



# Citizen engagement

*A Policy Brief from the Policy Learning Platform  
for better Governance*

February 2025



GOVERNANCE

## Authors of this policy brief



Arnault Morisson

*Thematic expert for a Smarter Europe and a Europe closer to citizens at the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform*

[a.morisson@ext-interregeurope.eu](mailto:a.morisson@ext-interregeurope.eu)



Elena Ferrario

*Senior Thematic Manager at the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform*

[e.ferrario@ext-interregeurope.eu](mailto:e.ferrario@ext-interregeurope.eu)

## Contributors of this policy brief



Ágnes Németh

*Researcher/project manager at the University of Eastern Finland ([CASPER](#) project)*



Andrea Cederquist

*Project Leader at Heinrich-Böll-Foundation ([URBCITIZENPOWER](#) project)*

# Summary

Citizen engagement is an important element of good governance and a sound investment in better policymaking. It refers to the active participation of individuals and communities in governance processes. The European Commission has launched several initiatives to actively encourage greater citizen engagement in EU policymaking such as in the [EU Missions](#) or through the [Citizens' Engagement Platform](#). Citizen engagement enhances democratic legitimacy, fosters inclusivity, and promotes trust between citizens and governments. By actively involving citizens in decision-making processes, regional governments can address pressing place-based societal grand challenges. Frequently implemented at the local and regional levels, Interreg Europe projects serve as an excellent platform for policy learning and the development of tailored, context-sensitive solutions through citizen engagement. This policy brief highlights five key recommendations drawn from good practices within Interreg Europe projects to maximise the potential and impact of citizen engagement. These recommendations aim to inspire and guide policymakers in leveraging citizen participation for more effective and inclusive governance.

The knowledge, solutions and good practices showcased in this policy brief come mainly from Interreg Europe projects.

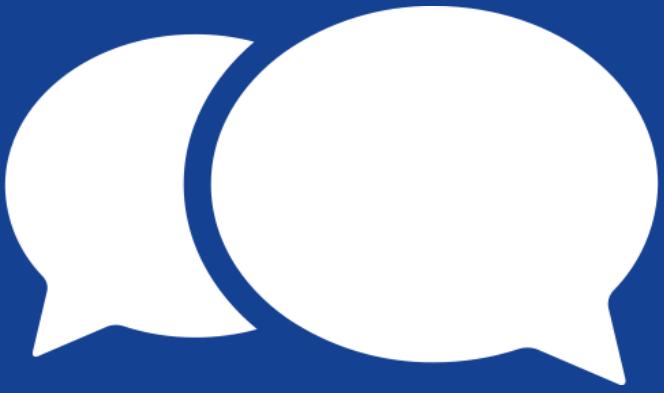
# Table of Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Insights from Interreg Europe project CASPER from Ágnes Németh</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Citizen engagement</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Citizen engagement in the policy lifecycle</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Citizen or stakeholder engagement</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Models for citizen engagement</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Insights from Interreg Europe project URBCITIZENPOWER from Andrea Cederquist</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Policy recommendations</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Policy recommendation 1. Consult citizens using hybrid participation formats</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Policy recommendation 2. Collaborate with citizens to find solutions to pressing place-based societal challenges</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Policy recommendation 3. Empower citizens with participatory budgeting</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Policy recommendation 4. Empower citizens with small-scale actions</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Policy recommendation 5. Empower citizens with small-scale funding</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Sources and further information</b>	<b>16</b>

## List of good practices and policy changes

GOOD PRACTICE 1: Involving citizens through hybrid participation formats, Ingolstadt, Germany	12
POLICY IMPROVEMENT 1: Open challenge competitions in Sofia, Bulgaria.	13
GOOD PRACTICE 2: Participatory budgeting, Lahti, Finland.	13
GOOD PRACTICE 3: Low cost actions to mobilize citizens in climate adaptation, Roeselare, Belgium	14
GOOD PRACTICE 4: The Iepen Mienskipsfûns (IMF), Fryslân, the Netherlands	15

## Insights from Interreg Europe project CASPER from Ágnes Németh, the University of Eastern Finland.



The CASPER project's aim is to involve citizens directly in finding solutions to depopulation challenges in rural areas. When dealing with the problem of rural shrinking, it is important to identify the essential elements of 'well-being' needs of current local populations. Besides, very often it is inevitable to make difficult decisions on right-sizing infrastructure and services. Citizen activation is crucial in these situations, as it can offer co-ownership of local development, enhanced legitimacy, accountability of decisions and measures, and opens the possibility to learn from rather than be put off, by potential failure.

