Context and Stakeholders Analysis for Historic Examples of Political Participation

Purpose

The purpose of the work detailed in Deliverable D1.2 is to provide a comprehensive **context and stakeholder analysis for historic examples of political participation**, with a particular focus on Collective Action Initiatives (CAIs) across 18 case studies in six European countries. This analysis aims to deepen understanding of the temporal, social, and spatial circumstances that have influenced the emergence and evolution of CAIs in response to climatic, political, and social imperatives.

These analyses are part of a broader research effort to answer the main research question:

> *What are the most significant factors and related dynamics influencing the emergence and development of Collective Action Initiatives (CAIs) in the context of the climatic, political and/or social imperatives and what are their implications for democratic transitions towards sustainability?*

By systematically examining the factors and dynamics that shape these initiatives—using frameworks such as the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) and established stakeholder analysis methodologies—the work supports the broader CO-SUSTAIN project objective: to define and test new democratic pathways for climate transition. The insights gathered here serve as a foundational step for subsequent research activities, including social network analysis, system mapping, and institutional ethnography, ultimately informing best practices and interventions that empower local policymakers and citizens to foster sustainable, democratic change.
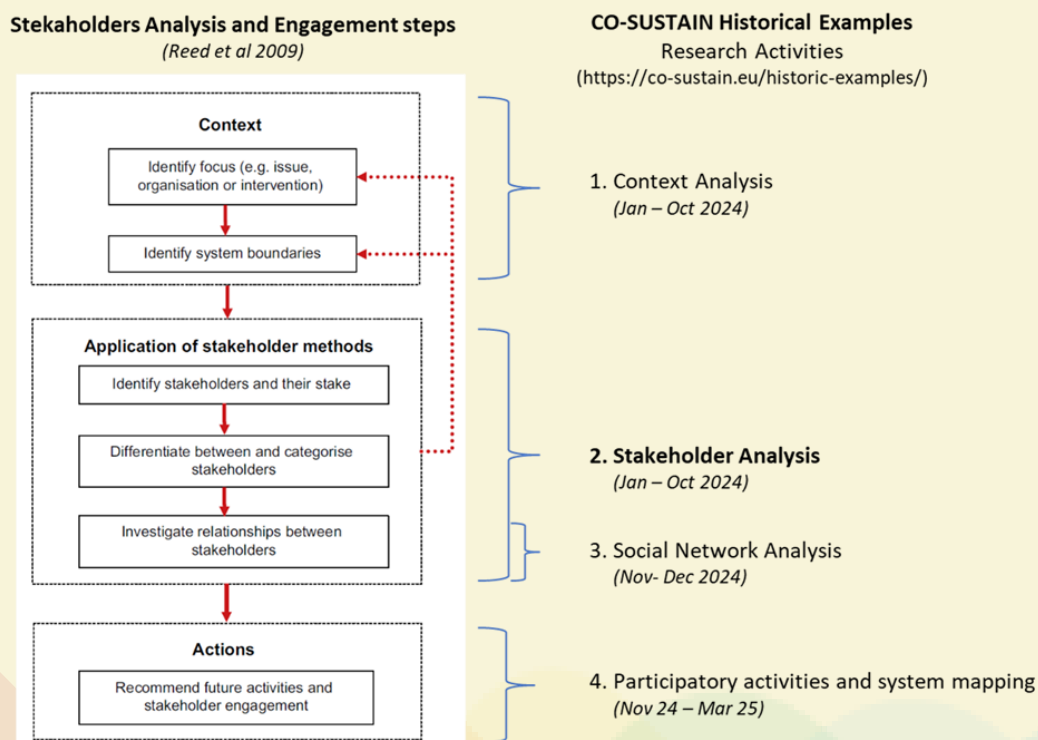

Figure 1: CO-SUSTAIN Stakeholders analysis and Engagement steps

Intended audience

This work is primarily intended for professionals and stakeholders engaged in the analysis, design, and implementation of democratic processes and collective action initiatives related to climate transition and political participation.

Main users

- **Policy makers and decision-makers** at local, regional, national, and European levels who are responsible for developing, implementing, or evaluating policies on climate action, democratic innovation, and citizen engagement.

- **Researchers and academics** specializing in political science, environmental governance, social innovation, and stakeholder analysis, particularly those interested in the dynamics of collective action, participatory processes, and multi-level governance.

- **Practitioners and facilitators** involved in the management or support of collective action initiatives, such as local government officials, civil society organizations, NGOs, and community leaders seeking evidence-based approaches to foster inclusive participation and sustainable transitions.

- **Land managers and urban planners** who require insights into the socio-political and institutional contexts that shape public involvement in land-use, energy, and environmental management.

- **Networks and intermediaries** (e.g., advisory bodies, research consortia, and advocacy groups) that support knowledge exchange and best practice dissemination across sectors and countries.

