InPlaLabs participatory action learning approach

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TRANSLATIONAL NETWORK OF INTEGRATED PLANNING LABS CO-CREATING
KNOWLEDGE ON FORWARD LOOKING TRANSDISCIPLINARY PLANNING PERSPECTIVES
ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND URBAN LIFE IN THE POST PANDEMIC CITY.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this document is to present the "InPlaLabs participatory action learning approach" of the InPlaLabs Network.

The InPlaLabs Network aims to support urban planning transformation by fostering inclusivity, sustainability, equity, and resilience among its diverse members. This guide serves as **a resource to promote systemic collaboration, participatory approaches, and knowledge co-creation among network members and especially during their effort to enhance climate-resilient and integrated planning practices**. It emphasizes the importance of effective internal collaboration to strengthen network member bonds and drive collective action towards shared goals, while also providing guidelines for utilizing collaborative tools to facilitate communication among members.

The guide is a combined methodological roadmap including theoretical aspects, communication, and collaboration aspects as well as a comprehensive toolkit, representing how these actions can be implemented in practice by following a structured process.

The guide offers a theoretical basis on collaborative actions by discussing the ambiguity surrounding terms like "community participation" and "participatory design" and highlighting at the same time the necessity for tailored approaches in urban planning. Theoretical foundations of such practices are important in order to ensure a common understanding of the collaborative opportunities provided in urban planning and can be used in network settings to ensure effective communication, collaboration and action design. Indeed, the guide underscores the need for structured participatory processes that ensure that InplaLabs network members have a meaningful influence on decision-making outcomes, moving beyond superficial engagement to empower citizens.

Additionally, the guide introduces Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) as a method that empowers communities to share and analyze their knowledge, leading to actionable insights for development decisions. It emphasizes the importance of ethical standards and prioritizing marginalized voices in the planning process. The guide also provides practical guidance on implementing participatory activities, including various methods to enhance stakeholder engagement, and stresses the significance of gathering feedback to promote transparency and continuous improvement in participatory practices that can benefit both internal (among network members) and external (with external interested stakeholders) collaboration.

2. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the InPlaLabs Network Guide, a comprehensive resource designed to support and enhance the activities of the network.

The InPlaLabs Network is a dynamic coalition of professionals, academics, policymakers, and community leaders, connected across various locations and disciplines but united by a common goal: to reshape the future of urban planning towards inclusivity, sustainability, equity, and resilience. This guide aims to provide essential information to network members and emphasize the necessity of participatory activities that will horizontally support its actions.

The InPlaLabs Network offers its members access to a rich reservoir of resources, data, expertise, and collaborative opportunities. Our mission is to facilitate active interaction and communication among members while promoting Integrated Planning principles to the broader community. Into detail, we aim to achieve:

Systemic transnational collaboration between different Labs: By connecting diverse planning labs and fostering cross-border cooperation, we can address urban challenges more effectively and innovatively.

Inclusive and participatory approach during the Network's activities: Ensuring that all voices are heard and valued, and that diverse perspectives are integrated into our planning processes engaging diverse groups of stakeholders depending on the activities planned and the issues concerned each time.

Knowledge co-creation between various planning actors: Encouraging collaboration among different stakeholders to develop shared understanding and solutions.

Upskilling planning actors on climate-resilient integrated planning: Providing training and resources to enhance the capacity of planners to address climate resilience.

Cultivating an integrated planning culture: Promoting holistic and collaborative approaches to urban planning.

A long-term hub bringing together different stakeholders: Creating a sustainable platform for ongoing collaboration and innovation.

To effectively support this mission, this guide focuses on **three core pillars**:

A. Internal Collaboration and Communication among Network Members

Internal collaboration and communication are the bedrock of the InPlaLabs Network. This pillar addresses the need for robust communication channels and

collaborative tools that ensure seamless interaction among network members. Effective internal collaboration fosters a sense of community, enhances the sharing of ideas, and drives collective action towards our common goals. This section will provide guidelines on how internal communication can be fruitful by the use of collaborative tools, and strategies to promote information flow and effective collaboration within the network.

B. Supporting Knowledge Co-Creation Process

The knowledge co-creation process is essential for integrating diverse perspectives and expertise into our planning initiatives. This pillar focuses on collaborative efforts to generate new knowledge and solutions through active engagement with various stakeholders, including professionals, academics, policymakers, and community leaders. By fostering an environment of mutual learning and shared discovery, we aim to develop innovative and effective planning strategies to make cities more adaptable, equitable, and sustainable.

C. Supporting Knowledge Sharing

Sharing knowledge is crucial for disseminating integrated planning principles and ensuring that valuable insights reach a wide audience. This pillar emphasizes the importance of transparent and inclusive knowledge sharing practices that engage a broad range of participants. By leveraging various communication platforms and participatory methods, we can democratize knowledge, encourage active participation, and foster a deeper understanding of integrated planning concepts among diverse audiences. This dimension will provide insights into effective knowledge sharing practices as well as practical tips and tools for their implementation.

In conclusion, the InPlaLabs Network Guide is designed to be a vital resource for all network members, providing the tools and knowledge necessary to support our collective mission. By emphasizing internal collaboration, knowledge co-creation, and knowledge sharing, we aim to create a resilient and inclusive urban planning community capable of addressing the complex challenges of our time. Together, we can cultivate an integrated planning culture that promotes sustainability, equity, and resilience for future generations.

3. HOW TO USE THE GUIDE?

As a proud member of the InPlaLabs Network, you have this guide at your disposal in order to dive into the world of collaborative approaches in collaboration settings such the one of this network. The guidelines given focuses on two kinds of participatory activities, namely a) internal communication and collaboration among existing members of the InPlaLabs Network and b) external communication and collaboration activities when engaging a wider audience

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and interested stakeholders is considered necessary for the network's works.

Start by gaining a deeper knowledge and understanding of the theoretical foundations of participatory planning, especially when it comes to urban planning and design.

Continue by understanding why these kind of processes are necessary for the network and how they affect the quality of communication and collaboration attempts.

Get familiarized with several participatory methods and tools that are ready to be adapted to your activities, aims and goals.

#Learn how to evaluate the participatory processes and how to become a better facilitator in the future.

4. GETTING STARTED WITH PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

4.1 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PARTICIPATORY URBAN PLANNING

While the terms "community participation" and "participatory design" are widely used, they remain somewhat ambiguous even today. In reality, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to participation, as various methods, tools, and objectives can be applied to different projects. As a result, participatory design projects can take many forms, each with its unique strengths and outcomes. Although there is diversity in definitions and methods there is a core and common features shared by all the approaches regarding the stable structure of the process designed on particular steps about clear questions, the importance of a well-informed group of participants and the existence of visible influence in decision making as an outcome of the process.

