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# GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES ON CLIMATE NEUTRALITY



**M100**

Mirror Mission  
Cities Hub Romania

*Inspired by the EU Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities  
Aligned with the NetZeroCities approach*

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# INTRODUCTION

## THE CLIMATE-NEUTRAL AND SMART CITIES MISSION

The European Union's commitment to becoming the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, as outlined in the European Green Deal, places cities at the forefront of transformative climate action. The EU Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, a key initiative under Horizon Europe, aims to accelerate progress by supporting 100 cities in reaching climate neutrality by 2030. This ambitious undertaking is designed not only to foster localized environmental and socio-economic benefits but also to serve as a model that can be replicated throughout the continent.

Cities play a pivotal role in this mission, encompassing only 4% of the EU's land area yet housing 75% of its citizens. They contribute over 65% of energy consumption and 70% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, highlighting the urgent need for urban transformation. Addressing these challenges and achieving climate neutrality by 2030 requires cities to adopt innovative and participatory approaches that engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders at all levels: municipal, national, and European. Such collaborative efforts ensure inclusive decision-making, shared ownership, and long-term sustainability.

## PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL: THE CLIMATE CITY CONTRACT

A central feature of the EU Mission is the Climate City Contract, a non-legally binding yet strategic memorandum between cities and the European Commission. This contract embodies a city's commitment to climate neutrality, outlining specific plans, policies, and strategies. Importantly, it is co-created with local stakeholders and citizens to foster broad support and engagement, reflecting the EU's recognition that meaningful climate action requires collective input. The participatory approach ensures that cities can address multifaceted issues, from urban mobility and energy efficiency to social equity and economic resilience. Through these processes, cities become incubators for systemic innovation and sustainable development.

Additionally, the European Commission recognises that research and innovation (R&I) are crucial for achieving accelerated climate neutrality. Thus, local governments, academia, private sector, and civil society organisations need to form cohesive partnerships to drive the necessary transformative change. No single entity can achieve these ambitious objectives alone, highlighting the need for coordinated and collaborative efforts at the European level.

## **PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL: THE M100 NATIONAL HUB**

At the national level, citizen engagement is crucial for building support for ambitious climate action plans and ensuring a fair and inclusive transition to climate neutrality. Cities act as coordinators of complex urban systems, meaning they must involve various stakeholders, such as citizens, city planners, architects, public and private service providers as co-designers, co-creators, co-implementers, and co-beneficiaries of climate action plans and projects. This inclusive approach fosters a shared vision and multiplies the potential for success by maximizing the impact of climate initiatives. Additionally, co-designed strategies, where stakeholders contribute to the planning and execution of climate projects, foster sustainable urban living and drive a faster transition towards climate neutrality while also generating practical benefits like job creation, directly improving citizens' lives. Therefore, cities aiming to achieve climate neutrality will need strong collaboration across all municipal departments, elected officials, and private/public sector stakeholders. National governments will be responsible for creating an enabling environment through policies and regulations that facilitate local action. Furthermore, the objective to become climate neutral will need to be the highest political priority to ensure realistic implementation. An effective governance structure must be established to oversee these efforts, guided by a shared and collectively agreed-upon vision.

Romania's national efforts towards climate neutrality are exemplified by the M100 National Hub, a Mirror Mission of the EU Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities that facilitates the coordination and support of Romanian cities in their transition. By providing a platform that integrates stakeholders from public administration, private sectors, and civil society, M100 ensures that participatory governance is at the heart of climate action. This multi-level, coordinated governance approach not only aligns with EU objectives but also tailors them to the specific needs and capacities of Romanian cities, promoting an inclusive, multi-disciplinary strategy that enhances local resilience and innovation.

Ultimately, the path to climate neutrality is inherently collaborative. The primary goal of the following guide is to encourage, inspire, and assist cities in redefining the importance of participatory approaches and equip public administrations with the tools and knowledge to take concrete measures that enhance citizen participation and stakeholder engagement. Only through this sustained, coordinated effort that leverages the collective expertise, perspectives, and efforts of diverse stakeholders, cities can become stronger, more resilient and turn climate commitments into actionable realities.



## BEST PRACTICES

### MAIN ANALYSIS

On April 28, 2022, the European Commission unveiled the 112 cities selected to join the EU Mission for 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030, a significant step toward achieving Europe's ambitious climate targets. The Cities Mission, encompassing 100 cities from all EU member states and 12 from associated Horizon Europe countries, provides targeted support and resources to help these cities reach climate neutrality by 2030, setting a precedent for others to follow by 2050. Among the cities chosen, Bucharest – District 2, Cluj-Napoca, and Suceava represent Romania's commitment to advancing sustainable urban development. This commitment is further reinforced through initiatives like the M100 National Hub, which integrates national and EU efforts and serves as a platform for cross-sector collaboration.

This chapter highlights best practices – proven methods and strategies – in participatory approaches used by these three mission cities. Best practices include processes that have shown tangible success, involving citizens not only in policymaking but also in the co-design, co-implementation, and co-monitoring of projects and initiatives. These examples demonstrate how tailored engagement approaches can ensure equitable, inclusive, and effective climate actions, creating community-driven pathways toward achieving climate neutrality, and offering valuable insights and replicable models for other urban centers.