The document is especially relevant for those seeking to understand the factors influencing the emergence and evolution of collective action initiatives in response to climatic, political, and social imperatives, and for those aiming to design or evaluate participatory processes that empower citizens and stakeholders in the context of sustainability transitions

Main activities

The deliverable undertakes a **comprehensive context and stakeholder analysis for 18 historic examples (HEs) of political participation across six European countries**, focusing on Collective Action Initiatives (CAIs). The main activities include detailed case studies that explore the temporal, social, and spatial circumstances influencing the emergence and evolution of these initiatives. The analysis is framed within the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) theoretical framework, which distinguishes between landscape, regime, and niche levels to understand the socio-technical contexts of each HE.

Methodologically, the project combines secondary data research with primary data collection through informants familiar with each case. This allows for a rich contextual understanding of demographic, economic, political, socio-cultural, socio-technical, and ecological factors shaping each initiative. The activity also involves identifying and profiling stakeholders—individuals, groups, and organizations—based on their roles, resources, influence, interests, attitudes, and relationships to the initiatives. This multifaceted approach supports the identification of key actors and their power dynamics within the political participation processes.

The geographical settings of the case studies vary widely, encompassing urban and rural areas with distinct socio-economic and environmental characteristics. For instance, cases range from energy cooperatives in Austria and Spain, housing communities in Poland, urban gardening initiatives in Estonia, to solidarity renewable energy communities in Italy. Each case is situated within its specific territorial, political, and administrative context, which is carefully analysed to capture local dynamics and broader regional or national

influences. The stakeholder analysis employs typologies based on categories (e.g., institutions, NGOs, citizens), spatial scale (local to supranational), and stakeholder roles (promoter, target group, beneficiary, third party). Quantitative assessments of power, interest, attitude, and impact are used to categorize stakeholders by relevance and influence. These activities collectively provide a foundational understanding that informs subsequent research phases, including social network analysis, system mapping, and institutional ethnography, aimed at supporting democratic transitions towards sustainability.
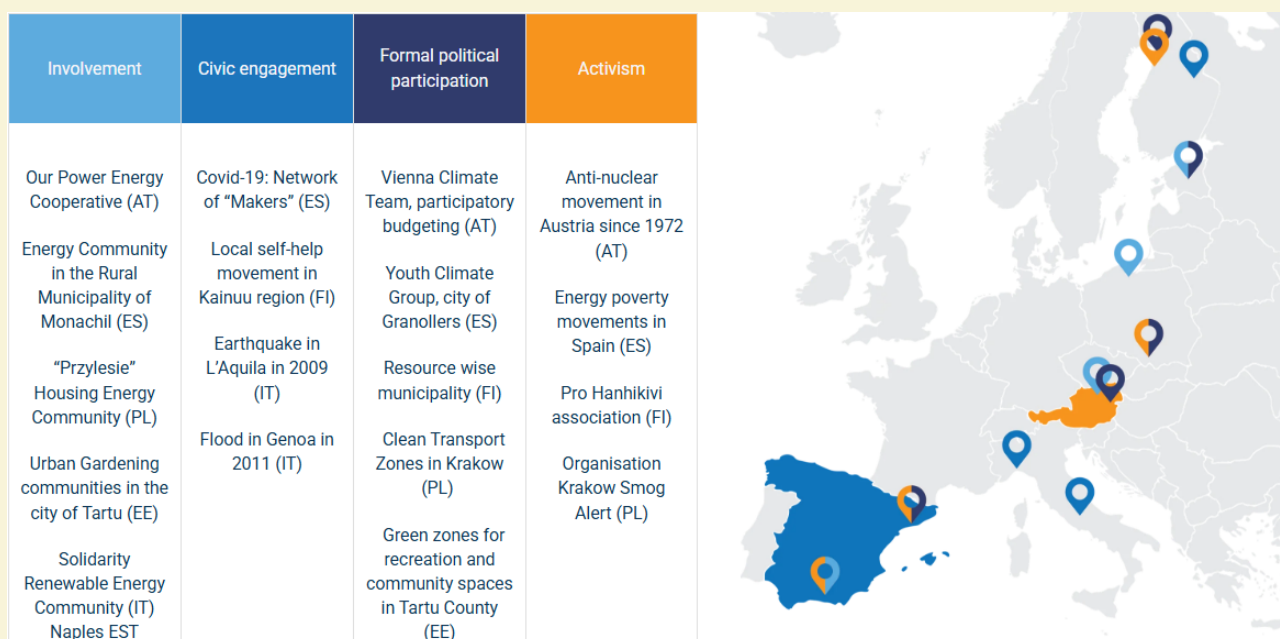
Involvement	Civic engagement	Formal political participation	Activism
Our Power Energy Cooperative (AT) Energy Community in the Rural Municipality of Monachil (ES) "Przylesie" Housing Energy Community (PL) Urban Gardening communities in the city of Tartu (EE) Solidarity Renewable Energy Community (IT) Naples EST	Covid-19: Network of "Makers" (ES) Local self-help movement in Kainuu region (FI) Earthquake in L'Aquila in 2009 (IT) Flood in Genoa in 2011 (IT)	Vienna Climate Team, participatory budgeting (AT) Youth Climate Group, city of Granollers (ES) Resource wise municipality (FI) Clean Transport Zones in Krakow (PL) Green zones for recreation and community spaces in Tartu County (EE)	Anti-nuclear movement in Austria since 1972 (AT) Energy poverty movements in Spain (ES) Pro Hanhikivi association (FI) Organisation Krakow Smog Alert (PL)