However, the road to successful citizen engagement is challenging, one must be aware of the common pitfalls of the process. A well-intended consultation can fail because of **poor planning**. Non-representative sampling or the domination of certain groups can skew the results, while planning consultations at inconvenient times or locations can prevent key demographics (such as mothers and the elderly) from participating. When the process involves complicated tools or is held in languages not accessible to all potential participants, or when there is a significant distance to the venue, participation inevitably drops.

**Poor facilitation** often hindrance the process of citizen consultation. The facilitator's lack of leverage on knowledge and expertise of the participants can cause discontent among the participants, which eventually results in declining participation. If verbal and quiet dynamics are not considered, dominant participants can overshadow quieter ones, leading to an imbalance in voice and contribution.

**Lack of promotion and incentives** may result in poor participation; if potential participants are unaware of a consultation or do not see a clear benefit in participating, they are less likely to engage. **Declining motivation and lack of transparency** are relatively frequent weaknesses of citizen engagement, that can be consciously prevented by intensive post-consultation providing follow-up on the process and results.

Last, but not least, when participants feel that there is **too much political influence on the discussed theme**, engagement can be deterred, and distrust may grow among the citizenry.

To avoid the most common pitfalls of citizen activation and consultation one needs to be able to provide effective facilitation, inclusive tools and communication, transparency and feedback, as well as to consider the availability of technical and field expertise.

# Citizen engagement

**Citizen engagement refers to the active participation of individuals and communities in governance processes**, encompassing decision-making, implementation, and monitoring. This involvement aims to enhance the quality, transparency, and ownership of policies at local, national, and EU levels. Citizen engagement is seen as fundamental to strengthening democracy and achieving inclusive policy outcomes. By involving citizens, governments can ensure that policies are more effective, equitable, and trusted. Citizen engagement creates legitimacy with the public. This approach fosters democratic legitimacy, inclusivity, and trust between citizens and governing bodies.

Over the past decade, innovation policymaking has embraced new concepts such as the quadruple helix model, Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), and mission-oriented approaches. These frameworks emphasise broader citizen involvement in addressing grand challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, and public health ([Mazzucato](#), read our policy brief on [regional missions](#)). Citizens are increasingly recognised as active participants in policymaking and implementation. Engaging citizens alongside stakeholders with technical expertise, sector-specific knowledge, and lived experiences adds a vital human dimension, essential for driving system-wide transformation.

The European Commission increasingly recognises citizens as active participants in policymaking and implementation, integrating engagement into key initiatives. For instance, the [European Citizens' Initiative \(ECI\)](#) allows EU citizens to propose legislation by collecting one million signatures across at least seven member states. The [Citizens' Engagement Platform](#) provides a multilingual digital space for citizens to debate policies and contribute to decision-making. Meanwhile, [EU Missions and Citizen Engagement Activities](#) under Horizon Europe involve citizens in addressing major challenges like climate change through participatory initiatives such as citizen science and consultations. Citizen engagement is also essential for advancing the Cohesion Policy, ensuring that projects funded through EU cohesion funds incorporate citizens' insights and experiences to address the most pressing community needs effectively.

Citizen engagement through public deliberation not only enriches individual civic capacities but also contributes to more robust and responsive democratic institutions ([Carpini et al.](#)). Citizen engagement offers numerous benefits to both individuals and democratic systems:

- **Strengthening trust and legitimacy:** citizen engagement builds trust by demonstrating government accountability and transparency. When citizens are actively involved in policymaking, they perceive decisions as more legitimate, even when outcomes are not universally agreed upon.
- **Improving policy outcomes:** engaging citizens ensures that policies address real needs. By tapping into the lived experiences and expertise of diverse communities, governments can design solutions that are both innovative and practical.
- **Promoting inclusion and diversity:** citizen engagement promotes social equity by amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups and vulnerable groups. Inclusive processes combat marginalisation and foster a sense of belonging.
- **Higher compliance and acceptance:** policies developed with citizen input are more likely to gain public support, reducing enforcement challenges and fostering voluntary compliance.
- **Driving innovation:** collaboration with citizens unlocks innovative solutions to systemic challenges. Open innovation and citizen science initiatives are transforming public service delivery.

Despite its benefits, citizen engagement faces significant challenges:

- **Accessibility issues:** marginalized groups often face barriers to participation, including language, digital divides, and logistical constraints.

- **Risk of tokenism:** superficial engagement processes can erode trust and fail to produce meaningful outcomes.
- **Resource constraints:** limited funding and capacity hinder the implementation of robust engagement initiatives.
- **Political and bureaucratic resistance:** reluctance to share decision-making power can undermine engagement efforts.



#### Key takeaways

Citizen engagement refers to the active participation of individuals and communities in governance processes, including decision-making, implementation, and monitoring. It offers a range of benefits, from facilitating problem-solving and strategic planning to improving daily decision-making and service delivery, while also fostering legitimacy and mutual trust.