## CLUJ-NAPOCA: CLIMATE NEUTRALITY ACTION PLAN



Cluj-Napoca, Romania's largest secondary city, is not only a cultural and academic hub but also a city deeply committed to sustainability and climate action. As one of Romania's key players in the EU Mission for 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart cities by 2030, Cluj-Napoca is committed to transform its urban landscape and lead the charge towards climate neutrality. Its **Climate Neutrality Action Plan** provides a detailed roadmap for achieving the city's ambitious climate goals by recognizing that the transition to climate neutrality requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society and placing significant emphasis on both citizen and stakeholder engagement. Known for its dynamic innovation ecosystem, the city has already made significant steps in adopting smart technologies, fostering green urban development, and promoting sustainable mobility even before being selected for the Mission. Through initiatives like the "Green Cluj" program and the "Walkable City" plan, the city has engaged residents in co-designing solutions that promote green spaces, sustainable transport, and urban renewal. Additionally, the creation of a smart and green neighbourhood in Sopor, based on a participatory approach, exemplifies Cluj-Napoca's commitment to inclusive urban development. Therefore, a key element of Cluj-Napoca's approach to climate neutrality is the

active engagement of its citizens and stakeholders in shaping and implementing the city's climate strategies. Through participatory planning, the city is ensuring that local voices are heard and integrated into decision-making processes, creating a sense of ownership and responsibility among residents.

In this section, we will delve into Cluj-Napoca's innovative participatory approaches, exploring how the city has engaged its diverse communities to co-create and co-implement sustainable, climate-neutral solutions that will serve as a model for other cities across Europe.

### Citizen engagement

Achieving climate neutrality by 2030 in Cluj-Napoca hinges not only on policy reforms and technological advancements but also on the active participation of the city's residents. The 2030 Climate Neutrality Action Plan recognizes that citizen engagement is essential for fostering long-term commitment to sustainability and driving behavioural change. As the success of climate neutrality depends on widespread public support and action, the plan prioritizes inclusive, transparent, and participatory engagement strategies to ensure that the citizens are not just passive recipients of change but active contributors to the transformation.

The plan begins with a crucial step: understanding existing perceptions, behaviours, and attitudes of Cluj-Napoca's residents regarding climate neutrality. **Surveys or interviews** are proposed to assess residents' understanding of climate-neutral concepts, their willingness to engage in climate action initiatives, and potential barriers in doing so. This data-driven approach allows the municipality to tailor its engagement initiatives to resonate and address the specific needs and concerns of the community.

Additionally, the plan introduces several initiatives that prioritize the involvement of citizens in shaping the future of their city, ensuring that climate action is not only top-down but also bottom-up, driven by the needs and ideas of the residents themselves. **The CIIC (Civic Imagination & Innovation Center) Modelling events**, conducted at the neighbourhood level, represent a pivotal platform for fostering direct engagement between residents and climate experts. These events provide an opportunity for citizens to voice their concerns, express their needs, and collaborate with experts on co-creating and co-implementing climate neutrality solutions. By focusing on a place-based approach, the CIIC ensures that the plan reflects the unique challenges and opportunities present in different neighbourhoods. Other key initiatives within the plan include the introduction of **participatory budgeting**, which allows residents to directly influence how resources are allocated to climate neutrality projects, and the **Net Zero City Caravan** which uses informal neighbourhood spaces such as parks, and markets to host interactive workshops and educational sessions. By removing barriers to participation, such as

formal settings or lack of information, this mobile engagement tool helps to bring climate action closer to residents, making it more accessible and expanding the scope of involvement. Most importantly, the plan acknowledges the importance of ensuring that climate action initiatives are inclusive and address the needs of marginalized communities. Therefore, the discussions organized will be simplified enabling broad understanding and participation, irrespective of education or professional background. **Net Zero City Champions** will play a vital role by engaging these communities, clarifying complex concepts, and fostering trust.

Given that empowering citizens through knowledge and skills is a crucial priority, the plan envisions a **Climate Neutrality Digital Twin**, a groundbreaking tool designed to promote inclusive governance. At its core, the Digital Twin is a platform that engages citizens by providing access to data, simulations, and decision-making tools. It allows residents to visualize the direct impact of their actions and the consequences of proposed climate interventions and specific policies, such as transitioning to renewable energy or sustainable mobility, empowering them to understand and actively participate in decisions that shape the future of their city. The Climate Neutrality Digital Twin offers a model for other cities to follow, demonstrating how digital platforms can amplify citizen engagement and support a collective commitment to climate goals.

Furthermore, the Cluj-Napoca Climate Neutrality Action Plan recognizes the transformative potential of restructured governance frameworks for urban sustainability, particularly within the context of densely populated apartment block neighbourhoods. Central to the proposed intervention is the adoption of **co-creation processes** involving condominium administrators, municipal authorities, and residents, integrating participatory governance principles to catalyse behavioural change and community ownership of climate neutrality objectives. **Public consultations** serve as a primary tool, facilitating the design of governance models responsive to local needs.

