

PRACTICE

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EXPERT

Citizen's engagement and participation – a vital requirement to create climate-resilient cities

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The Eco-Street initiative in the IGNITION project

Why does participation matter in climate adaptation projects?

How citizens live and behave and how public and private actions interact can enforce adaptation to climate change or – in some case – hamper it. Effectively implementing climate change adaptation action at the appropriate scale will therefore not be possible without bringing citizens on the journey. Citizens are not an homogeneous group but are diverse in terms of needs, expectations, skills and abilities. Public action needs to consider all of these by using different target group-specific approaches and tools. As the first users of public and private spaces and services in the city, citizens hold valuable local knowledge on what problems are and what solutions could be. Their active involvement will on one hand create awareness, knowledge, creative solutions, and ownership, and on the other ensure that climate adaptation projects participate to building inclusive and just cities.

Why is inclusive engagement in the 6 climate change adaptation projects important to support the needed transformative adaptation action to climate change? How cities ensured it in practice?

Learnings from the projects and the policy-lab

Citizen participation comes in different forms and intensities

As multiple as UIA cities and their contexts are, as manifold are their approaches. Experience from GUARDIAN (Riba-roja de Túria) has shown that complex situations with many different stakeholders require a careful selection of participation forms, involved groups, timing and intensity. Involving them too early without having clearly defined roles for different citizens and their intervention options would risk to raise wrong expectations. Some experience in the past has shown that such insufficient preparation of the process result in disappointment from citizens and dropping engagement. For example, Amsterdam once experienced resistance against participation events as citizens had felt that these were just organised to inform them and their input would not be included.

Therefore, projects must actively involve citizens in the development and implementation of solutions, thus, enabling them to have a real impact. OASIS (Paris) has invited ambassador students to re-design their playgrounds in playful co-creation workshops. Together with teachers they went through a detailed analysis of the different areas of the yard and came up with a first use map. IGNITION (Greater Manchester) has organised an Eco- Street competition where local communities could submit their ideas to green their back-alley ways or neighbourhood squares. IGNITION supported them with small grants and technical advice. Both examples have created greater awareness and engagement due to a feeling of ownership for the places.

Effective citizens engagement needs to be embedded in a supportive framework in terms of knowledge, awareness, willingness, trust and an open-minded attitude, financial incentives and a budget for collaboration, legal conditions, among others. It is important to start the participatory process early and put the focus on the needs of the citizens rather than on the municipality's project goals. Language and knowledge need to be adapted so that the different groups can understand. Appointing a guardian or neighbourhood ambassador to work with the different groups is also an effective tool. It is important to give them a clear mandate and budget.

Legal and administrative barriers at local, regional, or national level can hamper local adaptation planning. For example, CartujaQanat (Seville) needed to experiment with different forms of public private partnership models. The new partnership framework agreement fitting to Seville's circumstances including the University, the city, the managing company for the science park and others will foster ongoing commitment to the management of the newly created space and explicitly ensure broad citizen engagement in different forms to create climate-resilient lively public space that belongs to citizens.

Ensuring inclusiveness and democratic participation

Reaching various citizen groups, such as children, elderly, parents, minorities, disabled people, women, can be challenging but also offer opportunities. Children may have limited knowledge on adaptation planning, but they are usually open minded and like to experiment; migrants may lack language skills but can bring new perspective from their culture and experience, etc. It is important to keep in mind that these groups overlap and people experience space differently (for example someone can experience spaces with a specific-gender and ethnicity perspective). Studying the different groups, their socio-spatial practices, interests, challenges, abilities and using specific involvement approaches is essential. Access to a platform or a space to exchange might not be sufficient for some to voice their concerns, they might struggle to identify and formulate their problems and ideas. Cities must implement measures assisting those groups, opening to advocacy planning.

Going broader than adaptation can help to reach groups that would usually not be interested in the topic. Topics that may be more attractive are health (used by GreenQuays (Breda)), greenspace and nature (IGNITION) or arts and culture through which adaptation needs can then be communicated. RESILIO and others went through intermediary such as NGOs, local groups, social workers and similar, that have established links to specific citizen groups. Working with people who are locally anchored in communities enables better access to citizens and hard-to-reach groups.

Aside of group-specific approaches, OASIS (Paris) found working with mixed groups to be effective. While primarily working with small children on schoolyards, which shall be open during weekends, it reaches also out to their parents and grandparents as well as other groups in the neighbourhood. Mixed group work can help to take the other's perspective and create understanding for the different needs.

