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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation:	Definition
DEMo4PPL	Digital Education Modules 4 Participatory Planning
PPL	Participatory Planning
HEI	Higher Education Institute

1. Introduction

This report synthesises the main European Union (EU) coordinates and perspectives regarding public engagement in decision-making processes and, in particular, regarding the development of a Participatory Planning approach in EU policy. It illustrates when the EU has started to include public participation in its Treaties and how this principle has been then translated into practice in the last three decades. By exploring a list of official documents and programmes, this report offers an overview on the experiences developed so far and provides a clear picture on how public participation has been conceived and delivered. It concludes discussing the limits of and challenges for the promotion of participatory planning in EU policy.

The report is structured as follows. After this short introduction, we introduce the Digital Education Modules 4 Participatory Planning (DEMo4PPL) project description. In section 3, we discuss the task's description, responsibilities, outputs, and key definitions which are specific to the DEMo4PPL project. In the next section, we present the evolution of the participation idea from public participation to digital participatory planning from the EU perspective, including the legal and policy framework, participation as a model of policy design and implementation, the importance of public participation in spatial planning, and digital participatory planning. In section 5, we attempt to answer the question of how EU documents have conceived participation, with particular emphasis on the European spatial development perspective and EU urban, rural, and territorial agendas. In sections 6, we discuss how the operationalisation of participatory practices has been foreseen by EU programs and instruments. Finally, we tentatively reflect upon the limits and challenges of participatory planning in EU policy.

2. Project Description

The project *Digital Education Modules 4 Participatory Planning* (DEMo4PPL), aims to develop and test an innovative modular curriculum, supported by the purposeful use of digital education tools, for teaching and training in Participatory Planning (PPL) and digital PPL tools, based on the needs and aspirations of HEIs. It aims to improve the readiness and capacity of HEIs to incorporate state-of-the-art participatory approaches into their curricula, while providing students and practitioners with the skills to practice effective PPL.

The objectives of the DEMo4PPL project include:

- **Innovative Modular Curriculum**: Develop modular curriculum in Participatory Planning (PPL) and digital PPL tools, designed to be adaptable to the needs of existing and new courses across disciplines at the undergraduate, postgraduate, and lifelong learning levels.
- **Upskilling of Students and Practitioners**: Equip students and practitioners with the necessary skills to meet current EU labour market demands and address social challenges effectively.
- **Purposeful Use of Digital Pedagogy**: Implement digital pedagogy strategies for educators, students, and practitioners with the effective use of digital tools.

A main priority of the DEMo4PPL project is to stimulate innovative learning and teaching practices. As digital PPL tools are increasingly relevant to contemporary spatial planning and territorial development, the project will address the corresponding demand in the labour market by offering modular education options to better prepare students and practitioners. This will enable for more effective PPL, directly related to citizen participation in planning and development. Project partners will develop learning pathways toward education and training, based on the assessment of their needs, gaps, and good practice. The DEMo4PPL project's modular approach creates synergies between undergraduate, postgraduate, and lifelong-learning and training programmes in higher education.

The list of partners contributing to the implementation of this project includes:

- Panepistimio Thessalias, Greece (Lead Partner),
- Politecnico Di Torino, Italy (Partner),
- Visshe Uchilishte Po Menidzhmant, Bulgaria (Partner),
- Uniwersytet Lodzk, Poland (Partner),
- Sillogos Ellinon Michanikon Poleodomias, Chorotaxias Kai Periferiakis Anaptixis, Greece (Partner).

3. Task's Description, Responsibility, Output and Definitions

Activity 2.1, "Overview of Participatory Planning Approach in EU Policy", aims to conduct an overview of the Participatory Planning approach in EU policy to analyse PPL approaches, policies and practices, as well as toolkits by researching online documents and platforms. The leading responsibility in delivering this task is on POLITO and the University of Lodz, while the output is to produce a report on Participatory Planning approaches and practice at the EU level.

The project adopts the following set of definitions:

- **Public participation**: A process that directly engages the civic society's decision-making and, more in general, in public action.
- **Participatory planning (PPL)**: A process by which a community undertakes to reach a specific goal by consciously assessing its elements and outlining a course of action to address those elements.
- **Digital participatory planning (PPL) tools**: Digital tools facilitate public participation in planning, allowing community member to generate/communicate/share knowledge and information about their environment.

4. From Public Participation to Digital Participation Planning: the EU Perspective

4.1. An introduction to 'participation issue' in the European Union: legal and policy framework

The right of every citizen to participate in democratic life was primarily addressed by the European Union (EU) with the ratification of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) in 1992. At the time, a deep sense of malaise and public disaffection with the European construct emerged. The need for "closer-to-citizens" became important in shaping the EU governance – as stated by the adoption of the [White Paper on European Governance](#), which, among others, aimed to reinforce the culture of consultation and dialogue at the EU level and thereby increase the legitimacy of the decisions taken. More specifically, the paper highlights five principles of 'good governance': openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence, which not only underpin democracy and the rule of law in the Member States but also apply to all levels of government. A few years later, in 2002, the European Commission adopted the General principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties[1] by the Commission (EC Principles and Minimum Standards). However, the milestone of the "Citizens' Europe" and the possibility for participation in policy-making at the EU level and in the Member States was enshrined in the TEU, in force from 2009 ("Treaty of Lisbon"), in section/title 2 – Provisions on democratic principles, specifically in articles 10 and 11. While Article 10 prescribes that every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union and decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen, Article 11 introduces, for the first time, an element of obligation and a legal basis for participation. Accordingly, the institutions shall, by appropriate means, allow citizens and associations to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action.

Based on what was developed in the last 30 years of advancements in delivering the public participation mechanism, the European Union today provides a wide array of participatory opportunities for its citizens to engage with – and potentially influence – EU decision-making. Based on the broad concept of democratic participation, which stems from the previous section and most recent case law, it is possible to map out the major participatory mechanisms existing under EU law. Those include:

- Requests for access to documents of the EU institutions,
- Petitions to Parliament,
- Public consultations by the Commission,
- Complaints to the European Ombudsman,
- Complaints to the Commission,
- European Citizens' Initiative.

