



FINAL REPORT ON IDENTIFIED BARRIERS AND NEEDS FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF MINORITIES IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING AND POLITICAL LIFE

WP3 – PACT Project

Preface

Within the framework of Work Package 3 (WP3) of the PACT project, led by Place, a common methodological approach was developed to support partners in identifying local barriers and needs related to the participation of minorities and underrepresented groups in local decision-making processes and political life.

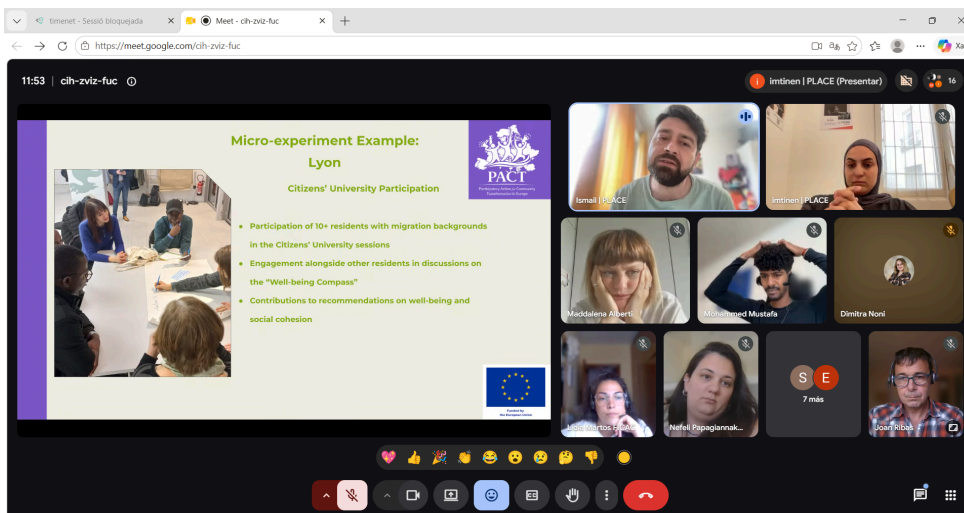
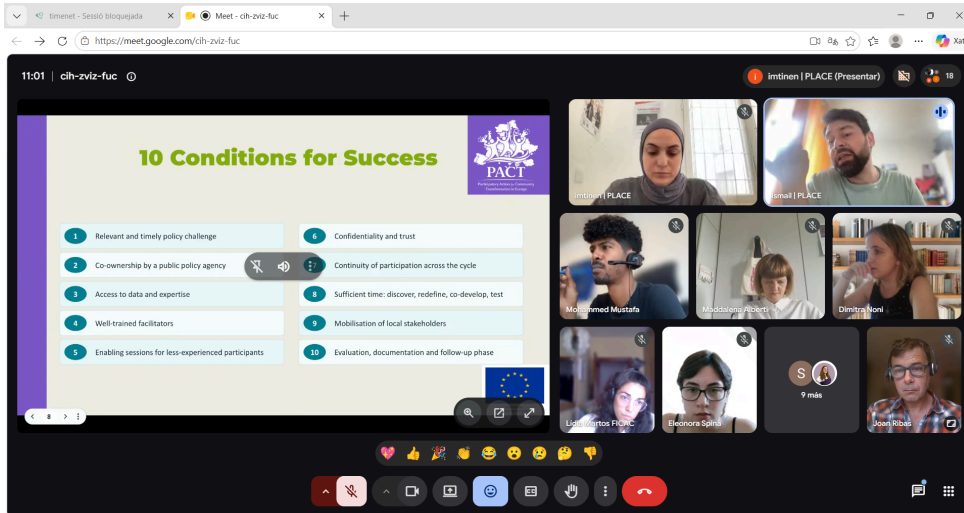
At the beginning of WP3, on 10 June, Place organised an online workshop entitled “Policy Labs – A Methodology for Participatory Governance”, addressed to all project partners. The session introduced the Policy Labs approach as a participatory governance methodology aimed at strengthening democratic inclusion by creating spaces for dialogue between citizens, particularly underrepresented voices, policymakers and relevant stakeholders. The workshop presented the main principles of the methodology, through which communities’ experiences and needs can be transformed into evidence-based and inclusive policy recommendations. Screenshots from the workshop are included below, while the presentation used during the session is attached at the end of this document.

Following this methodological exchange, Place (WP3 Leader) and KMOP (WP4 Leader) coordinated closely to ensure coherence between the data collection process implemented within WP3 and the activities foreseen under WP4. This coordination aimed to ensure methodological consistency across local activities and to facilitate the use of the information collected through WP3 as a basis for the design and implementation of the Policy Labs and for the preparation of the White Paper.

This approach was aligned with the objectives foreseen in WP3, where Place oversees the preparation phase and ensures methodological consistency among local sessions. It also reflects the objectives of T3.2, according to which the outcomes of the local roundtables and collaborative need analyses would be collected through final reports and used as a basis for WP4 activities.



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1. Introduction and methodology

The objective of Work Package 3 (WP3) of the PACT project was to collaboratively identify the main local barriers hindering social inclusion, stakeholder cooperation, and the meaningful participation of minorities and underrepresented groups in decision-making processes and political life across the partner countries.

To achieve this objective, each project partner organised a local participatory consultation involving different categories of stakeholders, including representatives of local authorities, policymakers, civil society organisations, minority-led organisations, community representatives, experts, and citizens. These consultations provided a space for dialogue and exchange, allowing participants to reflect on the factors that limit minority participation at the local level and to identify the main needs emerging from their experiences.

The WP3 activities built upon the knowledge, experiences, and practices collected during the previous phases of the PACT project, particularly through WP1 and WP2. The consultations represented an opportunity to further explore and contextualise the challenges already identified, bringing together institutional perspectives, civil society expertise, and the direct experiences of communities that are often underrepresented in public decision-making processes.

A participatory approach was adopted across all partner countries. Depending on the local context and target groups involved, partners used different methodologies, including roundtable discussions, interactive workshops, World Café sessions, facilitated debates, and consultation questionnaires. These methods allowed participants to share experiences, discuss existing participation mechanisms, and collectively identify the main obstacles affecting inclusion and representation.

Although each partner identified a specific minority community as the primary entry point for its local activities, the discussions and data collection addressed the broader challenges affecting the participation of underrepresented minorities in local decision-making. Depending on the national context, the focus included Roma communities in Hungary, the Albanian community in North Macedonia, and Muslim, migrant, and other minority communities in Greece, Spain, Italy, and France. Across all countries, the activities also engaged a broader range of stakeholders, including young people, representatives of public authorities, civil society organisations, and professionals working on inclusion, participation, and human rights.

Although partner countries present different historical, political, social, and institutional contexts, the findings collected through WP3 reveal several common patterns. Across the different consultations, minorities and underrepresented groups reported similar challenges affecting their participation in public life, including difficulties in accessing



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information, communication barriers, limited trust in institutions, insufficient representation, discrimination, and socio-economic constraints.

At the same time, the discussions highlighted common needs linked to the creation of more inclusive and accessible participation environments, where minorities and underrepresented groups are recognised as active members of local communities and contributors to democratic processes.

2. Common barriers affecting minority participation in local decision-making and political life

The consultations carried out within WP3 highlighted several recurring barriers affecting the ability of minorities and underrepresented groups to participate meaningfully in local decision-making processes and political life.

Although the specific challenges differ depending on national contexts, the findings show that barriers to participation are generally interconnected and result from the interaction between structural, institutional, social, and practical factors.

In many cases, formal participation opportunities exist, but they do not automatically guarantee meaningful involvement. Participants highlighted difficulties in accessing information, understanding institutional processes, being represented, expressing their perspectives, and seeing their contributions recognised within decision-making processes.

The main barriers identified can be grouped into five interconnected areas:

2.1 Limited access to information, communication barriers and accessibility gaps

One of the most frequently identified barriers concerns difficulties in accessing clear, timely, and understandable information about participation opportunities, public consultations, and decision-making processes.

Participants highlighted that although participatory mechanisms are often formally open to everyone, they remain difficult to access in practice due to language barriers, complex administrative procedures, digital exclusion, or communication channels that do not effectively reach all communities.



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Language emerged as a particularly relevant obstacle. In several contexts, participants reported that the lack of multilingual information and limited availability of language support reduce the ability of minority communities to engage with institutions and participate in public discussions.

Participants also stressed that accessibility goes beyond translation. Effective communication requires information that is understandable, easily available, and shared through channels that are connected to the everyday realities of the communities concerned.

2.2 Lack of trust between institutions and minority communities

A second major barrier identified across the consultations is the limited level of trust between minority communities and public institutions.

Participants frequently described a gap between formal opportunities for participation and the perception of having a real influence on decisions. In several contexts, communities reported that they are invited to participate but do not always see their contributions reflected in final decisions.

This perception contributes to the idea that participation can sometimes be symbolic rather than meaningful.

The lack of trust is also connected to previous experiences of exclusion, discrimination, or insufficient institutional responsiveness. When communities do not perceive institutions as willing to listen and respond, participation decreases and existing inequalities may become reinforced.

2.3 Limited representation and visibility of minorities in decision-making spaces

Another recurring challenge concerns the insufficient representation of minorities and underrepresented groups within decision-making structures.

Participants highlighted that minority communities are often involved mainly as beneficiaries of policies rather than as actors contributing to their design and implementation.



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Existing participatory spaces may not adequately reflect the diversity of local communities or may remain difficult to access for groups that have historically experienced exclusion.

The consultations also highlighted the importance of recognising the internal diversity of minority communities, avoiding approaches that consider minorities as homogeneous groups and ensuring that different experiences and perspectives are represented.

2.4 Socio-economic and practical barriers affecting participation

The consultations also showed that participation is strongly influenced by social and economic conditions.

Participants identified several practical obstacles, including lack of time, precarious employment conditions, caregiving responsibilities, financial constraints, administrative difficulties, and limited access to childcare or transportation.

These barriers particularly affect people experiencing forms of vulnerability and may prevent them from participating consistently in public life.

The findings demonstrate that participation cannot be considered separately from broader social inequalities and that access to democratic spaces is also influenced by people's everyday conditions.

2.5 Discrimination, stereotypes and negative public narratives

A further recurring theme concerns the impact of discrimination, stereotypes, and negative narratives on minority participation.

Participants highlighted that minority communities are often represented through simplified or negative narratives, particularly in political and media debates.

These dynamics contribute to feelings of exclusion, affect trust in institutions, and discourage participation.

Several consultations highlighted the importance of recognising minorities as active members of society and challenging narratives that portray diversity as a problem rather than as a resource for local communities.



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3 Common needs emerging from the consultations

The analysis of the WP3 consultations shows that the barriers affecting minority participation are closely linked to a number of common needs emerging across different national contexts.

These needs do not represent solutions or policy recommendations, but rather describe the conditions considered necessary by participants to enable more meaningful participation.

3.1 Need for stronger dialogue and recognition of minorities as active stakeholders

Across countries, participants highlighted the importance of strengthening relationships between institutions, minority communities, and civil society organisations.

A recurring theme was the need to move beyond approaches where minorities are considered only as beneficiaries of policies, recognising instead their knowledge, experiences, and contribution to local communities.

3.2 Need for more accessible information and participation processes

Participants identified the need for clearer information about:

- existing opportunities for participation;
- local decision-making processes;
- rights and possibilities to contribute to public discussions.

Accessibility was considered a key element, including linguistic, administrative, digital, and social accessibility.

3.3 Need for greater representation and recognition of diversity

Participants highlighted the importance of increasing the presence and visibility of minority groups within public and decision-making spaces.



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The discussions showed that representation is not only related to numbers but also to the recognition of diverse experiences, perspectives, and forms of knowledge.

3.4 Need to strengthen trust and sense of belonging

Trust emerged as a fundamental element influencing participation.

Participants linked meaningful participation with the possibility of feeling recognised as full members of local communities and seeing institutions as spaces where their voices are valued.

3.5 Need for greater awareness of participation mechanisms

Finally, participants highlighted the importance of increasing knowledge of how local governance and participation mechanisms work.

This concerns both minority communities, which may face difficulties in accessing institutional processes, and public and social actors working in increasingly diverse societies.

4. Conclusions

The findings collected through WP3 demonstrate that barriers to minority participation are complex and interconnected.

Challenges related to information accessibility, trust, representation, discrimination, and socio-economic conditions contribute to limiting the ability of minorities and underrepresented groups to participate meaningfully in local decision-making processes.

At the same time, the consultations highlighted common needs shared across different national contexts, particularly the importance of recognition, accessibility, dialogue, representation, and stronger relationships between institutions and communities.



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The results of WP3 provide the basis for the following project activities, supporting further reflection on approaches and tools aimed at strengthening more inclusive and participatory local governance processes within WP4.



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POLICY LABS

A Methodology for Participatory Governance

10 June 2026



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POLICY LAB



**PART OF PARTICIPATORY
AND DELIBERATIVE
DEMOCRACY**



**BRINGING CITIZENS
WITHIN POLICY MAKING
PROCESS**



**COMPLEMENTING
REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRACY WITH
BOTTOM-UP DIALOGIC
PROCESS**



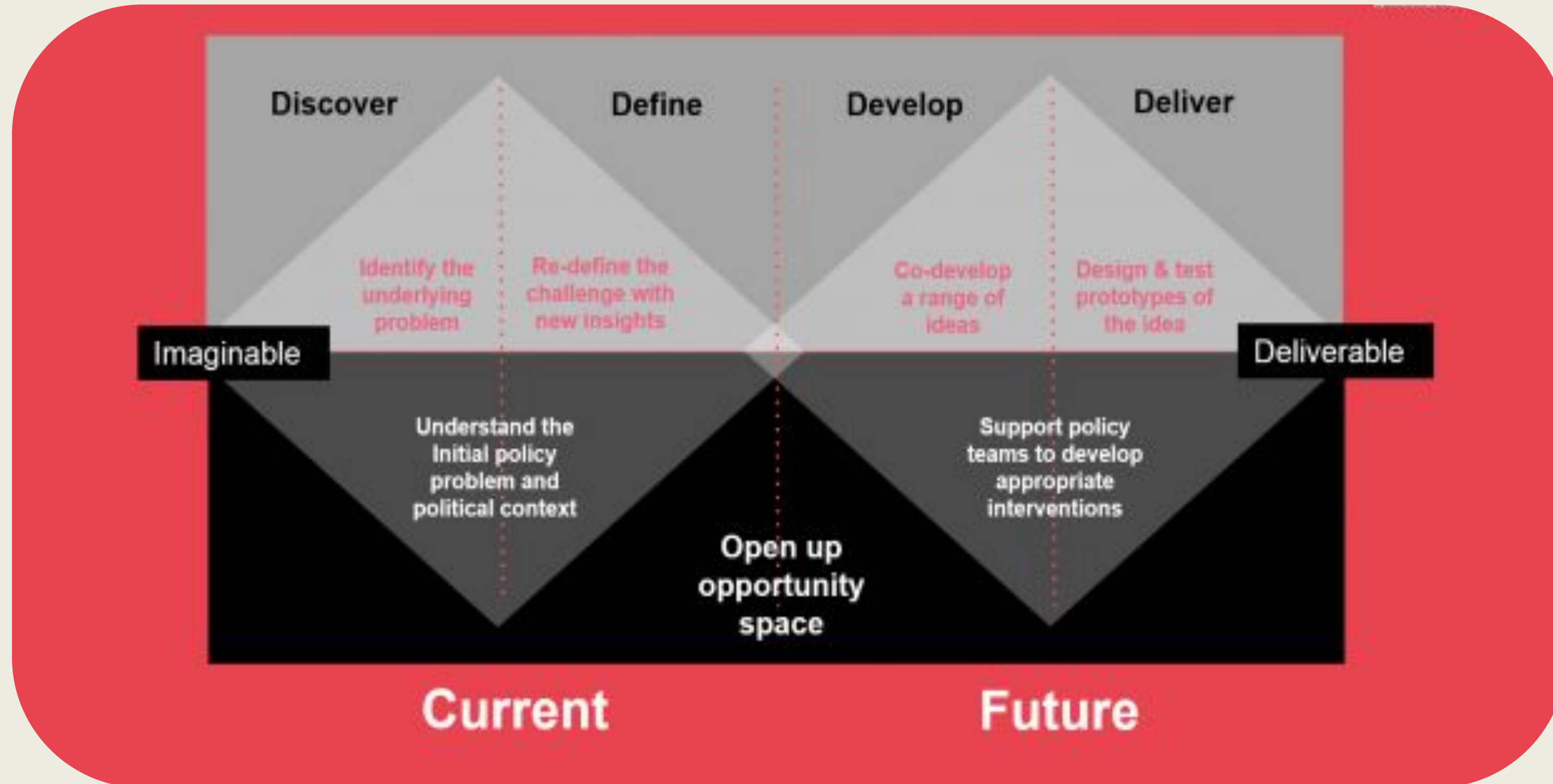
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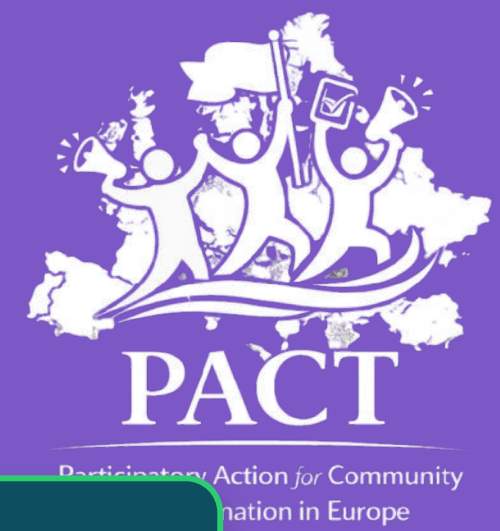


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Structured around the Double Diamond design cycle: diverge → converge → prototype → recommend



The Policy Lab Cycle



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POLICY LABS ARE DIFFERENT FROM....



- A policy roundtable among politicians and experts
- An online consultation to vote or comment an existing policy proposal
- Institutionalised bilateral dialogue between a specific group of citizens and a Policy Making Body



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3 BASIC PRINCIPLES OF POLICY LABS



User-orientation The views, concerns, hopes and proposals of final policy beneficiaries must be heard first. Lived experience drives the process.

Design Thinking: Think solutions first. Co-create innovative approaches through structured iteration rather than expert-led drafting.

System Approach Break departmental silos. Engage public administration, civil society and the private sector together around a shared policy challenge.



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Who participates — and how facilitation works



Participant mix

- Aim for roughly $\frac{1}{3}$ beneficiaries / $\frac{1}{3}$ decision-makers / $\frac{1}{3}$ stakeholders
- Grassroot, unheard voices must be a significant majority, not a token minority
- Experts are welcome as input providers, not as decision-makers
- Recruitment through stakeholder networks AND public calls — combine both
- Preparatory sessions required for both grassroots AND experienced participants

Core facilitation Techniques

- Open and focused questions to stimulate expression
- Minimal responses: signals of careful listening
- Formulation — capturing the gist of contributions back to the group
- Managing interruptions and conflicts with curiosity, not control
- Emotional support (appreciations) to sustain participation



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10 Conditions for Success

- 1 Relevant and timely policy challenge
- 2 Co-ownership by a public policy agency
- 3 Access to data and expertise
- 4 Well-trained facilitators
- 5 Enabling sessions for less-experienced participants

- 6 Confidentiality and trust
- 7 Continuity of participation across the cycle
- 8 Sufficient time: discover, redefine, co-develop, test
- 9 Mobilisation of local stakeholders
- 10 Evaluation, documentation and follow-up phase

Micro-Experiments

The element that makes Policy Lab recommendations evidence-based



Define goals

Every ME has clear goals co-defined by the working group — what change is being tested?



Identify actors

Who will benefit?
Who needs to be involved to run the experiment at small scale?



Estimate impact

Map expected changes — qualitative and quantitative — before the ME starts.



Build user stories

Communicate expected results in plain language. Evidence gathering is agreed upfront.



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Adaptable elements



Adaptable to context

- Duration of the full Policy Lab cycle
- Presence and scope of micro-experiments
- Role and frequency of thematic experts as input providers
- Policy level: national, regional, local
- Language, accessibility and format of sessions



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Micro-experiment Example: Lyon

Citizens' University Participation



- Participation of 10+ residents with migration backgrounds in the Citizens' University sessions
- Engagement alongside other residents in discussions on the “Well-being Compass”
- Contributions to recommendations on well-being and social cohesion



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Key Takeaways

Create an inclusive space

Establish clear ground rules and ensure all participants feel respected and safe to speak.

Balance participation

Encourage contributions from people with different backgrounds and actively invite quieter voices.

Focus on shared problem-solving

Guide discussions from identifying challenges toward developing concrete solutions.

Keep the process structured

Use clear steps (problem identification → idea generation → prioritisation → recommendations).

Use accessible language

Avoid jargon and ensure discussions remain understandable for all participants.