### Stakeholder engagement

Recognizing that no single actor can address the multifaceted challenges of climate change alone, the Climate Neutrality Action Plan for Cluj-Napoca adopts a multi-stakeholder approach to ensure the efficient and inclusive implementation of its initiatives. Stakeholders are not simply recipients of top-down actions, but rather catalysts for change and direct beneficiaries of the positive climate impact generated by the proposed actions.

The foundation of this approach is identifying and categorizing stakeholders based on their influence and roles within the city's urban systems. This comprehensive **mapping** enables a targeted engagement strategy that brings together infrastructure providers, research

institutions, residents, civil society, and collaborative alliances. Key infrastructure actors, such as the Cluj County Council, Cluj Metropolitan IDA, and public utilities like Termoficare Napoca S.A. and CTP Cluj-Napoca S.A. are pivotal in integrating climate-resilient solutions into urban development. Their role ensures that the city's energy and mobility systems align with climate neutrality goals. Additionally, universities such as Babeş-Bolyai University and the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca contribute by fostering innovation and knowledge transfer. Collaborative alliances, including the Transylvania Energy Cluster, Cluj IT Cluster, and the North-West Regional Development Agency, facilitate access to funding, expertise, and innovative solutions while financial institutions like the Transylvania Commercial Bank are critical enablers, supporting investments in climate-focused projects.

The transition of Cluj-Napoca's District Heating System to green energy serves as a prime example of how diverse engagement and collaboration are not just beneficial but essential for driving systemic change. The Municipality ensures strategic alignment and public funding, while organizations like Servelect and the Romanian Green Building Council provide technical expertise. Regional bodies such as the North-West Regional Development Agency bridge local efforts with broader frameworks. Crucially, residents and homeowner associations contribute to ensure the solution is practical and equitable. This inclusive model enhances innovation, minimizes resistance, and ensures accountability, demonstrating a replicable framework for achieving sustainable and systemic urban transformation.

In order to empower its stakeholders and ensure that all participants possess the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to its implementation, the plan prioritizes various capacity-building initiatives such as trainings, study visits, experience exchange sessions. Both **formal and informal training sessions** will be organized, reflecting the diversity of the audience, including engaged citizens, technical professionals, public officials, businesses and NGOs. The emphasis on training extends beyond simple knowledge dissemination since it focuses on fostering **co-creation, co-implementation, and co-monitoring** of the plan's actions. The creation of an **interactive website** to serve as the main communication platform for climate neutrality is also a key initiative, providing a space for publishing relevant information about the projects, events, and pilot activities.

Additionally, to overcome barriers and capitalize on opportunities, the plan establishes a **Net Zero Coalition** comprising representatives from various stakeholder groups. Each member will bring unique expertise and perspectives, ensuring that the coalition reflects the city's socio-economic diversity and harnesses the collective power of its ecosystem. This participatory structure enhances transparency and accountability, fostering trust among stakeholders and reinforcing public commitment to the plan's objectives.

Lastly, the **"Blueprint for Net-Zero Apartment-block Neighbourhoods"** – Cluj-Napoca's Pilot City Activity, funded under the NetZeroCities Pilot Cities Programme, leverages the key participatory tools and initiatives mentioned such as the CIIC, the Net Zero Caravan, and Net Zero Champ Campaign, to transition apartment-block neighbourhoods into climate-neutral districts. The project also incorporates capacity-building measures like the **Know-how and Climate Neutral Skills Upgrading Packages**, designed to equip building administrators and ecosystem representatives with the knowledge required to implement and sustain net-zero strategies effectively.

It is important to note that the need for flexibility and adaptation during the implementation phase is essential. The municipality and its stakeholders will need to continuously monitor progress, learn from their experiences, and adjust interventions as necessary to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of their efforts.



## SUCEAVA: CLIMATE NEUTRALITY ACTION PLAN



SOURCE: [WWW.PRIMARIASV.RO](http://WWW.PRIMARIASV.RO)

Suceava's journey towards climate neutrality reflects a steadfast commitment to engaging its diverse stakeholders and fostering active citizen participation. Building on a foundation of successful initiatives - such as pioneering Romania's first 100% electric public transport fleet and promoting sustainable urban infrastructure, the municipality is leveraging its role as a facilitator to motivate local actors. The city has adopted electric vehicles for municipal purposes and has implemented a network of charging stations with incentives for residents who use electric vehicles. By joining the 100 Smart and Climate Neutral Cities Mission, Suceava envisions itself as a thriving green metropolis by 2030, characterized by renewable energy systems, efficient mobility solutions, and vibrant public spaces.

Its **Climate Neutrality Action Plan** places community involvement at its core, fostering trust, shared responsibility, and enhancing the feasibility and effectiveness of the measures adopted. Therefore, by empowering its community and nurturing partnerships, the city is creating a replicable model of climate resilience and collective progress.