In this regard, the EU has initiated the European Commission's [Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy](#) to facilitate the implementation of public participation and monitor related initiatives.

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[1] [LexUriServ.do (europa.eu)](#)

4.2. Participation as a model of policy design and implementation

Since the early 90s, the EU has questioned how to include citizens in the policy design and implementation mechanisms. One of the first attempts to institutionalise it is represented by the Aarhus Convention - Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters that dates back to 1998. In its first article, the Convention establishes:

"In order to contribute to the protection of the right of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being, each Party shall guarantee the rights of access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters in accordance with the provisions of this Convention".

Even though referring to the environmental sector, the will to involve citizens in the decision-making process represented an important step towards introducing participatory mechanisms.

On the basis of the Aarhus Convention the Directive 2003/35/EC on public participation in respect of the drawing up of certain plans and programs relating to the environment was introduced (Aarhus Directive). More in detail, the directive transposes elements of the Aarhus Convention into EU law. It ensures that the public has the opportunity to participate in the preparation and modification of certain plans and programs relating to the environment. This has been then followed by the Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (Environmental Impact Assessment - EIA Directive). More specifically, the EIA Directive establishes procedures for the assessment of the environmental effects of certain public and private projects before they are approved. It includes provisions for public participation in the decision-making process. An amendment of it has been approved in 2018 (Directive (EU) 2018/410 amending Directive 2003/87/EC), which includes provisions related to public participation in the preparation of national energy and climate plans as part of the effort to implement the EU's climate and energy policy. The EU Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC) was approved in parallel with the EIA. The SEA Directive requires the assessment of the environmental impact of certain plans and programs at an early stage of their preparation. It also includes provisions for public participation in the strategic environmental assessment process. These documents collectively contribute to fostering transparency, public access to information, and involvement in the European Union's environmental and other relevant decision-making processes.

4.3. Public Participation in spatial planning: why is it important?

Representative democracy regimes are increasingly incorporating instruments of direct and collaborative democracy in their decision-making processes (Slaev et al., 2019). Extensive research on this topic shows a clear trend in the direction of opening up decision-making arenas to a multitude of actors and many European countries, in the last decade, have been embracing institutional models oriented towards citizen engagement (Nadin et al., 2020; Hossu, Oliveira and Niță, 2022). However, community participation in urban governance and planning is not a new topic. Arnstein (1969) questioned the different degrees of citizens' involvement in planning as early as the 1960s.

Spatial planning as "institutional technology" (Janin Rivolin 2012) has the mandate to address territorial development by ensuring the balance between private and public interests. More specifically, spatial planning processes consist of a plan-making phase and plan-implementation phase, which involves the practical implementation of the designed plans and complementary decision-making (Hersperger et al., 2019). The objective of both phases is to set frameworks and principles to guide the location of development and physical infrastructure (Healey, 1997). To this end, recent spatial planning practices have underlined the importance and relying on broader participation to ensure equity and legitimacy, as well as to include tacit and expert knowledge in the planning processes (Pinel, 2015).

Two perspectives emerge that enhance the legitimacy and democratic value of participatory practices, i.e., first, Forester's deliberative approach to planning practice and Susskind and Cruikshank's consensus-building perspective (Forester, 1999). They concur that ensuring legitimacy and democratic decisions in complex and conflicting spatial planning contexts requires organising a pluralistic and equitable process through facilitative practices and mediators.

Such practices include online and offline surveys, participation through Internet-based knowledge platforms, an in-depth dialogue within neighbourhood walks, individual talks, living labs, or charrettes (Özdemir & Tasan-Kok, 2017). In this respect, citizens' participation is often considered an indicator of urban liveability (Ariyanti et al., 2020) and a primary driving force for improving urban environmental quality (Mouratidis, 2021).

To sum up, enhancing public participation is important because, as a democratic process, it ensures that decisions about the use and development of land are made transparently and democratically allowing citizens to have a voice in shaping their communities and to participate in decisions that affect their lives (Bragaglia et al., 2024). Moreover, the activation of Participatory Planning enhanced legitimacy and acceptance. When the public is involved in the planning process, resulting decisions are more likely to be seen as legitimate and accepted by the community. This can help to prevent conflicts and opposition to development projects, leading to smoother implementation and greater public support over the long term. Yet importantly, it increased accountability. Indeed, experiences show that engaging the public in spatial planning increases the accountability of decision-makers by making them more responsive to the needs and concerns of the community. This helps to build trust between government institutions and citizens, leading to more effective governance and better outcomes for society as a whole.

What to keep in mind?

Public Participation is an essential feature of spatial planning. It increases citizens' awareness and impact in the decision-making process. Participatory planning has slowly become a method to shape cities and territories future development perspectives building trust between government and the community.

4.4. Digital tools and participatory planning

The wording 'digital participatory planning' refers to the use of digital tools and technologies to facilitate and enhance participatory processes in spatial planning and urban development. It leverages digital platforms, software applications, and online communication channels to engage stakeholders and the public in decision-making processes related to the use, development, and management of urban and rural areas. As instruments it can be:

- Online Platforms: Digital platforms specifically designed for participatory planning purposes provide a central hub where stakeholders can access information, share ideas, and participate in discussions. These platforms often feature interactive maps, surveys, forums, and other tools to facilitate engagement.
- Geospatial Technologies: Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and other geospatial technologies play a crucial role in digital participatory planning by enabling stakeholders to visualize spatial data, analyse patterns, and understand the implications of different planning decisions. Interactive maps and visualization tools allow participants to explore and provide feedback on proposed projects and policies.
- Virtual Meetings and Workshops: Digital participatory planning may involve virtual meetings, webinars, and online workshops to facilitate discussions and collaboration among stakeholders, particularly when in-person meetings are not feasible or practical. Video conferencing and collaboration platforms enable real-time communication and interaction among participants from different locations.
- Data Visualization and Communication: Digital tools enable planners to present complex information in accessible and engaging formats, such as interactive visualizations, infographics, and storytelling techniques. Clear and compelling communication helps to increase understanding and awareness among stakeholders and the broader public.