## Citizen engagement in the policy lifecycle

Governments can embed citizen engagement throughout the policy lifecycle, from agenda-setting to evaluation. The policy lifecycle is usually composed of five stages: issue identification, policy design, decision making, implementation, and evaluation (see table 1 below). Effective citizen participation in decision-making requires certain conditions to ensure meaningful engagement and maintain public trust:

- **Relevance:** citizens should be involved when they can contribute to solving a specific problem.
- **Influence:** there must be opportunities within the decision-making process for citizens to impact outcomes, with a genuine commitment from leadership to consider their input.
- **Resources:** adequate financial, technical, and human resources are essential to support a meaningful participatory process.
- **Timing:** the participatory process should be integrated into the decision-making cycle early enough to influence outcomes, ensuring decisions haven't been predetermined.

Governments must ensure these conditions are met and engage citizens at the appropriate stages of the policy lifecycle. [Failing to do so risks undermining participation efforts](#) and eroding public trust in government institutions.

Policy lifecycle	Possible role of citizens	Possible methods
<b>Issue identification</b>	Citizens can be involved to help identify the most pressing problems to solve, map the real needs of the public, or gather inputs or ideas to tackle the problem.	Digital platforms and petitions to raise awareness. Participatory agenda-setting through deliberative processes or citizen initiatives.
<b>Policy formulation</b>	Citizens can be involved to enrich a proposed solution, identify risks, prototype or test solutions, or collaboratively draft a policy, project plan, or legislation.	Digital and in-person platforms for commenting and editing drafts. Workshops and feedback sessions for solution design.
<b>Decision making</b>	Citizens can be involved to collectively decide on the solution to be implemented, the budget to be allocated, or the projects that will be selected.	Online or in-person voting mechanisms. Participatory budgeting for resource allocation.
<b>Implementation</b>	Citizens can provide help in deploying the solutions or projects decided in the previous stage.	Hackathons, collaborative workshops, or makerspaces for prototype creation. Open innovation labs and public meetings for ongoing collaboration.

<b>Evaluation</b>	Citizens can be engaged to evaluate or monitor the implementation of the solution and to measure its outcomes and results.	Open data platforms and progress updates. Feedback tools like surveys, polls, and Community Score Cards.
-------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Table 1.** Stages of the decision or policy cycle, and the potential role of citizens. Source: own elaboration from the [OECD](#).



### Key takeaways

Governments can embed citizen engagement throughout the policy lifecycle—from agenda-setting to evaluation—by ensuring participation is relevant, impactful, adequately resourced, and timed early enough to meaningfully influence decisions.

## Citizen or stakeholder engagement

Participation enables **citizens and stakeholders** to influence the activities and decisions of public authorities at various stages of the policy lifecycle ([OECD](#)). While citizen engagement can involve both individual citizens and organised stakeholders, there are significant differences between them, and their participation should be approached differently (see Table 2 below).

Individual citizens need participation methods that provide sufficient time, information, resources, and incentives to engage effectively. In contrast, stakeholders—defined as interested or affected parties such as institutions and organisations—typically have a lower threshold for participation, access to dedicated resources, and clearly defined interests in the process. Stakeholder participation is generally more familiar to policymakers and often requires less specialised knowledge. However, citizen and stakeholder participation are not mutually exclusive. Stakeholders frequently contribute to citizen participation processes by designing, implementing, or sharing their perspectives. Many methods, such as public consultations, can be adapted to involve both groups.

The distinction between citizens and stakeholders is not always clear-cut and may overlap in practice. Both groups are equally valuable, as they enrich public decisions, projects, policies, and services in different ways. Public authorities should determine whom to engage at each stage of decision-making and tailor the design and expectations of participatory processes accordingly.

Citizens and stakeholders require different conditions for participation and produce distinct types of input. Stakeholders can offer expertise and specific insights through mechanisms such as advisory bodies or expert panels. On the other hand, citizen participation relies on methods that ensure the public has adequate time, information, and resources to generate quality input and develop individual or collective recommendations. Regardless of the group, both forms of participation must have a clear and meaningful link to decision-making.

	Involving stakeholders	Involving citizens
Definition	Stakeholders – any interested and/or affected party, including institutions and organisations, whether governmental or non-governmental, from civil society, academia, the media, or the private sector.	Citizens – individuals regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and political affiliations, or any other condition – in the larger sense ‘an inhabitant of a particular place’, which can be in reference to a village, town, city, region, state, or country depending on the context.

