EUROPEAN URBAN RESILIENCE FORUM

26 - 28 June 2024

Valencia, Spain

Synthesis Report

Co-creating inclusive climate adaptation solutions: An interactive workshop on citizen engagement.

About this report

This report aims to synthesise insights from the workshop "*Co-creating inclusive climate adaptation solutions*" that took place on June 27th, 2024, during the European Urban Resilience Forum (EURESFO24). Key learnings are presented for each of the case studies addressed during the workshop (namely Malmö, Dresden, Rome, Utrecht and Messinia) and summarised in a set of final reflections and recommendations, with a specific focus on the inclusion of vulnerable communities.

An additional aim of this report is to open further opportunities for peer-learning and build on the connections made during EURESFO24 to strengthen a community of practice around just resilience across projects.

Key recommendations to local practitioners for the effective inclusion of vulnerable groups in climate adaptation planning and implementation:

- Recognize and understand the multidimensional, intersectional character of vulnerability
- Work with intermediaries and cultural mediators to engage most vulnerable communities
- Collect and use data in creative ways: go where the people are
- Reframe from "vulnerable" to "valuable" people
- Building and keeping trust is imperative
- Build municipal capacity for meaningful & long-term citizen engagement across silos
- Design participatory processes with inclusivity & reciprocity at the core

All hands on deck for just resilience: Why context-tailored, inclusive engagement is imperative

Implementing changes - technological, behaviour and social - to transform cities, regions and communities so as to increase climate resilience is a challenge that needs input and engagement from diverse stakeholders. Those communities that are most affected by the more frequent and more severe weather that climate change is bringing must have a seat at the table when discussing how to adapt. In part, this is about building better democracies: making sure that these groups' needs and wishes are considered and empowering them to have their say on their future. But in part it is also about making better decisions: recognising and integrating local knowledge and skills to design and implement adaptation solutions that are apt for local contexts. These two complementary aspects have driven an explosion in the diversity of processes that support citizen engagement and co-creation in recent years.

The workshop

As part of EURESFO24, an interactive workshop was organised to address the key questions:

- How can local governments design and implement *citizen engagement in climate resilience*/adaptation planning and implementation, especially so as to involve the most vulnerable groups in society?
- How to do so in a meaningful and effective way, beyond just "ticking the box of participation", considering substantial resource constraints imposed on local governments?

Participants were invited to engage in 5 different real-world case studies (based in Malmö, Dresden, Rome, Messinia, and Utrecht), each facilitated by local experts and building on the insights of the Adaptation AGORA, UrbanReLeaf, and ACCTING projects.

Participants had the chance to discuss challenges, strategies and good practices to promote inclusive participation and community engagement in the co-creation of adaptation solutions at the local level, addressing the specific needs and constraints of each case.

EURESFO24

The European Urban Resilience Forum (EURESFO) is an initiative co-organised by ICLEI Europe and the European Environment Agency (EEA). Building on a growing number of engaged participants, partners, and activities, the annual event has established itself as an exchange platform for city representatives, experts, and stakeholders from local and regional institutions, providing a valuable space to discuss challenges, solutions, initiatives and strategies in local and regional governments' efforts to adapt to a changing climate, manage disasters and multiple crises and build resilience.

The 2024 edition of the European Urban Resilience Forum took place in the framework of the Valencia Cities Climate Week (including the Cities Mission Conference, EURESFO and the Energy Cities Annual Forum), hosted by the city as part of the Valencia EU Green Capital 2024 celebrations.

Insights from the case study discussions

Case Study 1: Rome, Italy

Context and climate issue / adaptation objective

- Working in AGORA to support the definition of the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy
- Identified nine specific sectors as among the most vulnerable and therefore at risk (Water, Urban settlements, Networks and infrastructures, Cultural heritage, Health, Socioeconomic system, Marine and coastal system, Agricultural and livestock system, and Biodiversity and Ecosystems)

The city must prepare to face increasing climate change impacts → active engagement of citizens is key in the process of identifying vulnerabilities and risks, allowing it to prioritise, in terms of timing and effectiveness, which adaptation measures/actions/strategies to implement within the urban context of Rome.

