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Contents

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation:	Definition
DEMo4PPL:	Digital Education Modules 4 Participatory Planning
EU:	European Union
GIS:	Geographical information systems
HEI:	Higher education institution
IT:	Information technology
LLL:	Lifelong learning
ModPPC:	Modular Participatory Planning Curriculum
PPL:	Participatory planning
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
WP:	Work Package

1. Introduction

1.1. The DEMo4PPL Project

European societies are increasingly faced with the urgent need to integrate local needs and specificities when territorialising supranational strategies such as the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, UN-Habitat, 2015) and the priorities detailed in the EU Green Deal (EC, 2019). To this end, it is crucial to foster the introduction of more effective Participatory Planning (PPL) practices, aimed at the inclusion and engagement of the entire civil society in spatial planning and development processes (Smith, 1974; Cilliers & Timmermans, 2014). Moreover, the digital turn that our societies is going through brings forward the emergence of advanced digital tools and innovative methods that may contribute to PPL (Afzalan & Muller, 2018). Despite the rapid development of digital PPL tools and innovative methods, their acknowledgement in the curricula of many Higher Education Institutions (HEI) across Europe follows a significantly slower pace, with negative impact on education and training of students and practitioners. This is primarily due to the lack of flexibility in the HEIs' curricula to timely grasp key elements of technological evolution and adjust them to their needs and goals. In addition, educators often lack the appropriate array of digital skills and knowledge to undertake the necessary changes in their modules.

Acknowledging the above, the DEMo4PPL project addresses the need for inter-disciplinary cooperation with focus on spatial planning and sustainable development aiming to create and test flexible learning pathways towards state-of-the-art knowledge on PPL and digital PPL tools. In doing so, the project adopts the following 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.

Based on the gaps and needs identified in the project partners' countries, DEMo4PPL will design and pilot a Modular Participatory Planning Curriculum (ModPPC), with a three-fold flexibility: (i) to address specialized thematic subjects across disciplines (ii) to deepen knowledge and expertise in specific PPL methods and tools and (iii) to adapt to different education levels. Aiming at stimulating innovative learning and teaching practice, the project is expected to significantly strengthen HEIs' capacity and readiness for sustainable adaptation to the digital age, promoting cooperation among HEIs and across disciplines and enhancing digital competences of educators, students and practitioners.

1.2. Nature and objective of this report

The report *Identification of needs and gap analysis at consortium level - Pathways towards Digital education & training modules* summarises and elaborates upon the results of the activities that compose WP2 *Needs assessment and gap analysis*. It provides comprehensive understanding

of participatory planning practices, tools, policies and approaches at the EU level and in the countries where the project partners are located, supplemented with a review of how PPL is approached and taught in HEIs' academic curricula and training.

This information is utilised to identify specific needs, gaps and goals in each of the four country that, together with the lessons that can be learned from selected good practices, are then translated into a set of common objectives to be achieved through the development and testing of the ModPPC. In so doing, this report represents an important stage in the process of developing an effective and innovative curriculum for PPL and digital PPL tools, ensuring that partner needs are appropriately addressed, and the developed curriculum is effective and has maximized usability. Additionally, realizing WP2 objectives will allow for greater flexibility and help to adapt the work done in other work packages to suit a variety of needs, scientific fields, and educational purposes.

The needs assessment and the gap analysis, validated with a broad array of stakeholders in the occasion of the workshop organised in WP2.4, is translated here into a set of pathways towards digital PPL education and training, that will constitute a crucial factor in successfully planning and implementing the activities proposed in the packages that follow.

1.3. Structure of the report

Aiming at achieving the above objectives, the report systematically synthesises the results of all the activities of WP2, to then distillate the main elements that shall pave the pathway towards the composition of the DEMo4PPL ModPPC. After this brief introduction, Section 2 summarises the methodological steps that have been adopted by the project team to review the EU approach to PPL as well as how PPL is practiced and taught in HEIs in the four countries under investigation.

Section 3 and 4 reflects on the results of the various activities that composed WP2 *Needs assessment and gap analysis*. More in detail, section 3 synthesises the lessons and useful elements that can be derived from the EU approach to PPL, drawing on the contents of the main EU guidance documents that in one way or another shape the European spatial planning agenda as well as on the main mechanisms and approaches that characterise the programming and implementation of the EU incentive schemes and instruments. On its hand, Section 4 is divided into two subsections, respectively focusing on the presentation of the results of the cross-national analysis of needs and gaps that characterise the PPL practice and education in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Poland. Each subsection first compares the peculiarities of the four national frameworks, to then identify the common challenges and gaps, as well as those that are peculiar to only selected contexts. Importantly, both subsections include a review of the good practices collected in the country reports that aims at highlighting what we can learn from them when planning the DEMo4PPL ModPPC.

Section 5 draws on the previous sections to present a way forward, that shall pave the way for the project's future activities. It includes a number of pathways towards digital education and training modules, that touch upon a number of elements that are deemed crucial to achieve the project's goal: (i) the inclusion of various teaching subject and their prioritisation, (ii) the structure of the modules that will compose the curriculum and their flexibility, (iii) the different teaching methods and their effectiveness in relation to different goals and (iv), the need to adapt the produced contents to different Higher Education levels. Importantly, the section dedicates particular attention to the digital side of PPL, both in terms of digital education as well as digital

PPL methods and tools. Section 6 rounds of the reports, summarising its main messages and virtually launching the future activities of the project.

2. Methodology

This section briefly summarises the methods that have been employed to run the research activities performed within WP2, of which this report summarises the outcomes and uses them as a basis to pave the way for the next steps of the project

2.1. Review of EU approach to PPL

Activity 2.1 *Overview of Participatory Planning Approach in EU Policy*, conducted a comprehensive overview of the PPL approaches at the European Union level, focusing on both guidance documents, policies, instruments, as well as surveying existing toolkits from online documents and platforms.

This activity was essentially performed through desk research, interesting the following areas of EU competence:

- The documents contributing to define the EU legal and policy framework for PPL as a model of policy design and implementation;
- The main agendas and guidance documents contributing to define the boundaries of the EU approach to spatial development and planning issues;
- The processes and mechanisms organising the functioning of the main EU programmes and instruments with some spatial implications.
- A number of existing toolkits aimed at PPL, produced in the framework of relevant EU-funded research projects.

Importantly, the understanding of planning that guided the selection of the documents to analyse has been rather broad. In line with the DEMo4PPL approach, it encompassed a multi-scalar approach to planning, from regional programming to wide-area coordination, from functional strategic planning to land-use regulation. At the same time, it concerned both urban and rural planning activities, as well as sectoral perspectives such as transport.

2.2. Review of PPL Practices

Activity 2.2 *Overview of Participatory Planning practice at national level* was run in parallel by the four academic project partners, focusing on their respective countries. It was organised according to two different steps, of which the second one further articulated into three parts.

The first step concerned the identification of the specific field of interest that would contribute to frame the scope of the analysis for each project partner. More in detail, each partner was asked to briefly describe their main subject of interest and the objective of their study programme. This step led to the identification of four main fields of interest, that were then explored more in detail by the four partners: (i) land use and spatial planning; (ii) rural development; (iii) tourism management and (iv) urban mobility.

The second step concerned the delivery of a survey, aimed at collecting data and comprehensive knowledge about participatory planning practice at the national level in the four countries under investigation, the survey, whose information were also complemented in light of the knowledge and experience of the project partners and through literature review and desk research, was articulated in three parts.

The first part concerned an open-ended questionnaire, addressed to 20 participants per country, identified among local authorities and practitioners which are considered experts in the identified scientific fields. Participants were asked to respond in writing to a number of questions focusing on the importance/urgency of PPL in the country and the legal framework regulating the latter, the main level interested by this practice, the existence of non-institutional or informal participation processes. They were also required to elaborate on the main challenges to PPL as well as on the most relevant success factors. In this case, questions were more detailed, and focusing on PPL objectives, methods, resources and outputs.

The second part of this activity narrowed down the interviewees sample to those interested in the specific field of interest selected by each partner and aimed to gain more in-depth knowledge through interviews with at least 5 experts. Through this activity, it was possible to gather a better grasp of the actual diffusion of digital PPL in the four countries, the adopted tools and methods, and the challenges these practices face.

Finally, a third part concerned the identification of good practices – at least five per country – intended as representative cases related to the identified scientific fields of interest and systematized according to a common structure that allowed for their comparability and synoptic reading.

2.3. Review of PPL in Higher Education Curricula

Activity 2.3 *Overview of Participatory Planning courses in academic curricula and training programmes at national level* was also run in parallel by the four academic partners involved in the DEMo4PPL project, and consisted in a mix of desk research, interviews with academic staff and a survey targeting students.

A preliminary step concerned the identification of the academic curricula that would constitute the main subject of inquiry. Each team, in line with the scientific field of interested identified for the analysis of PPL practices in Activity 2.2, defined the sample of Bachelor and Master curricula to survey, identifying one or more UNESCO ISCED-Field code(s). The sample was then complemented by other programmes, either because of particular interest in the country HEI environment or for the partner institutions. The identified curricula were investigated through desk research to survey the modules that are of interest for the project. For each of them, a contact person was identified, either the coordinator or a representative of the selected scientific field, to be contacted to validate and deepen the collected information.