<b>Potential benefits of involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brings in official stakeholder perspectives</li> <li>Ensure representation of key actors</li> <li>Helps to identify potential impacts, deliver tailor made solutions, and ensure their effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brings in public opinion or public judgement</li> <li>Can bring a diversity of views and include rarely heard voices</li> <li>Can be representative of the broader public</li> <li>Helps raise awareness and facilitates public learning about an issue</li> </ul>
<b>Considerations when preparing to involve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Threshold to participate is low</li> <li>Have dedicated time and resources for getting informed about the issue and to participate</li> <li>Often have clear interest and incentives to participate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Threshold to participate is high</li> <li>Do not have dedicated time and resources for getting informed about the issue and to participate</li> <li>Often do not have personal interest or incentives to participate</li> </ul>

**Table 2.** Differences between involving stakeholders and citizens. Source: own elaboration from the [OECD](#).



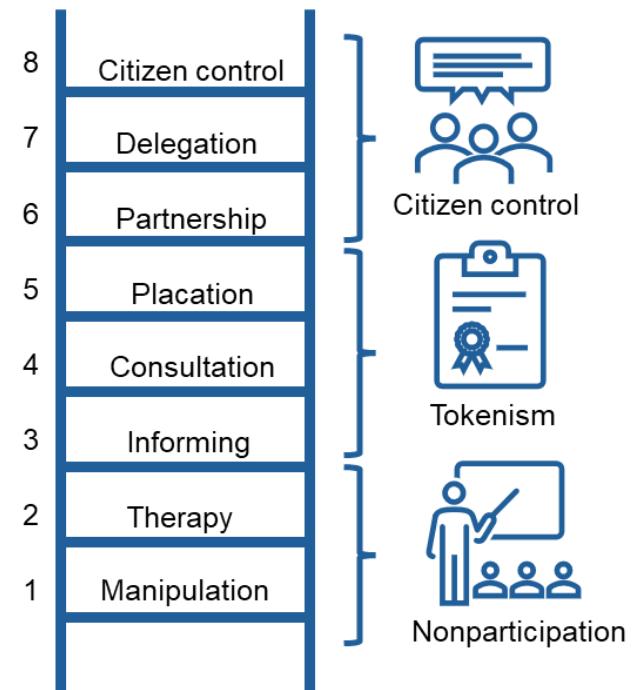
### Key takeaways

Citizen engagement includes involving both citizens and stakeholders in governance processes. Involving citizens and/or stakeholders is equally important, however, their participation should not be treated identically.

## Models for citizen engagement

Citizen engagement has transformed significantly over time, evolving from basic consultations to active collaboration and co-creation. Sherry Arnstein's influential "Ladder of Participation" (1969) categorises this progression into eight rungs, ranging from manipulation to full citizen control. This model underscores the limitations of one-way communication, which can result in tokenism. Tokenism refers to the practice of making only a symbolic effort to include citizens, without genuinely valuing or incorporating their input, perspectives, or contributions. Recognising this, regional governments increasingly strive to advance beyond tokenism toward genuine co-creation and empowerment.

Another model framework that references the Arnstein ladder is the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) that categorises five stages of public participation—inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower—and defines the public participation goal and promise to the public for each stage (see Table 3 below). These stages guide governments in designing processes that align with their goals.



**Figure 1.** Arnstein's Ladder of Participation.  
Source: own elaboration from [Arnstein \(1969\)](#).

The different models emphasise the distinction between one-way communication and two-way engagement. One-way communication, often used for awareness-raising or educational purposes, may not constitute engagement *per se*. However, it plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse and building legitimacy to address societal challenges. Effective communication and stakeholder management strategies serve as a foundation for deeper, two-way engagement and collaboration.

True engagement goes beyond one-way communication to involve relational processes such as involvement, co-design, and co-creation. These approaches not only enhance democratic participation but also navigate complex political landscapes, ensuring that citizen voices are integrated meaningfully into decision-making. Two-way engagement leverages a diverse array of methods and initiatives, including incentivized participation, participatory budgeting, living labs, and citizen assemblies (see table 3).

Interactions	Public participation goal	Promise to the public	Examples of initiatives
Inform	One-way communication. To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem and/or solutions.	We will keep you informed.	Strategic communication, use of media
Consult	One-way communication. To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	Research (opinion polls), formal consultations (surveys, interviews), in-person events
Involve	Two-way communication. To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	Digital and social media engagement, innovation events, human-centred design, citizen science
Collaborate	Two-way communication. To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	Participatory action research, action learning networks, participatory co-design methods, civic innovation labs or living labs.
Empower	Two-way communication. To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.	We will implement what you decide.	Deliberative methods, participatory budgeting, data commons and digital democracy platforms.

**Table 3.** IAP2 spectrum of participation and citizen engagement mechanisms. Source: own elaboration from [European Commission](#).

