

Partnering up for sustainable and Just cities:

Local governments and community-led initiatives

When it comes to making cities more ecologically sustainable and socially just, local governments and community-led initiatives (CLIs*) are better together. CLIs are well-positioned to know on-the-ground challenges and strengths, while local governments have the power to support and scale-up their impact. Yet dialogue and partnership building is lacking between the two.

The next few pages share insights from food-savers, climate communicators, neighbourhood planners and other city dreamers from both CLIs and local governments across Europe who were engaged in ICLEI Europe's **UrbanCommunity project**.

We chose to focus this resource on engagement with CLIs (instead of general resident engagement) because we see CLIs as especially active, passionate forces, spring-loaded to contribute to urban development - if given the chance.



CLIs

Any form of concrete action undertaken by self-organized groups of people towards environmental and social goals.

www.sustainablejustcities.eu



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UrbanCommunity
FOR SUSTAINABLE
AND JUST CITIES



Robert Bosch
Stiftung



Why is collaboration between local governments & community-led initiatives important for sustainable & just cities?

Collaboration between local governments and CLIs makes cities more socially equitable, and urban governance more democratic. It enables long-term, mutually-beneficial and trust-based change towards sustainable and just cities.

- A wider array of people and especially underrepresented voices are accessed and included - a true effort to 'leave no one behind'
- Democracy is reinvigorated through increased civic engagement, accountability, transparency and promoting collective values
- Long-term thinking and planning sprouts from rooted community efforts, contributing to continuity across election cycles
- Win-win situations flourish when CLIs and local governments exchange knowledge and resources. The former offering innovation, imagination, local buy-in, and the latter giving support, resources, and even delegating authority (e.g. "[Right to Challenge](#)" [Rotterdam](#))
- Trust is restored, as people in government and the community develop personal relations and create a positive common narrative of change together, as well as systems and rules of collaboration they remain loyal to
- Social innovation springs up from collective action and inspires system change



Podcast

Listen to Kieran McCarthy, city councillor from Cork, Ireland, share his experience and thoughts on the topic, [here](#).



What challenges exist for collaboration between local governments & community-led initiatives?

Challenges for collaboration usually stem from a lack of something. This can be lack of trust, time, interest, representation, money, skills, imagination, transparency and political will from either side. Some other issues are:

- Inaccessible bureaucracy, lack of common understanding, excessive focus on re-election, and barriers from other governance levels
- Pervasive narratives of disengagement connected to CLIs' fragile trust in governmental institutions
- Missing intersectional approaches, meaning engagement which aims to center marginalised voices and rebalance power differences coming from identity-based privileges and discrimination
- Lack of long-term engagement ensues when local government-CLI relationships depend on one off projects and on certain individuals rather than being institutionally and systemically embedded in governance structures
- Our capitalistic economic system disincentivises personal activism and civic engagement through overwork and non-economic valuation of engagement
- Insufficient systematic processes and spaces for local government-CLI collaboration and follow-up engagement
- Missing incentives and support for both local governments and CLIs regarding climate action and sustainability



How are local governments and CLIs already creating trusting, collaborative relationships?

There are many examples of CLIs and local governments experimenting with how to join forces over social equity and environmental sustainability. Their efforts are based on principles of empowerment, consistency, and bridge-building, among others.

- Simple, longer-term and unbureaucratic funding (e.g. [“Inspire the Neighborhood” Brussels](#), [“AdaptCascais Fund” Cascais](#), [“Participatory voting on citizen-submitted projects” Amsterdam](#))

Note: For a closer look at our findings on money matters,

[read our summary of how funders can support and empower CLIs](#)

- Transparent, consistent, processes and accessible knowledge
- Regular meetings between CLIs and local governments with follow-ups and moments for honest reflection
- Clear presentation of “who does what” on local government websites and other channels
- Multilingual approach, and simple language for lay people
- E.g. The [“Municipalities in Transition” Framework](#)
- Making it personal by connecting as people in dialogue over specific topics
- Acknowledge each other’s efforts and celebrate wins together
- Direct and accessible contact person in local government to liaise with CLIs, and vice versa
- Support each other in projects: A coach or mentorship scheme completes a missing link between local governments and CLIs and builds capacity (e.g. [“Sustainable Neighbourhoods Facilitator Service” Brussels](#), [“Community Climate Coaches” Training Program](#))



Illustration by Carlotta Cataldi

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