Using these kinds of instruments is highly encouraged from the EU perspective, but it cannot be imposed on EU territories and communities. While digitalisation (and digitalisation of public processes) is at the top of the EU agenda, the EU has no mandate to force anyone to use this technological tool to perform participatory planning through digital devices. While the EU does not mandate the use of specific planning methods or technologies, it does provide guidelines, recommendations, and funding opportunities to support member states in adopting innovative and participatory approaches to spatial planning, including digital tools and technologies. In this respect, the JRC Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy has a collection of examples and good practices in the field of digital participatory planning.

> **What to keep in mind?**
>
> The EU does not have the authority to compel the use of technological tools for participatory planning via digital devices; instead, it assists territories in implementing digital participatory planning initiatives.

5. How did EU guidance documents conceive public participation through time?

This section scrutinises how the EU spatial planning and programmes. Retrospectively, it gives a general overview of the main documents adopted in the last three decades. In this section, we propose three following spatial perspectives of analysis: territorial, urban, and rural.

5.1. The European Spatial Development Perspective

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is a strategic document adopted by European Union member states in 1999, aimed at providing a framework for territorial development policies and cooperation within Europe (European Commission, 1999). It emphasizes sustainable development, balanced growth, and integration across various spatial scales. While not prescriptive, it encourages member states to adopt participatory approaches in shaping their spatial development policies.

Accordingly, public participation is recognized as a fundamental aspect of the ESDP. The perspective acknowledges the importance of involving stakeholders, including the general public, in decision-making processes related to spatial development. Below how the ESDP considers public participation:

- Democratic Principles. The ESDP recognizes that decisions about spatial development affect the lives of people and communities, and therefore their input is crucial.
- Bottom-up approach. The ESDP calls for the engagement of local communities and stakeholders in the decision-making process from the early stages. It acknowledges that local knowledge and perspectives are essential for effective planning and implementation.
- Participatory processes. The ESDP encourages the establishment of participatory processes at various levels of governance, including local, regional, and national levels. These processes may involve public consultations, workshops, stakeholder meetings, and other mechanisms to gather input and feedback from citizens and interest groups.
- Transparency and accessibility. The ESDP emphasizes transparency and accessibility in decision-making processes. It calls for clear communication of information related to spatial development plans, policies, and projects, enabling citizens to understand and engage effectively.
- Capacity Building. The ESDP recognizes the importance of building the capacity of stakeholders, including local authorities and civil society organizations, to actively participate in spatial development processes. This may involve providing training, resources, and support to enable meaningful engagement.
- Inclusive Development. The ESDP advocates for inclusive development that takes into account the needs, preferences, and aspirations of all segments of society. It stresses the importance of addressing social, economic, and environmental disparities through participatory approaches to ensure that development benefits everyone.

Overall, the ESPD understands participation issue in terms of institutional involvement of spatial planning authorities at various levels (European, national, regional and local) as well as in terms of citizens engaged into the decision-making process.

5.2. EU Territorial Agendas

5.2.1. Territorial Agenda of the EU (TAEU) 2007

The [Territorial Agenda of the European Union](#) (TAEU) 2007 is a strategic document that outlines the territorial development priorities and objectives for the European Union and its member states. Like the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), the TAEU recognizes the importance of public participation in shaping territorial development policies. Here's how the TAEU 2007 considers public participation:

- Inclusive Approach: The TAEU emphasizes an inclusive approach to territorial development, which involves engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including the public, in the decision-making process. It acknowledges that territorial development policies should reflect the needs, preferences, and aspirations of citizens and communities.
- Multi-level Governance: Like the ESDP, the TAEU promotes multi-level governance, which involves cooperation and coordination among different levels of government (local, regional, national, and European) as well as non-governmental actors. Public participation is seen as essential for effective multi-level governance, enabling citizens to influence decisions that affect their territories.
- Participatory Processes: The TAEU encourages the establishment of participatory processes at various levels of governance to involve citizens and stakeholders in territorial development planning and implementation. This may include public consultations, stakeholder forums, citizen panels, and other mechanisms to gather input and feedback.

5.2.2. Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 (TA2020)

The [Territorial Agenda of the European Union](#) (TA EU) 2020 is a strategic policy document that sets out the key territorial development priorities and objectives for the European Union and its member states. It provides a framework for coordinating spatial planning and territorial development policies across Europe. The agenda aims to promote balanced, sustainable, and inclusive development, fostering territorial cohesion and reducing disparities between regions. Even though its approach suggests place-based initiatives, there is no specific indication on citizens' inclusion in decision-making process. This can be due to the fact that by promoting place-based approaches, citizens' engagement is implicitly considered.

5.2.3. Territorial Agenda 2030

In 2020, the Ministers responsible for spatial planning, territorial development and/or territorial cohesion agreed on the Territorial Agenda 2030 of the European Union. The [Territorial Agenda 2030](#) provides an action-oriented framework to promote territorial cohesion in Europe: a future for all places. In general terms, the Territorial Agenda underlines the importance of and provides orientation for strategic spatial planning and calls for strengthening the territorial dimension of sector policies at all governance levels. It seeks to promote an inclusive and sustainable future for all places and to help achieve Sustainable Development Goals in Europe. Participation of citizens in framing the future of the EU territories is highly recognized by the Agenda. Indeed, it supports the place-based approach to policy making contributes to territorial cohesion. Accorsingly, it is based on horizontal and vertical coordination, evidence-informed policy making and integrated territorial development. It addresses different levels of governance (multi-level governance approach) contributing to subsidiarity. It ensures cooperation and coordination involving citizens, civil society, businesses, research and scientific institutions and knowledge centres.