The [OECD](#) has developed a ten-step framework to guide the planning, implementation, and evaluation of citizen participation processes (see Figure 2). Its goal is to ensure these processes are inclusive, impactful, and tailored to the intended audience, employing appropriate methods. While emphasizing quality, inclusion, and impact, the guidelines remain flexible, acknowledging alternative approaches. A key recommendation is to involve potential participants early in the design phase to ensure the process meets their needs and encourages greater participation.

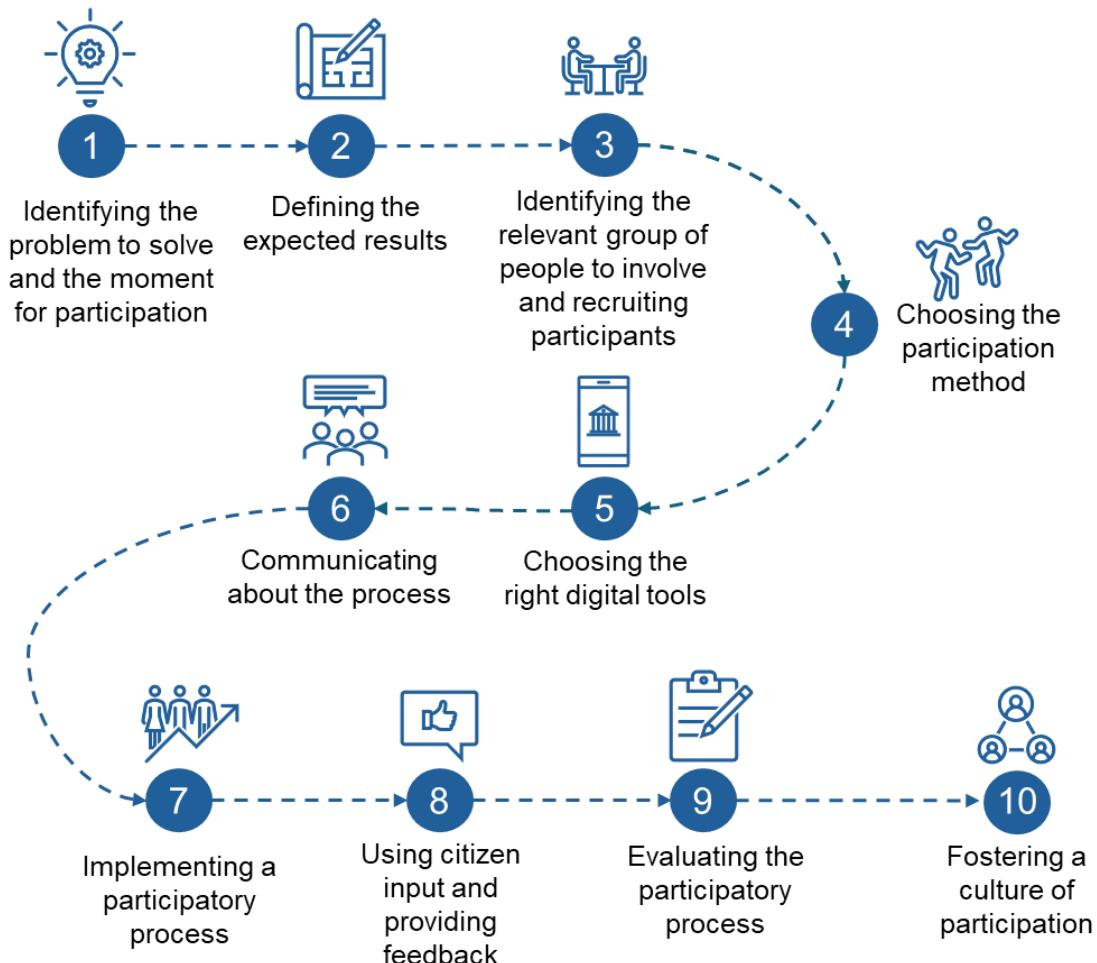
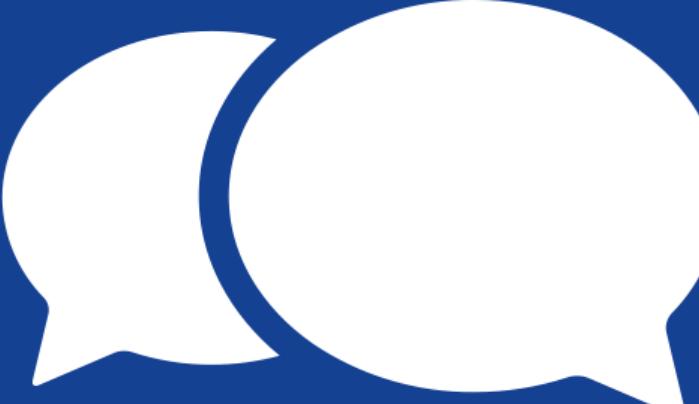


Figure 2. Ten-step path for planning and implementing a citizen participation. Source: own elaboration from the [OECD](#).