In recent years, there has been a profound shift towards a more democratic and participatory approach to decision-making. The European Union, in particular, has been at the forefront of promoting participatory governance by actively engaging relevant stakeholders throughout the policy-making process, from problem identification to policy evaluation. This "participatory turn" builds on decades of experience with various citizen and social group consultation methods. The rapid growth of new technologies and social media platforms over the past decade has further accelerated this shift, offering innovative ways to facilitate meaningful stakeholder involvement and amplify the voices of diverse

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perspectives.

When it comes to planning, **participatory planning** or community-based planning was initially a movement and later a methodology that emphasized the importance of **involving local communities in the planning and decision-making process**. The idea of engaging communities in the planning and designing of spaces dates back to the 1950s and 1960s, when urban dwellers' involvement was first discussed. As Marcus B. Lane notes in his book "Public Participation in Planning: an intellectual history," this period marked a significant shift in planning thought, often referred to as the "revolution" of the late 1950s and 1960s. According to Lane, it was during this time that systems or synoptic planning replaced blueprint planning in both the US and UK, enabling geographers and urban planners to work on a larger scale. This change allowed them to adopt a more holistic approach, incorporating diverse perspectives, data, and opinions. Under this context, it seems like the concept of participation in urban planning, design, and architecture has had a profound impact across the sector.

Participatory planning consists of a network of "public discussions" (forums), organized to facilitate decision-making and communication between government, citizens, "stakeholders", businesses, and scientific experts, on a specific decision or problem. It is therefore a "*democratic process of continuous learning, where participants gain knowledge about themselves, but also the values and opinions of other participants*".

Several academics, practitioners as well as international organizations have tried to provide a concrete definition of participatory processes and set the ground for a common understanding of their nature and role in decision making. Some of the most prevailed ones can be considered the following, which can highlight the interdisciplinary, multiple (complex!) and democratic nature of these procedures:

According to the World Food Program (WFP, 2001) in its guide, Participatory Techniques and Tools, the participatory process is a **people-centered approach** with the greatest probability of success since it **provides the possibility to empower the voice of the weakest**.

Creighton (2005) defines the participatory process as the process in which **the concerns, needs and values of a social group are integrated into decision-making**, both from the viewpoint of governments for the development of public policies, and that of corporate governance.

Another definition comes from Giaoutzi and Stratigea, who consider participatory planning as a "democratic process of lifelong learning, in which participants gain knowledge about themselves but also the values and views of other participants" (Giaoutzi and Stratigea, 2011).

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Another definition of participatory design that goes into more detail and could be helpful to introduce someone to the subject is also the following coming from Robertson and Simonsen (2013, p. 2): *A process of investigating, understanding, reflecting upon, establishing, developing, and supporting mutual learning between multiple participants in collective "reflection- in- action".* In participatory projects, participants typically take on two key roles: those of users and designers. Designers aim to gain a deep understanding of the users' circumstances, while users strive to articulate their goals and needs, and learn about the technological means to achieve them.

In tandem with the development of participatory design theory, architects, urban planners, and public space designers have created various tools and methods to facilitate participation. However, it is essential to recognize that there is no one "right" way to implement participation. Instead, practitioners can ask themselves the following questions, as suggested by the World Food Programme's Guide for Participation (2001):

- Are we truly listening to the stakeholders affected by our work?
- Are the right stakeholders involved in the process?
- And do these stakeholders have the power to influence the outcome?

The above definitions are not the only ones and as society and needs evolve further approaches are added to the international policy scheme. All the existing theories, thought, share some **important common features**, which are found in almost all case studies:

- Participatory processes involve **a two-way interaction** between the decision-making agency or institution and the public, going beyond simply providing information.
- When involving the public in decision-making, **a structured process** is necessary to facilitate active participation.
- **Participants have a significant degree of influence** in making a decision, but not sole authority; the final decision is made by those responsible for policy development.
- Participatory processes are applicable in the development of policies by various public and private bodies, but not necessarily applicable to all aspects of political and social life.

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4.2 DIFFERENT LEVELS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The concept of citizen participation in decision-making and planning although gained significant recognition around 1970, it was also met with criticism. Sherry Arnstein, a prominent voice in the field, famously argued that:

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"Citizen participation is like eating spinach - everyone agrees it's good for you, but no one actually wants to do it."
(Arnstein, 1969, p. 216).

Arnstein's critique targeted the way citizen participation was often superficially implemented in urban planning programs. She claimed that policymakers and planners pretended to involve the public to create the illusion of participation, rather than genuinely seeking their input. According to Arnstein, for participation to be meaningful, there must also be a shift in power dynamics, as mere token involvement does not lead to meaningful change and to this end she introduced the Ladder of Public Participation, a diagram that still affects the way planners and policymakers form and decide upon the way citizens engagement proceeds.

Based on the ladder of citizens' participation in planning (Arnstein, 1969), citizens' power, which includes partnership, delegate power and full citizens' control, differs qualitatively from tokenism, which is made mandatory by the specifications and usually implemented in the relevant studies.

Her main point was that for participation to be meaningful, there should also be a redistribution of power. If the citizens are allowed to share their thoughts but do not really affect the outcomes, then participation is an empty shell, not a meaningful process. That way Arnstein conceived the idea to create a ladder or a spectrum about participation, based on the degree of people having or not having the power to affect the decisions made about planning.

Arnstein's critique of citizen participation was itself subject to criticism. In 1992, John Painter challenged some of Arnstein's assumptions. While acknowledging that policymakers have significant power and should ultimately make decisions on important matters, Painter emphasized the importance of participation and consultation in the process. Painter argued that Arnstein's focus on the methods and processes used in participatory projects was too narrow, and that other factors should also be considered to understand how a community's perspective is represented in the project's outcomes.

The ladder is the following:

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Figure 1: Arnstein's ladder of participation. Source: Kusi, (2023)
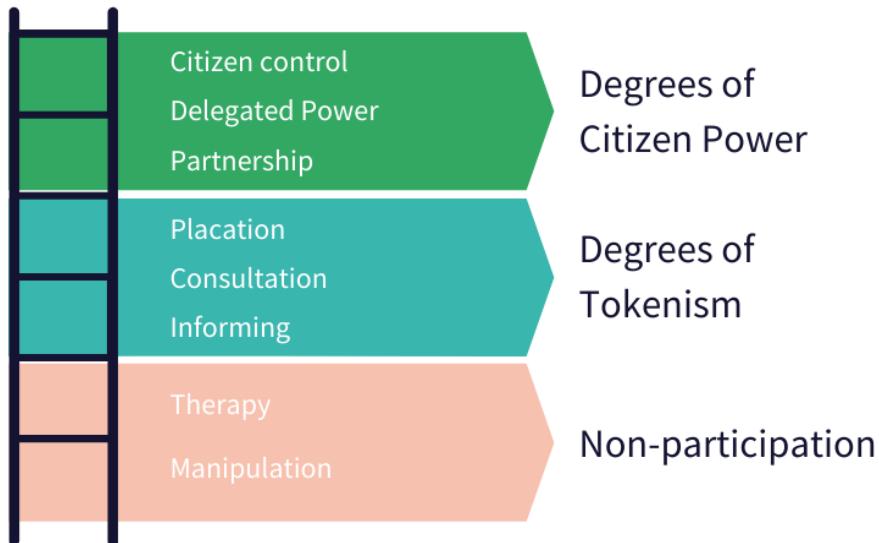
4.3 PARTICIPATORY LEARNING AND ACTION (PLA)

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) **is a participatory methodology**, and more particularly a qualitative research method based on the full and active participation of community members. PLA in fact is "*a family of approaches, methods, attitudes, behaviors and relationships, which enable and empower people to share, analyze and enhance their knowledge of their life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor, evaluate and reflect*" (Chambers, 2008; Napier and Simister, 2017).

