

Key Lessons Learned from Stakeholder Co-creation and Engagement



The LOCALISED project applied a multi-layered stakeholder interaction approach, focusing on continuous engagement, tool development, and long-term sustainability. It fundamentally shaped the design, functionality, and dissemination of project tools, including the Climate Action Strategiser (CAST), the Citizen Engager (CE), the Sustainable Business Model Canvas (SBMC), and the Net-Zero Business Consultant (NZBC). This factsheet summarises core lessons learned and provides some recommendations for similar co-creation objectives.

Overarching Insights and Learnings from Stakeholder Engagement

The LOCALISED engagement strategy was characterised by an iterative and modular approach. This involved overlapping exploratory, co-design, and dissemination/testing phases, which provided critical feedback loops essential for ensuring that the developed tools were relevant and practical for future users. Three types of stakeholders were involved at different stages and for different purposes of interaction and feedback:

- The **“wise” group** comprised experts with deep knowledge in local decarbonisation and adaptation planning processes. They informed LOCALISED research early in the project about the types of answers needed at the local level for decarbonisation and adaptation planning and, hence, the tools to be built.
- The **“users”** consisted of potential future users of the tools that co-designed the Climate Action Strategiser (CAST) in the second half of the project.
- The **“community of interest”** for LOCALISED results and outputs was mainly involved in communication, dissemination, and exploitation activities, and mostly at the end of the project.

The stakeholders involved were very diverse, including urban planners and responsible persons in administrations, as well as local businesses, and each group had specific requirements. This summary presents learnings from the various engagement processes across all groups involved.



CONTINUOUS, ITERATIVE ENGAGEMENT IS CRITICAL

Stakeholder interaction cannot be a one-off step. Feedback loops between needs assessment, co-design, and dissemination proved critical for the relevance of the different tools. The process was dynamic, adapting to situational needs and the progress of tool development.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT GUARANTEES LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Stakeholders should be ideally engaged from the very beginning of the project, during the conceptualization process. This will allow for long-term alignment of interest, objectives, and priorities.

CONSIDERING STAKEHOLDER FATIGUE

Many stakeholders are hesitant to engage in multiple co-design and co-creation processes, so called Stakeholder fatigue, because of time requirements. Teaming up with already ongoing activities could lower the hurdles to engage.

INSTITUTIONAL EMBEDDING IS KEY FOR ADOPTION

Tools must support internal coordination, facilitate external communication with decision makers, and align with national/EU reporting frameworks (e.g., SECAP vs. alternative formats). This ensures the tools are politically and institutionally relevant.

FLEXIBILITY AND CONTEXT-SENSITIVITY

Modular design is necessary to accommodate varied planning contexts, administrative realities, and differing data maturity levels across municipalities. Tools must be adaptable.

TOOLS REQUIRE STRONG SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Advanced features alone are insufficient for effective adoption. Support structures - such as onboarding materials, tutorials, helpdesks, and user-specific training and guidance - are indispensable prerequisites for effective adoption.

TRANSPARENCY BUILDS TRUST

Clear documentation of data sources, assumptions, and modeling logic is critical, especially for complex tools like the CAST. Stakeholders expressed reluctance to act on outputs they could not verify or explain.

MAINTENANCE, UPDATES, AND DATA SUSTAINABILITY

Tools rely on timely, resource-intensive, and transparent data updates, which require institutional commitment and clear responsibility. Otherwise, they won't be used.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

Tools may involve licensing/implementation costs that exceed the budget or dedicated personnel capacity of smaller cities.

VISUALISATION AND STORYTELLING ENHANCE COMMUNICATION

Visual presentation of complex information (as in the CAST) simplifies communication and scenario comparison. However, layered, role-specific pathways are needed to avoid information overload for different user groups (policymakers, technical staff, citizens).

INCLUSIVE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT REQUIRES TAILORED APPROACHES

Early involvement of multipliers, low-threshold outreach, and tailored communication strategies are key to engaging diverse groups effectively in climate-related decision-making.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND LOCALISATION

English-only tools and documentation significantly limit accessibility, particularly for smaller municipalities/regional authorities.

POLITICAL WILL AND INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES

Lack of national mandates for integrated climate planning limits motivation and participation in related engagement activities. Local governments often prioritise immediate concerns (e.g., waste management) over climate planning.

Recommendations for Future Co-creation and Uptake

Based on the lessons learned, future projects aiming for impactful, sustainable tool development and deployment should:

- **Prioritise Usability Early**

Allocate dedicated resources for language translation and locality-specific adaptation of tools and documentation from the beginning of the co-design phase.

- **Clear Outline of the Co-creation and Engagement Process**

This outline should include the expected time commitment, proposed meeting dates, the type of input required, and the benefits or outcomes that participants will obtain. There is room for flexibility, but it needs clear and transparent communication so that contacted stakeholders can make an informed decision on their participation.

- **Coordinate and conquer**

Engage with key stakeholders after coordination with other possible projects and initiatives to minimize the risk of overburdening them with engagement requests. Try to align with them or/and make sure that the benefit of participating in the co-creation is explicit for the stakeholders.

- **Embed Tools Institutionally**

Develop clear communication strategies demonstrating how tools meet institutional needs for reporting (national/EU), internal coordination, and external advocacy. This helps to ensure that the tools will continue to be used after a project or stakeholder process finishes.

- **Seek Strategic Partnerships**

Explore partnerships with regional climate alliances, national portals, and public platforms to ensure long-term data maintenance, hosting, and additional users. Identifying “broker institutions” on different levels which recommend the tool to their communities of practice is needed and useful to reach a broader audience.

- **Invest in Support**

Plan for support structures (helpdesks, training, onboarding). These are essential activities to ensure user-specific assistance and easier access for using the tools.

- **Adopt Modular Design**

Design tools with flexibility to accommodate different planning contexts (e.g., Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP) vs. alternative reporting) and stakeholder groups. Allow users to upload their own data also for comparison, reporting, and evaluation needs.

- **Focus on Transparency**

Ensure the underlying modeling, data sources, and assumptions are clearly documented and traceable to build user confidence and trust. Also, ensure full transparency about the acceptance or rejection of recommendations received during the co-creation process.



For more information, have a look at the following project reports:

- [Report of stakeholder interaction in LOCALISED](#)
- [Initial insights from the stakeholder interaction following the LOCALISED methodology](#)
- [Report on the adaptation of the service to the public stakeholders](#)
- [Stakeholder interaction methodology and schedule](#)
- [Dissemination and communication strategy](#)
- [Exploitation and sustainability strategy of LOCALISED outputs](#)
- [Narratives of Change](#)



The LOCALISED project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101036458.

The content in this document reflects the author's views. The European Commission is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained there.