### Key takeaways

Citizen engagement can be categorised into five key stages: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. This engagement can be broadly distinguished between one-way communication and two-way interaction. The IAP2 model and the OECD ten-step framework provide valuable guidance for regional policymakers, helping them move beyond tokenism and foster genuine co-creation and empowerment.



## Insights from Interreg Europe project URBCITIZENPOWER from Andrea Cederquist, Heinrich-Böll-Foundation, Germany.

### Empowering citizens - Towards a New Urban Citizenship

Cities across Europe face growing environmental, social, and economic challenges, requiring innovative governance and citizen-driven solutions. The UrbCitizenPower project responds by empowering citizens as active participants in urban transformation, improving policies across six cities and one region. This brief presents first key insights from the project, developed in collaboration with Charles Landry, who is an author and international adviser on the future of cities.

As cities increasingly are facing challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and economic disparities, a new model of urban citizenship is essential. Traditional, top-down urban planning must give way to co-creation, placemaking, and inclusivity. By positioning citizens as key agents of change, cities can foster diverse, multicultural communities where participation and collaboration shape policies. A core assumption of the UrbCitizenPower project is that people can acquire agency to shape their future. However, to harness this agency, we need structures that support and enable collective action. This includes inclusive governance, equitable access to resources, and frameworks that encourage innovation and participation.

A core principle in the project and of citizen empowerment in general is fostering a culture of participation, moving beyond consultation to deeper engagement in decision-making. By incorporating the New European Bauhaus (NEB) values - sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusion - cities can elevate participation from passive involvement to active co-creation, a quest that is reflected in Arnstein's ladder of participation mentioned before.

A city's aesthetics are more than just visual appeal - they influence well-being, social trust, and engagement. Urban environments that acknowledges beauty, integrate green spaces, accessible public areas, and facilitate the notion of public interest design can act as an enabler of social cohesion. Innovation in urban policy requires a shift from rigid governance to flexible, citizen-driven approaches. By integrating arts, culture, and creativity into participatory governance, cities can build more engaging, inspiring, and democratic spaces. Creativity plays a key role in breaking down barriers and fostering new urban narratives. Encouraging a "Yes, if" mindset over a restrictive "No, because" approach enables cities to experiment with fresh, inclusive solutions.

The future of urban citizenship lies in re-thinking how we plan and (inter-) act. By enabling courageous conversations, embracing co-creation, and fostering a systemic understanding we can shape cities that are dynamic, equitable, and beautiful by engaging citizens at all levels of participation.

# Policy recommendations

This policy brief concludes by outlining five key policy recommendations, ranging from broad strategies to more specific actions, aimed at **enhancing citizen engagement**. These recommendations are illustrated with good practices from relevant Interreg Europe projects.

## Policy recommendation 1. Consult citizens using hybrid participation formats

Policymakers should prioritise providing citizens with comprehensive one-way communication channels to foster greater involvement. This can be achieved through inclusive, transparent, and adaptable participation formats that seamlessly integrate in-person and digital methods, ensuring broad accessibility and enabling meaningful feedback.



### Key actions for policymakers: use diverse communication methods

- Use engagement infrastructure and have dedicated teams with expertise in facilitation, digital tools, and citizen engagement to support robust and scalable participation efforts.
- Leverage hybrid methods and combine traditional in-person consultations with innovative digital tools to reach wider audiences and adapt to diverse citizen preferences.



### GOOD PRACTICE 1: Involving citizens through hybrid participation formats, Ingolstadt, Germany

A hybrid citizen participation initiative was organised to gather diverse opinions on future Blue-Green Infrastructure (BGI) projects in Ingolstadt, Germany. Formats included stakeholder workshops and public engagement during the “Donau-Lust” town fair, held on a closed Danube shoreline road. Citizens could share feedback via QR codes, sticky notes, posters, and a whiteboard. The event registered 562 contributions, reflecting strong public interest and providing insightful ideas for future planning. This approach aligns with the EU Biodiversity Strategy’s goals for river restoration. By integrating online and onsite participation, the project fostered social inclusion, local ownership, and innovative input, offering a replicable model adaptable to various urban contexts.

[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

## Policy recommendation 2. Collaborate with citizens to find solutions to pressing place-based societal challenges

Policymakers can use challenge-oriented hackathons to drive citizen-centered solutions for regional societal challenges by fostering partnerships between citizens, municipalities, businesses, and other stakeholders. Challenge-oriented policies aim to respond to societal demands or even to the “Grand Challenges of our time” and participate to the shift towards transformative changes. Regional policymakers can design challenge-based policies such as competition for start-ups or students to find new solutions to regional societal challenges.