By following this approach, networks activities support the enhanced dialogue among practitioners, policy makers, academics and researchers with local stakeholders and community members **to better grasp local knowledge, aspirations and needs when it comes to city planning concerns** enhancing at the same time internal interaction and knowledge co-creation. By introducing this approach to InPlaLab's network members there is the aspiration to spread the participatory philosophy to those involved, exchange and co-create knowledge on these issues, empower them to multiply this approach to national level and create stronger bonds at each city planning and not only ecosystem.

The ultimate goal of PLA is to provide actionable insights that inform community development decisions, rather than seeking academic rigor, and its principles could be summarized as follows (Napier and Simister, 2017).

In more detail the PLA approach is based on the following **principles**:

- Encouraging open discussions and debates in a non-judgmental environment to identify issues, errors, and mistakes.

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- Applying high ethical standards throughout the process.
- Facilitators act as catalysts rather than instructors.
- Using language and concepts that resonate with local cultures and contexts.
- Prioritizing the voices and opinions of marginalized communities, including children, women, lower-caste individuals, and people with disabilities.

PLA also employs a triangulation approach to ensure reliability and inclusivity by gathering information from multiple sources and perspectives. This involves multi-disciplinary teams, comprising community members and outsiders with diverse skills and views.

Its implementation is based on a wide range of participatory tools and approaches that can be used to work, plan, and reflect with and alongside communities and some of the most necessary ones are included in this guide to inspire members on how they can apply PLA to their actions in a more effective way.

5. SECTION 1: INTERNAL COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

The InPlaLabs Network is a dynamic total of professionals, academics, students, policymakers, and community leaders connected across various cities and countries, but united by a common goal: to reshape the future of urban planning towards inclusivity, sustainability, equity and resilience. Through this network, members gain access to a rich reservoir of resources, data, expertise, and collaborative opportunities. The network facilitates active interaction and communication between each member and promotes Integrated Planning principles to the broader community.

Promoting participatory philosophy is evident both among the core activities promoted by the network and its members as well as in the way they collaborate to plan, design, make decisions and implement these actions. In this section, we will delve further into those participatory activities that could be used in order to ensure an effective collaboration scheme among the network members, create stronger bonds among them and finally support the development of impactful, quality outcomes that are able to highlight the interdisciplinary nature of the network.

Based on the above, participatory activities are essential among the InPlaLabs Network's members for the following critical reasons:

#Enhanced Collaboration: They foster a collaborative environment where

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members can share insights, expertise, and resources, leading to more comprehensive and innovative solutions.

#Inclusive Decision-Making: These activities ensure that diverse perspectives are considered in planning and decision-making processes, promoting inclusivity and equity.

#Stronger Bonds among the Members of the Network: Engaging in participatory activities helps build stronger relationships and a sense of community among members, enhancing trust and cooperation.

#Knowledge Co-creation and Sharing: Such activities facilitate continuous learning and the exchange of ideas, ensuring members stay informed about the latest developments and best practices in urban planning.

#Interdisciplinary Integration: They highlight the network's interdisciplinary nature, allowing for a holistic approach to urban planning that incorporates various fields of expertise.

#Quality Outcomes: By involving members in participatory processes, the network can produce more impactful and high-quality outcomes that address the complex challenges of urban planning effectively.

To this end, participatory actions are promoted to describe the way network members interact in a more organized manner. These activities can be multiple corresponding to different needs, aims and objectives each time. In the following list the most effective and crucial of them are presented but there is always an open discussion to improve them by grasping the current needs of the members involved as well as the expected outcomes that need to be delivered by them. In more detail, the following means for collaborative action will be considered by the network members:

#1 Participatory Workshops among Network Members

Regular participatory workshops among network members with the support of various participatory tools provide platforms for members to share their expertise, learn from each other, and work together to co-create actions and knowledge to deal with urban planning challenges more effectively. These sessions emphasize the importance of diverse perspectives and can lead to more inclusive and innovative outcomes.

#2 Participatory Workshops with Invited Stakeholders and Community Members

Scheduled workshops with external stakeholders and community members according to the matter of concern and the target that needs to be reached. These planned discussions can be themed around specific topics such as sustainable development, equitable housing, or resilient infrastructure depending on networks directions and helping them to better grasp current issues of high

matter of concern in the decision-making environment in which their activities are placed. Such activities can have a national, transnational, or international spatial reference depending on the aims of the network and the corresponding issue of concern. Encouraging network members to participate in or lead community engagement initiatives can strengthen ties between the network and the broader community. These initiatives can include public consultations, workshops with local stakeholders, and collaborative projects with community organizations.

#3 Virtual Knowledge Hub

Digital means will be developed allowing members to engage in continuous dialogue, exchange knowledge, look for information and resources, share insights, and seek advice on various projects and issues. This virtual space will serve as a repository of knowledge and a place for ongoing interaction, fostering a sense of community, collaboration, knowledge co-creation and sharing.

#4 Joint Research Projects

Encouraging members to participate in joint research projects can lead to groundbreaking studies and reports that benefit from the diverse expertise within the network. Collaborative research can be supported through shared funding, resources, and access to data, enhancing the quality and impact of the outcomes, supporting network's knowledge co-creation as well as future sustainability.

#5 Regular Webinars and Online Training

Hosting webinars and online training sessions on various aspects of urban planning ensures that all members have access to the latest knowledge and tools. These sessions can cover topics like community engagement, sustainable practices, and policy development, education and contemporary tools and methods, promoting continuous learning and skill enhancement. These actions can be supported by existing members of external invited professionals depending on the subject under discussion.

#6 Mentorship Programs

Establishing a mentorship program within the network can help build stronger bonds among members. Experienced professionals can mentor newer members, providing guidance, support, and valuable insights, while fostering a culture of knowledge sharing and mutual support.