## Citizen engagement

Suceava's commitment to achieving climate neutrality by 2030 rests on a participatory framework that integrates citizen engagement at every stage. This model is built on principles of collaboration, transparency, and inclusivity, ensuring that the voices of residents are integral to the planning and implementation processes. For instance, the **co-creation of Suceava's Climate Neutrality Action Plan** was a collaborative effort involving residents, businesses, experts, and public officials. This approach ensured that the plan reflected the diverse perspectives and needs of the community. **Public consultations, workshops, and online surveys** served as vital tools for gathering citizen feedback, understanding specific community concerns and priorities. **Thematic working groups** further advanced this collaborative process. These groups, comprising representatives from civil society, public institutions, and experts, focused on critical intervention areas, such as rehabilitating residential buildings and expanding green spaces. Their focused efforts provided targeted solutions while fostering a sense of shared responsibility. In addition, the plan emphasizes the importance of continuous communication, consultation, and **feedback mechanisms** throughout the implementation phase in order to maintain active engagement. **The CIIC Suceava** also organizes activities to keep citizens informed and involved throughout the plan's implementation.

The **collaborative frameworks** established through public consultations, thematic working groups, and feedback mechanisms directly enable the successful execution of the city's climate neutrality pathways. By fostering active involvement, these participatory methods ensure that citizens are not merely passive beneficiaries but essential contributors to systemic transformations. For example, in the **energy systems pathway**, the envisioned outcomes, including enhanced municipal heating efficiency and increased adoption of renewable energy, require active participation from citizens. Residents play a vital role by adopting energy-efficient practices in their homes, supporting renewable energy initiatives like solar panel installations, and cooperating with district heating modernization efforts. These actions not only align with the city's broader goals but also empower citizens to directly reduce their carbon footprint. In the **mobility and transport pathway**, citizen involvement is equally indispensable. Transitioning to sustainable transport modes necessitates behavioural shifts, such as favouring public transport for commutes, choosing cycling or walking for short trips, and embracing electric vehicles.

In this context, the city has initiated a series of social innovation interventions aimed at fostering citizen engagement, raising awareness, and creating a shared sense of responsibility for climate action. One of the initiatives is the implementation of **targeted social and media campaigns** designed to inform residents about the city's climate neutrality goals, highlight ongoing projects, and showcase opportunities for community involvement. By enhancing

communication between the local administration and the public, these efforts build trust, improve the visibility of the city's actions, and encourage citizens to adopt sustainable behaviours. The municipality has also introduced interactive **online workshops** under the Net Zero Cities (NZC) framework. These workshops serve as a platform for residents and stakeholders to engage directly with the city's climate strategy, ensuring that it remains aligned with community priorities. Additionally, the **NetZero Caravan** brings climate action directly into the public sphere by organizing events and activities in communal spaces.

Finally, **monitoring and evaluation** are central to this approach. Regularly assessing the impact of initiatives ensures that interventions remain effective and adaptable, with citizen feedback and changing circumstances adjusting ongoing strategies.

Through these interventions, Suceava demonstrates a clear understanding that social innovation and active participation are pivotal to achieving its climate neutrality objectives. By promoting active citizen engagement, fostering a sense of ownership, and leveraging the power of communication and social interaction, the city aims to create a sustainable future that is truly driven by its residents.

### Stakeholder engagement

Effective stakeholder engagement is central to the successful realization of Suceava's climate neutrality goals. By identifying and **mapping the various stakeholders** involved such as local governance bodies, public service providers, and civil society organizations, the city has crafted a strategy that emphasizes collaboration, transparency, and the collective responsibility necessary to meet its climate objectives. For example, the Suceava Local Council, with its decision-making power, is a key actor whose engagement is essential to secure policy support and funding for climate initiatives. Other entities, like TPL SA (public transport operator) and Thermonet SA (local heating operator), are also integral to the city's climate actions, as they hold influence over sustainable mobility and energy systems. Thus, understanding the interdependencies among stakeholders ensures that Suceava's climate efforts are holistic and inclusive.

At the heart of Suceava's approach is the principle of **collaborative design and planning**. By involving stakeholders early in the planning stages, the city ensures that climate actions are not only technically sound but also align with community needs and priorities. Public consultations, workshops, and the creation of local working groups serve as forums where various sectors, ranging from public services to civil society, can contribute their expertise and perspectives. For example, the action "Rehabilitation of the municipal transport and distribution heating system" aims to reduce energy consumption and CO2 emissions, thereby

improving air quality and lowering heating costs for residents. This initiative engages diverse stakeholders, including the municipality, heating distribution operator, owners' associations, the Ministry of Energy, and the Regional Development Agency North-East. By involving those directly impacted, this inclusive approach ensures that the solutions designed are both practical and broadly supported.