5.3. EU Urban Agendas

5.3.1. Leipzig Charter

The Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities was adopted in May 2007 during the Informal Meeting of EU Ministers responsible for Urban Development. It represents a milestone in European urban policy by setting out principles for sustainable urban development. The charter focuses on integrated urban development, emphasizing social, economic, and environmental aspects. Among the Charter's goals, good governance establishes that urban planning is not the responsibility of the public sector alone. Both civil society and the private sector are partners in the urban development policy of the future, reinforcing local democracy. Their involvement also means greater planning and investment security. Cities should enter into new partnerships with neighbouring cities. Cities and their surrounding regions need visions based on a fair balance of interests. In this respect, the Leipzig Charter recognizes the importance of public participation as a fundamental aspect of sustainable urban development. It calls for inclusive governance structures that involve all relevant stakeholders, including citizens, in the planning and implementation of urban policies and projects. By incorporating the perspectives and priorities of local communities, cities can create more vibrant, resilient, and liveable urban environments in line with the principles of the charter.

5.3.2. Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU)

The Urban Agenda for the EU aims to realise the full potential and contribution of urban areas towards achieving the objectives of the Union and related national priorities in full respect of subsidiarity and proportionality principles and competences. The Urban Agenda for the EU scope is threefold. It focuses specifically on three pillars of EU policymaking and implementation:

- The Urban Agenda for the EU focuses on a more effective and coherent implementation of existing policies, legislation, and instruments. The Urban Agenda for the EU will not initiate new regulation but will be regarded as an informal contribution to the design of future and revision of existing regulation, notably at EU level, in order for it to better reflect urban needs, practices and responsibilities. It recognises the need to avoid potential bottlenecks and minimise administrative burdens for urban authorities.
- The Urban Agenda for the EU will contribute to identifying, supporting, integrating, and improving traditional, innovative and user-friendly sources of funding for urban areas at the relevant institutional level, including from European structural and investment funds (ESIF) (in accordance with the legal and institutional structures already in place) in view of achieving effective implementation of interventions in urban areas. The Urban Agenda for the EU will not create new or increased EU funding aimed at higher allocations for urban authorities. However, it will draw from and convey lessons learned on how to improve funding opportunities for urban authorities across all EU policies and instruments, including Cohesion Policy.
- The Urban Agenda for the EU will contribute to enhancing the knowledge base on urban issues and exchange of best practices and knowledge. Reliable data is important for portraying the diversity of structures and tasks of Urban Authorities, for evidence-based urban policy making, as well as for providing tailor-made solutions to major challenges. Knowledge on how Urban Areas evolve is fragmented and successful experiences can be better exploited. Initiatives taken in this context will be in accordance with the relevant EU legislation on data protection, the reuse of public sector information and the promotion of big, linked and open data.

As regarding citizens' involvement, the Urban Agenda underscores the importance of inclusive governance and engagement, ensuring that the voices of citizens', communities, and various interest groups are heard and incorporated into decision-making processes. By fostering participatory approaches, it seeks to promote transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in urban governance.

5.3.3. Pact of Amsterdam

The Pact of Amsterdam, signed in 2016, launched the Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU) in the frame of intergovernmental cooperation on urban matters. It represents a significant milestone in the evolution of the EU's urban agenda. It provides a comprehensive framework aimed at advancing sustainable urban development and empowering cities in EU policymaking processes. This landmark agreement acknowledges the pivotal role of cities as engines of economic growth, innovation, and social progress within the European context. Central to the Pact's ethos is the recognition of the intricate web of challenges confronting urban areas and the imperative for integrated responses. By promoting holistic approaches, the Pact underscores the interconnectedness of various urban issues and advocates for collaborative efforts across different governance levels – local, regional, national, and EU. This multi-level governance approach seeks to facilitate effective coordination and cooperation among diverse stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations, businesses, and academia.

As regarding the public participation, the Pact of Amsterdam emphasizes the principle of partnership, emphasizing the importance of inclusive decision-making processes that actively engage citizens and community groups. By fostering participatory governance mechanisms, the Pact endeavours to ensure that urban policies resonate with the needs, aspirations, and diverse perspectives of urban residents. This commitment to inclusivity aligns with broader principles of democratic governance and social cohesion.

5.3.4. New Leipzig Charter

The Charter, adopted in 2020, puts forward a revised vision for sustainable urban development in Europe and considers the Urban Agenda for the EU as a key vehicle for its implementation. The Charter places the emphasis on the transformative power of cities for the common good. This is to be achieved through actions taken within the three thematic dimensions - 'Just, Green and Productive Cities' - as well as through one cross-sectoral dimension 'Digitalisation' that are implemented in a format of multi-level governance. The Charter enshrines the five EU principles of good urban governance that comprise 'policy for the common good', 'integrated approaches', 'multi-level governance', 'place-based approaches' and 'participation and co-creation'. So, the charter reaffirms support for 'transformation through integrated urban development, with a place-based, multi-level and participatory approach' (p.1). It further contends that 'citizens should have a say in processes that impact their daily lives and that new forms of participation should be encouraged and improved, including co-creation and co-design in cooperation with inhabitants, civil society networks, community organisations and private enterprises' (p.6).

5.4. Rural Agendas

Rural agendas shaping participatory planning in rural context are mostly dependent on Common Agricultural Policy, one of the longest-used instruments in European Union which history dates back to 1957 when Treaty of Rome defined fundamentals of European Economic Community, including main goals of agricultural policy: to increase productivity and stabilise agricultural markets, to ensure

the availability of food at reasonable prices in members states, and to provide fair living standards to farmers. Then, in 1962 the Common Agricultural Policy was officially set up. However, the issue of public participation in development and planning of rural territories was out of consideration at that time. Harvey (2015) reminds that between end of 1950s and end of 1970s, 10 million people left EU agriculture. This was due to the fact that agriculture was expected to become more productive and profitable. New EU policy introduced at the beginning of 1970s did not face with that issue impacting rural societies. In contrary, EU Commission decided even to support the idea of intensive agriculture with all negative social, economic, and environmental consequences. This should be also considered as a process impacting decrease of social and human capital of rural areas within EU.