#7 Interdisciplinary Working Groups

Creating interdisciplinary more targeted working groups focused on specific urban planning challenges / topics can support members to improve their collaboration and harness the diverse expertise within the network leading to more effective collaboration and working schemes. These groups will work on

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developing comprehensive strategies and solutions, benefiting from the varied perspectives of their members. This collaboration scheme will be considered and proposed in the future for further development of the network when the diversity and the growth of its participants will be able to support it.

#8 Exploiting the function of Communities of Practice (CoP)

Communities of practice, also known as CoPs, are groups of individuals who share a common interest or passion and come together to learn from each other's experiences and expertise (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). These networks are dynamic and member-driven, where people gather to support one another and achieve individual and collective goals. Think about it - you've likely been part of CoPs in various contexts, such as a sports team, a book club, or a volunteer group. In fact, CoPs are ubiquitous, existing in every corner of our lives. They're often overlooked, yet they play a crucial role in facilitating informal learning and knowledge-sharing.

Regarding InPlaLabs Network's activities, we recognize the importance of collaborating with existing CoPs that focus on supporting their collective action. Our role is to facilitate knowledge co-creation and sharing, while also promoting the theoretical understanding of their actions. By doing so, we aim to contribute to the development of knowledge around their role, the way they operate, and the implications of their actions on achieving sustainability and resilience in urban environments.

#9 Conferences and Networking Events

Organizing annual conferences and networking events provides opportunities for members to meet in person, share their work, and build stronger professional relationships. These events can also feature keynote speakers, panel discussions, and breakout sessions to advance integrated spatial planning through collaboration, and evidence-based strategies, making cities more adaptable, equitable, and sustainable; while opening up member activities to the wider academic community, policy scene and public.

6. SECTION 2: DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING PARTICIPATORY LEARNING

6.1 PARTICIPATORY PROCESS CONCRETE STEPS

As already mentioned in this guide a participatory process, in order to be successful and effective, should follow a structured process. To better understand how it works it is necessary to present a **sequence of more detailed steps** that have been established as the core one and which tend to differentiate depending on the scope of each plan, the particularities of the place, the socio-economic

conditions, the availability of resources, and more. These steps are divided into three phases presenting (a) the preparation / preliminary phase, (b) the implementation phase and finally the necessary (c) evaluation and assessment phase. These phases are presented as follows:

[A. Preliminary stage]

Step 1: Define action's objectives. Clearly outline the objectives of the participatory process that you are planning to implement. Especially within a network's philosophy it is important that a common goal and its specific objectives be clearly defined and agreed among the involved parties.

Step 2: Elaborate a stakeholders' analysis. Identify and invite key stakeholders who will contribute diverse perspectives to the concept you want to further delve into. Ensure a balanced representation of multiple representatives of diverse perspectives to enrich the co creation process. This process can be demonstrated by a Stakeholder Mapping process during which stakeholders of interest are identified and grouped as per their level of participation, influence, and interest in the particular project / action / initiative that is currently designed by the working team.

Step 3: Inform the group of participants. The importance of a well-informed audience cannot be overstated in a properly designed participatory process. Having access to accurate and comprehensive information about the subject in question and the potential changes that can be made is a condition that makes participants empowered to make informed decisions. In such a way it is more possible that the goals and values they set are based on a solid understanding of the relevant facts and feasible transformations. Consequently, the decisions and actions resulting from these processes are more likely to be effective, legitimate, and sustainable, reflecting the true democratic input of the participants. Managing the flow of information in participatory processes is crucial for making informed, democratic, and legitimate decisions.

Step 4: Set the Agenda and find the right space. Create a detailed agenda that outlines the structure of the participatory process and make sure to disseminate it with all involved participants under a reasonable timeframe. Structuring the agenda is not an easy task! Include icebreakers, introduction to the concept, brainstorming sessions, inspiring breaks, group discussions, idea synthesis and presentations to fit your objectives and expectations from the process. Allocate time for each activity, ensuring a dynamic and engaging flow. Also, make sure to find the right space either physical or online that fulfils the needs of the group.

Step 5: Choose Facilitation Techniques and tools. Select facilitation techniques that encourage open collaboration and idea generation ensuring that the purpose of the process is fulfilled and foster creative thinking and ensure everyone's voice is heard. In section 4.2.1 tools and methods that can support this step are presented and explained.

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In addition, prepare tools for participants to use during the workshop, such as sticky notes, markers, whiteboards, and digital platforms for virtual workshops. These tools will aid in capturing and visualizing ideas effectively. Encourage your participants to work visually, as that helps the imagination and usually fosters developing better ideas.

All the aforementioned steps can be described in a **Participatory Planning Strategy**, a document presenting the whole preparation and implementation philosophy of the participatory process to support involved members to have the common perception of everything agreed upon. In addition, an effective **communication strategy** and the necessary **communication material** are also of high importance to keep the audience informed and interested before, during but also after the planned activities.

[B. Implementation of the participatory design activity]

Step 5: Foster Idea and Dialogue Generation. In a participatory workshop setting, facilitators guide participants through an open and creative environment where they can share their thoughts, experiences, and challenges. Participants are encouraged to think outside the box and explore unconventional ideas, recognizing that these often lead to innovative solutions; always by following a structured process that leads to well-defined goals. By collecting as many ideas as possible, facilitators can identify common themes and promising concepts that align with the process objectives.

Step 6: Concept Synthesis. After all ideas have been generated, participants come together to present their concepts and share feedback. This collaborative discussion helps identify potential challenges and opportunities for growth. The outcome of this process could be multiple related to the participatory tools used from the very beginning of the process. More hints on this are available in section 4.2.1.

Step 7: Define Next Steps. Conclude the workshop by defining actionable next steps under the issue and plan under discussion. Depending on the nature of the decision made, assign responsibilities, set deadlines, plan follow-up actions, etc.

[C. Evaluation of the process]

Step 8: Document and Share. Document the outcomes, ideas, and discussions from the workshop. Create a comprehensive report or presentation that captures the co-creation journey and the participatory activity's results. Make sure you share this with all participants and stakeholders for transparency and accountability.

Step 9: Don't be afraid to ask for feedback! After the completion of the process, it is necessary to ask participants to evaluate the process. It will help you understand the weak and strong aspects of the structured process followed, supporting you to improve methodologies and tools used and planned better

future initiatives.

6.2 IMPLEMENTING PARTICIPATORY ACTIVITIES

Effective implementation of participatory actions requires **careful planning**, **facilitation**, and **commitment** to the process.

This section provides practical guidance on how to put all theoretical knowledge into practice, including tips on using participatory tools and methods, facilitating participatory workshops, and overcoming common challenges.

6.2.1 PARTICIPATORY TOOLS AND METHODS

In this section a brief representation of key participatory methods and tools are included as they were evaluated to fit the purposes of the network's actions and needs. In table 1 you can find the list of the tools that are described in the following section in more detail.