Furthermore, to successfully implement climate neutrality initiatives, Suceava has recognized the importance of establishing robust organizational and governance structures that enable effective coordination and support. One of the key mechanisms established to support climate action in Suceava is the **Climate City Local Support Group**, composed of public servants, experts, and stakeholders with specialized knowledge in climate neutrality. The group plays a central role in coordinating the implementation of the city's climate action portfolio, providing technical support and expertise to the municipal authorities. By creating a dedicated team with both local and technical expertise, Suceava is ensuring that its climate action efforts are aligned with best practices and that the municipality has the internal capacity to drive these initiatives forward.

In addition to strengthening internal governance structures, Suceava has embraced regional collaboration through the establishment of the **Metropolitan Development Association**, which includes two cities and seven villages. This association focuses on sustainable mobility projects, facilitating coordination on reducing transportation emissions across the region and reaching 100% electric public transport in the area. This collaborative governance model ensures that climate initiatives extend beyond city boundaries, creating a more unified and effective approach to addressing transportation-related emissions.

Given that transparency is another core component of Suceava's stakeholder engagement model, the **Climate Neutral Digital Platform** has been introduced to enhance communication and information sharing between various stakeholders, including public authorities, citizens, and local organizations. This platform acts as an interactive website that facilitates transparency, and promotes ongoing dialogue, ensuring that all stakeholders have access to timely updates and the opportunity to contribute their ideas and feedback.

Overall, the key aspect of Suceava's strategy is **encouraging shared responsibility** and ownership of the climate neutrality agenda. By offering opportunities for active participation, co-creation, and leadership within the Net Zero City Coalition, the city empowers stakeholders to take ownership of the initiatives that will shape its future.

## **BUCHAREST – DISTRICT 2: CLIMATE NEUTRALITY ACTION PLAN**



Bucharest's District 2 stands as a pivotal player in Romania's urban transformation, reflecting both the opportunities and challenges of sustainable development. Home to over 372,000 residents, this northeastern district exemplifies the intricate balance between rapid urbanization and environmental responsibility. Facing pressing issues such as air pollution, high greenhouse gas emissions, and insufficient green spaces, District 2 has embraced a visionary **Climate Neutrality Action Plan**. This plan seeks to address systemic challenges by integrating innovative energy solutions, sustainable mobility, and urban regeneration while ensuring the community's active involvement.

In this part, we will explore best practices concerning participatory approaches, emphasizing the critical role of stakeholder and citizen engagement in shaping effective, inclusive, and sustainable climate action strategies. By drawing on collaborative design principles, transparent communication, and shared ownership, District 2's efforts serve as a model for fostering resilience and inclusivity, inspiring progress across Bucharest and beyond.

## Citizen engagement

The district's Climate Neutrality Action Plan (CNAP) integrates a robust participatory framework designed to address systemic barriers, capitalize on opportunities, and recognizing citizen engagement as a critical enabler for achieving its ambitious climate neutrality objectives.

**Public consultations** have highlighted key priorities, including waste management, green spaces, and sustainable urban mobility. By fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility, residents become more invested in adopting sustainable behaviours, exemplified by the 82% willingness rate to reduce their environmental impact.

Given that the success of initiatives hinges not just on infrastructural changes but also on shift in community behaviours and habits, educational and capacity-building initiatives are essential to further empower citizens to climate action. A primary focus of the plan is the transformation of **mobility and transport** in District 2, where reducing dependence on private cars and promoting sustainable alternatives such as public transport, cycling, and walking are critical components. In parallel, **the energy systems** are set to undergo a transformation that prioritizes energy efficiency and a reduction in carbon emissions. Therefore, public campaigns and educational initiatives are central to these efforts, ensuring that residents are well-informed and motivated to adopt sustainable practices. In this context, the establishment of the "**Center for Innovation in Sustainability – Climate Neutrality Hub**" exemplifies District 2's commitment to knowledge-sharing and public empowerment. By hosting workshops, awareness campaigns, and training sessions, the hub equips residents with the tools and knowledge needed to support sustainable practices, reinforcing their role as active partners in the district's transformation. Furthermore, **Community Climate Action Forums** facilitated by the City Hall in collaboration with NGOs and local stakeholders provide spaces for citizens to engage in dialogue about climate action, share ideas, and collaborate on community projects.

Social equity and inclusivity are also fundamental to the district's engagement strategy. Marginalized communities, often disproportionately affected by climate challenges, are directly integrated into the decision-making process. Through targeted programs such as the "**Social Inclusion Programme for Sustainable Development**" and advanced tools like the **Climate Neutrality Digital Twin**, District 2 ensures that all voices are heard and that the benefits of climate action are equitably distributed.

The **Citizen Involvement Program for Sustainable Reconversion of Public Spaces** is another key initiative of District 2's CNAP, aiming to transform urban areas into vibrant, sustainable, and community-oriented environments. This program directly involves residents in the redesign and repurposing of public spaces, ensuring that these projects align with their specific needs



and preferences. Such participatory approaches ensure that reconverted spaces are not only functional but also reflective of the district's social and cultural identity.

In line with these efforts, the **Digital Platform for Carbon Footprint Assessment and Sustainable Behaviour Change**, part of the **URBANWISE Pilot Project** funded by the NetZeroCities Pilot Cities Programme, empowers residents to track and reduce their carbon footprints. The platform offers citizens the tools to assess their environmental impact, encouraging more sustainable behaviour while contributing valuable data for the co-creation of climate solutions.

