

Governance for ensuring Democratic and Just Transitions

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2.1. Why is participatory governance needed?

Tackling climate change requires deep systemic change across society (European Environment Agency 2019). This change will affect everyone – some will benefit from new business ventures and jobs; others will face the risk of energy poverty, unemployment, health problems, and other negative consequences.

Urban sustainability and effective climate action at the local scale will not be possible without bringing all citizens on board (European Environment Agency 2021). Policy and action on climate change should be seen as intertwined with action towards social and environmental justice, because environmental inequality and unequal exposure to impacts of climate change lead to social inequalities. Co-created climate actions involving different social groups in appropriate ways have a high probability of also being 'just' in nature. If 'justice' is not considered when designing new green infrastructure for example, it can exacerbate existing inequalities, create new ones, or even preserve an unequal status quo (Zacharzewski and O'Phelan 2022).

This report focuses on cities and the need to involve citizens both actively and widely in transitions towards a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient Europe - thereby making these transitions just. It sees citizen engagement and involvement as a key element of Just Transitions processes. While it will of course be embedded in a wider stakeholder participation process, including various other organisations within (public-private) partnerships, this particular focus is also motivated by the fact that there can be partnership without participation but not participation without partnership (Adams and Ramsden 2019).

Democratic Transitions

In this study, we understand that Transitions will be democratic if all categories of social group are able to access information equally and are empowered to be heard, to listen to others' needs and wants, and to co-create and co-design actions for a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient Europe.

2.2. What are the advantages and challenges of participatory governance?

Democratic Transitions is about ensuring inclusive participation and fair treatment for all citizens to make the Transitions 'just'. And it is vital to understand that research has demonstrated the beneficial effects of inclusive participation on the acceptance and sustainability of policy action.

While this effect is expected for participation in the form of co-creation, investigations on two Dutch cities also found a positive effect on strengthening local democracy merely by informing and consulting citizens. With more

involvement, people feel more responsibility for public matters and more engaged, and they started listening to different opinions – at least for those participating (Michels and De Graaf 2010). Choosing higher levels of participation, such as working in partnership to co-create concrete solutions may foster an even better understanding, knowledge, and ownership of policy measures, thereby increasing the sustainability of the solutions developed and possibly more changes in behaviour (C40 Cities). Participation helps to fulfil high expectations and enhances the quality of urban planning by including citizen’s needs, local knowledge and a local perspective (UIA 2022).

As the main users of public and private spaces and services in the city, citizens possess valuable local experiential knowledge on what the needs are and what solutions could be. This can complement planners’ knowledge, thereby offering a valuable asset for local adaptation planning and implementation (UIA 2022; C40 Cities n.d.).

It is crucial, then, that urban planning processes bring everyone on board with open minds. Solutions can then go beyond top-down driven incremental changes and instead, enable the more radical innovations and transformative solutions that are needed (Noll, 2022) and which co-creation with citizens and stakeholders can enable. This method can play a role in creating a carbon neutral and climate-resilient Europe.

It will therefore be necessary to go beyond helpful but stand-alone tools such as citizens assemblies or participatory budgets and integrate these into a broader vision about what society and inclusive governance mean in the context of climate change. The complexity of the climate change challenge requires a governance approach that is much more about empowering and bringing people along on a journey, together with governments, in a systemic perspective (Zacharzewski and O’Phelan 2022).

None of this will be straightforward. Cities will face challenges when they seek to design and/or implement new governance methods, including participatory governance. Among these challenges will be:

- conflicting ideas on what should happen in the city.
- the necessary radical changes in the existing governance models may face resistance by policy and decision-makers as they would have to share power with citizens – finding the right balance between community-led bottom-up and government-led top-down decision-making will be difficult.
- moving to new forms of inclusive & participative governance may require time, resources, capacity & trust building to support citizen engagement as well as local administrations and other stakeholders.
- not all citizens have the resources, time, technical means, or the knowledge to contribute to participatory processes in the way these are often currently organised – the most experienced and loudest may dominate the process .
- regional and national legislation and institutions can impose barriers.
- the climate crisis is currently intertwined with other crises, increasing the need for Just Transitions but also adding cross-departmental complexity to the participation challenges facing cities.

(See also the [Inception Report Democratic Transitions for all](#))

2.3. UIA project selection criteria for this study

While ideas on the opportunities and challenges of Democratic Transitions and about how to deliver this agenda exist, concrete examples that reveal the practicalities of implementation are still scarce. Initiatives and projects such as [Sustainable Just Cities](#) for fair local Green Deals (ICLEI Europe), [Driving Urban Transitions](#) (DUT European Partnership), the [Policy Support Facility](#) for climate adaptation (Covenant of Mayors), and others, have just started. The question was therefore if UIA projects could deliver practical insights and solutions to inform the governance of Just Transitions?