Table 1. Participatory tools and methods

Participatory tools	Brief description
Focus Groups	Qualitative research method with a small group discussing a specific topic, guided by a moderator, to gain diverse insights and feedback.
Ideas' Brainstorming	Unstructured discussion to generate a wide range of ideas without immediate critique, aiming for quantity and creativity.
Participatory Tour	Participants explore a place and document their feelings and observations, used in projects related to urban regeneration and planning.
Collective Mapping	Collaborative redesign of a location using maps to document issues, assets, and personal experiences, leading to a nuanced understanding of the area.
Problem / Solution Tree	Tool for identifying and addressing problems by creating a Problem Tree and then converting it into a Solution Tree with proposed interventions.

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Mind Map	Visual tool to organize and relate ideas around a central concept, either through text or drawings, to clarify vision and structure.
Field Trips and Virtual Field Trips	Physical or virtual excursions to observe and learn from environments, applicable to local or exemplary places relevant to the project.
Role Playing Games	Simulations where participants act out scenarios to explore and solve real-world challenges, enhancing understanding and collaboration.
Gamification	Engaging participants through games with a purpose, such as role-playing stakeholders to discuss issues and solutions in a fun and interactive way.
Stakeholder Matrix	Mapping of affected stakeholders to ensure comprehensive communication and participation in the process, addressing potential distrust and encouraging involvement.
SWOT Analysis	Tool for assessing Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats related to a problem or strategy, including spatial data integration for complex decision-making.
Digital Tools	Various online tools (e.g., Miro, Jamboard) used for participatory processes, enabling virtual collaboration and interaction.
Participatory Planning GIS (ppGIS)	Platform for inclusive participation using spatial data and multi-criteria analysis to prioritize interventions and gather comprehensive input from users.

Focus groups

A focus group is a qualitative research method that gathers a small, carefully chosen group of individuals to engage in open-ended discussions about a specific topic or product. To ensure generalizable findings, the hosting organization selects participants who represent the target population, providing a diverse range of perspectives.

During the discussion, a trained moderator facilitates the conversation, ensuring

that it remains free-flowing and unbiased. Typically, a focus group consists of 6-10 participants, with 8 being a common number. Participants share their thoughts, opinions, and insights about the topic at hand, and the moderator takes detailed notes on their comments and opinions.

The selection of participants is critical in focus group research, as it can significantly impact the results. Therefore, it's essential to be meticulous in choosing members who accurately represent the target population. By doing so, researchers can gain valuable insights and feedback on products, services, or ideas, allowing them to refine and improve them for a broader audience.

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Ideas' brainstorming

Brainstorming is a kind of discussion that aims to go beyond the process of a workshop or a round table. The goal is that the participants feel comfortable and free to share any thought or idea they have in mind. Some things that need to be clear are:

- There is no wrong or right idea.
- It doesn't matter how long the process will be.
- There is no critique during brainstorming.
- After the participants share their ideas, the thoughts are organized around axes.

Figure 2: Example of a brainstorming session board. Source: commonspace's archive.

This technique makes the group very active, and the participants feel able to express themselves. It needs time, and effective facilitation of the overall discussion to make sure that all the ideas are expressed and captured for the benefit of the question / statement around which the dialogue is organized. During a brainstorming discussion we aim at quantity. We do not wait for the perfect idea, but we share anything that comes to mind. The more ideas we write down the better. Also, we aim to encourage people to share wild ideas, ideas that are maybe not even possible to happen, an aspect that provides us the

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opportunity to reflect on the ideas set and also build on each other's ideas.

Participatory Tour

The participatory tour is a tool that aims at the deeper connection of the involved members to a place. Practically, the participants can walk around the place at stake and take notes of their feelings and senses at any point they want. A participatory tour can be implemented in different ways depending on the project and it is highly used in projects related to urban regeneration and planning. For example, it could be a tour based on feelings and sensations, a photographic tour, a tour based on noise etc., depending on the matter of concern and the initial aim of the participatory activity. The participants could hold a map and take notes on it. For this participatory exercise to be effective involved parties need to:

● feel free and comfortable to walk around,

● take their own pace,

● make their one stops and express their image of the place in the way decided.

Figure 3: Examples of how participants act during participatory tours. Source: commonspace's archive.


Collective Mapping

Collective mapping is a crucial tool for sharing spatial ideas within the framework of participatory design. It involves the team collaboratively redesigning a location from their own perspectives. Through this process, participants can articulate their visions for the area and identify necessary interventions.

During collective mapping, participants use a map or plan of the location to document various elements such as issues, assets, ideas, preferences, and personal experiences. They can indicate areas where they feel positively or negatively, recount specific experiences, and note sensory details such as noise levels, lighting conditions, and odors as well as indicate areas that deal with

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specific challenges and need further attention under a planning perspective.

This activity results in a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the location, feeding the team with diverse insights and ideas for its transformation.

Figure 4: Examples of Participatory mapping used in different settings. Source: commonspace's archive

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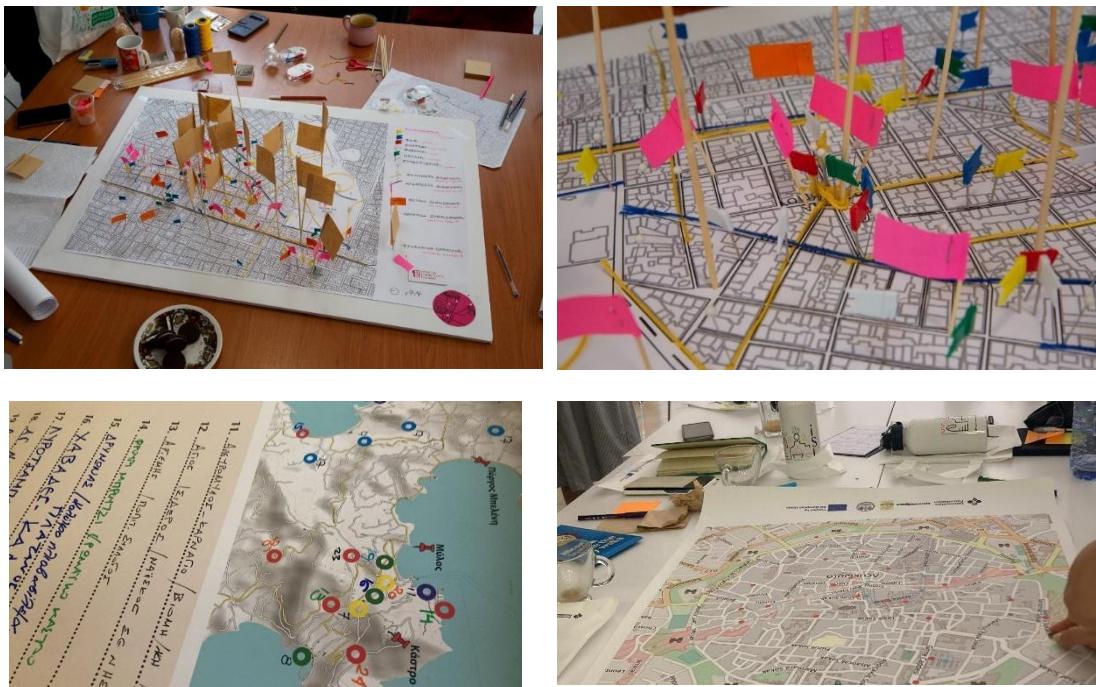
Problem / Solution Tree