Finally, by embedding citizen engagement at every stage, District 2 demonstrates that a participatory approach is not merely a procedural requirement but a strategic advantage. This inclusive methodology not only fosters public trust and social cohesion but also strengthens the district's resilience, ensuring a successful transition toward climate neutrality.

### **Stakeholder engagement**

A fundamental step in effective stakeholder engagement is comprehensive **stakeholder mapping**, which serves to identify and assess the key players, their interests, and the interconnections across different sectors. The Bucharest City Hall and District 2 City Hall are central to coordinating climate policies, managing resources, and overseeing infrastructure development. Their leadership ensures that climate strategies are aligned with the city's long-term sustainability goals. Additionally, entities such as TERMOENERGETICA, the district heating provider, and STB SA, the public transport operator, are crucial for implementing sector-specific climate actions related to energy efficiency and sustainable mobility. Regarding the private sector, business clusters such as the Bucharest Real Estate Club (BREC) and the Association of Real Estate Investors in Romania (AREI) represent private developers and investors, whose involvement is essential in areas like energy efficiency, green building, and sustainable transportation. The integration of academia and research institutions into the process like the Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest (UTCB) and the University of Architecture and Urbanism Ion Mincu (UAIM) provides valuable expertise and supports the technical foundation of the action plan, ensuring that climate action measures are informed by the latest scientific data and best practices, while NGOs such as Climato Sfera and the Văcărești Natural Park Association are instrumental in raising public awareness, advocating for environmental protection, and engaging the community in sustainable practices. Furthermore, as already mentioned, local residents and community groups are essential for the success of climate actions, as they provide input on local needs and preferences.

The **Climate Neutral Neighbourhoods Programme** draws directly from the comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise conducted as part of the district's climate neutrality strategy. The programme intends to bring together homeowners, local businesses, environmental NGOs, and urban development experts to implement a range of initiatives, including the development of energy-efficient housing, the establishment of community gardens, and various other sustainable projects. Therefore, it aims to transform neighbourhoods into sustainable communities by recognising the importance of collaboration and partnerships.

One of the core best practices in stakeholder engagement is fostering **inclusive and transparent communication**. This involves establishing clear, open channels for dialogue where stakeholders can voice concerns, provide feedback, and contribute ideas throughout the process. Therefore, a central component of the District's 2 Multi-Level Climate Collaboration Framework is the establishment of an **Integrated Climate Neutrality Task Force**. This task force, operating within the City Hall, acts as the central coordinating body for climate neutrality initiatives. By bringing together representatives from different departments, the task force ensures a unified approach to policy development and implementation. Its role extends beyond internal coordination, as the task force also serves as a key point of contact for external stakeholders, facilitating communication and collaboration between the public sector, private companies, academic institutions, and NGOs. Thus, it is able to access broader resources, knowledge, and best practices, contributing to national and international sustainability goals.

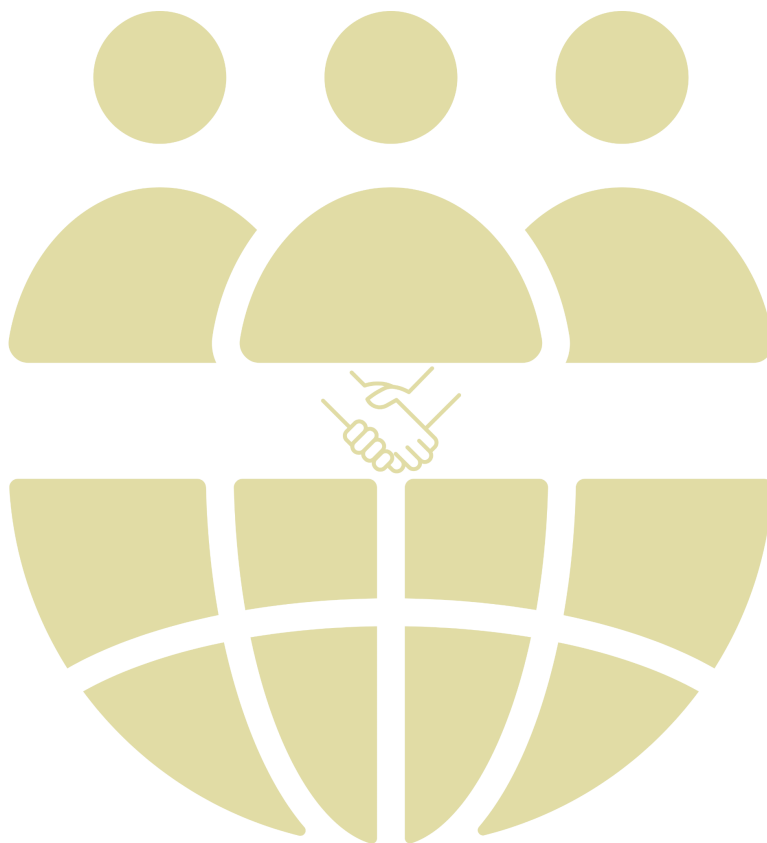
Other key initiatives in the district's governance model are the **Local Climate Coalition**, which serves as a platform for dialogue, knowledge sharing, and the co-creation of climate solutions, and the **Urban Living Lab for Green Cities**. On this collaborative platform, residents, businesses, and researchers come together to develop and test new solutions to address local climate challenges. The lab's primary focus will be on experimenting with green technologies, accelerating their adoption, and creating economic opportunities that align with the district's climate goals while acting as a catalyst for innovation.