Since its creation, the Urban Innovative Actions initiative has supported 86 projects on 14 policy topics. While there have been thematic calls on climate topics, in particular to support the energy transition, the circular economy, and climate adaptation, none of the projects specifically focused on Just Transitions for a carbon-neutral and climate resilient Europe and the governance models needed to make the transitions more participative and inclusive. Nevertheless, many UIA projects on climate topics and projects on other topics have developed and tested innovative forms of citizen participation and collaborative governance that can offer relevant insights for planners developing participative governance approaches for Just Transitions. Out of 86 projects, we selected 14 for a survey. Out of these, we selected 8 for follow-up in-depth interviews and we present these in this report as case studies (see Tab. 1 below and chapter 5 for the case studies). We discuss the findings from the surveys and interviews conducted with these projects and offer insights from other information sources in the following chapters. We also draw lessons for other cities and higher-level policymakers (see section 4).

Table. 1: 14 UIA projects selected and analysed. On the case studies, see the in-depth exploration in chapter 5.

Acronym	Main Urban Authority	Topic of the call	Case study
OASIS	Paris, France	Climate Adaptation	X
<u>GBG_AS2C</u>	Barcelona, Spain	Climate Adaptation	X
<u>IGNITION</u>	Greater Manchester, UK	Climate Adaptation	X
SPIRE	Baia Mare, Romania	Sustainable use of land, nature-based solutions	X
<u>A place to be-come</u>	Seraing, Belgium	Urban poverty	X
<u>Vilawatt</u>	Viladecans, Spain	Energy Transition	X
<u>CO-CITY</u>	Turin, Italy	Urban poverty	X
<u>Green Minds</u>	Plymouth, UK	Sustainable use of land, nature-based solutions	X
<u>CIRCULAR SOUTH</u>	Antwerp, Belgium	Circular economy	
CAMINA	Almeria, Spain	Culture and cultural heritage	
<u>Košice 2.0</u>	Košice, Slovakia	Culture and cultural heritage	
<u>TAST'IN FIVES</u>	Lille, Belgium	Urban poverty	
<u>HOPE</u>	Helsinki, Finland	Air Quality	
<u>CitiCAP</u>	Lahti, Finland	Urban Mobility	



Figure 1: The geographical coverage of UIA projects studied for Democratic Transitions for All

We analysed the projects through the prism of three interlinked Democratic Transitions subtopics:

- *Fostering citizens' participation* to enable their meaningful involvement in the city's...
- *collaborative decision-making*, which creates conditions and incentives for...
- *behavioural changes* at the individual level (Figure 1).

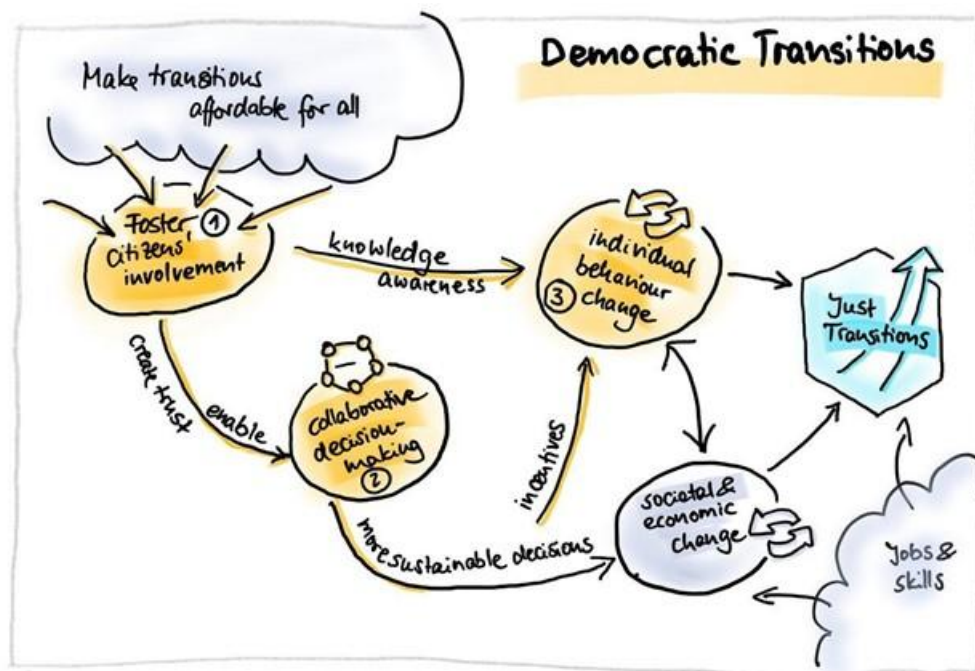


Figure 2: Dimensions of citizen engagement in democratic transitions

See on UIA website