#### Key actions for policymakers: address concrete place-based challenges

- Design challenge-based policies such as through competitions, hackathons, or co-creation workshops that engage citizens in addressing specific challenges fostering innovation and ownership.
- Focus on inclusivity and ensure that marginalised and underrepresented groups have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from these initiatives.



### POLICY IMPROVEMENT 1: Open challenge competitions in Sofia, Bulgaria

Sofia Development Association, the Sofia municipal foundation for innovation in Bulgaria, organises Hackathons, challenge-based competitions where teams have 24 hours to develop minimum viable products (MVP) before pitching it to a jury. 40,000 euros is awarded to develop MVP and prototypes. The Municipality of Sofia is involved to provide challenges, funds, and assist prototype development, and commercialisation. Learning from Interreg Europe partners, namely the good practices [Entrepreneurial Campus Contest](#) and [University-Business challenge contests](#) from Castilla y Léon, Spain, the Hackathon was refined to add an interregional dimension and a focus on S3 priorities. The new hackathon, “Breaking the Digital Borders”, focusing on Balkan countries offers an example of how Municipal Government can promote challenge-oriented innovation policies.

[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

### Policy recommendation 3. Empower citizens with participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting empowers citizens to play a direct role in allocating funds for public projects. This approach provides tangible opportunities for community involvement in decision-making processes, fostering stronger community engagement and enhancing democratic governance. By allowing citizens to influence the distribution of public resources toward local priorities, participatory budgeting strengthens the connection between governments and the communities they serve.



#### Key actions for policymakers: foster a culture of cooperation and inclusion

- Design participatory budgeting frameworks that are accessible to all, with clear guidelines to promote transparency and opportunities for input at every stage to build trust and accountability.
- Encourage active participation through hybrid formats including workshops, online platforms, and events to educate citizens about the process and inspire them to contribute their ideas.



### GOOD PRACTICE 2: Participatory budgeting, Lahti, Finland.

Participatory budgeting (PB) allows citizens to decide how public funds are spent. In 2020, Lahti allocated €100,000 for PB, implementing projects in 2021. The city was divided into four areas, enabling residents to propose and vote on projects enhancing wellness, community, and the environment. Citizens participated in three stages: ideation, development, and voting, with 713 ideas submitted, 58 proposals finalized, and 10 selected for funding. Nearly 4,000 residents voted, with strong participation across age groups, especially women. PB fosters transparent governance and aligns with Green Deal goals. Lahti's PB model is replicable, engaging citizens in decision-making and promoting sustainable development through collaborative, localised initiatives.

[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

## Policy recommendation 4. Empower citizens with small-scale actions

Policymakers can experiment with small-scale actions to encourage grassroots participation by supporting accessible, localised initiatives that empower citizens to take action on key challenges, such as climate adaptation or community improvement.

### Key actions for policymakers: experiment with small-scale pilot projects



- Simplify participation by piloting easy-to-access programmes that provide citizens with tools, resources, and guidance to undertake small-scale projects.
- Promote community ownership by recognize and celebrate citizen contributions, fostering a sense of pride and responsibility for local development.
- Engage vulnerable groups by collaborating with trusted intermediaries and associations.

## GOOD PRACTICE 3: Low-cost actions to mobilize citizens in climate adaptation, Roeselare, Belgium



InterRevita

The good practice illustrates how to promote small-scale actions to mobilize citizens in climate adaptation in the city of Roeselare, Belgium. The city has set climate goals per inhabitant: deseal 1m<sup>2</sup>, plant 1 tree, enable 1m<sup>3</sup> of water infiltration, and provide hedge or facade gardens. Citizen-involved actions include “Behaag Roeselare,” a campaign offering affordable plants, and a Valentine’s “Love Tree” event distributing free trees. Streets with eight or more residents choosing facade gardens receive city-funded plants. Neighborhood challenges focus on climate resilience, including biodiversity, bird and butterfly counts, and public flower planting. In 2022-2024, various campaigns led to thousands of new shrubs, trees, and hedges. Resources include €500 per district for challenges, with facade gardens costing €160/m.

[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

## Policy recommendation 5. Empower citizens with small-scale funding

Policymakers can strengthen community resilience and innovation by offering targeted funding opportunities that support citizen-led projects and initiatives, particularly in underrepresented groups and areas.

### Key recommendations from our peer review on [boosting community resilience by small scale funding in Fryslân, the Netherlands](#)



- Target less-represented community groups by using intermediaries, facilitators and network leaders. Public municipalities, voluntary and private networks can be used to interact with relevant target groups.
- Nominate Local Heroes to build ownership and express appreciation.
- Follow the mantra “we are coming to you to discuss your needs” when delivering targeted communication and promotional activities.