In synthesizing, stakeholder engagement must be seen as an ongoing, iterative process throughout the entire lifecycle of climate initiatives rather than a one-time event. It should not be limited to the planning phase but should continue throughout the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation stages. This ensures that actions remain relevant and responsive to evolving community needs and external factors.

## SECONDARY ANALYSIS

Recognizing that urban areas are both contributors to and solutions for global emissions challenges, the European Union has placed cities at the heart of its climate-neutrality mission. The **NetZeroCities initiative**, as part of this effort, exemplifies the EU's commitment to empowering cities as engines of climate action and innovation. As a cornerstone of the EU Mission "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030," NetZeroCities equips cities with the resources, tools, and expertise necessary to overcome barriers to decarbonization. Among its many interventions, the **Pilot Cities Programme** plays a transformative role by fostering participatory approaches to urban climate action.

This chapter delves into the stakeholder engagement tools supporting several projects across the three cohorts financed by NetZeroCities, highlighting how collective governance and community engagement are not merely facilitators but essential drivers of rapid decarbonization and climate-neutrality ambitions. The goal is to provide insights into the innovative practices adopted by Pilot Cities, showcasing how participatory approaches drive systemic transformation and enable replicable models.





## **PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES IN THE NZC PILOT CITIES PROGRAMME**

Pilot Cities serve as living laboratories where stakeholders - local governments, businesses, civil society, and academia - collaborate to test and scale solutions to achieve climate neutrality. Spanning three cohorts, these 104 cities are dismantling barriers, fostering inclusivity, and enabling systemic change through participatory innovation. Projects range from energy-efficient retrofits to urban mobility redesigns, underpinned by a shared commitment to equitable and sustainable urban living.

Participatory approaches are integral to the success of climate-neutral projects, as demonstrated by the initiatives in **Nantes** (France) and **Lahti** (Finland). Being part of the first cohort, both cities exemplify innovative strategies to involve citizens, stakeholders, and institutions in achieving systemic change. In Nantes, the "Carbon Neutrality Challenge" is at the heart of its participatory strategy. This initiative aims to guide households, students, and employees toward a carbon-neutral lifestyle through a series of workshops and activities that emphasize education and empowerment. Participants have access to an online platform, acting as a knowledge hub, where they evaluate their current carbon footprint and track progress toward reducing emissions. Therefore, psychosocial challenges, such as resistance to behavioural change, are addressed by equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge required for a transition to more sustainable practices. Furthermore, the program tackles cultural gaps by addressing fragmentation in responsibilities and improving collaboration between public and private stakeholders. Public policies are also influenced by the insights gathered from participants, ensuring that governance evolves to meet the urgency of climate goals.

Similar to Nantes, which successfully engaged diverse stakeholders in building climate-resilient urban systems, Lahti's approach is embedded in its co-creation methodology, which actively involves local organizations and employees. Through stakeholder engagement, the city seeks to shift commuting patterns from car dependency to sustainable modes such as public transport, cycling, and walking. This is achieved via comprehensive mapping of commuting behaviours, intervention testing in case-study organizations, and the co-development of policies and recommendations tailored for a business district. To address ingrained challenges such as a lack of cycling infrastructure, workplace facilities, and sustainable commuting incentives, Lahti employs a participatory toolbox that includes workshops, behavioural nudges, and structured dialogues with stakeholders. These participatory strategies ensure that interventions are practical, context-sensitive, and scalable.

Moving forward, the cities of **Zagreb** (Croatia) and **Stockholm** (Sweden), part of the second cohort of pilot cities, are also illustrating progressive approaches to climate neutrality through

the incorporation of participatory methods, involving citizens and local stakeholders in the development and implementation of sustainable urban strategies. Zagreb, recognised as the greenest capital in the EU, focuses on involving residents and stakeholders in the co-creation of sustainable urban environments. The city has adopted a participatory approach within the framework of its Climate Neutral Greening Hub (CNGH), aimed at promoting green infrastructure and urban sustainability. Citizens, local businesses, and public institutions collaborate in the revitalization of private and semi-public courtyards, transforming them into spaces for green innovation. By focusing on nature-based solutions like urban gardening and rainwater harvesting, the project empowers residents to implement climate adaptation strategies at the neighbourhood level. These efforts are complemented by public campaigns that emphasize climate action as a communal responsibility, strengthening social cohesion.