Key challenge & question

- How can the city of Rome effectively engage its citizens in the identification of vulnerabilities and risks associated with climate change?
- How can citizens be effectively engaged in the selection of mitigation actions to be implemented?
- How? (focusing on the 9 sectors mentioned above, as part of the city's Adaptation Strategy)?

Group discussion results

Discussion dealing with three perspectives:

1) **Methods and approaches**
   - Training and Quality of Processes
   - Target Group Outreach: Engage with the target group through participation in other events.
   - Participation, Budgets, and Online Platforms
   - Collective Initiatives: Activities such as planting trees, etc.
   - Knowledge Exchange Leading to Action
   - Utilizing Public Spaces for Participation
2) **Representation and Engagement of Vulnerable People**
   - Reconceptualise Vulnerability: Shift from viewing individuals as vulnerable to recognizing them as valuable in adaptation strategies.
   - From Learning to Empowerment
   - Pilot Projects: Implement experiences in public spaces and marginalised neighbourhoods.
   - Collaboration: Work with NGOs and associations.
3) **Multi-level and Multidisciplinary Approaches**
   - Dedicated Spaces for Multi-level Governance
   - Metropolitan Open Data Platform
   - Round Table Actions: Facilitate discussions and actions involving various levels of governance.

Case Study 2: Malmö, Sweden

Context and climate issue / adaptation objective

Changing climate, growing socioeconomic inequalities, and rapid urbanisation, making an ideal environment for (extended) heatwaves, with impacts unevenly distributed across the city.

Key challenge & question

Having identified and spatially analyzed the city's especially vulnerable groups, the city now needs to turn the analysis into action. Vulnerable groups that are part of the healthcare/social support system have routines in place for heat waves, but the groups that are outside of these systems have yet to be addressed. The elderly and children in crowded and hot rental apartments, homeless and/or undocumented people, and people with addiction are a few of the groups we have identified to work further within the coming years. How do we reach/communicate with these target groups?

Group discussion results

- Important to manage citizen expectations and provide them with a sense of agency and purpose.
- Important for project leaders/civil servants working with community participation to be given a mandate to actually see the citizens' input come to fruition.
- Malmö's social vulnerability mapping is not perfect but is a good document to base discussions on, both with local politicians and citizens.
- Be wary of "projectification". If citizen engagement is carried out with temporary funds, trust can be severely damaged when the municipality makes a premature exit. A possible solution is to give ownership of the process to local communities, as seen in a great example from France. Most importantly, citizen engagement needs to be part of the municipalities every day work and have its own long-term budget.
- Building and keeping trust is imperative.
- Communicate through local NGOs and use them as a proxy to give your message local acceptance.
- Don't communicate with vulnerable groups by calling them vulnerable. Often, these people have developed their own resilience strategies that are not commonly known or adapted by Swedes, especially if they come from cultures more accustomed to heat. Approach them asking for their expertise, not by asking how they want to be "saved".
- Sweden has an extremely high level of trust in public institutions, which paradoxically means we are bad at citizen engagement. The public often doesn't expect to be engaged but rather expects the municipality to solve any issues at hand. We are in need of an internal change in work culture.

Case Study 3: Dresden, Germany

Context and climate issue/adaptation objective

- One of the greenest cities in Europe but extreme climate events are increasing. High numbers of people who are vulnerable to heat, such as the elderly and children. There are also urban heat islands that do not cool down, even at night.
- The focus of the pilot case study in AGORA is on strengthening resilience to heatwaves: identifying heat-vulnerable groups, showing how the municipality can reach them in planning and implementation, and discussing success factors and barriers.