At the beginning of 1990s, as the result of MacSharry reform, the environmental context of CAP was prioritised for the very first time. As thus, extensification of agriculture started in EU (Daugbjerg 2003). Moreover, at the same time, EU created special rural development policy focused on both traditional aspects of agricultural policy (direct payments for producers are the first pillar of that policy), but also on environmental and socio-economical aspects of rural development (LEADER programme has been launched as the second pillar of EU rural policy). LEADER programme was initially granted by the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund. But the success of LEADER in rural areas led to open up the possibility of applying this approach in other types of areas, including coastal and urban. Hence, in the 2007-2013 financial perspective of EU, LEADER programme was successfully transferred to multi-funded Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). Since then, every single Local Development Strategy (LDS) can be supported by several EU Funds. Recently, rural development pillar of CAP (including CLLD/LEADER) is granted by European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development with allocation of EUR 95.5 billion in the 2021-27 programming period. Till now, CLLD/LEADER programme is most vital EU initiative targeting development of rural territories, and is based on seven features which all of them are directly related to the concept of civic participation: bottom-up and place-based approach to local management, place-based approach to setting up local identity, public-private partnership (governance instead of government, with substantial role of local action groups – LAGs – combining interests of public, civil, and private sectors), local development strategy integrating and promoting differentiated functions of rural territories, innovation and cooperation.

In terms of EU common agricultural policy, Central East European enlargement of EU was one of the biggest challenges in the history. Principles of CAP have been revisited, and accessing countries received a significant financial support through SAPARD programme. The EU funding guidelines emphasized sustainability, sensitivity to social and cultural concerns, subsidiarity, and the need for public participation in the design and implementation of rural development projects by accessing countries (Beckmann & Dissing, 2004).

In the end of conference on the future shape of Rural Development Policy which took place in Cork, Ireland on the 7-9 November 1996, so called "Cork Declaration" was discussed and presented. This impactful document increased the priority of rural development, notably by increase of resources, offering assistance for development across all rural areas, and implementing increased subsidiarity, simplification, and integration in the deployment of diverse measures to support rural development. 20 years later, in the same place – in the city of Cork, Ireland, the revised version of the declaration was announced – "Cork Declaration 2.0". This was response of rural Europe to Sustainable Development Goals proposed by United Nations. From the perspective of this report, it is important to mention that "Cork Declaration 2.0" emphasised three features of rural development: public participation, digitization, and planning oriented on preservation of cultural rural landscapes, biodiversity, soil, water and climate. Moreover, enhancing rural governance is one of the priorities expressed in the document.

Rural Pact is the last EU framework to be mentioned. It presents vision for European rural areas towards 2040 targeting priorities of The European Green Deal. Public participation was embedded in the process of shaping the aforementioned visions as the EU Commission has undertaken an open public consultation. The goal was to allow citizens, civil society, and stakeholders to share their perspective of the long-term process of the development of European rural territories. It revealed however, that building awareness among farmers about low-emission emissions or environmentally and climate neutral technologies will be a big challenge. This is also confirmed by the current pan-European farmers' strikes. Hence, rural development requires more inclusive and participatory approach.

6.   Public participation within EU programmes and instruments

6.1. European Territorial Cooperation framework

Since the early nineteenth century, the European Union has been promoting cooperation between regions and countries to foster economic and social development and overcome border-related obstacles. Public participation is crucial in various cooperation programs, including the URBACT program and the EU Macro-regional Strategies introduced since 2009, such as the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) in 2009, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in 2010, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region in 2014, and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region in 2015

URBACT is a European Union programme introduced in 2002 and is specifically dedicated to promoting sustainable urban development by fostering collaboration among cities across Europe. Through URBACT, cities join thematic networks focusing on common urban challenges like mobility, social inclusion, or economic development. These networks facilitate the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and innovative solutions among cities. URBACT supports capacity building through training sessions, workshops, and online resources, empowering urban practitioners and policymakers to develop and implement integrated urban strategies. The programme also emphasizes the transfer of successful initiatives between cities, accelerating innovation and improving urban policies and practices. By working together, cities can address interconnected urban challenges more effectively, contributing to the achievement of EU policy objectives for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. URBACT plays a vital role in shaping EU urban policies by generating evidence-based knowledge, showcasing innovative practices, and advocating for the importance of urban issues on the European agenda. URBACT programme conceives citizen participation as a vital component of sustainable urban development, in terms of:

- Inclusive Decision-Making, URBACT emphasizes inclusive decision-making processes, recognizing the importance of involving citizens in shaping urban policies and projects. It promotes mechanisms for engaging citizens at various stages of the urban planning process, from initial idea generation to project implementation and evaluation.
- Community Engagement, URBACT encourages cities to actively engage with local communities to understand their needs, priorities, and aspirations in the prevision of the adoption of the Integrated Action Plan. This may involve organizing public consultations, workshops, focus groups, and other participatory events to gather input and feedback from residents. This is particularly valuable in case of the implementation of small-scale action(s).
- Co-creation: URBACT supports co-creation approaches that involve collaboration between citizens, policymakers, and other stakeholders in designing and implementing urban interventions. By working together, stakeholders can leverage their collective knowledge, resources, and creativity to develop innovative solutions that better meet the needs of the community.
- Digital Platforms: URBACT recognizes the potential of digital platforms and technologies to facilitate citizen participation in urban governance. It encourages cities to use online platforms, social media, and mobile applications to engage a wider audience, particularly younger residents and those who may face barriers to traditional forms of participation.

In the elaboration of strategies, EU microregions also require an inclusive approach towards the involvement of citizens and key stakeholders. This can be achieved on a national level, where each Facility Point should ensure the participation of national and local actors in decision-making and

implementation processes. Alternatively, on a transnational level, involvement necessitates integrated approaches by guaranteeing the participation of all actors with territorial interests. Among the successful experiences, one can mention the introduction of the Youth Council by EUSALP, aiming to amplify the voice of the younger generation living in the Alpine Space.