Meanwhile, Stockholm's approach to climate transition is marked by the Scale Stockholm initiative, which aims to build local capacity and scale sustainable solutions in the city. A key component of this strategy is the establishment of Local Transition Arenas across five distinct districts, each chosen for its unique socioeconomic characteristics. These arenas serve as platforms where residents, civil society organizations, local businesses, and other stakeholders actively collaborate to test and refine climate and health initiatives. Moreover, the Scale Stockholm project integrates citizen engagement with data-driven approaches to urban planning. One example is the creation of the Stockholm Opportunity Map for Climate and Health, an interactive tool that combines data visualization with place-based insights to guide decision-making. This tool, alongside a range of co-creation methodologies and policy indicators, forms a comprehensive framework for scaling successful initiatives from local arenas to the city-wide level.

Finally, **Reykjavik** (Iceland) and **Kalamata** (Greece), two cities from the third cohort, are employing dynamic participatory approaches to foster community-driven climate action. These cities are not only reducing their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions but also engaging citizens, businesses, and local organizations in co-creating solutions for sustainable urban futures.

In Reykjavik, the pilot project emphasizes public-private partnerships and grassroots involvement, utilizing soft GIS data collection to encourage active participation in decision-making on transport and waste management. The city combines fact, fiction, and storytelling to analyze environmental discourses, feeding into the outreach efforts and helping to overcome barriers to change, such as high car dependency and resistance to waste reduction. Through regular communication, workshops, and focus groups, stakeholders are kept informed and involved, making the participatory process an integral part of the city's climate strategies.

Kalamata stands out by placing a strong focus on schools as key community hubs. By leveraging Digital Twin technology and a citizen engagement app, the city enables schools to monitor and reduce emissions related to energy consumption and mobility. Additionally, Kalamata4NetZero Lab functions as a collaborative space for diverse stakeholders, including citizens, businesses, and local authorities, to work together on climate solutions. The city's novel governance model empowers citizens through a three-tier structure, including School Climate Ambassadors, fostering a sense of ownership and action among pupils and teachers, while also building awareness and capacity for sustainable behaviours.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Identify key stakeholders and citizens involved throughout the process through the stakeholder mapping exercise; Categorize them using an influence interest matrix and analyze stakeholder relationships; Assess the capacity of both individuals and groups involved, along with identifying the incentives and barriers influencing their participation.*
- *Revisit stakeholder identification throughout the process as new information becomes available.*
- *Involve stakeholders and citizens from the initial stages of planning and maintain their engagement throughout the entire adaptation process.*
- *Implement incentives to encourage behavioural change and motivate stakeholders and citizens in the implementation and adoption of adaptation measures.*
- *Encourage partnerships and knowledge exchange among stakeholders, including local authorities, businesses, community organizations, and research institutions; Engage the private sector, particularly in identifying and implementing effective, innovative solutions that address climate vulnerabilities and risks, enhancing adaptation from environmental, social, and economic perspectives.*
- *Outline the objectives, target audience, desired level of engagement, roles and responsibilities, communication channels, and resources required for successful stakeholder participation.*

- *Select appropriate participatory activities and tools that are tailored to the specific objectives of each step in the climate adaptation planning cycle. These may include exchanging information, undertaking joint analysis, promoting mutual learning, enabling collective decision-making, and involving specific stakeholders.*
- *Employ a variety of engagement techniques, including workshops, focus groups, citizen assemblies, surveys, storytelling, climate walks, festivals, hackathons, living labs, and participatory budgeting – critical for creating a secure space for debate and deliberation, ownership of issues, and raising awareness.*
- *Conduct consultations with diverse stakeholder groups to support the design, implementation and/or assessment of the policy; Share how their input was taken into account.*
- *Encourage open communication, active listening, and constructive feedback using tools such as visioning, Pentagonal Problem, participatory mapping, study circles, and cognitive mapping.*
- *Disseminate timely, clear, and relevant information through appropriate channels; Tailor the content as well as the format and the way that information is provided to ensure that it is understandable and accessible for each stakeholder group; Highlight compelling stories and use visual elements to enhance understanding.*

- *Actively engage vulnerable groups and underrepresented communities to ensure equitable participation and address their specific needs and concerns.*
- *Provide access to resources, mutual learning, and support systems that allow vulnerable groups to participate in climate adaptation planning and implementation.*
- *Provide training and support to stakeholders and citizens to enhance their understanding of climate neutrality concepts, participatory processes, and available tools. For knowledge exchange, tools such as World Café, Fish Bowl, role-play exercises and Pro Action Café are recommended.*
- *Track progress, monitor climate adaptation outcomes, and learn from experiences; Regularly report on findings to decision-makers, stakeholders, and the public.*
- *Engage citizens in data collection, monitoring, and evaluation activities such as the ScienceUs Project, NEWSERA, Hackair, and AGORA in order to assess progress and reduce climate vulnerabilities and risks.*
- *Overcome Short-Termism and foster long-term thinking and planning that extends beyond political cycles.*
- *Adopt an intergenerational approach, which recognizes the need to decide and act now without displacing the burden or negative consequences of climate action on to the shoulders of future generations.*