Drawing on the project objectives as well as on the first insights gathered through desk research, each team compiled a semi-structured interview protocol, aiming at gathering the necessary information to fill in the common reporting form. All contact persons identified in relation to the surveyed courses were approached, and those expressing their availability were interviewed. Also in this case, particular attention was dedicated to the identification of 5 good practices per country.

At the same time, a survey – following a similar structure for all partners – was produced and distributed to the students of selected curricula through an online platform, in order to collect their opinion of the needs and gaps of their educational paths concerning PPL.

3. What can we learn from the EU approach to PPL?

This chapter explores the lessons from reviewing the EU's approach to PPL. It begins by discussing the main findings from the EU's efforts to incorporate PPL into its governance framework, then delves into the current challenges the EU faces in furthering this approach. Additionally, the chapter offers a set of tailored recommendations that can be used to develop an academic module on PPL, thereby enhancing the understanding and implementation of PPL principles across Member States.

The overview of the EU's approach to PPL (Task 2.1) reveals a tendency on citizen involvement in spatial development and urban policies. In the last three decades, the EU has actively provided guidance, support, and financial incentives to encourage participatory planning while respecting member states' sovereignty. Due to the sensitive issue, this delicate balance ensures that national and local governments retain control over their specific contexts while also benefiting from the overarching framework and resources provided by the EU.

One of the most notable advancements in the EU's approach is the conceptualisation of participation as a policy design and implementation model. This represents a paradigm shift from considering public participation merely as an ethical principle to embedding it as a mandatory component within the EU's primary directives, particularly in environmental policy. This transformation has significantly expanded the responsibilities of EU Member States, compelling them to adopt and promote participatory planning initiatives as mandated by EU directives but not exclusively. Beyond these mandates, indeed, the EU has also launched several soft initiatives to foster PPL through various programmes and projects. These initiatives provide additional avenues for Member States to engage with and benefit from participatory planning processes.

This chapter is structured to present these insights and recommendations systematically. Section 3.1 highlights the importance of subsidiarity — the principle that decisions should be made as closely as possible to the citizens they affect — as the cornerstone of PPL. It also explores how this principle can be integrated into the PPL academic module to enhance its pedagogical effectiveness. Section 3.2 examines EU objectives on PPL and how it is delivered through its various programmes. Finally, section 3.3 addresses PPL's structural and contextual limits and challenges, offering critical insights into the barriers that must be overcome to fully realise the potential of participatory planning within the EU framework and Member States' contexts.

3.1. Subsidiarity as a trigger of PPL

In the last three decades, 'good governance' - characterised by openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence - has become a cornerstone for implementing the subsidiarity principle from the EU to Member State governments. This principle emphasises decision-making at the most immediate or local level that is consistent with resolving the issue or problem at hand. Efforts to enhance Member States' practices of PPL have driven systemic innovation at the EU level, promoting democratic-centred initiatives that have gradually but steadily influenced Member States and their territories.

In this respect, the EU provides guidance, support, and best practices for participatory planning at national and local levels rather than imposing mandates. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership and adaptability among Member States, allowing them to tailor participatory planning processes to their unique contexts. Consequently, PPL has been

integrated into numerous EU programmes and regulations over recent programming periods, making the principle of subsidiarity substantial, operable, and implementable. These efforts have resulted in more inclusive and responsive governance structures that better reflect the needs and aspirations of local communities.

From a pedagogical perspective, it is essential to build on the subsidiarity principle to refine existing experiences and explore theoretical avenues for expanding PPL at both the EU and Member State levels. Incorporating subsidiarity into PPL educational frameworks can enhance the understanding and application of participatory governance principles. This approach facilitates the cross-fertilisation of disciplines related to PPL, fostering a more comprehensive understanding and implementation of participatory governance across Europe.

3.2. One purpose, various tools

While promoting PPL has slowly been accepted at all territorial levels, the EU has played a crucial role in anchoring this concept within various programmes. All EU programmes recognise citizens' involvement as a value to promote and an objective to achieve. This has been a significant step towards using PPL effectively and efficiently by territories when implementing EU-funded projects. The EU's conditionality on citizens' involvement can be further emphasised by territories and communities, urging administrations at all levels to activate similar tools that promote citizens' voices in decision-making.

Accordingly, citizens' voices are vital in discussions about the future of the EU and designing innovative solutions for local urban transformation. The review highlights that PPL is particularly relevant for programmes like Urbact and the European Urban Initiative, which consider public participation essential for implementing spatial transformative projects. In contrast, programmes like Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) value stakeholders' participation in setting strategies and coordinating governance mechanisms.

This EU overview shows that citizens' activism can significantly influence administrative processes and benefit from them. This influence extends from shaping policy directions to ensuring that local and regional projects align with the communities' actual needs and aspirations. By embedding PPL in various programmes, the EU not only enhances the democratic process but also ensures that development initiatives are more inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to the people they are designed to serve.

From a pedagogical perspective, it is important to differentiate the various approaches EU programs implement to facilitate PPL. This differentiation is crucial for correctly understanding the PPL concept and effectively transferring this knowledge to EU Member States. By clearly identifying and articulating these diverse methodologies, educators and policymakers can ensure that the lessons and best practices derived from PPL are accurately conveyed and adapted to the specific contexts of each Member State. This, in turn, enhances the overall effectiveness of knowledge transfer and PPL implementation across the EU.

3.3. Structural and contextual limits and challenges of PPL

Despite the EU's efforts, public participation faces various structural and contextual limits and challenges. The EU generally suggests participatory planning without adequately considering cultural complexities. Indeed, cultural differences can significantly impact the willingness and

ability of individuals and communities to participate effectively. Factors such as historical experiences, social structures, the maturity of Member State democracies, and power dynamics must be carefully considered to ensure meaningful participation.

Another issue that has emerged is related to the EU funding system. While participatory planning is a valuable approach to inclusive decision-making, its effectiveness can vary depending on expectations. Mandating participatory planning without adequate support or resources may not always lead to desired outcomes. Moreover, PPL can be perceived as a time-consuming practice, especially when dealing with complex issues or diverse stakeholder groups. Leveraging digital tools and technologies can partially 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.

However, implementing participatory planning through digital tools can face challenges related to digital infrastructure and the need for efficient decision-making processes. The digital divide can seriously limit the potential of PPL concerning the use of digital tools for participatory planning, which can be hindered by disparities in digital infrastructure and access. Certain stakeholders may be marginalised or excluded from the planning process in regions or communities where digitalisation is not widespread or a digital divide exists.

From a pedagogical perspective, it seems crucial to tailor academic curricula considering the mentioned geographically differentiated limits and challenges. Contextual conditions should somehow be incorporated into the flexibility of the curricula. Issues like the digital divide, where and when it exists, should be addressed by exploring ‘analogical’ solutions. Creating synergies between e-PPL platforms and in-person PPL practices can enhance citizen’s participation.

4. Transnational comparison

4.1. Introduction to the comparison

This section of the report brings together the evidence collected in relation to the practice and teaching of PPL in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Poland. In more details, it takes stock of the information collected through desk-research, questionnaires and interviews, as well as of the outcomes of the hybrid experts' workshop 'Identifying common needs and gaps for participatory planning', held in Volos on May the 20th, 2024.

In the following sections, we compare the information collected in the country reports produced in relation to (i) PPL institutional frameworks and practices and (ii) how the latter is approached in Higher education curricula. Particular attention is devoted to the individuation of common needs and gaps, upon which meaningful lessons for the development of the DEMo4PPL ModPPC can be drawn, as well as of contextual elements that will be useful in the localisation of the ModPPC in the four contexts under investigation.

The two subsections are organised in the same way, and concluded by an overview of the most interesting practices – in terms of PPL practice and education – identified through the analysis. They are intended to prove inspirational for the development of the Curriculum, as positive examples of how PPL can be practiced and taught around Europe.

4.2. PPL Institutional frameworks and practices

4.2.1. Comparing national frameworks

This section aims to provide an overview of the various national frameworks associated with participatory planning in the general content of spatial planning. Through the comparison of national contexts, the chapter sheds light on the diverse approaches and methodologies employed in participatory planning across different countries, offering valuable insights for understanding the global landscape of participatory approaches, the common aspects and the integration of the participatory theme in the four field of interest: land use and spatial planning, rural development, tourism management and urban mobility. The comparison allows the emergence of aspects common to the national contexts; among these, the common presence of procedures for implementing public participation in urban mobility through the Sustainable urban mobility plans (SUMP) and widely disseminated tools stand out in the LEADER field of Community-led local development (CLLD), both of which derive from European Union policies. Other aspects see different situations among countries due to the presence or absence of national plans and reference laws at a national level. This is the case, for example, of the tourism sector where Italy does not have a reference at a national level, Bulgaria has a national law, Poland sees all three levels, national, regional and local, involved with different roles and, finally, Greece includes the topic in the broader context of spatial planning, but with the addition of tools such as National Plans.