For knowing other interesting experiences aiming at facilitating citizens engagement are presented by the following tools: https://participatory.tools/ and https://www.user-participation.eu/.

6.2. European Urban Initiative

The European Urban Initiative (EUI) is an essential tool to support cities of all sizes, to build capacity and knowledge, to support innovation and develop transferable and scalable innovative solutions to urban challenges of EU relevance. This initiative has been introduced in the current programming period (2021-2027) substituting the Urban Initiative Actions in place in the previous programming period. As URBACT, EUI has a strong understanding of citizens' participation in the decision-making process by enhancing partnership and co-creation principles (EUI, 2021). Accordingly, while a stronger focus will be placed on innovation processes led by cities, it is as crucial to keep mobilising around tested solutions and to involve citizens.

6.3. Rural Pact

Before the Rural Pact was proposed, a set of four different scenarios visioning rural Europe in 2040 were developed by EU Joint Research Council in collaboration with the European Network for Rural Development Thematic Group on the Long-Term Rural Vision. In those scenarios, two different levels of multilevel governance to climate change, economic development, and digitalisation were considered: fragmented multilevel governance (characterised by poor direct participation of citizens, limited coordination and collaboration between different types of actors) and networked multilevel governance (characterised in contrary by high level of direct citizen participation, and well-coordinated, collaborative, and collective decision-making processes).

In the first scenario (Rurbanities scenario) identified by EU Join Research Council, limited coordination between different governance levels occurs, and people are turning to rural areas due to lower costs of living, less pollution, and higher security. Hence, the social cohesion will be declined, and 'not-in-my-backyard' attitude will increase. Tensions between residents, and between residents and policymakers are expected. In the second scenario (Rural renewal scenario), permanent conscious effort in building and maintaining communities is an estimated priority. It is argued that digital technologies enable immediate access to information requested by any of rational decision, but also facilitate participation in decision-making processes at any level of governance. The third scenario (Rural connections scenario) utilizes expectation of shrinking rural areas. Networking and governance will be developed based on increase of digital infrastructure and digital skills of rural populations. It is argued that digital tools will facilitate citizen participation. Also, coordination of participatory structures by European regions is requested. The goal will be to develop time-effective participatory structures (rural hubs) designed to strengthen bottom-up strategy developments and implementations. The fourth scenario (Rural specialisation scenario) is quite similar to the previous one. However, the increase of oligopolies of few large actors in the agriculture, renewable energy production, forestry, tourism, and industry is expected. This significantly changes the governance of rural areas, and power and interest of particular actors.

The process of setting up scenarios for rural Europe in 2040 had a participatory character itself. Workshops with actors of different ages, occupations, and types of rural areas as well as experts were

organised by EU Joint Research Council. Despite the scenarios, the main priority of the EU should be to develop rural areas as "socially dynamic with strong local participation, good governance and trust" (Bock and Krzysztofowicz, 2021). Hence, collaborative approach is a priority: civic participation focused on bottom-up initiatives and stimulated by the efficient and just regulatory frameworks.

When introducing Rural Pact, the European Commission has recognized that rural areas' role and significance are not adequately valued and are insufficiently rewarded. Green, just, and digital transitions of European rural territories are demanded. Hence, a [long-term vision for the EU's rural areas](#) was proposed. In the context of civic participation, it is stated in the document that new developmental opportunities lie in the involvement of local communities in decision making processes. Shrinking and ageing population of EU rural areas is one of the main challenges targeted by the aforementioned long-term vision. The solution is to make rural territories attractive to live and work. The key instrument is to vitalize and empower local communities by involving individuals in decisions regarding their future and enabling them to leverage the cultural and economic strengths of their region. In that context, development of digital tools for public participation and social innovations (including those targeting empowerment of women in rural areas) is a must for future rural Europe.

Rural Pact was presented and discussed during [the EU conference held in Brussels on 15-16 June 2022](#) in the forum of Rural Pact community – public authorities, civil society organisations, businesses, academic and research and innovation bodies and citizens sharing the following goals: to amplify the voice of rural Europe, to structure collaboration and mutual learning within various stakeholders of rural areas, and to support voluntary actions for rural development. In the context of civic participation, the following conclusions from the conference should be underlined: 1) development of digital tools empowering rural populations is possible only when the adequate infrastructure is provided and demanded skills and competences of individuals are supported, 2) bottom-up and top-down approaches, as well as long-term strategies and local actions' plans must be integrated, and supported with the financial resources directly connected to local communities – individuals when involved in participatory planning must be aware of the resources that can be used in decision-making process and implementation, 3) direct support for local participative organisations and civil society organisations is mandatory to empower local communities, and link the interests and development goals of rural and urban populations and their territories. The following target groups were underlined in the conference's discussions: young people in rural areas, members of so-called energy communities, as well as key actors of rural research and innovation ecosystems.

6.4. Integrated Territorial Investment

The Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) is a mechanism introduced under the European Union's cohesion policy to support integrated and place-based development strategies at the local or regional level. It allows regions or cities to pool funds from different European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and other financial instruments to implement coordinated actions addressing specific territorial challenges or opportunities. As regarding the citizens participation, the ITI allows to implement:

- Place-Based Strategies: ITIs is based on place-based strategies that respond to the specific needs, potentials, and priorities of a particular territory, such as a city, a region, or a functional area. They aim to mobilize local stakeholders, including public authorities, businesses, civil society organizations, and residents, to co-design and implement integrated development plans tailored to the territorial context.
- Participatory Governance: ITIs emphasize participatory governance and stakeholder engagement throughout the planning, implementation, and monitoring phases. They involve

local communities, including disadvantaged or marginalized groups, in decision-making processes to ensure that investments reflect the aspirations and concerns of all residents.

6.5. Community Lead Local Development

LEADER represents a localised development approach that the EU has employed for the past 30 years. It involves the active participation of local stakeholders, organised through Local Action Groups (LAGs), in shaping and executing strategies, decision-making processes, and resource allocation for the advancement of their rural areas. Originally funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development within national and regional Rural Development Programmes, the LEADER method expanded during the 2014-2020 programming period. This extension, now termed Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), encompasses three additional EU Funds: the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, and the European Social Fund.

Rural development policy of EU prioritizes local involvement in all stages of the policy cycle: from policymaking, through decision-making, towards implementation of a single actions. The following groups of local stakeholders are targeted by EU rural development policy: 1) local authorities and representatives of LAGs responsible for rural development and planning at local level, 2) local actors and organisations representing various groups of interests like farmers, landowners, forest managers, rural businesses, environmentalists, researchers, rural communities, and disadvantaged groups, 3) recent and potential beneficiaries and participants in EU supported rural development projects.

In the 2023-2027 programming period, the LEADER method is set to become operational within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy[2]. Notably, LAGs are currently slated to implement area-based Local Development Strategies, emphasizing bottom-up development processes that incorporate innovation, networking, and collaboration. Hence, the Rural Toolkit has been designed as the source of EU funding and support options available to rural areas within the European Union[3]. Its primary objective is to assist local authorities, institutions, stakeholders, businesses, and individuals in identifying and leveraging existing EU funds, programs, and additional initiatives for the advancement of rural territories. By providing comprehensive guidance, the Rural Toolkit aims to facilitate the development of rural Europe.

The future of LEADER/CLLD instruments is recently discussed. The influential opinion expressed by the European Committee of Regions, and the ELARD – the European LEADER association which joins LAGs, should be mentioned at least. The main conclusion of the 2023 LEADER Congress hosted by the European Committee of the Regions[4] is that the new LEADER/CLLD instrument should be financially supported adequately to the local and regional needs, and implementation procedures should be simplified. Committee of Regions suggests the restoration of the future fund of the Common Agricultural Policy supporting agricultural and non-agricultural rural development. Territorial cohesion is the priority. Hence, aforementioned fund should be managed regionally and focused on civic participation in both planning and implementation of regional and local strategies, decisions and actions. The LEADER/CLLD approach should be restored.

Quite similar opinion has been expressed by the ELARD association[5]. ELARD asks "Is it reasonable to assume that we can develop employment, revive public services, strengthen social cohesion, set up new modes of transport, fix young people in their territory, give better life conditions to people

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[2] https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/news/leader-facts-and-figures-new-lags-2023-2027_en
[3] https://funding.rural-vision.europa.eu/?lng=en
[4] https://cor.europa.eu/pl/news/Pages/2023-LEADER-European-Congress.aspx
[5] ELARD's opinion: LEADER and CLLD within European politics post 2027 - Elard

of the rural territories with only 5% of the Common Agricultural Policy budget?" It is emphasised that LAGs are recently very familiar with the LEADER/CLLD approach and experienced in using financial and non-financial tools supported by the EU. However, rural development is still neglected in terms of adequate financial support. Also, multi-funding has become very complex. Hence, the access to financial support for rural development is restricted by the complexity of bureaucratic procedures. Thus, increase of financial support and simplification of implementation procedures of the LEADER/CLLD approach is requested.

7. Limits and challenges of Participatory Planning in EU policy

Participatory planning is an essential aspect of democratic governance and sustainable development in Europe. As emerged from the above, the EU is promoting citizens' participation principle in several ways: from the high-level institutional perspective to promoting more place-based approaches. It does so by framing its various initiatives addressing territorial development in such way that considers fundamental citizens' involvement. While the EU does not impose specific participatory processes on Member States, it encourages and supports the adoption of inclusive and participatory approaches to spatial planning through various policy frameworks, funding programs, and initiatives. Indeed, it provides instruments and specific programmes that are specifically focused on opening rooms for various types of public participation in spatial development policies and planning.

First, due to the limit of competences, the EU cannot imperatively force implementing participatory planning approach to each country:

- The European Union operates within a framework of subsidiarity, where decisions are made at the most appropriate level of governance. This means that the EU respects the sovereignty of its member states and does not have the authority to impose specific planning approaches, such as participatory planning, on individual countries.
- Instead, the EU can provide guidance, support, and best practices for implementing participatory planning at the national and local levels.

Second, it can offer guidelines on how to implement participatory planning while each country is responsible to effectively implement:

- The EU can offer guidelines, toolkits, and recommendations to member states on how to integrate participatory planning principles into their urban development policies and practices.
- It can facilitate knowledge-sharing and capacity-building activities to help countries develop the necessary skills and expertise to effectively engage stakeholders in the planning process.

Third, Participatory planning is dependent on the EU futures scenarios (more inclusive etc.):

- Participatory planning approaches are aligned with the EU's vision for more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient cities. As the EU develops future scenarios and strategic frameworks, such as the European Green Deal or the Urban Agenda for the EU, participatory planning is increasingly recognized as a key tool for achieving these objectives.
- By involving citizens, communities, and stakeholders in decision-making processes, participatory planning helps ensure that EU policies and initiatives reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of European societies.

Fourth, participatory planning is used differently depending on the programmes:

- Participatory planning is implemented differently across various EU programmes and initiatives, depending on their specific objectives, target groups, and geographical scope.
- For example, participatory approaches may be integrated into regional development programmes, urban regeneration projects, or initiatives aimed at promoting social inclusion and cohesion.

Fifth, Participatory planning is gaining importance in the last decades (by observing EU strategies):

- Over the last few decades, participatory planning has gained increasing importance within EU strategies and policies as a means to enhance democratic governance, improve the quality of decision-making, and foster social cohesion.
- The EU has recognized the value of participatory approaches in addressing complex urban challenges, such as urban sprawl, environmental degradation, social exclusion, and economic disparities.