Figure 5: Example of the transformation of a problem tree to a solution tree evident by the different colors used. Source: PPLab, (2022)

The Ideas' Tree is another valuable tool to be used by network members when solution generation is on their agenda. This tool consists of **two parts**: the **creation of a Problem Tree**, which is then transformed into **a Solution Tree**. The process begins with team members writing down the problems they encounter related to the general issue of concern on individual pieces of paper. These issues are then organized into a Problem Tree. Once the Problem Tree is constructed, participants engage in a discussion about the problems, their causes, and their consequences, aiming to identify solutions. For each cause, the team proposes a method to alter the situation; for each problem, they suggest a solution. Consequently, the identified solutions modify the outcomes and are defined as the project's objectives. **Through this process, the team converts the Problem Tree into a Solution Tree**, thereby pinpointing strategies and ideas for necessary interventions.

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Mind Map

Figure 6: Mind Map example. Source: Guthrie, (2024)
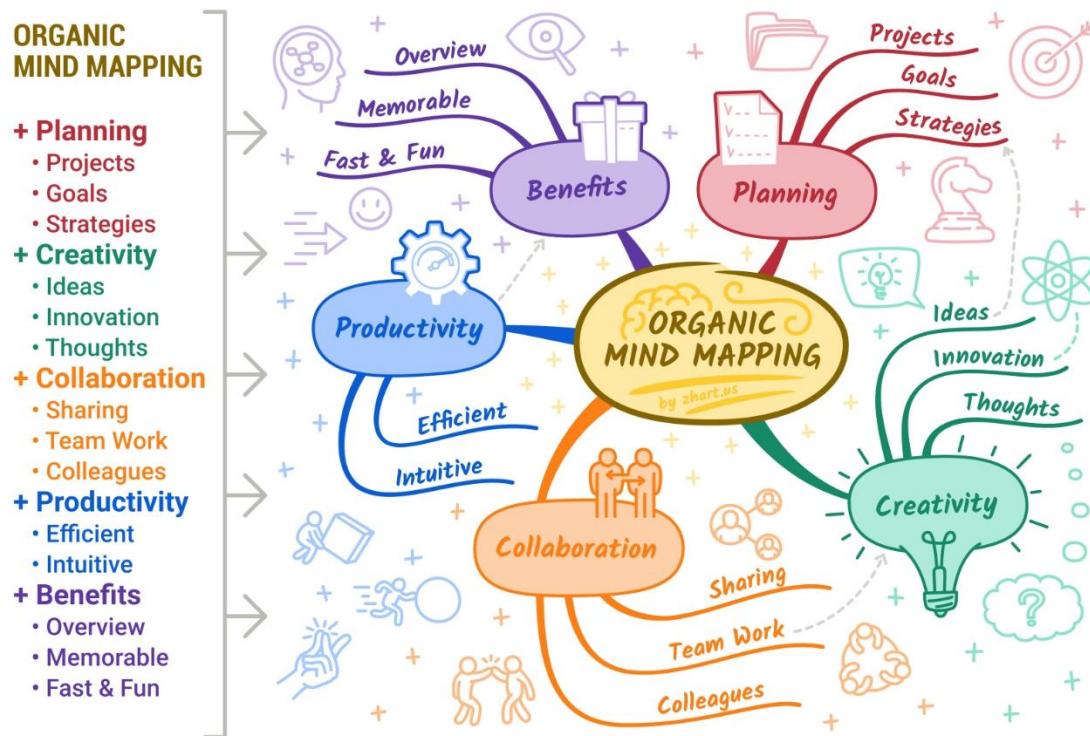
To construct a mind map, the group begins by writing the central idea of their vision within a closed figure in the center of a sheet of paper. Gradually, more specific ideas generated from previous activities are added in separate closed figures, positioned in relation to the central idea. This method helps elucidate the visionary proposal, individual goals, and potential outcomes.

Alternatively, the mind map tool can be used through drawing. Participants are given a blank sheet of paper and encouraged to express their perception of their space, neighborhood, or area using sketches, words, and diagrams. These designs can be as personal and abstract as each participant desires. This approach aids the group in redefining the relationships among different parts of the area in question, reconsidering its structure, and assessing the importance of its components. Examples of such drawings are provided below:

An example and template can also be found here:

https://repository.participatorylab.org/dataset/mental_maps,

Field Trips and Virtual Field Trips

During this phase of the project a field trip should also be implemented. If the place at stake is the team's environment (for example the school), the team could spend a day outside their classroom, in the yard or in the specific spaces of the school that are going to be redesigned. Also, field trips to other places, such as key places in the neighborhood could be organized. Field trips to places that have implemented participatory planning, or to places that can set a good example to the team are also encouraged.

For the Virtual Field Trip, you can get more feedback: https://v-global.eu/results/participatory-toolkit/ as well as an example of The Nature Conservancy programme available here.

Role Playing Games

Role-playing games are participatory exercises where stakeholders simulate real-world scenarios to explore and address multiple and virtual complex issues and challenges including urban ones. Participants are assigned roles such as residents, city officials, and developers, engage in scenarios reflecting current challenges like zoning changes or transportation projects. Through guided simulations, they make decisions, negotiate, and debate, gaining a deeper understanding of urban complexities and collaboratively developing innovative solutions. This approach enhances stakeholder engagement, fosters collaboration, and increases support for final plans while identifying and addressing potential conflicts early. Effective facilitation and realistic scenarios are crucial for success, translating insights into actionable strategies for comprehensive urban development.

Stakeholder matrix

The mapping of local stakeholders is a very important step. The identification of all the people and stakeholders who are affected (both directly and indirectly) by the problems under consideration is necessary.

The transfer of information to the public and the community during the start of the participatory program is a very important part that the participants should not overlook.

It's a common phenomenon that due to the fact that there is a distrust, which

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spreads, there is a hesitation among people to participate. The part of the direct, honest communication strategy by the organizer is a very powerful tool in order to attract the participation of more and more stakeholders that are affected by the problem.