Figure 2: CO-SUSTAIN 18 Historical examples

Key results

1. Comprehensive Multi-Level Context and Stakeholder Analysis Across Europe
- The deliverable presents a systematic analysis of 18 historic examples of political participation, focusing on Collective Action Initiatives (CAIs) in six European countries. Using the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) framework, it examines the temporal, social, and spatial factors influencing the emergence and evolution of these initiatives.
- **Significance:** This approach uncovers how local, national, and global trends—such as climate change, demographic shifts, and political regimes—shape collective action. The findings offer a nuanced understanding of the conditions necessary for successful participatory initiatives, informing effective interventions in diverse contexts.

2. Identification and Categorization of Key Stakeholders and Power Dynamics
- The analysis identifies and profiles stakeholders—citizens, NGOs, local governments, businesses, and national institutions—based on their roles, resources, influence, interests, attitudes, and relationships to each initiative. Stakeholders are categorized using typologies such as the Power-Interest Matrix and impact likelihood.
- **Significance:** This mapping reveals which actors are most influential or vulnerable, highlighting the importance of inclusive engagement and addressing power imbalances. Clarifying stakeholder roles supports more targeted, equitable participatory processes, strengthening democratic transitions toward sustainability.

3. Evidence-Based Best Practices for Democratic Climate Transition

- Lessons from the historic examples are distilled into best practices for fostering political participation and collective action in climate transition contexts. These include the value of local government support, community-driven innovation, and integrating participatory processes with formal policy frameworks.
- **Significance:** These results provide a practical foundation for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers aiming to empower citizens and stakeholders in climate action. The findings demonstrate how context-sensitive approaches and stakeholder engagement can drive sustainable change and inform future interventions and policy development across Europe.

4. Methodological Innovations in Context and Stakeholder Analysis

- The deliverable introduces a robust, replicable methodology for context and stakeholder analysis, combining secondary data with primary insights from informants familiar with each case. It applies the MLP framework and quantitative assessments (e.g., Power-Interest, Attitude-Impact) to categorize stakeholders and contextual factors.
- **Significance:** This methodological approach enables a deep, comparative understanding of diverse CAIs, supporting cross-case learning and adaptation. It also provides a template for future research and practical applications in analysing complex socio-technical transitions.

5. Insights into Barriers and Drivers of Participation

- The study identifies common barriers (e.g., regulatory uncertainties, resource limitations, low initial engagement) and drivers (e.g., supportive policy environments, strong local networks, crisis events) that affect the success of collective action initiatives.
- **Significance:** Recognizing these factors helps practitioners anticipate challenges and leverage opportunities when designing or supporting new participatory initiatives, ultimately increasing their resilience and effectiveness.

6. Impact on Policy and Legislative Development

- Several case studies demonstrate how CAIs have influenced local, national, or even European policy and legislative frameworks—such as the development of renewable energy community laws, participatory budgeting, and urban planning regulations.
- **Significance:** These examples show the potential for grassroots initiatives to shape broader policy landscapes, reinforcing the role of bottom-up innovation in democratic governance and climate transition.

Research and implications

The results of this deliverable offer significant implications for both research and practice in the field of democratic climate transition and collective action. For researchers, the systematic application of the MLP framework and the robust stakeholder analysis methodology provide **a replicable model** for studying the interplay between context, actors, and outcomes in diverse socio-technical settings. The cross-country, multi-case approach enables comparative analysis and the identification of patterns, barriers, and drivers that transcend local specifics. This opens up new avenues for academic inquiry into the mechanisms of political participation, the evolution of collective action initiatives, and the role of power dynamics in shaping sustainable transitions. Furthermore, the deliverable's integration of qualitative and quantitative methods, including social network analysis and system mapping, sets a foundation for future studies to delve deeper into the causal relationships and feedback loops that influence democratic innovation and climate action.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide actionable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders seeking to foster effective and inclusive participation in sustainability transitions. The identification of key stakeholders, their interests, and influence allows for more targeted engagement strategies that can address power imbalances and enhance collaboration. The best practices distilled from

historic examples—such as the importance of local government support, the effectiveness of community-driven innovation, and the integration of participatory processes into formal policy frameworks—offer concrete guidance for designing and implementing successful collective action initiatives. By highlighting common barriers and enablers, the deliverable equips practitioners with the knowledge to anticipate challenges and leverage opportunities, ultimately supporting more resilient and impactful interventions. Overall, these findings contribute to the broader goal of empowering citizens and institutions to co-create solutions for a democratic and sustainable climate transition, ensuring that future efforts are informed by evidence and grounded in real-world experience.

Conclusion

According to Paul Ekman and Erik Amnå[1] one can outline four types of political participation: **Engagement**, **Civic Engagement, Formal Political Participation and Activism.**

- **Engagement** refers to lower-level participation in social issues, such as attending meetings or local events, which are more personal in nature.
- **Civic engagement** extends beyond individual participation to include volunteering and supporting causes that benefit the community, empowering citizens and strengthening social cohesion.
- **Formal political engagement** includes organized efforts such as voting in elections or aspiring for political positions , or engaging in policymaking processes to influence government decisions.
- **Activism** however, is a more complex form of participation which encompasses advocacy that involves direct confrontation, mass protests or campaigns that challenge established norms and structures.

These categories reflect varying levels or "depths" of involvement with democracy and community life, highlighting the spectrum of participation dynamics.

Initially developed to describe interpersonal interactions and their emotional dimensions in different contexts, this typology provides a useful framework for analysing community engagement and political discourse.

It is worth pointing out that social movements play an important role in processes of social change. While involvement and formal political participation face limitations in scale and depth of engagement, they play important roles in fostering awareness and legitimacy. Civic engagement and activism, by contrast, demonstrate the transformative potential of grassroots mobilization and collective efforts. Their emergence is determined by a combination of external factors, such as crises and perceived threats, and internal factors, such as social capital, cooperation and consideration of the local context. These movements can effectively influence policy, change social attitudes and contribute to building a more sustainable and just future. Ultimately, the success of these initiatives depends on their ability to balance participation levels, leverage local resources, and adapt to the broader social, political, and climatic context

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[1] Ekman, J. and Amnå, E., 2012. Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology. *Human Affair*s 22. Doi: 10.2478/s13374-012-0024-1.

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Key takeaways

- **Involvement (Passive Participation) :**
  - Often driven by **individual benefits** (e.g., reduced energy bills, access to garden plots).
  - **Active participation** in decision-making remains **limited**, with initiatives typically sustained by a small, **active core**.
  - Influenced by **external factors** like EU and national policies.
  - Can serve as an **introductory stage** for increased awareness and potential future active involvement.
  - While valuable for fostering **connectedness** and legitimacy, its capacity for **transformative change** is limited due to passive engagement.

- **Civic Engagement (Grassroots Response to Crises) :**
  - Characterized by strong **human capital**, **commitment**, **altruism**, and the ability of individuals to **self-organize**.
  - Based on **cooperation** and **solidarity** (e.g., "Makers" network in Spain, self-help in Kainuu, L'Aquila earthquake, Genoa flood).
  - Often initiated in response to **crises and disasters**, leading to increased **resilience** and preparedness for future risks.
  - Demonstrates the **transformative potential** of grassroots mobilization.

- **Formal Political Participation (Institutional Influence) :**
  - Heavily influenced by **regime-level actors** (government officials, political parties, legislation) from the early stages.
  - Relies on **public consultation** and other feedback mechanisms (e.g., participatory budgeting, planning) to gain legitimacy and citizen input.
  - Offers a crucial avenue for citizens to **influence policy decisions** through established channels.
  - Faces **limitations** such as **unequal participation** (representativeness issues), **bureaucracy**, and slow processes, which can hinder effective and timely climate action.

- **Activism (Challenging Norms for Change):**
  - Exhibits **agility** and the ability to **mobilize broad public support** (e.g., anti-nuclear movements, energy poverty alliances, Krakow Smog Alert).
  - Characterized by significant **social and relational capital**, often involving **cooperation with other organizations**.
  - Demonstrates **long-term commitment** and persistence, transforming spontaneous mobilization into **sustainable structures** for change.
  - Catalyzed by **crises** and perceived threats, utilizing expertise and cooperation.
  - Plays a **critical role in social change**, effectively influencing policy and societal attitudes, and contributing to a more sustainable future.

Overall, the success of participation initiatives depends on balancing different levels of involvement, leveraging local resources, and adapting to broader socio-political and environmental contexts

Acknowledgements

This summary sheet was based on **Deliverable 1.2** of the CO-SUSTAIN project. CO-SUSTAIN aims to define and test new democratic pathways for a sustainable transition, enabling local policymakers to support various and novel forms of political participation and empowering citizens to act.

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