The promotion, definition, and implementation methods of participatory planning emerge as essential in the generality of spatial planning tools; however, they suggest a considerable space for growth in these practices and in the expertise and specialisation necessary to govern and manage these processes. The necessary skills explored more in-depth in the following chapters see PPL practices having to deal with changing contexts, formality and informality of processes, with the triggering of processes by administrative authorities or as processes born from

spontaneous movements and civil society, from developments of EU policies and its programs. This panorama offers opportunities and potential innovations in integrating participatory approaches in space planning, besides shaping figures that can help these processes to be bold and effective.

In order to better outline how participatory approaches and processes are defined and practised, the different national contexts involved in the project are compared in relation to four themes, for which PPL proves particularly relevant and around which the national questionnaires have been organised: Land use and spatial planning, Rural development, Tourism management and Urban mobility.

Land use and spatial planning

Urgency in terms of spatial planning, spatial level of reference and institutional obligations.

In all national contexts, spatial planning occurs at the three territorial levels of reference: national, regional and local. A common understanding is that participation is acquiring a central role in the spatial definition of land use; in Poland, Italy and Greece, the participatory aspect finds particular emphasis at the local level (plans or masterplans) including forms of consultation and public participation. In Bulgaria, participatory forms are found at all three levels, from consultative forms to more detailed involvement at the local level. Poland, Greece, and Bulgaria have mandatory provisions for implementing participatory forms in spatial planning processes, and there are indications in national laws. In contrast, in Italy, although public participation processes are practised in the definition of plans at the local level, there is no obligatory indication.

Non-institutional and informal participation processes

The presence of informal and non-institutionalized participatory processes is present in all national contexts, with different nuances in the perception of the impact these have or can have. In Italy, in the context of urban and territorial transformations, more or less spontaneous participatory forms are often activated, sometimes going in parallel to the formal planning process, intending to influence the decision-making process. The same happens in Greece, where these processes run alongside formal ones. In Poland, especially in large cities, consultative forms fuel non-formal public participation processes. In Bulgaria, non-formal public participation processes are accompanied by a risk of pre-selection of participants to lower the potential conflict between stakeholders. In general, the non-formal aspects applied to participation in spatial planning are considered a significant opportunity to increase the effectiveness of decision-making and the quality of planning outcomes and create mutual coordination between those participating.

Integration of outcomes in the planning product

The context relating to the existence of mechanisms that guarantee or enable the integration of the results of participation in the planning products must be reported as a general consensus concerning the non-existence of these mechanisms or, in any case, to a notable ease in not taking into account indications developed through processes participatory. That is true for Bulgaria, where the mandatory requirements about involving citizens in the planning processes are circumventable in practice and for Italy, where there is no indication of a mechanism to integrate PPL's outcomes; some regional Laws establish the obligation for the administration to

take into account the results of participatory processes. In both Greece and Poland, it is noted that it is possible that the results of the participation are evaluated by commissions or managers of the authority that promotes the planning process, and if deemed valid, they can be integrated into the final documents at the discretion.

Rural development

Urgency in terms of spatial planning, spatial level of reference and institutional obligations.

Planning in rural development follows a similar approach between the four national contexts, with different gradients and methods. A strategic definition and framework at the national and regional levels is followed by strategic implementation and application at the local level.

Greece and Italy have identified participatory forms in the implementation tools defined as Community-Led Local Development integrated into the strategic development system at regional and local levels. Italy adds the development of local strategies dedicated to marginal areas. A common indication concerns the forms of involvement and participation conveyed within the Local Actions Groups. The obligation to include participation is highlighted in Poland from the national law on the spatial planning level, while all four countries share the integration of participation in rural development through the LEADER approach.

Non-institutional and informal participation processes.

In rural development, the comparison between the practices in the four national contexts sees some substantial differences while recognizing the existence of informal and non-institutional participation practices. In Bulgaria, it is noted that informal public participation is struggling due to the ageing and decreasing population. Similar processes are also underway in Italy, where participatory practices in rural and marginal areas are present and growing, sometimes even moving in parallel with national and regional strategic formal instruments (e.g. Strategy for the Inner Areas). In Poland, especially at the local community level, non-institutional processes are activated, especially in cases of objectionable investments. Finally, in Greece, informal participation processes are applied within the context of planning for rural development, sometimes in relation to the LEADER/CLLD programmes.

Integration of outcomes in the planning product.

In rural development, operational and cultural discontinuity factors emerge when recognising participatory approaches as an opportunity for balanced and sustainable development. The guarantee of the integration of the results of participation shows, on the one hand, a lack or poor effectiveness of these mechanisms, in particular in Greece, where the institutional obligation for some form of public participation does exist, but the integration of the results of these processes is not certain to be included in the final decision-making process. In the Italian context, there are no indications of integration. However, in some steps of the strategic planning process, there are instructions for assuming the outcomes of local working groups, mainly through the CLLD approach and in formulating local strategies for internal areas (SNAI). In Bulgaria, it is reported that the transfer of information between local authorities and organisations is often informal and facilitated by geographical proximity, but this creates risks of poor autonomy for the organisations. Finally, The Polish context provides integration mechanisms in the definition of master plans, where the outcomes of the consultations are reported in a document that indicates how they were considered in the final version of the planning document.

Tourism management

Urgency in terms of spatial planning, spatial level of reference and institutional obligations.

The planning context related to tourism management differs substantially between the four national contexts. In Bulgaria and Greece, the participatory context linked to tourism refers to national spatial planning regulations, with the second one expressing a national tourism plan (Greek Tourism 2030 / Action Plan). In Poland, the central role of participation is recognized, given the potential role of local communities and takes place at three levels: national level with general policy directions, followed by regional strategies development and locally by local tourism strategies. In Italy, no law defines a national tourism Plan, except for some references in the National Strategy for Inner Areas, which is why participation aspects are scarcely structured and mostly embedded in integrated local development strategies. Bulgaria, Greece and Italy have no institutional binds to develop participation in tourism management. Otherwise, Greece will involve professional and social bodies in the Tourism Commissions at the local level.

Non-institutional and informal participation processes

Within tourism management, all national contexts report how non-institutional and informal practices are present, although different aspects emerge due to the conformation of the reference frameworks at the spatial levels of each country. In Bulgaria, informal processes are developed by civic initiatives and movements that often emerge as a reaction to government decisions aiming to push the higher levels to reconsider the decision. In Italy, due to the lack of national plans or regulations, informal forms of participatory activation are practised, mainly to deal with specific subjects of tourism development and funding opportunities. Something similar happens in Greece with a particular focus on the context of EU and nationally funded programmes. In Poland, it is recognised that some informal networks of experts and tourism organisations play an advisory or management role in tourism management and planning.

Integration of outcomes in the planning product

In tourism management, the four national contexts indicate a lack of capacity in the planning processes to guarantee the inclusion of participation results. In Poland and Italy, there are no indications or commonly used mechanisms that ensure the integration of public participation. In Greece, despite the institutional obligation for some form of public participation, the practice reports how the integration of the results of these processes is not certain to be included in the final decision-making process. Similarly, in Bulgaria, consultative councils on tourism in the municipalities that develop tourism can only make proposals to the municipal councils about planning, and there is no legal obligation for the proposals to be accepted.

Urban mobility

Urgency in terms of spatial planning, spatial level of reference and institutional obligations.

In all four national contexts, the theme of the inclusion of communities and citizens in mobility choices is considered essential and with a rapidly growing level of interest on the part of the various actors involved. That can be explained by the role played by the EU in providing policy indications on mobility and participation. Italy and Greece report that Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) are the privileged place to develop participatory forms in urban mobility by providing mandatory involvement indications. In Poland, the definition of local mobility plans and feasibility studies require the activation of public consultations. Similarly, in Bulgaria, the city's

General Development Plans, which integrate mobility aspects, provide for public and expert consultations. Therefore, Urban mobility planning takes place locally in all four national contexts with a regional framework in Italy and Poland and a strategic and general management reference at a national level in Greece.

Non-institutional and informal participation processes

In urban mobility planning, some differences are visible in the four national contexts, mainly through the recognition of informal activation as a phenomenon capable of interacting with formal processes. For Greece and Italy, a shared aspect is the trigger that mobilizes groups and citizen movements, i.e. sustainable mobility and more general aspects of environmental and sustainability issues. Movements and working groups that promote surveys, information campaigns and workshops are created and operate around this theme. Precisely in Greece, thanks to these tools, the Sustainable Mobility Committees are consulted by local authorities, while in Italy, civic groups are invited to join formal processes, such as the participatory steps of SUMP's definition. Environmental sustainability aspects are also evident in Bulgaria. However, here, informal participation is mainly visible as an activation of protest and disapproval towards choices and policies of urban or central administrations. In Poland, informal non-institutional obligations for urban mobility do not exist; however, sometimes, the opinion of local experts, such as residents of different age groups and NGOs, is collected and can be interpreted as a participatory approach.

Integration of outcomes in the planning product

There is a general lack of specific mechanisms to ensure the integration of participation results in urban mobility planning processes. Where these are present, it is not certain that the participatory results will be translated into the final plans. This situation is familiar to Italy and Greece, which recognize indications in the definition of SUMPs but without the subsequent outcomes being necessarily taken into consideration. In Poland, although certain legal provisions and local initiatives support the integration of public participation, there are no common mechanisms to ensure the full integration of participation in the final planning product. The same happens in Bulgaria, where consultative councils on tourism can propose modifications to transport schemes, but their proposals are not mandatory for local authorities.

4.2.2. Comparing challenges and gaps

Although the Demo4PPL research activity detected evidence of a growing interest in participatory practices and positive feedback regarding the incremental rooting of a participatory cultures in the four countries under investigation, a number of challenges and gaps remains, particularly in relation to the inclusion of the digital dimension as a central element of PPL practice and education. These are addressed in the subsections below, starting with the aspects considered relevant to all national contexts, followed by the gaps shared by only two or three countries and finally, the local challenges and gaps that characterised a single country. While the former will provide useful elements upon which to shape the DEMo4PPL ModPPC, the latter will contribute to inform its implementation in the four countries, and to avoid that contextual specificities eventually hamper the process.

4.2.3. Common challenges and gaps

The elements that emerged as common to all four national realities, despite the framework of the DEMo4PPL project in May 2024, where a specific working session composed of members of the research teams of the project partners and practitioners, students and external researchers synthesised and framed the three priority gaps in all four countries. Framing the aspects related to these three Main Gaps makes it possible to contribute to developing a solid and shared base of 'hot topics' that the digital education and training modules will have to deal with in terms of in-depth study and competences offered.

The three priority gaps (Tab. 1) express a common difficulty in ruling participatory aspects within planning processes and the awareness of PPL's opportunity. The issue of resources is a pressing one: there is a lack, scarcity, and insufficient capacity to estimate and manage PPL effectively. Finally, there is scepticism towards participatory approaches and the risk of distortion and conflicts among stakeholders with specific reference to civic society and the political sector.

***Table 1**. Common Challenges and Gaps for the implementation of PPL to all project countries (*source: own elaboration based on DEMo4PPL)

Bulgaria	**Greece**	**Italy**	**Poland**	**Three Main Common Gaps**
Insufficient understanding about spatial planning processes among citizens, incl. technocratic language.	Lack of "participation culture" and biased approaches of citizens/stakeholders and decision makers.	Inconsistent (confused?) regulations concerning participation and the engagement of citizens.	Low public awareness of participatory planning processes.	**Gap A:** Lack of public awareness, understanding and clarity rules for citizen engagement and participation.
Insufficient resources - time, financial, human - on the part of both citizens and public authorities.	Insufficient resources for PPL in the implemented planning process, incl. time, budget and/or (digital) tools.	Scarcity of time and finance dedicated to participatory processes, from public engagement to impact monitoring.	Limited financial resources of institutions responsible for the participation processes.	**Gap B:** Insufficient human, time and financial resources dedicated to participatory processes.
Conflicts of interest and political influences can undermine the process of citizen participation.	Unbalanced representation of different social groups and/or areas due to limited means of participation.	Lukewarm attitude of decision-makers regarding participatory methods and tools.	Socioeconomic disparities and unequal access to information and resources, especially in some social groups.	**Gap C:** Scepticism and negative attitude of involved parties (indifference of decision-makers, conflicted interests of stakeholders, public mistrust).

The analysis of the data collected from the interviews and questionnaires revealed many additional elements that impede and slow the implementation of participatory approaches and are shared by two or three national contexts. As with the previous gaps, these are impediments

to participatory planning processes common to all four project partners' fields of interest: land use and spatial planning, urban mobility, tourism management and rural development.

Table 2. Challenges and gaps shared among Bulgaria, Greece and Poland (source: own elaboration based on DEMo4PPL)

Bulgaria	**Greece**	**Poland**
Scepticism and mistrust - legal ways to avoid the integration of the results from the participatory processes and involvement of pre-selected Civil Society organisations.	Ineffective mechanisms within the planning practice to integrate PPL contribution in the planning outcome.	No legal obligation to integrate the results of the participation process in the planning product.

Table 3. Challenges and gaps shared among Greece, Italy and Poland (source: own elaboration based on DEMo4PPL)

Greece	**Italy**	**Poland**
Inadequate expertise and know-how of planning bodies to conduct effective participatory planning.	Lack of a formal definition and homogeneous framework defining roles and competences; plus a lack of common understanding of the different skills required in PPL (facilitation, analysis, negotiation, public speaking, etc.)	Limited technical expertise of institutions responsible for the participation processes.

4.2.4. Local challenges and gaps

The project partners share many challenges and gaps in the various national contexts. Nevertheless, some gaps remain specific to each country, offering valuable ideas for defining the role, skills, and practical tools in designing and managing public and multi-stakeholder participation processes. These specific aspects, therefore, play an essential role in defining the didactic details of a training module dedicated to the in-depth study of participatory planning models, techniques, and skills, as well as the contexts in which these skills and tools will be applied.

Table 4. Local challenges and gaps (source: own elaboration based on DEMo4PPL)

Country	**Local challenges and gaps**	**Thematic zoom**
Bulgaria	Complicated and bureaucratic procedures - public participation is neglected at the initial stages of planning.	All fields
Greece	Unwillingness by authorities/decision makers to undertake the political cost of PPL processes	Urban mobility
	Attempts to manipulate the process by vested interests	Tourism management

	Difficulties in communication and coordination	
	Difficulties in participation, especially in remote areas	Rural development
	Establishment of standardized -not always substantial- participation processes	Land use and spatial planning
Italy	A fragmented vision of public bodies towards cross-sectoral and multilevel work.	All fields

4.2.5. Reviewing good practices: what do they teach us?

The good practices mapped and analysed in the three national contexts offer an overview of the modalities, purposes and tools the participatory approach implements by involving different audiences in spatial planning processes. The twenty good practices analysed (Tab. 5) take their starting point from the in-depth thematic analysis of each country (land use and spatial planning, urban mobility, tourism management and rural development) and provide several valuable elements in defining pivotal tools and competencies when undertaking a participatory planning process. What emerges helps us frame which skills and tools (Tab. 6) within participatory processes are fundamental and lets us understand how activating public participation processes foresees the integration between different typologies of professionals, public administration sectors and civil society organisations (formally organised or not).

Table 5. Review of good practices on participatory planning practice in Bulgaria, Greece, Ital and Poland (source: own elaboration based on DEMo4PPL)

Country	**Location: City / Area**	**Good Practice Title**
Bulgaria	Dobrich Municipality	GlobalDobrich
	Dobrich Municipality	Combined Investment Concept "Economy and Mobility in the Interest of the People"
	Varna	Varna Spaces
	Varna	Mayor's Advisory Council on Urban Development and Public Works
	Sofia Municipality	Civic Participation Forum
Greece	Thessaloniki	Resilient Thessaloniki
	Ioannina	Bridges of participation
	Island of Samothrace	Islands of Hope
	Thessaloniki	Neighbourhood initiative Alexandrou Svolou
	Thessaloniki	Special Urban Plan in the area of the former Camp "Pavlos Melas"
Italy	Mirano Municipality	SUMP Mirano
	Trento Municipality	Supertrento
	Bari Municipality	COSTASUD Urban Transformation Plan

	Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna Municipality	"To be" future present" - Urban General Plan
	Torino Municipality	Torino Changes. Towards the new Urban General Plan
Poland	Łódź Voivodeship	PB of the Łódź Voivodeship „Łódzkie na Plus"
	Selected Polish communes	Development of human resources to conduct public consultations in spatial planning
	Selected Polish communes	Inspire Hub
	Zelów Municipality	Public consultations during the creation of Zelów Municipality Development Strategy 2021-2027
	Łódź Voivodeship	Regional Forum of Participation Practitioners

Table 6. PPL's skills, tools and products emerging from good practices (source: own elaboration based on DEMo4PPL)

PPL's skills, tools and products	
PPL's skills and competencies	– Skills about bottom-up process management and support – Knowledge about public engagement methods – Ability to design/promote creative approaches in developing participatory tools to enable community engagement – Ability in negotiation and mitigation of risks/conflicts – Ability to work and act in a multi-stakeholder ecosystem – Skills in strategic planning – Project management skills – Public speaking – Skills in digital governance approaches – Skills in digital communication and dissemination – Skills to co-design methodologies and implementation of processes – Ability to transfer/integrate co-design into actions and processes – Skills in collecting data through public consultation and surveys – Skills in collect and manage digital spatial data – Ability to activate inclusivity methods in public actions – Skills to facilitate working groups live or in a digital environment – Ability to use creatively classic management tools (e.g participatory budget, public competition) – Skills to use digital/analogic mapping and data visualisation tools – Knowledge about new trends and innovation in policy making – Ability in negotiation and mitigation of risks/conflicts – Skills in territorial analysis
PPL's Tools and products	– Skills in territorial analysis – Crowdfunding and fundraising – Co-design tools – Facilitation tools – Social/gender inclusion tools – Creative and visioning tools – Strategy documents and reports – Digital social media for PPL

	– Digital consultations and surveys – Tactical urbanism/space temporary use – Study visits and territorial explorations – Mapping and data visualisation (digital and non) – Productivity digital applications – GIS tools – Territorial analysis tools – Financial and budget tools for social innovation (e.g. Microgrants, Participatory Budget)

One of the key goals of our mapping and research action on participatory planning practices was to delve into the current use and proliferation of digital forms - tools or organizational modes - that aid participatory processes. While non-digital forms and methods still have a place in the design and execution of participatory planning, there is a clear trend. Practitioners from various fields and territorial levels are increasingly drawn to digital tools. They also recognize the need to update digital skills that are either dedicated to or valuable for participation and the importance of customizing digital applications to fit the intervention context. On the one hand, we observe the replication of non-digital tools in digital format (e.g. digital canvas, questionnaire).

However, it is also evident that applying digital modalities and formats is necessary to ensure the inclusiveness of processes, more effective dissemination and communication of results, and greater speed in proceeding within long and complex processes. This shift underscores the relevance and necessity of digital formats in our work, providing reassurance about the direction of our efforts to define didactical contents for a formative module in participatory planning. Another significant aspect is the role of digital as a vital tool for intermediation between forms of communication, languages, and relational models that are inevitably differentiated due to the multi-stakeholder nature of participatory processes. This role of digital tools bridges the gaps and empowers us to navigate the complexities of participatory planning. From this perspective, we can envision a path that is not entirely defined regarding the evolution of the digital function in participatory planning, which already appears to characterise the operational action of participation strongly. The following table (Tab. 7) summarise the skills and digital tools that emerged from the analysis of the twenty good practices selected by the project partners

Table 7. Emerging digital skills and tools in PPL (source: own elaboration based on DEMo4PPL)

Digital skills, tools and products in PPL	
Digital skills and abilities in PPL	Skills to conduct working groups live or in digitally environment
	Skills in collecting [digital] data through public consultation and surveys
	Skills in digital communication and dissemination
	Skills to use digital/analogic mapping and data visualisation tools
	Skills in digital governance approaches
Digital tools and products in PPL	Productivity digital applications
	[Digital] consultations and surveys
	Digital social media for PPL

	Mapping and data visualisation (digital and non)
	GIS tools

4.3. PPL in Higher Education Curricula

4.3.1. Comparing national frameworks

The role of science and the character of the institutions dealing with it are shaped in interaction with the social environment. As an element of the public sphere, they are subject to co-evolution in connection with reforms of social services and state institutions (Tarkowski, Michalski & Połom 2023). The educational process at the university level is influenced by many factors, including the transition to the information phase of civilization development, development of the knowledge-based economy. In an economy in which knowledge becomes the basic developmental resource, human competences (consisting of their knowledge, skills and attitudes) are the basis of their work efficiency and a source of competitive advantage on the labour market (Rachwał 2021). Therefore, all these factors and processes mean that education in the field of planning is geographically differentiated. Hence, it looks slightly different in each country that is part of the DEMo4PPL project consortium.

In **Greece**, planning education is integrated into undergraduate and postgraduate programs at public universities, particularly within engineering and architecture faculties. Two spatial planning departments exist: one at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and another at the University of Thessaly, both offering multiple postgraduate programs and research opportunities. There is no dedicated transport planning department, but transport and urban mobility courses are included in civil engineering, rural and surveying engineering, and spatial planning programs. Thirteen engineering departments offer abovementioned courses at the undergraduate level, with the only specialized postgraduate transport program being an inter-departmental course at the University of Thessaly. Various postgraduate programs also offer individual courses on transport and mobility.

In **Italy**, education in the field of planning emerged relatively recently, evolving with the professional recognition of planners responsible for shaping the built environment. Significant legislative reforms around the turn of the millennium formalized planning-specific degrees and professional titles, transitioning the field from practitioners with architectural, engineering, and surveying backgrounds to a distinct profession. Dedicated planning degree programs began in the early 2000s, leading to the introduction of bachelor's and master's degrees and professional titles like Junior Planner and Territorial Planner. Since then, over 12,000 planning graduates have emerged. Despite these developments, the status of planning education remains contentious, with proposals to merge planners back into the architectural profession threatening the integrity of standalone planning degrees. The National University Council supports the current education model, but recent legislative measures in Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan introduce uncertainty by potentially enabling immediate licensure for planning graduates. This may impact the structure and focus of planning programs.

Dynamic socio-economic changes in **Poland**, driven by systemic political, social and economic transformation and European integration, necessitate continuous modernization of educational goals, content, and methods. In the 1990s, the fields of spatial management, economy, and

planning were established through interdisciplinary collaboration across various universities. These fields addressed the growing demand for specialists in spatial planning and regional development. The interdisciplinary nature of these programs integrates diverse knowledge, allowing for tailored specializations. In 2018, Poland legally defined "socio-economic geography and spatial management" as a discipline within social sciences, offering development opportunities but also posing challenges. There is significant variation in spatial management programs across universities, differing in hours, subject structure, and the balance of theoretical and practical content. For the 2023/24 academic year, 62 spatial management programs were offered, primarily at the bachelor's and master's levels, with most having a general academic profile. These programs are classified under "Architecture and town planning" but also relate to other fields like earth sciences, engineering, economics, and social sciences due to their interdisciplinary nature.

In **Bulgaria**, planning education, which prepares individuals for careers in regional, environmental, urban, or transportation planning, is offered by institutions across various vocational fields. Given the multidisciplinary nature of subjects related to the sustainability of communities and regions, many other academic and professional fields also address these topics. Seven HEIs in Bulgaria have accredited programs in the field of architecture and construction—five of these are in the capital city of Sofia, while the others are in Varna, Rousse, and Shumen. The institution in Varna offers only a doctoral program.

4.3.2. Comparing challenges and gaps

4.3.3. Common challenges and gaps

Determining common challenges and gaps in spatial planning education is crucial for DEMo4PPL project for several reasons. Understanding the specific weaknesses in current educational programs allows the project to target areas that require enhancement. This ensures that educational modules expected as DEMo4PPL project's outcomes will be focused and effective, addressing the most pressing needs in spatial planning education. Recognizing challenges such can lead to the development of new teaching methods. Here are the most common gaps identified in PPL education:

- **Gap A:** *Insufficient number and/or up-to-date content of participatory planning (PPL) dedicated academic courses and lifelong learning (LLL) programmes reflecting the needs and conditions of real-life practice*.

There is a significant gap in the availability and relevance of PPL dedicated academic courses and LLL programs, which fail to meet the current needs and conditions of real-life practice. The insufficient number of these courses and programs means that many students and professionals lack opportunities to engage with and learn about PPL. Furthermore, the content of existing programs is often outdated, not incorporating the latest methodologies, technologies for effective PPL. This gap leads to a workforce that is not adequately prepared to utilize advanced digital tools and IT solutions, which are increasingly critical for implementing planning processes. Consequently, the development of inclusive, community-driven planning initiatives is hindered. Addressing this issue requires the creation of more comprehensive and up-to-date educational offerings that integrate modern digital tools and IT, aligning better with the practical demands of the field of planning. Additionally, there is a strong need for professionals and

researchers not only to produce knowledge that can be used by local communities in PPL but also to involve local communities in the knowledge production process (citizen social science).

- **Gap B:** *Need to complement theoretical knowledge with practical skills of future practitioners through hands-on practice, fieldwork, digital tools etc.*

A significant gap exists in the current educational framework due to the need to complement theoretical knowledge with practical skills for future practitioners through hands-on practice, fieldwork, and the use of digital tools. While students often gain substantial theoretical understanding, they frequently lack opportunities to apply this knowledge in real-world settings.

- **Gap C:** *Difficulty/inertia of academia to keep up with the dynamic, interdisciplinary, and "smart" nature of contemporary PPL in terms of skills, tools, methods and/or strategies.*

This gap in academia lies in its slower pace of curriculum development and institutional change, which struggles to match the rapid evolution of skills, tools, and methods required by contemporary PPL. Consequently, the students may find themselves underprepared for the dynamic, interconnected challenges they face in modern professional life.

4.3.4. Local challenges and gaps

In the countries which become a DEMo4PPL project consortium members spatial planning education has several significant gaps and challenges (Tab. 8). Firstly, in **Greece** there is an insufficient number of relevant courses or inadequate coverage of contemporary planning topics within existing curricula, leaving students without comprehensive knowledge of modern practices. Additionally, teaching staff often lack the experience and know-how in PPL and associated digital tools, which hinders effective instruction. Moreover, there is an inadequate use of interactive teaching methods, limiting students' training and practical experience essential for real-world applications.

Table 8. Main gaps for the academic teaching of participatory planning - Integrating findings from the overview of planning curricula in all fields (land use and spatial planning, rural development, tourism, and urban mobility) (source: own elaboration based on workshop)

Country	Gaps
Greece	– Insufficient number of relevant courses or coverage in existing courses in planning curricula. – Lack of experience and know-how of teaching staff in PPL, corresponding methods and (digital) tools. – Inadequate use of interactive teaching methods, especially in terms of training and practical experience. – Insufficient resources to support teaching needs in PPL, incl. software, equipment, tools and infrastructure. – Difficulty of HEIs to keep up with emerging needs and trends of PPL.
Italy	– Lack of systematic and continuous exploration of the evolution of the needs in the practice, and of the provision of PPL programmes (e.g., addressed to public officials and practitioners).

	– Confuse/overwhelm students with the number of competencies and skills they need - Loosing planning "core business" process in favour of participatory methodologies. – Training gap between the tools and skills required and the context of rules and regulations. – "Flattening" the terminology towards an urban-biased language, to the detriment of other scales and types of territories. – Hiatus between the knowledge and tools offered to students and the real needs of the practice world (inertia of educational institutions etc.).
Poland	– Insufficient number of separate courses on PPL. – Lack of experience and know-how of teaching staff in PPL area. – Too much focus on theoretical knowledge on PPL, and lack of development of practical skills or fieldwork. – Insufficient resources to support teaching needs in PPL, including software, equipment, tools. – Limited integration of interdisciplinary approaches to teaching PPL, especially social context is missing.
Bulgaria	– There are no courses that focus purposefully on PPL. – The PPL elements are distributed across vocations, courses, and training institutions. – Teaching civic participation in academic programs often emphasizes general concepts/principles while neglecting practice. – The training in the different vocational fields focuses on the civic participation elements only in the field-relevant legislation. – The three main elements – participation, (spatial) planning, digitalization – appear separately in the education programs (three courses instead of one demanded).

In **Italy** there is a lack of systematic and continuous exploration of the evolving needs in professional practice and the provision of PPL programs, particularly those aimed at public officials and practitioners. This disconnects results in curricula that may not align with current industry requirements. Students often feel overwhelmed by the myriad of competencies and skills they are expected to acquire, leading to a loss of focus on core planning processes in favour of participatory methodologies.

In **Polish** planning education, several gaps and challenges hinder the effective preparation of students for contemporary planning practice. Firstly, there is an insufficient number of separate courses dedicated to PPL, which limits students' exposure to and understanding of this crucial aspect of modern planning. Additionally, many teaching staff lack the necessary experience and know-how in PPL, further diminishing the quality of education in this area. Moreover, the curriculum tends to overly emphasize theoretical knowledge of PPL, while the development of practical skills and opportunities for fieldwork are significantly lacking.

Finally, in **Bulgaria**, there are no courses that focus purposefully on PPL, leaving a critical gap in the curriculum. Instead, PPL elements are dispersed across various vocations, courses, and training institutions, leading to a fragmented and inconsistent learning experience. Teaching civic participation in academic programs tends to emphasize general concepts and principles, often at the expense of practical, hands-on experience.

4.3.5. Reviewing good practices: what do they teach us?

Examples of good practices in the field of academic teaching of PPL are important for several reasons (Tab. 9). They help ensure that students acquire the knowledge and skills needed to

effectively engage in PPL. Examples of successful PPL projects can inspire and motivate students and teachers. And finally, good practices serve as models that students and educators can emulate. When educators and students are exposed to successful examples, they can adapt and improve upon these methods, leading to new and innovative approaches in the field of PPL.

Table 9. Review of good practices on participatory planning education and training in Greece, Italy, Poland and Bulgaria (source: own elaboration based on DEMo4PPL)

Country	Good practice examples
Greece	– Postgraduate course: "Participatory processes for sustainable planning in cities and regions" – Focus Group: "New Mobility Services. Co-creating accessible futures through new mobility services" – Ecomobility for education – ParticipatoryLab – SUMP Support Centre
Italy	– ProPart - Interactive and Participatory Design – Methodologies for Social Inclusion and Participation – GEOURBANISTIC - Analysis, planning and sustainable management of land and territory – "Cultural planning for local innovation and active citizenship" - Progettazione culturale per l'innovazione del territorio e la cittadinanza attiva – Vulture Park Living Lab
Poland	– 'Locals talking - panel discussions' during 'SPOT - Sustainable Spatial Planning of Tourism Destinations' under Erasmus+ Programme, University of Lodz, – Course on 'GIS in social participation' – Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, – Participatory Budget 'wspUŁrządzimy' at the University of Lodz, – the Local Government Spatial Data Platform offered by GIAP, – Form of completing the course 'Social participation in spatial planning' at the Faculty of Geographical Sciences (University of Lodz),
Bulgaria	– Tools for Enhancing Youth Engagement in Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation – RoBulUs – Public Law and Citizen Participation – Smart Cities' Development – Public Consultations and Civic Participation – People, Places and Practice: Contextualising the Tourism, Hospitality and Events Industries

The review of good practices in PPL education reveals several key lessons for integrating participatory processes into spatial planning curricula:

1. **Interdisciplinary approaches** - spatial planning education allows to obtain knowledge and skills related to spatial organisation of socio-economic development and interdisciplinary (geographical, economic, natural, social, legal, architectural, and technical) knowledge on the management of a space.
2. **Modern teaching and training methods** – Labs or other similar methods demonstrate the value of interactive and co-creative environments where students and practitioners collaborate on real-world problems. These settings foster practical learning and

innovation through active participation. The interdisciplinary nature of the field plays a pivotal role, integrating knowledge from various disciplines and facilitating the creation of diverse specializations tailored to the staffing capacities of individual university departments. However, this is also a challenge for the teaching staff.

3. **Integration with technology** - the integration of PPL with new technologies and modern solutions emphasizes the need for students to understand and engage with modern tools and concepts. GIS plays the critical role of digital tools in PPL. GIS and other technologies enable more effective analysis and communication in planning.
4. **Practical skills and engagement** – some examples stress the necessity of hands-on experience. Engaging students in real-world projects and fieldwork bridges the gap between theory and practice.
5. **Cultural and local context** - some examples of good practices emphasize the significance of cultural and local contexts in PPL. Tailoring strategies to local needs and cultural specifics enhance the relevance and effectiveness of planning initiatives.

In conclusion, the revised good practices teach us that successful PPL education requires a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach that integrates practical skills, local and cultural contexts, technological proficiency, and active community engagement. These elements collectively prepare students to effectively address contemporary challenges in spatial planning and contribute to sustainable and inclusive urban development.

5. Pathways towards digital education and training modules

This concluding section draws on the evidence collected in the country reports concerning PPL practice and education, and discussed in the sections above in a comparative perspective. In doing so, it sketches out a number of pathways towards the development of a modular curriculum aimed at tackling the identified challenges and filling the resulting gaps. In the following subsections, attention is dedicated to highlight the reasons behind the development of such curriculum and its digital nature, to then suggest some of the directions that should be followed in pursuing this task, in particular in relation to the teaching subjects and their prioritisation, the flexible structure of the modules, the methods to be employed and the overall adaptability of the curriculum to different teaching levels and thematic programmes.

5.1 The need for a modular curriculum

The main priority of the DEMo4PPL project is to stimulate innovative learning and teaching practices. This will be reflected in the development of a Modular Participatory Planning Curriculum (ModPPC). The modular approach intends to create synergies between undergraduate, postgraduate and lifelong-learning and training programmes in higher education. More specifically, the ModPPC shall include both basic modules which are common for the undergraduate, postgraduate and life-long training level, as well as optional modules that are suitable for some or all these levels and that can be adjusted to their needs and goals through modular course design (cfr. Mahayni et al., 1999).

In so doing, it will constitute a first-of-its kind modular curriculum with up-to-date content and flexible organization in basic and optional modules. The basic modules will reflect on core subjects, common across disciplines and education levels. The optional modules will comprise two categories: general subjects for advanced knowledge and skills and thematic subjects for specialised analysis on specific themes, where PPL may be implemented.

The appropriate selection and combination of modules will enable to design new courses or support existing ones based on needs and goals of the participating organizations at all educational levels. In this light, a specific framework for the appropriate implementation of the synergies with existing bachelor, master and lifelong-learning programmes active in the Higher Education Institutions engaged in the project is going to be developed together with the ModPPC, and will serve as a blueprint also in relation to the use of the latter by other institutions.

5.1.1. The four thematic zooms

In order to ground the development of the ModPPC on concrete PPL practices and educational frameworks, the DEMo4PPL team decided to survey and synoptically compare how PPL is practiced and taught in the four national contexts that hosts the institutions that compose it. However, due to the intrinsic context-dependent nature of the planning practice, hence of its participatory dimension and educational dimensions, the synoptic comparison had to be preceded by an understanding of how planning is intended in the four countries and institutions.

This operation allowed for the identification of four main thematic fields, that frame in a broader or narrower way how planning is intended and taught in the four educational institutions involved in the project:

Land use and spatial planning is a comprehensive, multi-level and multi-disciplinary process that involves the management, regulation, and strategic organization of land and its resources to

optimize the organisation of human activities in space. This process encompasses the development and implementation of policies, plans, and regulations aimed at directing land use and development in a manner that shall contribute to achieve economic development, social cohesion and efficient resource utilization and environmental protection at the same time. Its essence lies in establishing land use zones and regulations to control the type, intensity, and location of development activities. This activity is complemented by visions and strategies produced at the different territorial scales to guide spatial transformation. Community engagement through public participation plays a significant role in land use and spatial planning, involving stakeholders, including the public, to ensure that development meets the needs and aspirations of the community.