## GOOD PRACTICE 4: The lepen Mienskipsfûns (IMF), Fryslân, the Netherlands

Interreg Europe

Co-funded by the European Union

GOCORE

The lepen Mienskipsfûns (IMF) was created in Fryslân to consolidate fragmented provincial funds, offering a streamlined and inclusive subsidy program for Frisian residents and non-profits. Operating across five regions, each with a population-based budget, IMF allows applicants to seek subsidies up to 30% of their budget (max €50,000). Regional consultants assist with applications, while advisory committees of residents evaluate projects. Since 2014, the fund has received strong political backing, approving over 600 projects annually and achieving a €5 return for every €1 invested. Key transferable features include regional consultants, citizen-led advisory committees, and an integrated, cross-thematic approach that supports community-driven initiatives while fostering trust and innovation.

[Click here to find out more about this practice.](#)

# Sources and further information

The Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform experts provide a tailored set of resources, contacts, or in-depth analyses to help you find the answers you are looking for. Explore our services that can help you solve regional policy challenges. If you have any specific questions related to citizen engagement, you can reach out to Policy Learning Platform experts directly via the [policy helpdesk](#).

## Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform information

- Policy brief on [green and blue infrastructure](#)
- Policy brief on [integrated low-carbon strategies](#)
- Policy brief on [preserving and restoring biodiversity](#)
- Policy brief on [good governance for biodiversity](#)
- Webinar recordings on [integrated low-carbon strategies](#)
- [Webinar recordings on Citizen Science](#)
- Webinar recordings on [Blue-green infrastructure for resilient cities III: Citizens' participation](#)
- Workshop on [bringing back nature to the city](#)
- Peer review on [fostering circular economy citizen engagement in Maribor](#)
- Peer review on [designing governance to support regional transformation in Heide Region](#)
- Peer review on [boosting community resilience by small scale funding in Fryslân](#)
- Story on [engaging citizens in transport planning](#)
- Story on [enabling community energy in the Region of Normandy](#)
- Story on [citizens involvement for sustainable food systems](#)

## Other sources

- European Commission – [EU Missions & citizen engagement activities](#)
- European Commission – [Citizen engagement and EU missions implementation at national level](#)
- European Commission – [Citizens' Engagement Platform](#)
- European Commission – [European Citizens' Panels](#)
- OECD – [Engaging Citizens in Cohesion Policy](#)
- OECD – [OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes](#)

## Interreg Europe Programme

Interreg Europe is an interregional cooperation programme co-financed by the European Union. With a budget of 379 million euros for 2021-2027, Interreg Europe helps local, regional and national governments across Europe to develop and deliver better policies through interregional cooperation projects and its Policy Learning Platform services. The programme promotes good practice sharing and policy learning among European regions in 36 countries – the 27 Member States, as well as Norway, Switzerland and the 7 EU candidate countries. Interreg Europe contributes to the EU cohesion policy together with the other European Territorial Cooperation programmes known as Interreg.

## Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform

The Policy Learning Platform is the second action of the Interreg Europe programme. It aims to boost EU-wide policy learning and builds on good practices related to regional development policies.

The Platform is a space where the European policy-making community can tap into the know-how of regional policy experts and peers. It offers information on a variety of topics via thematic publications, online and onsite events, and direct communication with a team of experts.

## Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform expert services

Our team of experts provide a set of services that can help you with regional policy challenges. Get in contact with our experts to discuss the possibilities:



Via the [policy helpdesk](#), policymakers may submit their questions to receive a set of resources ranging from inspiring good practices from across Europe, policy briefs, webinar recordings, information about upcoming events, available European support and contacts of relevant people, as well as matchmaking recommendations and peer review opportunities.



A [matchmaking session](#) is a thematic discussion hosted and moderated by the Policy Learning Platform, designed around the policy needs and questions put forward by the requesting public authority or agency. It brings together peers from other European regions to present their experience and successes, to provide inspiration for overcoming regional challenges.



[Peer reviews](#) are the deepest and most intensive of the on-demand services, bringing together peers from a number of regions for a two-day work session, to examine the specific territorial and thematic context of the requesting region, discuss with stakeholders, and devise recommendations.

Discover more: [www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning](http://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning)



Co-funded by  
the European Union



## Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform

15 Rue du Palais Rihour (5<sup>e</sup> étage)

59800 Lille, France

To cite this policy brief: Morisson, A. & Ferrario, E. (2025). Citizen engagement. Lille: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform.

Tel: +33 328 144 100

[info@policylearning.eu](mailto:info@policylearning.eu)

[www.interregeurope.eu](http://www.interregeurope.eu)

Follow us on social media:

