GEtCoheSive 2023-2026

WP3 Activity 3.3

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Transnational Action Plan

Version 1

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1. Purpose and Scope

This Transnational Action Plan (TAP) establishes a shared framework for strengthening inclusive participatory governance across the partner territories. It serves as the operational vehicle for the pathways identified in the Transnational Strategy for Participatory Governance (D.3.2.2), translating high-level strategic orientations into concrete, collaborative actions. While the Transnational Strategy (TS) identifies common structural gaps, such as linguistic hurdles and institutional silos, and strategic orientations, the present Action Plan defines the joint commitments through which partner organisations will address these challenges within their respective contexts.

The TAP functions as a strategic bridge between the project's transnational vision and the Local Action Plans (LAPs) developed in Emilia-Romagna (Italy), Berlin (Germany), Vienna (Austria), and Slovenia. While the LAPs address the specific institutional roles and responsibilities as well as the socio-political realities of each partner organisation, the TAP aligns these local efforts to contribute to a shared transnational model for inclusive governance.

The TAP does not replace local action plans. Instead, it provides:

- **A common direction for strategic actions:** Aligning diverse local efforts toward the shared goal of moving from consultative engagement to collaborative co-design.
- **A framework for transnational learning and coordination:** Facilitating continuous learning and the exchange of innovative methodologies and tools across borders.
- **A commitment to institutional sustainability:** Establishing a reference point for partners to embed participatory practices as permanent governance standards beyond the project lifecycle.
- **A basis for future cooperation and policy development:** Providing a foundation for future cross-regional partnerships and the ongoing integration of inclusive practices into territorial policy.

2. Shared Context and Structural Challenges

Despite the diverse institutional and social landscapes in the partners' territorial contexts, a clear set of common challenges has emerged that prevents participatory governance from reaching its full potential. Significant efforts have been taken by governments in Berlin, Vienna, Emilia-Romagna, and Slovenia, including the adoption of regional participation laws, the publication of a city-wide democracy strategy, and the establishment of dedicated offices for civic engagement. These efforts demonstrate a strong political commitment towards participatory urban governance. However, formal

structures alone have not been sufficient to ensure deep inclusion. Underrepresented groups continue to face a complex intersection of linguistic, social, economic, and institutional barriers that often restrict their depth of involvement and their ability to influence decision-making. Public administrations and practitioners frequently lack the specialised skills, time, and resources required to recognise and dismantle these hurdles effectively. Furthermore, cooperation between public institutions and civil society remains largely informal or tied to short-term project cycles, making inclusive participation practices difficult to scale or institutionalise as long-term governance standards.

Despite different institutional and social contexts, partners face four common structural gaps identified in the TS: Design flaws in participation processes often exclude residents who lack high social capital or specific education, especially underrepresented groups that face linguistic, social, economic, and institutional barriers. This results in shallow or consultative engagement that rarely moves beyond gathering opinions. Furthermore, the weak continuity of participation processes stems from the fact that cooperation between public institutions and civil society is often informal or project-based. A logic that favours "on-off" engagement over the long-term, trust-based partnerships required for sustainable impact. Therefore, the ability to scale innovative practices is hindered by a lack of institutional depth and collaboration.

This TAP serves as a direct operational response to these structural gaps. By moving beyond local efforts, the formalisation of transnational public-civil society partnerships, and the commitment to cross-sectoral capacity building, the partners aim towards a unified, transnational approach to inclusive urban governance.

3. Vision

Our common vision is to embed inclusive, accessible, and meaningful participation into everyday governance, ensuring that diverse perspectives are systematically integrated into public decision-making across our territories. To achieve this vision, the partners focus on four interconnected objectives:

1. **Inclusion by design:** Transforming participation from a "one-size-fits-all" model into a multilingual, multi-modal system that prioritises accessibility from the start.
2. **Shared agency:** Shifting the role of (underrepresented) residents from passive respondents to active co-designers with real influence over territorial policy.
3. **Institutional stability:** Moving beyond temporary projects toward formalised governance frameworks and stable public-civil society partnerships.
4. **Cross-sectoral capacity & scalability:** Building the internal skills, cross-departmental structures, and community-based capacities necessary to make

participation a shared core competence across both public administration and civil society.

4. Transnational Areas of Joint Commitment

4.1. Area 1: Inclusive Communication and Accessibility by Design

Strategic driver (Ref. Strategy 1 in the TS)

As identified in the TS, language and information barriers are primary causes of "shallow inclusion". Open participation often favours individuals with high social capital and/or advanced education. To counter this, inclusion must be a design requirement rather than an afterthought. This can be achieved by creating a multilingual and multi-modal communication infrastructure specifically designed to engage underrepresented groups and bridge information gaps.

Joint commitment (Ref. Pathway 1 in the TS)

Partners commit to making accessible communication a standard practice in participation processes. They aim to achieve this through coordinated investment in financial, human, and technical resources, as defined in the TS. A core priority is to normalise multilingualism and multi-modal communication across all institutional processes. The integration of analogue and digital formats ensures that participation remains possible for those with limited digital literacy or access. Digital tools will be treated as extensions of community dialogue, not replacements for it.

Partners commit to the following operational actions:

- Promoting plain language, easy-read standards, multilingual communication and visualisations (pictograms, infographics) so that contents are understandable at a glance, regardless of a participant's native language or level of education.
- Partnering with translation and communication professionals and community facilitators to ensure all materials, whether a physical flyer or a digital app, are technically sound and culturally appropriate.
- Creating shared visual toolkits and simple digital participation platforms that use icons and easy navigation instead of heavy text.
- Providing physical access to digital tools via QR codes, paper-to-digital surveys, and public participation stations (with internet and shared devices) so residents without smartphones or data can still contribute.

4.2. Area 2 – Co-Design & Community-Based Participation Formats

Strategic driver (Ref. Strategy 2 in the TS)

Open participation does not automatically ensure inclusion. As identified in the TS, the collaborative development of co-design methodologies requires that underrepresented

groups be recognised as active contributors and knowledge holders. By shifting their role from "passive respondents" to co-designers, partners ensure that policies are directly informed by lived experience throughout the entire participation process, from initial problem definition to final evaluation.

Joint Commitment (Ref. Pathway 2 in the TS)
Partners commit to providing the institutional flexibility and resources necessary to reach underrepresented groups. With this commitment, an environment of experimentation is fostered, in which decision-making power is shared, and traditional bureaucratic hurdles are dismantled.

Partners commit to the following operational actions:

- Developing low-threshold participation formats, accessible participation spaces, and community-based outreach to remove bureaucratic complexities.

- Implementing participatory evaluation and feedback loops that empower participants to assess the quality, inclusivity, and actual influence of the participation process on final policy decisions.

- Investing in the training of public officials and community facilitators to enhance a participatory approach, providing them with the specific skills needed to address the participation challenges faced by underrepresented groups.

- Collaborating with community representatives to ensure participation formats accommodate diverse communication styles, cultural norms, and community-specific preferences.

- Applying the GEtCoheSive Toolkit to support the design and implementation of inclusive co-design processes through practical methods, templates, and facilitation tools and using the Toolkit to strengthen community outreach, stakeholder mapping, and culturally sensitive engagement strategies tailored to underrepresented groups.

- Integrating the GEtCoheSive Toolkit's monitoring and learning instruments to assess inclusiveness, capture participant feedback, and continuously improve participation practices.

4.3. Area 3 – Structured Cooperation and Governance

Strategic Driver (Ref. Strategy 3 in the TS)

Effective participation requires stable cooperation and clear institutional roles. As identified in the TS, without formalised frameworks, engagement remains superficial, person-dependent and lacks accountability, particularly during political transitions.

Joint commitment (Ref. Pathway 3 in the TS)

Partners commit to institutionalising sustained public-civil society partnerships. This necessitates shared decision-making and the formal recognition of civil society expertise, supported by stable funding and transparent tracking systems.

Partners commit to the following operational actions:

- Clarifying roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes, utilising Memorandums of Understanding adaptable to different legal contexts;

- Promoting cross-sectoral and multi-level coordination between public authorities, CSOs, and national/EU actors to ensure shared goals;

- Ensuring feedback mechanisms and transparency towards participants to inform them how their input was used in decision-making.

- Exchanging strategies for multi-level funding, to ensure civil society can act as a stable intermediary in participation processes and decision-making.

4.4. Area 4 – Strengthening Institutional Capacity & Scalability

Strategic driver (Ref. Strategy 4 in the TS)

As identified in the Transnational Strategy, participation is currently undermined by limited scalability and "siloed" administrations. Without sustained organisational capacity and clear mandates, participation remains rather project-based, than becoming a core governance competence.

Joint commitment (Ref. Pathway 4 in the TS)

Partners commit to cross-sectoral capacity building, ensuring that both public authorities and civil society practitioners have access to shared training, tools, and professional standards.

Partners commit to the following operational actions:

- promoting continuous training for public authorities and civil society practitioners by integrating participatory governance competences into existing training systems;

- using and adapting shared methodologies and GEtCoheSive toolkits for staff training across all partner organisations;

- supporting peer learning between institutions and establishing interdepartmental working groups across partner organisations.

5. Target Groups and Beneficiaries

The **primary users** of the TAP and its outputs are:

- public administrations at local, regional and national level;
- municipal associations and coordination bodies;
- civil society organisations and participation practitioners involved in community engagement and inclusive governance.

These actors will be directly involved in the development, testing and implementation of the proposed tools, guidelines and practices.

The **final beneficiaries** of the TAP are:

- residents and local communities;
- underrepresented and vulnerable groups (including, where relevant, migrants, young people, elderly people, low-income residents, people experiencing homelessness, and other groups facing barriers to participation);
- public institutions, which will benefit from improved policy quality, greater legitimacy and increased public trust.

The TAP adopts a co-creation approach that ensures the active involvement of target groups throughout the design, testing and implementation of outputs, rather than limiting their role to consultation. In particular, the following forms of involvement will be implemented and documented for reporting purposes:

Co-design and consultation

- Organisation of local workshops, focus groups or participatory meetings with civil society organisations, community representatives and participation practitioners to collect needs, feedback and practical inputs.
- Involvement of municipal staff and frontline practitioners in the co-development and adaptation of tools and guidelines.
- Collection of user feedback through surveys or structured reflection sessions during pilot phases.

Testing and piloting

- Pilot implementation of selected tools or practices within ongoing participatory processes.
- Direct involvement of residents and, where possible, underrepresented groups as participants in these processes.
- Documentation of lessons learned, barriers and enabling factors emerging from real-life application.

Engagement of underrepresented groups

- Targeted outreach actions (e.g. through community organisations, mediators, peers, or local networks) to facilitate the participation of groups that are typically underrepresented.
- Adoption of accessibility measures, such as simplified language, multilingual communication, flexible formats or support measures, where relevant and feasible.
- Monitoring of participation diversity where data collection is possible and compliant with data protection requirements.

Validation and feedback

- Sharing draft outputs (guidelines, tools, recommendations) with key stakeholders and practitioners for validation.
- Ensuring feedback loops, including communication on how stakeholder contributions have influenced the final outputs.

Transnational peer learning

- Involvement of partner organisations and their local stakeholder ecosystems in transnational exchange activities.
- Collection and integration of practice-based evidence from different local contexts.

6. Governance and Implementation

The implementation of the TAP is based on a decentralised and multi-level governance model, designed to reflect the diversity of organisational and institutional contexts involved while ensuring a coherent strategic direction across the partnership. Responsibility for implementation is shared among the endorsing entities, each of which commits to integrating the agreed priorities within its own organisational framework, policies and operational practices, in line with its mandate and capacities. This distributed ownership is intended to strengthen long-term commitment, support the sustainability of actions beyond the project timeframe, and allow for context-specific adaptation while maintaining alignment with the common objectives of the TAP.

At the same time, coordination at transnational level will ensure coherence, mutual learning and collective progress. Transnational exchange and strategic alignment will be facilitated through the existing partnership framework, which will provide regular opportunities for dialogue, peer learning and joint reflection. These exchanges will support the monitoring of progress, the identification of challenges and enabling factors, and the continuous improvement of approaches based on shared experience. The transnational dimension is conceived not only as a space for knowledge exchange, but also as a mechanism for joint problem-solving and the co-development of practices that can be adapted across different organisational, institutional and territorial contexts.

Implementation will also rely on strong collaboration with a broader ecosystem of stakeholders. Cooperation with research organisations will support evidence-based approaches, the documentation of results and the development of analytical tools to assess the effectiveness and impact of inclusive participation practices. At the same time, engagement with civil society organisations, community networks and participation practitioners will ensure that actions remain grounded in local realities and responsive to the needs of communities, particularly those groups that face structural barriers to participation.

This governance approach aims to combine organisational and institutional leadership with openness to external expertise and community knowledge. By fostering collaboration across sectors, governance levels and national contexts, the TAP seeks to strengthen collective capacity while promoting a shared culture of inclusive, transparent and accountable governance. The combination of decentralised implementation and structured transnational coordination is intended to ensure both flexibility and consistency, enabling endorsing actors to respond to local priorities while contributing to common learning and long-term systemic change.

7. Resources and Feasibility

The implementation of the TAP is designed to be realistic and sustainable by relying primarily on existing organisational and institutional capacities. The proposed actions will be integrated into current governance arrangements, operational procedures and strategic priorities of the endorsing actors and entities, rather than creating parallel structures. This approach strengthens ownership, reduces implementation risks and supports the continuity of the measures beyond the project period.

Feasibility is further ensured by the alignment of the TAP with ongoing policy frameworks, programmes and institutional mandates at local, regional and national level. In many cases, the actions represent the consolidation, adaptation or scaling-up of practices that are already being implemented or tested. Inclusive participation approaches will therefore be embedded within existing activities such as staff training systems, funding schemes, community engagement initiatives and internal or multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms.

Implementation will rely mainly on internal human resources, complemented where relevant by existing partnerships with civil society organisations, research bodies and community networks. The transnational cooperation framework will support efficiency by enabling the sharing and adaptation of tools and methodologies across contexts.

As a result, additional financial requirements are expected to remain limited. Any incremental costs will primarily relate to training, facilitation, communication or coordination and can, in most cases, be covered through existing budgets and ongoing programmes. Overall, the TAP is based on a strategy of integration and optimisation of

available resources, ensuring both feasibility in the short term and sustainability over time.

8. Expected Results and Impact

The TAP is expected to contribute to:

Expected Results	Key Performance Indicators
Increased institutional capacity for inclusive participation	- Number of public administrations adopting or piloting inclusive participation tools or guidelines. - Number of staff trained on inclusive participation methodologies (disaggregated by department and level). - Percentage of trained staff reporting increased confidence/competence (post-training survey). - Number of internal procedures or operational documents revised to integrate inclusion principles.
Improved inclusion of underrepresented groups	- Number of participatory processes explicitly targeting/including underrepresented groups. - Diversity profile of participants (age, gender, migration background, socio-economic vulnerability), where data collection is feasible and compliant with privacy rules. - Percentage increase in participation of underrepresented groups compared to baseline. - Number of accessibility measures implemented (e.g. multilingual materials, simplified language, childcare, mediation, outreach actions, accessible participation spaces).
Stronger public–civil society cooperation	- Number of formal cooperation agreements or partnership frameworks established between public authorities and civil society organisations. - Number of joint activities (co-design

	- workshops, consultations, community initiatives). - Number of civil society organisations regularly involved in participatory processes. - Stakeholder satisfaction level regarding the quality of collaboration (survey or qualitative feedback).
Increased transparency and trust	- Number of participatory processes with publicly available information on objectives, methods and outcomes. - Percentage of processes providing feedback to participants on how their input was used. - Number of communication outputs produced (reports, dashboards, public updates). - Participant satisfaction and perceived trust in the process (post-process evaluation).
Better quality and legitimacy of public policies	- Number of policy measures, plans or services informed or modified based on participatory outcomes. - Number of policy proposals co-designed with stakeholders. - Evidence of integration of participation results in official decisions (references in policy documents). - Internal assessment by public authorities on the usefulness of participation for policy design.
Strengthened transnational learning and innovation	- Number of transnational exchanges organised (workshops, peer reviews, study visits). - Number of tools, methodologies or practices transferred or adapted across partner contexts. - Number of joint outputs produced (guidelines, toolkits, policy briefs). - Self-assessment by partners on the added value of transnational cooperation.

9. Transnational Learning and Knowledge Network

The effectiveness of the four areas of commitment, Inclusive Communication, Co-Design Formats, Structured Governance, and Institutional Capacity, is fundamentally enabled by a permanent transnational learning and knowledge network. As identified in the Transnational Strategy, isolated local practices limit the potential for systemic innovation, whereas a continuous cycle of comparison, reflection, and adaptation allows for an equitable flow of knowledge across all partner organizations. Partners commit to maintaining this self-sustaining infrastructure for cross-country learning to reduce development costs, accelerate innovation, and ensure that local efforts are grounded in shared research and pooled expertise.

This network functions as the operational backbone for the entire TAP through the maintenance of a shared digital repository of tools, templates, and good practices. By organizing peer-learning activities, study visits, and practitioner exchanges, the network brings together public authorities, universities and CSOs to adapt successful methods tested in diverse contexts to their own local contexts. This collective approach allows partners to develop common standards for assessing participation quality, generating the documented evidence needed to prove the effectiveness of these strategies to stakeholders.

Ultimately, networking and joint learning transform the TAP from a local roadmap into a powerful joint advocacy tool. By coordinating advocacy at national and European levels, partners amplify their collective voice to influence future funding programs and policy frameworks. This supports the implementation of the measures within the four areas of commitment in different local contexts, as well as their promotion as a reference for inclusive governance across Europe.

10. Sustainability and Transferability

Sustainability is ensured through:

- integration into existing policies and funding schemes,
- institutionalisation of training and cooperation structures,
- continued use and adaptation of shared tools.

The approaches are transferable to other regions and policy contexts and contribute to the wider European dissemination of inclusive participatory governance.