Key challenge & question

- Which are the most vulnerable groups to heat stress and which key actors could best reach them?
- How can the municipality engage heat-vulnerable groups in the planning stage? Discuss challenges and barriers and success factors.
- How can the municipality engage heat-vulnerable groups in the implementation stage? Discuss challenges and barriers and success factors.

Group discussion results

Most vulnerable groups and key actors: The **most vulnerable groups to heat stress** identified by participants included the elderly, people with disabilities, chronic diseases, low incomes, homeless, women, overcrowded housing conditions, children, workers in open spaces, refugees/immigrants, those in poor building conditions, and socially isolated individuals. **Key actors to reach these groups** identified by participants included social services (elderly, people with disabilities, people with chronic diseases, women, overcrowded housing conditions), NGOs/local institutions (people with disabilities, women, workers in open spaces, refugees/immigrants), foundations (people with disabilities, people with low incomes, women), medical services (elderly, people with disabilities, people with chronic diseases, children), emergency services (elderly, people with disabilities, people with chronic diseases), the private sector (workers in open spaces, social isolation), workers' unions (workers in open spaces), neighbourhood centres (elderly, people with disabilities, people with low incomes), universities/academia (all groups), ESCoS (social isolation), childcare facilities/school workers (children), one-stop shops (identify energy-poor people), and cultural institutions (theatres, libraries, etc. - all groups).

Planning stage: The planning stage faces challenges such as addressing the needs of vulnerable groups in green areas (i.e., accessibility, security, gender sensible views), identifying key contacts, and overcoming planning barriers like late involvement in the planning and lack of trust in the process by citizens. Potential solutions mentioned by participants include adopting a social approach to reach communities, identifying key stakeholders, utilising open spaces (Agoras) for discussions, leveraging existing social bonds for building trust, and engaging citizens early to link their needs with actionable solutions. Collaboration across municipalities (supporting smaller neighbouring cities/localities) and within city organisations (avoid org. silos) is deemed also crucial.

Implementation stage: Challenges in the implementation stage include varying education levels, trust issues, the digital divide, limited financial resources, and effectively reaching the target population. Solutions involve tailored communication strategies across different languages and media, acknowledging and bridging the digital divide, using survey tools for situation analysis, increasing financial support for energy efficiency measures, encouraging citizen investment in their environment, promoting bottom-up initiatives, and engaging citizens in their daily environments (where they are) at convenient times. Early engagement and accessible communication materials are also deemed essential for building trust

Case Study 4: Utrecht, The Netherlands

Context and climate issue / adaptation objective

- Classic climate adaptation interventions to address more frequent peak rainfall events and hot dry periods involve removing pavements in favour of water-infiltrating, cooling green cover. However, local residents often fear loss of parking and often prefer the status quo. This is also happening in the city's less privileged neighbourhoods with few trees, fewer economic opportunities, and diverse groups of citizens that do not feel they have a voice in shaping their surroundings.
- Focus of the pilot in Urban ReLeaf is reducing heat stress by co-creation (inhabitants<>public authorities) in data-driven greening measures, focusing on four of the city's less privileged neighbourhoods.

Key challenge & question

- What (as a public authority) should you do differently to traditional policymaking and action planning, when encouraging citizen-science and co-created planning?
- What changes does this require from public organisations?

Group discussion results

Innovating traditional policy making and action planning for citizen engagement in co-created planning:

- When discussing co-creation, there is an opportunity to combine issues and to accommodate the needs and preferences of different stakeholders -> Storytelling is needed, so that citizens can relate.
- Focus on the commonalities across stakeholders to find agreements, really getting to know the lives and perspectives in the communities (this takes time).
- It is always relevant to analyse and understand the target audience: Citizens may feel intimidated by big/more technical decisions, and they may not feel capable of providing solutions to complex problems. It is important NOT to put them in the spotlight, but to engage them little by little.
- Focus on building trust with the citizens, so that citizen science can ideally create ownership:
    - Co-create not just the data-collection and interpretation, but also the methodology and technology (sensors, interfaces) itself, interpreting data together with the citizens.
    - Moving from only citizen-science data-collection, to shared insights on (possibly combined) issues, making an inventory of 1) possible short-term actions and solutions, and 2) the long term perspective -> Take a walk, and talk together!
- Address communication barriers: Who is talking to the community, the municipality or scientists? How to adjust the language? Actors from the community are needed as intermediaries -> **Capacity building of neighbourhood ambassadors (the actors from the community**

Relevant actions/changes from public organisations:

- Avoid silos -> Don't target issues separately but integrate actions in complementary approaches. Make sure you can provide tailor-made approaches and solutions, instead of sectoral standards (and limitations). One of the biggest challenges is the timeframe of decision-making processes: You cannot rush the process from combining issues, gaining trust, and interpreting issues together to defining solutions. More freedom and flexibility in decision-making, long-term engagement and long-term perspective are crucial.
- Go through a process to come to a clear and limited end objective, defined together with neighbourhood participants, and manage the mutual expectations, i.e., consultation or co-decision-making. Use the communication to increase awareness that heat (stress) is a health issue.

Case Study 5: Messinia, Greece

Context and climate issue / adaptation objective

- A small, mountainous village in Greece faces the threat of wildfire every summer, a situation worsened by climatic shifts, declining demographics and weakening local economic and social structures.
- Despite challenges due to their marginalisation from broader governance structures, the community has initiated a bottom-up process to develop a community-managed disaster risk reduction (CMDRR) plan. Through self-assessment and participatory design, they have identified their strengths and vulnerabilities and drafted a list of desired actions and measures to include in the plan.
- The community is now preparing to engage in a deliberation process with a broader range of stakeholders, including local government officials, regional policymakers, and experts in disaster management.

Key challenge & question

How to strengthen sustainability/durability of bottom-up, community led approaches:

- What strategies can the village use to build effective collaborations with external stakeholders and gain their support to address vulnerabilities?
- What mechanisms can be put in place to secure long-term support and resources for the community-based disaster risk reduction (CBDRR) plan?

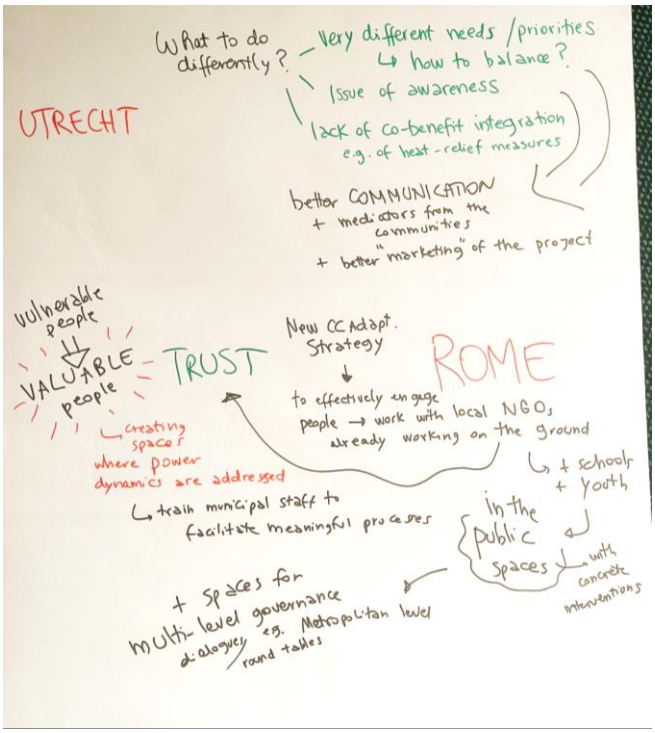
Group discussion results

The group discussion was organised as a role-play, where participants chose a stakeholder role from a set of potential roles, and the local experts represented the village. The discussion concentrated on how the village community could gain support from the different stakeholders, as well as how to secure longer term support for the implementation of the CBDRR plan.

