a city-wide referendum to pedestrianize streets.
- City Halls, like in Bologna, where a Climate Citizens’ Assembly shaped public policy.
- Organisations and projects, like UrbanLab for Green Cities in Romania, where a national program empowers diverse local actors through hackathons, incubators, and pilot projects.

Each of these actors brings something important to the table — and this guide provides tailored steps for each, whether you're just starting out or already running participation processes. You’ll find concrete tools, from citizen surveys and co-design workshops to advisory boards and participatory budgeting, along with real-world cases that show how they work in practice.

By breaking down public participation into approachable formats and real examples, this guide invites everyone — from individuals to institutions — to take part. Because participation isn’t just an outcome — it’s a method for building better cities, and a mindset that grows stronger when shared.

Citizens: Help shape your city

Cities across Europe show that real change starts with everyday people stepping in — not as experts, but as neighbors, commuters, parents, youth. Public participation works when it's shared. Here's how you can take part, whatever your experience.

🟢 **Just Starting?**
Start small. Stay curious. Participation often begins with showing up: answering a city survey, joining a community event, or reading a local plan.

- Follow your city on social media or subscribe to updates
- Join an open consultation or vote in a participatory budget
- Reflect: what's one thing you'd improve in your neighbourhood?

🟡 **Already Involved?**
Step up. Invite others. Projects like NetZero Caravan in Cluj show how citizens co-design real change when they're active collaborators.

- Join or start a local working group
- Volunteer to support a participatory event
- Ask your city: how are decisions made, how can you join in?

🔵 **Already Active?**
Scale up. Build together. From Bologna's assembly to Iceland's citizen science, advanced participation means shifting power — and sharing it.

- Mentor others and create inclusive spaces
- Collaborate with city halls or NGOs on better processes
- Prototype your own participatory tool or event

City Halls: Build trust with citizens

Across Europe, cities that listen better, govern better. Participation isn't just a checkbox — it's a tool for building smarter plans, stronger support, and more sustainable outcomes. This guide shows what's possible.

🟢 **Just Starting?**
Test it. Don't wait for perfection. From first-time consultations to online polls, early action matters. Participation grows when people see it working.

- Run a short community survey or feedback wall
- Host an informal Q&A or info session on a local project
- Map who's missing from the room to include them

🟡 **Some Experience?**
Improve how you listen — and how you respond. Cities like Lisbon, Ghent, and Tallinn are moving beyond "informing" to co-creation — and learning in the process.

- Invite residents to co-design a pilot initiative
- Create feedback loops: what did you hear, and what changed?
- Train staff in facilitation, not just communication

🔵 **Leading the Way?**
Embed it. Make it systemic. From Paris' Citizens' Assembly to National Platforms, leading cities treat participation as social infrastructure.

- Build permanent spaces for citizen input (e.g. advisory boards)
- Link participation to budget, planning, and climate strategies
- Partner with universities or civic groups to innovate and evaluate

Organisations: Encourage the shift towards collaboration

NGOs, companies, schools, and cultural institutions all play a role in making cities more democratic. This guide shows how organisations can go beyond outreach and into real co-creation.

🟢 **Just Starting?**
Support what's already happening. Participation doesn't mean reinventing the wheel. Many groups help amplify city or community efforts.

- Partner with a local event, consultation, or awareness campaign
- Use your space or platform to host conversations
- Share knowledge and networks with civic actors

🟡 **Some Experience?**
Act as a bridge between people and institutions. Projects like UrbanLab or synAthina show how organisations can convene, facilitate, and prototype participation.

- Co-host a participatory process or co-design workshop
- Train staff in inclusive methods and facilitation
- Use participatory data or mapping tools to surface needs

🔵 **Leading the Way?**
Drive systems change with others. Organisations like Føns Nærvarme or NEB-STAR Stavanger show what's possible when communities, companies, and cities align.

- Develop long-term partnerships with municipalities
- Embed participation in how you design, deliver, and evaluate projects
- Help scale successful models across cities or sectors



Photo: Rawpixel

Resources for the future

For cities aiming to integrate public participation into climate-neutral and sustainable urban development, a growing ecosystem of organisations, networks, and projects across Europe offers support, inspiration, and guidance.

Organisations to follow

PlaceMaking Europe

A leading European network advancing participatory design, tactical urbanism, and place-based innovation. Great for case studies, events, and tools.

C40 Cities

A global network of nearly 100 climate-leading cities, with a strong focus on inclusive climate action and community-led governance and participatory policy co-design.

Eurocities

A network of 200+ cities sharing best practices in governance, mobility, and participation. Focuses on urban innovation, inclusion and citizen engagement.

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

Supports local governments in implementing inclusive and sustainable climate action. Offers policy briefs, co-creation tools and capacity-building.

European Urban Initiative

The main EU funding instrument for testing and scaling urban innovation, with a strong emphasis on citizen involvement.

Publications to read

C40 Cities: Green & Thriving Neighbourhoods Guidebook
Offers guidance on implementing net-zero solutions at the neighbourhood level, emphasising community participation to address local needs and enhance urban resilience.

NetZeroCities Knowledge Repository
Offers research, frameworks, and technical guidance on participatory urban climate governance.

UN-Habitat – An Incremental and Participatory Toolbox for Urban Planning guides step-by-step participatory urban planning in fast-changing contexts.

OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes provides a ten-step framework for designing, planning, implementing, and evaluating citizen participation processes, offering practical advice and examples to enhance democratic policymaking.

The CrAFt CookBook
Developed through the EU-funded project led by NTNU, this offers cities a step-by-step guide to climate neutrality inspired by the New European Bauhaus by highlighting tools for co-creation, collaboration, and integrating environmental, social, and cultural sustainability.



Photo: monkeybusiness

Toolkits to use

New European Bauhaus Toolkit helps local governments and stakeholders apply NEB principles—sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusion—through creative engagement formats and participatory tools.

TD-NEXT Toolbox is a co-creation and transdisciplinary research toolkit used in sustainability projects. Includes stakeholder mapping, futures thinking, and reflection tools.

Urban Governance Atlas provides a curated collection of nature-based governance models and participation tools for cities, with over 250 real-life examples.

PlaceMaking Toolbox is a collection of curated placemaking resources for all to access, learn from, and practice.

C40 Knowledge Hub provides an extensive library of guides, case studies, and frameworks focused on inclusive climate action, community engagement, and urban innovation. Built for cities tackling the climate crisis.



Photo: Wavebreakmedia

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