Interests between different groups may not just be differing but conflicting. Some may want more parking space others more green space, or some prefer green walls while owners and other tenants may be afraid of too much wildlife, damages to the buildings or higher maintenance needs. The simple participation of the public does not automatically generate democratic decisions. To ensure a democratic participation, the municipality or project

needs to enable all relevant groups to participate actively and voice their interests even if they have less resources, knowledge, digital and other skills, to balance and mediate between interests, as OASIS did with a tailored approach to school children to include this group, which usually drops out of general participation processes. Defining common ground is a good starting point to move from an approach of control to a trust-based one.

CartujaQanat found that a key condition is to listen carefully and open-minded to all groups to create the mutual understanding, e.g., the project partners that had different ideas to develop and manage the space and potential users of the space and solutions. Similarly, OASIS tried to listen intensively to children instead of asking adults, such as teachers, parents, psychologists, adaptation, or health experts interpreting what children need. This brought up new ideas, such as new use chart for the yards, better signage or redesigning existing structures and materials according to the children's ideas and drawings, like changing a plain industrial awning in a colourful surface creating a playful ambience when sun hits it.

Fostering citizens' creative potential and encouraging behaviour change

Citizens are the main users of urban space and thus have a very local knowledge on it. Together with their own creativity, this can be a vast asset in developing adaptation action. This knowledge needs to be requested and brought to light, thus, supplementing professional knowledge. IGNITION's evidence base on the benefits of nature-based solutions has been very helpful for technical adaptation specialists, but it was too abstract for citizens and other stakeholders with little adaptation knowledge. An online simulation tool, where people could explore playfully different combinations of nature-based solutions and see how the benefits change, made the nature-based solutions and the evidence base as a tool more accessible to them in developing their own creative ideas. GreenQuays developed a city-safari and map of opportunities, where residents pointed to adaptation problems in their living environment and provided ideas for possible solutions from their perspective. With more knowledge from co-creation with planners and by becoming active in the process, citizens develop ownership for the results and feel inspired to change their behaviour. They also gain new knowledge that they apply in their own backyards, like planting specific types of flowers that support bees and biodiversity instead of loans or sealed surfaces. Another example that organising many small actions can lead into a cascade of multiple adaptation actions over time, is the unsuccessful applicants of the Eco Street competition (IGNITION) intend to implement their ideas to green their neighbourhood on their own and therefore spreading the approach over the city.



Adapting participation to young children in the OASIS project, Paris

Lessons learnt

- The **local knowledge of citizens on the urban space, their specific perspectives and own creative ideas can be a valuable asset** for local adaptation planning and implementation. The city will need to bring this up with appropriate participation tools and processes and combine these ideas with planners' knowledge to develop measures that answer all stakeholder's needs and are supported long-term.
- The diversity of citizen groups and importance to plan inclusive cities require municipalities to carefully understand the different needs, knowledge, abilities, interests, and motivation of citizens. **Analysing their socio-spatial practices through the lenses of ages, genders, abilities, socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities and religions is the first step** in designing and choosing appropriate participation forms and tools.
- **Successful and sustained engagement also needs resources.** In addition, a central contact point like a guardian or neighbourhood manager can be very effective in bringing all stakeholder groups and their interests together and developing balanced and holistic solutions that fit citizens' needs. It is important that this person has a clear mandate and resources.
- While participation approaches need to be diverse and tailored to citizen groups, the overall engagement process needs to follow a **holistic perspective**. This enables to focus engagement of all groups towards the overall targets, to mitigate conflicts and promote synergies and thus finding balanced solutions.
- The **purpose of participation needs to be clear from the beginning** and the process carefully planned. Then, the right tools and approaches as well as the timing for different citizen groups can be selected. Setting clear rules and explaining what is open for discussion and what is not, helps to create consensus and avoids wrong expectations and disappointment.
- Choosing higher levels of participation, like working in co-creation on concrete solutions may pose **challenges to planners** but creates better understanding, knowledge, learning by doing, ownership of the measures, thus increasing their sustainability. Participation helps to **raise expectations and quality of planning projects**.
- Building **mutual understanding and trust** is essential and requires finding a language that all can understand and bringing knowledge up to a level that enables an active participation. This involves listening carefully to each other and mediate where needed. Working with people who are **locally anchored in communities enables better access to citizens and hard-to-reach groups**.
- Administrative procedures at local or higher levels can hinder certain participation schemes. It **requires will and creativity to find adapted solutions** to that fit to the administrative set up or adjust the framework.

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