Insights from this lively exchange where participants really played their role are:

- A first insight is the need for project management. Now that the plan is available, it is a matter to translate the plan into a concrete project with a timeline, identifying responsibilities and making those responsible accountable for the implementation.
- A second insight is the potential to bring environmental organisations together with voluntary civil protection groups. These civil protection groups are not (yet) active in the villages. They could be empowered by the environmental NGOs (with money) and expand to the villages. Creating antennas with villagers-volunteers and training them. This would help solve the barrier faced with the fire department, which refuses to work with volunteers that are not recognized by the ministry.
- The third insight is on a possible alliance between the villagers, the forest engineer and the academics. In the discussion, the academics proposed providing the village with expertise and advising on how to implement some parts of the plan developed by the citizens (e.g. regenerative ecology for replanting post-fire and reducing fire risks in future). The initial reaction of the village in the roleplay was one of scepticism to this offer. They said they did not understand these academics, that they felt they were talking above their head, not to them. The forest engineer appeared to be able to act as an intermediary between the academics and the village and translate the proposals and advice. This could create a winning team.

Synthesis discussion and key learnings



With the case studies zooming in on specific and contextual challenges, the following discussion was designed to zoom out and synthesise common questions, learnings and recommendations to foster inclusivity in citizen engagement for climate adaptation. In this discussion two key questions emerged:

- *How can local governments design and implement citizen engagement in climate resilience/adaptation planning and implementation, especially so as to involve the most vulnerable groups in society?*
- *How to do so in a meaningful and effective way, beyond just "ticking the box of participation", considering substantial resource constraints imposed on local governments?*

The discussion gave some crucial insights for practitioners to respond to these challenges that span the different recurring phases of citizen engagement from identification, to design, implementation and monitoring, and particularly underline the importance of building trusting, collaborative relations at the local level:

Recognize and understand the multidimensional, intersectional character of vulnerability

There is a diversity of factors that drive vulnerability and which often overlap, e.g. age, health, housing situation, socio-economic status, legal status, literacy or language. A good example to approach this is the mapping of social vulnerability in the case of Malmö.

Work with intermediaries and cultural mediators to engage most vulnerable communities

There is a wide range of organisations that already engage with vulnerable populations and can provide access, legitimacy and knowledge of needs. This ranges from social service providers, NGOs, community-led initiatives, workers unions, medical services, to neighbourhood centres and ambassadors. Leverage these existing social bonds.

Collect and use data in creative ways: go where the people are

It is fundamental to collect data, for example to identify the areas on the territory that are most at risk, and the vulnerable households whose needs have to be taken into account. This data is sometimes hard to access, due to privacy concerns or lack of capacity from the part of local governments. Experiment with creative approaches to data collection: for example, it can be a good idea to meet the people you want to engage with at their own time, space and pace to collect information about their needs and build connections for further engagement.

Reframe from "vulnerable" to "valuable" people

Those people who are most exposed to climate hazards like heat might also have the most experience with developing creative solutions and approaches to deal with them. These capacities should be recognized and fostered. This includes migrant communities that might already have a lot of knowledge on strategies to adapt to climate change from their country/culture of origin. We need to foster knowledge sharing, with the help of cultural mediators, to co-create adaptation solutions that are culturally sensitive and can actually be implemented. A lot can be learned from marginalised communities, when it comes to the cultural shifts and behavioural changes needed for adaptation in our societies.

Building and keeping trust is imperative

In all case studies, trust between community members and particularly in relation to the municipality and other practitioners was highlighted as a cornerstone for effective engagement and long-term resilience. Key strategies to build trust and legitimacy:

- It is crucial to involve people early in the process and follow-up throughout the process.
- To prevent disappointment, **honesty** is the best policy in managing expectations: be transparent about the objective, timeline and (non-)impact of any participatory process.
- Engage with local groups, NGOs, associations that are already active on the territory.
- Use public space for public engagement, through concrete / "physical" interventions and collective "doing".