Figure 7. Examples of stakeholder's matrix. Source: simply stakeholders
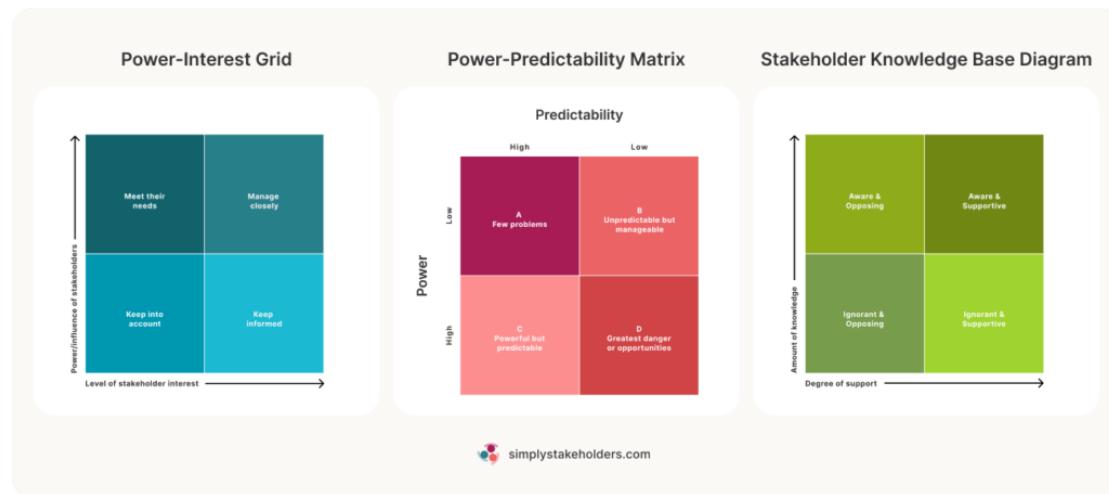
An additional example can be found here.

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SWOT analysis

Figure 8. Example of SWOT analysis used in an urban planning problem for the city of Faro, Algarve region. Source: Berte and Panagopoulos, (2014)

SWOT analysis is a tool that can be used in public space recognition but also during the recording of issues related to the development of a strategy. It is widely used in different professional and scientific sectors as this method manages to map an issue/problem easily, in depth and mainly with wide participation. The acronym SWOT comes from the English: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats.

Spatial SWOT is also a more specific implementation of the tool in order to properly analyze complex decision problems that need to integrate spatial data with or without algorithmic techniques. Within this context a very fundamental role can be played by the integration of spatial information and the well-known Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis.

Figure 9. Example of spatial SWOT analysis, Parco "La Mandria", Turin, Italy.

![InPlaLabs logo]

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Source: Comino and Ferretti, (2016)
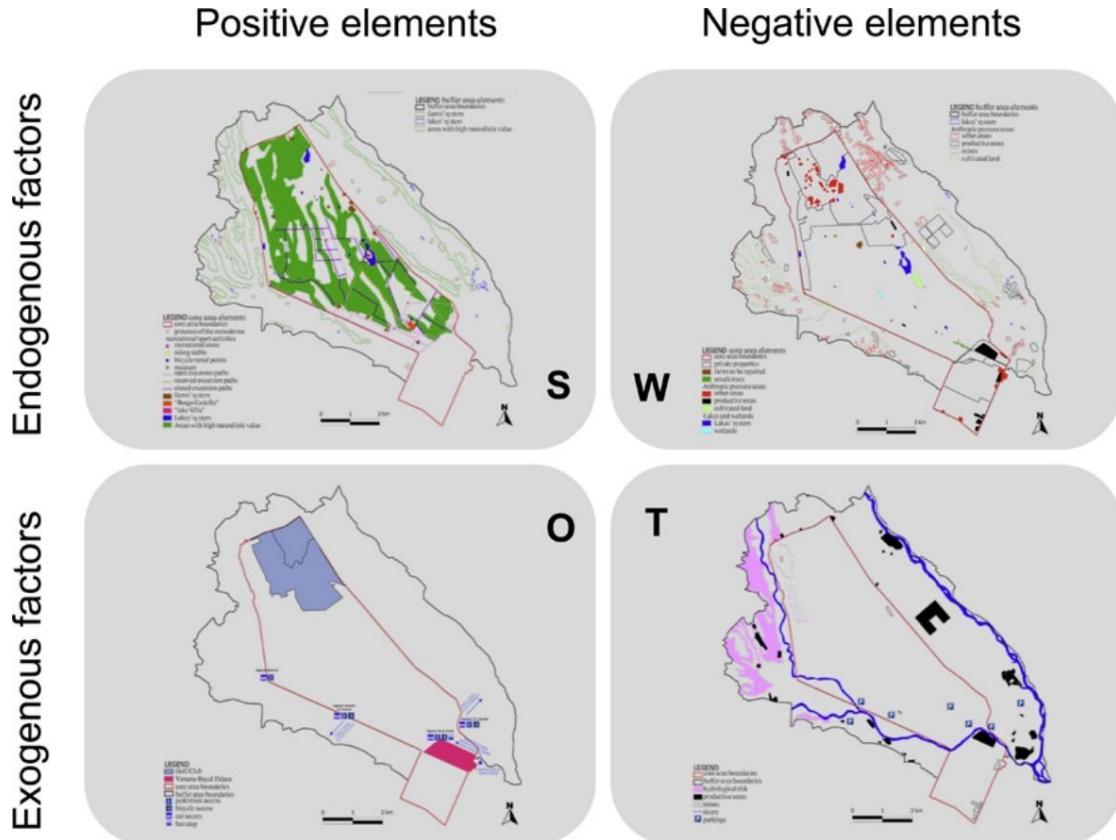
See examples and templates here.

Gamification

Another useful tool for this phase of the project is gamification, meaning participatory planning through playing. Another term for this tool is Serious Games, meaning the games that are not used only for entertainment, but they also serve another goal.

An example of a serious game that could be useful for this specific cause is a role-playing game where members of the group become different stakeholders of the place at stake. Students can take the side of the Municipality, the residents, the parents etc. and try to discuss the problems and the vision of the place through their roles' view. This is a game that helps the participants to understand that there are different approaches to space and communicate better their ideas to the public. Other gamification ideas can be implemented depending on the project and the children's ages. The only rule is to create a fun atmosphere and focus on the playing part rather than the learning one.