Rural development, due to the unique characteristics of rural areas, differs significantly from urban development. Participatory planning for rural areas is particularly susceptible to the disengagement of local citizens and the subordination of rural interests to urban privileges across cultural, social, economic, and administrative contexts (Johansen & Chandler, 2015). This results in disadvantages for rural communities and can stimulate local conflicts. Therefore, participatory planning for rural areas should aim to empower local communities not only in their interactions with other stakeholders in rural development but also in their antagonist relationships with urban entities (Harvey, 2009).

Tourism management concerns the strategic planning, organization, and coordination of activities and resources necessary for effectively running tourism destinations, businesses, and services. Integrated tourism planning is a complex process designed to ensure the harmonious incorporation of tourism into the overall development of destinations. This process considers territorial, spatial, marketing, and management aspects. While territorial and spatial planning are fundamental to tourism development and resource utilization, they alone are not sufficient. Spatial differentiation has always been crucial for enhancing the territorial structure and organization of tourism. Only when tourism is embedded within the broader economic, social, and spatial environment can it contribute to sustainable and harmonious development. Therefore, strategic planning for tourism should be seen as an integral part of the integrated planning process at macro-level.

Urban mobility concerns the planning for the movement of people and goods along the transport network of the urban area and its interconnections with the interurban transport networks. For more than three decades, planning for urban mobility has been strongly linked to socio-economic and environmental sustainability of cities and their surroundings. Urban mobility is also strongly affected by the technological innovations and the rapid digitalisation of the economy. Public participation, as part of the planning process for urban mobility, significantly contributes towards the development of the appropriate mix of policies and measures which better address the local needs and the global challenges in a user-oriented and socially responsible way.

These fields have been necessarily given prominence in the analysis, at the same time orienting the definition of the pathways aiming at ensuring that the ModPPC is thematically flexible in its implementation (see section 5.5.2)

5.1.2. The digital turn

Importantly, the DEMo4PPL project does not limit its scope to PPL, but approaches the latter through an up to date, innovative perspective. Acknowledging the fact that digital PPL tools are becoming increasingly relevant to contemporary spatial planning and territorial development (Wilson et al, 2019, Wilson and Tewdwr-Jones, 2022), the project will address the corresponding labour market demand by offering modular education options to better prepare students and practitioners to the adoption and use of digital methods and tools in the PPL practice.

At the same time, particular attention will also be dedicated to the digitalisation of education, that has gained prominence in the recent years and especially because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this light, the ModPPC will include both modules based on traditional teaching methods as well as modules that foresee the application of digital pedagogy tools in order to achieve better learning outcomes. Particular attention will be devoted to developing synergies between the needs of digital PPL and the opportunities provided by digital education tools so that, while employing the latter to interact in the classroom or online, the students will also learn the advantages to use the same or similar methods in the future practice.

5.2. Teaching subjects and prioritisation

A first set of considerations concerns the knowledge subjects that should be tackled in the ModPPC, so that the latter is able to education professional figures able to understand, design and manage PPL processes.

The first and perhaps most relevant subject regards participation as such, in terms of participatory practices, participation research and action research. The theoretical fundamentals of participation shall be presented and discussed and discussed. In parallel to its theoretical foundations, participations should be discussed also in terms of the ethical implications that different types of participation bring along with it, in terms of inclusion/exclusion, actual level of decision-making power devolved to the different types of actors vis-à-vis the public authority, and the possible challenges and pitfalls that the processes may run into.

A third subject concerns the methods to handle participation and participatory processes, and the various degrees of engagement of the participating actors that they entail. Participatory methods should be discussed in relation to their goals, expected outcomes, and capacity to engaged different categories of actors. In this concern specific attention should be dedicated to cover specific offline and digital methods and techniques aimed at participation, and in particular at PPL.

Then, a specific section of the ModPPC should focus on participation as connected to planning (PPL) with a reflection on both the process and the outcomes (e.g. the different forms that it may take in different stages of projects, the different actors that may be relevant, the contrasting interests and desired outcomes), discussing the overall methodology and detailing how different understanding of planning and planning themes (see section above) may require different types of PPL methods and techniques.

Relevant information should be provided through the ModPPC in relation to the costs of participation, in terms of actual financial resources, as well as of the required time. At the same time, overarching courses concerning different planning themes and understandings may be integrated into the ModPPL, featuring different levels of priority (Table 10).

Table 10. Possible subjects to be integrated into the ModPCC and prioritisation (source: own elaboration based on DEMo4PPL)

Overarching sphere	Topic	Priority
Theoretical and practical fundamentals Introducing PPL, understanding its contribution to democratic processes with particular reference to the field of planning. Insights of the institutional and legal aspects of decision making, governance and planning.	**Public participation for planning and policy:** introductory course providing fundamentals in relation to various understandings of planning (e.g. urban and regional, land use, mobility, tourism management etc.) and how they links and interfaces with public participation main theories.	Basic
	Public Policy Analysis: Methods for analyzing and developing public policies, decision-making processes and how they can be subject to public participation.	Optional
	Governance and Public Administration: Understanding the structures and functions of government and public agencies, , providing either a focus on a specific country (framed within a broader international institutional environment) or a comparative perspective.	Basic (possibly joined with the topic below)
	Planning Law: Legal frameworks governing land use and planning, providing either a focus on a specific country (framed within the international institutional environment) or a comparative perspective.	Basic (possibly joined with the topic above)
Political, social and ethical implications Discussion of potential challenges and ethical implications (e.g. related to digital divide, differential geographical context and socio-economic, political and power dynamics).	**Goals and challenges of PPL**: Insights on the multiple potential goals of PPL processes, on the reasons why the latter are undertaken, and on the challenges that they may face.	Basic
	Ethics in PPL: Ethical considerations and dilemmas in participatory planning.	Basic
	PPL and power dinamycs: Insights on the unbalanced power relations that permeate PPL arenas and, more in general, actor constellations.	Optional
	PPL and conflicts: understanding on the conflicts that may emerge within PPL, as well as of how can PPL be used to mitigate potential conflicts	Optional
Participatory methods, skills and financial implications Systematic analysis of different methods to address different policy fields, objectives and planning stages, as well as to enhance awareness and engagement, addressing indifference, mistrust	**Community Development:** Techniques and strategies for community development and empowerment.	Basic
	Participatory Methods: Tools and methods for facilitating community participation in planning processes.	Basic
	Conflict Mediation and Negotiation skills: Techniques for resolving conflicts among stakeholders. Strategies for negotiating agreements and compromises.	Basic
	Communication Skills and Facilitation tecniques: Effective communication techniques, both verbal and written. Skills for leading group discussions, workshops, and public meetings.	Basic

and conflict. Financial and administrative constraints and opportunities for public participation within planning and decision-making. Scientific and managerial skills for practitioners.	**Stakeholder Management:** Identifying and managing stakeholders in the planning process.	Basic
	Project Planning and Management: Techniques for planning, executing, and managing projects.	Basic (possibly joined with the topic below)
	Public Finance: insights on PPL project finance and budget restriction/resource allocation, opportunities to finance public participation projects or activities etc. All framed within a general understanding of the financial aspects of public projects and budgeting.	Basic (possibly joined with the topic above)
Digital participation i.e. know-how of digital tools to improve cost-effectiveness of participatory activities and to increase stakeholder representation and geographical coverage.	**Introduction to digital participation and PPL:** theoretical and organisational foundations of digital participation, addressing how technological evolution allows for the employment of digital tools to PPL.	Basic (can be aggregated)
	Digital Participation Platforms: Using digital tools to enhance public participation.	Basic (can be aggregated)
	GIS for Planning: Using GIS tools for spatial analysis and visualization in planning processes.	Basic (can be aggregated)
Thematic subjects i.e. subjects concerning specialized knowledge in relation to specific themes that may prove either be subject of PPL or useful to further grasp the nuances of the latter and ease its practice	**Sociology of Communities:** Understanding the social dynamics within communities.	Optional
	Cultural Anthropology: Insights into cultural diversity and its impact on planning processes.	Optional
	Geography: insights on the interaction of societies and space, and on the environment human and natural complexities and socio-economic dynamics.	Optional
	Smart Cities: Leveraging technology for smarter urban planning and management.	Optional
	Economics: Economic principles relevant to various aspects/subjects of planning that may involve PPL: urban and regional development, transport, tourism etc.	Optional
	Environmental Impact Assessment: Methods for assessing the environmental impacts of development projects.	Optional
	Cultural heritage: PPL aimed at the (joint) management of tangible and intangible heritage assets that a society has inherited from previous generations.	Optional

Importantly, all the above shall be flexible enough to be included as specialised content within modules or courses that are particularly suited to this type of approach. For example, in the light of the analyses carried out in the DEMO4PPl countries, spatial planning and urban design studios, courses in real estate, sociology, sustainable mobility, digital mapping, and, more generally, all courses that have a practical component linked to real case studies could be particularly suitable to host PPL subjects and methods. At the same time, courses reflecting on the theoretical aspects of planning could incorporate elements concerning the reason behind and the foundations of participation, its ethical implications etc.