Build municipal capacity for meaningful & long-term citizen engagement across silos

Municipalities and their staff need the financial resources, capacities and mandate to make citizen engagement an integral part of their work. This includes training to plan and facilitate participatory processes.

Design participatory processes with inclusivity & reciprocity at the core

In order to reach all parts of society, it is crucial to look at inclusivity throughout the planning & implementation of participatory processes - from communicating in various languages, to offering childcare and fair compensation, or using power-sensitive facilitation techniques.

Support bottom-up, community-led groups

Community-led initiatives are well-positioned to know on-the-ground challenges and strengths and can benefit from the long-term support of institutional actors like municipalities. Before starting anew, look who's already working on the ground and partner up.

Way forward

Next to these messages, a key learning of the workshop is arguably that there is great interest in the question of how to strengthen local (climate) resilience through participatory & deliberative democratic practices. Around 70 participants joined the discussion, each bringing a valuable perspective and considerable expertise to the discussion, leading to relevant insights for the practical challenges of the respective case study and beyond. Certainly, the workshop can only be a starting point in strengthening this exchange and learning from each other towards the objective of inclusive, just resilience.

In this spirit, we would like to keep the exchange going and strengthen the community of practice. A good starting point is following and engaging with the participating EU-funded projects ACCTING, Urban ReLeaf and Adaptation AGORA. Some details and means to engage are outlined in the final chapter of this report.

Within the Adaptation AGORA project, ICLEI Europe will host a range of peer-to-peer learning activities, including webinars, on challenges and good practices for citizen engagement towards climate resilience geared towards local government representatives and practitioners on the ground. To be part of this exchange, become a follower of the project by sending an email and join the AGORA Community Hub.

Finally, the 10th European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns (ESCT) 2024 in Aalborg as well as the 2025 edition of the European Urban Resilience Forum (EURESFO) in Rotterdam will serve as key arenas to continue in-person exchange. All cities, partners and experts seeking to contribute to the sustainable transformation of our cities and regions are invited to attend #Aalborg2024 from 1-3 October, which also marks the 30th Anniversary of the Aalborg Charter (1994) and the 20th Anniversary of the Aalborg Commitments (2004). At EURESFO 2025 in Rotterdam, questions of just & inclusive resilience will remain high on the agenda.

Stay in touch!

Adaptation AGORA

A Research Action funded by the Horizon Europe programme, that support the overall objectives of the Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change. It does so by leveraging and step forwarding best practices, innovative approaches, policy instruments and governance mechanisms to meaningfully and effectively engage communities and regions in climate actions, accelerating and upscaling adaptation processes for building a climate resilient Europe.

- Join the AGORA Community Hub
- Follow us on Linkedin
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ACCTING

ACCTING (AdvanCing behavioural Change Through an INclusive Green deal) is an EU-funded project aiming to understand the impact of Green Deal policies on vulnerable groups, prevent inequalities, and produce knowledge and innovations to advance behavioural change at individual and collective levels for an inclusive and equal European Green Deal.

- Join the ACCTING network
- Follow us on Linkedin
- Follow us on Twitter / X

Urban ReLeaf

An EU-funded project that promotes collaboration between local communities and public authorities to address urgent climate issues related to urban greenspace planning, heat stress, and air pollution. Its mission focuses on community placemaking, public sector innovation, and tailored strategies to reach our common goal of creating greener, more just and resilient cities for all.

- Get involved
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Our teams working on these topics:

- Justice, Equity & Democracy team
- Resilience & Climate Adaptation team

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A special thanks goes to the local experts that contributed their knowledge and efforts in the preparation and facilitation of this workshop.

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Case Study 2: Malmö, Sweden

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Case Study 3: Dresden, Germany

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Case Study 4: Utrecht, The Netherlands

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Case Study 5: Messinia, Greece

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- Panagiotis Giannakopoulos - Co-founder of social cooperative Nostos, Manganiako, Messinia Region
- Alain Denis - Managing Director, Yellow Window

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