Digital tools

Following the digital era and transformation, digital tools have also dynamically entered how participatory processes are being implemented. Especially during restriction measures forced during the pandemic crisis, digital tools and online participatory processes have increased changing the way physical and online processes are realized. Some examples of such tools are the following:

- Miro
- Jamboard, during the step of urban planning
- Bigbluebutton (for the introduction)
- Genially (for defining Objectives)
- Quick draw
- Lino
- Sketchboard
- Sketchtogether
- Drawchat
- Whiteboard/Jotform

Participatory Planning GIS (ppGIS)

It's a unique tool in the concept of participation, presenting innovative features. The platform provides the tools, knowledge, and steps for equal and effective participation of citizens and users. The proposed projects and actions set by the organization are communicated to the users through a targeted and structured communication campaign to ensure the increased participation of the target groups. Supports processes of analysis and selection of appropriate design solutions, proposals, and ideas. Multi-criteria analysis algorithms prioritize the interventions and the weight of the participants' opinions, who are invited to participate in all stages of the process.

Find examples and templates [here](#) and [here](#).

6.2.2 FACILITATION GUIDELINES

Leading a participatory activity is not an easy task! Whether you are up to lead a small group of stakeholders participating in a focus group or have to plan and organize a more demanding participatory outdoor walking tour there are some common aspects that need to take into consideration to ensure that the process runs smoothly and leads to concrete and fruitful results (Koutsi and Flade, 2023; PMI, 2023).

Necessary facilitation tips:

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- **Get Familiar**: Get to know your participants, their interests, and their needs to create a personalized experience.

- **Clarify Purpose**: Define the workshop's objective and scope to ensure everyone is aligned.

- **Set a Clear Goal**: Establish a specific outcome or target for the workshop to focus efforts and make sure that everyone participating has a clear understanding of it.

- **Plan Beyond the Basics**: Anticipate and plan for more than just the workshop itself, including follow-up and next steps.

- **Be Prepared for the Unexpected**: Develop a contingency plan to handle unexpected events or last-minute changes.

- **Create a Welcoming Environment**: Set the scene by establishing a comfortable and inclusive atmosphere.

- **Check-In and Connect**: Start the workshop with a brief introduction and check-in to establish rapport and build trust.

- **Eliminate barriers to participation** (e.g., accessibility, capacity).

- **Check** whether participants are fine to have specific statements attributed to them and (even if anonymous) **get authorization** from all participants to publish information they provide.

- **Establish Ground Rules**: Clearly communicate and agree upon expectations, norms, and roles to ensure a productive and respectful environment.

- **Share the Agenda and Set Expectations**: Clearly outline the workshop's schedule, agenda, and expected outcomes.

- **Break the Ice with an Engaging Activity**: Use an icebreaker to build trust, encourage participation, and set a positive tone.

- **Facilitate, Don't Direct**: Empower participants to take ownership of the process by facilitating discussions rather than controlling them.

- **Document Progress**: Use multimedia tools to capture notes, ideas, and progress throughout the workshop.

- **Assess Goal Achievement**: Evaluate whether the workshop's objectives were met and identify areas for improvement.

- **Wrap-Up and Next Steps**: Complete the workshop with a wrap-up activity, provide next steps, and establish accountability.

- **Communicate Progress and Core Insights**: Share progress, outcomes, and insights with stakeholders, highlighting successes and challenges.

- **Encourage Feedback and Engagement**: Invite feedback, ask questions, and encourage ongoing engagement to foster a sense of ownership and accountability.

- **Act on Feedback and Follow-Up**: Respond to feedback, implement changes, and follow up on commitments made during the workshop.

Find the workshop script at the Annex section to support your planning process.

6.3 EVALUATING THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

Did you manage to reach the end of the participatory process?

Now it's time for evaluation!

Evaluation is critical supporting you to:

- **Define measurable outcomes**: By establishing clear criteria for success, you can identify practical ways to assess the effectiveness of the exercise and track progress towards its objectives.

- **Enhance project and program management**: Incorporating regular review and reflection sessions throughout the process will help you refine your approach, stay on track, and adjust as needed to ensure you're meeting your objectives.

- **Promote transparency and accountability**: Asking for feedback enhances even further the transparency levels of the process allowing the participants to express their satisfaction or concerns on the steps followed and the results obtained.

- **Improve future practices**: By gathering robust evidence and knowledge about what works and what doesn't, you can develop a deeper understanding of the impacts of different approaches and tools used, ultimately informing better decision-making on how to act in future initiatives.

If the evaluation aims to verify compliance with targets, quantitative methods and data analysis are typically used to demonstrate whether specific objectives were met. If the evaluation seeks to promote learning among participants, policymakers, and government officials, qualitative methods such as individual and group interviews, observation, and storytelling can be employed to explain why something worked or didn't work. The reporting approach should be tailored to resonate with the intended audience.

In most of the cases, evaluation processes can be done at the end of the process in the form of a questionnaire and address indicatively some of the following

questions depending on the feedback that you are reaching to get:

1. Demographic questions to get to know your participants background better and support your statistical analysis.
2. Did we achieve what we set out to accomplish?
3. Have we met our established targets?
4. Were our objectives well-defined and realistic?
5. Did our decisions affect current status of participants, policies, and decision-making processes?
6. Did I learn something new?
7. Was the process interesting and fruitful?
8. Do you think that this participatory workshop helped you express your views and ideas?
9. What valuable lessons can we apply to future initiatives?
10. How do you think the workshops could be improved?
11. Would you be interested in including participatory processes also in your work?

Take into account the evaluation results and keep improving your work and facilitation techniques!

7. CONCLUSIONS

This Guide is part of *WP2: Founding InPlaLabs Transnational Network of Integrated Planning Labs - Development of conceptual, digital, and methodological infrastructure*, a set of activities aiming at supporting the conceptualization, creation of a multi-stakeholder network related to planning (HED students-teachers, practitioners, policy officers, and the planning community in general). The aim of this network development is to create a pool of well-informed professionals of different levels of expertise, providing a dialogue floor to exchange, share and co-create knowledge on transdisciplinary perspectives crucial for the post-pandemic climate-resilient, inclusive and human-centric city.

At the heart of the network's methodological approaches and philosophy lies the essential aspect of integrating participatory practices and promoting knowledge co-creation among network members and a wider pool of interested stakeholders. The guide is developed to meet this ambitious goal and inspire the members to embrace more inclusive approaches. The goal of its establishment is this community to grow steadily during the project´s lifetime, contributing to Goal 13: climate action, and 17: Partnerships for the Goals as included in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring a more robust, continues and scientifically-grounded collaboration to this scheme (UN, n.d.).

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● ANNEXES

A. Workshop Script example

Time frame	Title	Goal	Co-creation Method	Workshop Materials	Results
08:00 – 09:00	Preparation and Arrival	● Preparation of the room ● Registration ● Workshop Commencement: ● Check in the agenda of the day. ● A round of introductions and check-in where participants share their strongest experience related to participation, followed by identifying common qualities.		Coffee Registration lists Post it. Pens	Participants are gathered, feel welcome and are aware of the process that will follow.

	Thematic Presentations			Presentations	Learn about the theme we are going to work and get to know better the case study.
11:00 – 11:15	Coffee Break				