5.3. Modules' structure and flexibility

The structure of developed PPL modules must respond to diagnosed challenges. First, the flexibility of the PPL modules' structure must allow the teacher to integrate place-based and problem-based approaches. Therefore, within the structure, there should be a clear path to

address the voices of public officials and practitioners and involve them in the teaching process. Direct cooperation with both officials and practitioners allows to select and apply tools and technologies according to the real needs of the practice world, as well as to identify the skills and competencies required in the field of PPL.

Second, the PPL modules' structure and content must focus on practical skills exercises and fieldwork and adjust the theory of PPL to the educational level: the lower the level of education, the lower the share of theoretical content. On the other hand, increasing interdisciplinary approaches to teaching PPL is a priority. The goal is to target participation, planning, and digitalisation within one module. This is also to increase the adaptability of modules to various programmes offered by HEIs representing different research traditions and scientific disciplines.

Finally, both the structure and content of the PPL modules must be designed to address the lack of experience and know-how among teaching staff in PPL. Content, as well as corresponding methods and tools (including digital ones), should be introduced in the following order: 1) non-digital problems of PPL solved by applying non-digital tools, 2) non-digital challenges of PPL addressed with the support of digital tools and technologies, and 3) work within a fully digital ecosystem of problems and solutions. It must be emphasised that using open-source software, which is easy to apply in less equipped educational institutions in terms of both tools and infrastructure, is a priority.

5.4. Teaching methods

The methods of PPL teaching in academic programmes are diverse and combine traditional forms of education with modern techniques and digital tools, developing both theoretical knowledge and practical skills of students.

The most commonly used method of providing students with the necessary theoretical knowledge is lecture. This is usually supported by multimedia presentations that contain images, maps, and videos that illustrate the issues discussed and are intended to engage students in the discussion. Guest lectures are also conducted by practitioners who share their experiences, enabling students to understand the practical aspects of PPL.

A frequently used method is the analysis of case studies, which develops students' analytical skills, enabling them to make informed decisions in the context of real planning problems. This method is also combined with a discussion of a given case. Individual and team-thematic projects are also used, allowing the practical application of acquired knowledge in participatory processes. Study visits are made to institutions and companies to collect data and analyse real cases. A less popular but also used method are simulation games imitating real planning scenarios; teachers play the role of moderators supporting students in decision making.

Students also participate in laboratories where they have access to the resources and tools necessary to complete projects. In teaching participatory planning, digital tools are used, such as common learning management systems, interactive Internet tools, e.g. analytical platforms, online maps, online meeting platforms, virtual whiteboards, online polls, and social media supporting educational interaction and the implementation of participatory projects.

Emphasis should be placed on the practical applications of participatory methods and tools. This may include study visits, internships, and collaborations with industry experts to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. PPL education will be characterised by an increased emphasis on interactive, hands-on, and technologically enhanced learning

experiences that prepare students to effectively solve urban planning and public participation problems in real-world settings.

5.4.1. Digital methods

The development of participatory planning teaching methods is anticipated to evolve by integrating digitalisation into problem-based and place-based learning. We foresee two paths for the digitalisation of PPL education. First, existing teaching methods will be enhanced with digital approaches, methods, and tools. Second, entirely new areas for practicing and teaching PPL will emerge, inspired by advancements in digital technologies.

The use of simulation games will also become more common. The goal is to increase students' engagement as well as bottom-up management and process support skills. They will be more realistic using advanced software to simulate complex spatial planning scenarios. There will also be an increase in the use of role-playing exercises and simulations that mimic real-world stakeholder interactions, helping students develop the skills needed to work and operate in a multi-stakeholder ecosystem, and negotiate and mitigate risk/conflict.

Analysis of real-world case studies will continue to be a very important teaching method for participatory planning that supports critical thinking. Future developments will likely include more interactive case study platforms, allowing students to benefit from dynamic data sets and real-time feedback, including from practitioners.

The development of teaching methods will necessarily be related to the development and widespread use of digital teaching tools, such as learning management systems, online collaboration tools, and map platforms (GIS). These tools will become more integrated, providing the ability to manage training materials, provide assessments, and provide feedback that will help teachers refine their approach and ensure the curriculum remains relevant and effective. These tools will facilitate interactive learning and support remote and hybrid learning environments. They will help develop skills in digital governance approaches.

As interest in participatory digital methods increases, it will be necessary to consider digital tools and platforms used for public consultation and participation. This will prepare students to effectively use digital technologies in participatory planning processes. This will develop skills in digital communication, collecting data (including digital) through public consultation and surveys, and designing and promoting creative approaches to develop participatory tools to enable community participation. There will be an increasing use of online tools for collaboration and stakeholder engagement. This includes platforms for etc., virtual meetings, on-line surveys.

5.5. Adaptability...

Adaptability of PPL programmes in higher education is essential because it ensures that students from diverse backgrounds and with varying levels of prior knowledge can actively engage and contribute, fostering a more inclusive learning environment. These programmes can be tailored to address current and emerging issues in the field, equipping students with relevant skills and knowledge that are directly applicable to real-world scenarios. By adapting to different educational levels, PPL teaching programs can progressively develop students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, which are essential for effective planning and decision-making.

Flexible PPL programs encourage lifelong learning by allowing students to continue their education and professional development at different stages of their careers, accommodating

their changing needs and interests. Moreover, adaptable programs can integrate new teaching methodologies and technologies, keeping the curriculum dynamic and up-to-date with advancements in the field, thus maintaining the educational institution's competitiveness and relevance.

5.6. ...to different Higher Education Levels

Adaptability of spatial planning programs in higher education, with particular emphasis of PPL, involves tailoring the curriculum and learning outcomes to meet the diverse needs and capabilities of students at different educational levels. PPL intersect with many disciplines such as environmental science, urban studies, social geography or public policy. To provide a broader perspective the teaching programs should contain elements from almost all these disciplines.

Design the teaching programmes with a modular structure of PPL programmes, allowing students to pick and choose courses that match their interest and academic level. Modular programs facilitate interdisciplinary learning by enabling students to combine courses from different fields, thereby broadening their knowledge and skills. This structure also makes it easier to update and adapt the curriculum to keep up with the latest developments and trends in various disciplines, ensuring that the education provided is current and relevant. Finally, a modular structure in PPL programs is important for teachers because it allows them to design and deliver more focused and specialized content, making their instruction more effective and engaging. This kind of structure facilitates team teaching and interdisciplinary collaboration, as teachers can contribute their expertise to specific modules, enriching the overall educational experience.

Including practical projects, case studies, and fieldwork to apply theoretical knowledge, tailored to the educational level of the students. This approach offers flexibility, allowing projects to be scaled in complexity and depth according to the students' academic level, from simple tasks in early levels to complex, research-based projects. Additionally, practical projects can be tailored to students' interests and career goals, promoting personalized learning and encouraging the development of specific skills pertinent to their future professional endeavours. Moreover, providing e.g. additional tutoring services and mentorship programs can support students at different educational levels as well. Additionally, utilising online platforms and other digital tools to provide supplementary materials, interactive modules, and virtual labs, can be adaptable to different learning paces and levels.

By incorporating these pathways, spatial planning programs can be effectively adapted to meet the needs of students at various higher education levels, ensuring a comprehensive and enriching learning experience. PPL modules should be considered both as elements of existing study programs and as offerings for microcredentials.

5.7. ...to different thematic programmes

The adaptability of PPL's modules to various thematic programs allows for the transmission of theoretical and practical content that effectively complements and enriches the core subjects of spatial planning courses. The analysis of planning processes in different thematic domains makes it possible to define the most appropriate level at which participatory processes are activated, thus enabling students to understand how different participatory models apply to different themes and levels of the planning process. The intersection of spatial and thematic dimensions turns out to be an interesting criterion for defining the application and study of participative approaches; in other words, it allows for the development of theoretical and applied

educational offerings capable of addressing different challenges in urban and rural settings or between aspects of mobility planning, rural development, or tourism management.

The aspects that emerged from the study of the four thematic contexts suggest that the modular organization of participatory planning contents must take into account the existence of a series of general skills regarding PPL and instead a series of theoretical and instrumental aspects more specific to the different themes and levels of intervention. The supra-thematic aspects are concerned, for example, with the ability to interpret and map complex environments, manage multi-actor contexts, and apply forms of group facilitation and co-design processes. On the other hand, more specific participatory elements concern knowledge in the field of digital governance, social and gender inclusion, public speaking and gaming for participation.

These differences suggest imagining modular courses adaptable to different thematic insights and the spatial level of application of the skills provided. This would also allow building tailor-made training courses with advanced and themed content.

Finally, the digital aspects of participatory planning generally cut across the themes and programs explored in this report. However, some differences emerge, particularly in in-depth teaching concerning the thematic and territorial contexts of applying digital participatory tools and the quality and level of the digital environments in which students will operate. From this point of view, integrating knowledge relating to digital tools with territorial analysis skills is critical in clarifying the contexts of intervention and allowing the training of figures capable of designing and implementing participatory tools and models effectively.

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