Sixth, the EU is offering the conditions to countries to implement participatory planning by ensuring dedicated funds:

- The EU provides financial support and incentives to member states to encourage the adoption and implementation of participatory planning approaches.
- Through dedicated funding programmes, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or the Cohesion Fund, the EU provides resources to support participatory planning activities, such as stakeholder consultations, capacity-building workshops, and pilot projects.
- By offering financial incentives, the EU incentivizes member states to integrate participatory planning principles into their urban development strategies and projects, thereby promoting more inclusive and sustainable cities across Europe.

However, despite the EU's efforts, the issue of public participation also faces various limits and challenges. About the limits, it seems that:

- EU suggesting participatory planning without considering cultural complexities: Participatory planning involves engaging various stakeholders in decision-making processes. However, cultural differences can significantly impact the willingness and ability of individuals and communities to participate effectively. Factors such as historical experiences, social structures, and power dynamics need to be carefully considered to ensure meaningful participation. Ignoring these cultural complexities can lead to ineffective or even counterproductive outcomes.
- Participatory planning effectiveness and EU funding: While participatory planning is a valuable approach for inclusive decision-making, its effectiveness can vary depending on the complexity of the issues involved. Simply mandating participatory planning without providing adequate support or resources may not always lead to desired outcomes. One suggestion is to tie EU funds to the implementation of participatory planning, ensuring that member states have the necessary resources and incentives to engage stakeholders effectively.
- Time-consuming nature of participatory planning: Indeed, participatory planning can be a time-consuming process, especially when dealing with complex issues or diverse stakeholder groups. However, leveraging digital tools and technologies can streamline and enhance the participatory planning process. Digital platforms can facilitate communication, collaboration, and data analysis, enabling more efficient decision-making and reducing the time required for planning activities.

Finally, the implementation of participatory planning through digital tools can face challenges, particularly related to digital infrastructure and the need for efficient decision-making processes:

- Digital infrastructure and divide: The effectiveness of using digital tools for participatory planning can be hindered by disparities in digital infrastructure and access. In regions or communities where digitalization is not widespread or where there's a digital divide, certain stakeholders may be marginalized or excluded from the planning process. This can undermine the inclusivity and representativeness of participatory planning efforts. Addressing digital

infrastructure gaps and promoting digital literacy and access are crucial steps to mitigate these challenges.

- Speeding up decision-making processes: While participatory planning aims to involve diverse stakeholders in decision-making, this can sometimes lead to delays in reaching consensus or making decisions. To speed up the decision-making process, it's important to establish clear timelines, objectives, and criteria for decision-making. Additionally, utilizing digital tools can facilitate real-time communication, collaboration, and data analysis, enabling stakeholders to exchange information, provide feedback, and make decisions more efficiently. However, it's essential to balance the need for thorough deliberation and inclusivity with the imperative of timely decision-making.

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9. Annexes

This list of annexes overviews three different PPL tools coming from the practices activated by local and international authorities as for instance:

- URBAN INNO, City of Rijeka;
- Hupmobile, City of Riga & Aalto University
- Our City Plans, by UN-Habitat

Name:	URBAN INNO (Toolbox of Smart Participatory Methods and Tools)
Responsible organisation / programme:	City of Rijeka / Interreg Central Europe
Period of development:	2016-2019
Purpose:	• Addressing the challenge to make central Europe more innovative and competitive by maximizing the innovation potential of smaller and medium sized urban ecosystems. • Providing toolbox of Smart urban innovation participatory methods & tools is a unique tool that will help you engage end-users (citizens,

consumers) into urban innovation process (developing urban development strategies, smart urban solutions, services or technologies).

Target groups:	Quadruple helix of urban innovation (4UI) networks: Academia; Industry; Governance; Civil society.
Comments:	- The toolbox is designed for advanced users, with at least some basic experience with participatory processes (like participatory workshops) or supported by experts for moderating and facilitating, which are listed in the project's website. 9 pilots were conducted in different regions in the fields of: shared and electric mobility; citizen collaboration; smart governance; innovation centre; smart energy
More information:	https://programme2014-20.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/URBAN-INNO.html (project website) https://www.user-participation.eu/ (toolbox website)

Name:	Hupmobile (Participatory.Tools)
Responsible organisation / programme:	City of Riga & Aalto University / Interreg Baltic Sea Region
Period of development:	2014-2020
Purpose:	Improvement and broadening of the stakeholder involvement processes, and assist the cities in their work with stakeholders within the core activities of the HUPMOBILE project and beyond. HUPMOBILE's objective is to provide a holistic approach to the planning, implementation, optimisation and management of integrated, sustainable mobility solutions in Baltic Sea port cities.
Target groups:	- Experts within municipal/governmental institutions. - Experts within regional agencies and NGOs in environmental issues. - Elected representatives within the local or state government. - Local residents, citizens and groups. - Local business and real estate owners. - Professional associations related to mobility issues (planners, landscape architects, etc.)

Comments:	• Despite the project's direct aim at sustainable mobility, the toolbox is a comprehensive, step-wise framework to participatory planning.
	• The tool includes and describes 16 physical and 16 digital participatory tools.
More information:	https://www.hupmobile-project.eu/ (project website)
	https://participatory.tools/ (toolbox website)

Name:	Our City Plans
Responsible organisation / programme:	UN-Habitat
Period of development:	2022
Purpose:	Global toolbox that guides and supports local governments and urban actors to better understand, customise, and develop inclusive and integrated urban planning processes, using a participatory and incremental methodology that adapts to their local context.
	The toolbox addresses SDG 11.3.2 indicator: "Proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically"
Target groups:	• City leaders.
	• City planners.
	• Other stakeholders (local community, businesses etc.)
Comments:	Ability to filter to toobox using financing components and mechanisms in climate action; participation; socio-spatial inclusion; urban finance.
More information:	https://unhabitat.org/our-city-plans-an-incremental-and-participatory-toolbox-for-urban-planning (report)
	https://ourcityplans.org/ (toolbox website)