



Literature review on the triggers and management of latent and manifest forms of political participation

Purpose

This deliverable 2.1 synthesises **current academic knowledge on the motivations, forms, and governance strategies of political participation in the context of climate transition**. It forms part of the CO-SUSTAIN project's effort to improve understanding of how latent and manifest forms of engagement — ranging from social involvement to activism — can be harnessed to advance democratic, just, and effective climate action. The literature review maps triggers such as awareness of ecological crises, personal and community experience, communication channels, and identity-based drivers, alongside strategies for managing participation through inclusive governance, enabling environments, and targeted narratives. This knowledge base supports the project's empirical work on historic examples and case studies.

Intended audience

This document is relevant for:

- **Policymakers** designing multi-level governance frameworks for climate action (local, national, and EU levels).
- **Public administration officials** seeking to foster citizen engagement and inclusiveness in transition strategies.
- **Civil society organisations, grassroots movements, and community leaders** looking to better understand participation triggers and effective mobilisation practices.
- **Researchers** in political science, governance, sustainability transitions, and environmental policy.
- **Practitioners** developing participatory processes in climate, energy, and socio-technical system transformations.

Main activities

The literature review followed a rigorous, multi-phase methodology to ensure a comprehensive and replicable synthesis of academic knowledge:

1. **Identification of sources** – Searches were conducted in Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar using tailored query strings combining four Aspects of Interest (triggers of change, forms of participation, types of actors, climate context) with six Theoretical Frameworks relevant to socio-technical transitions.
2. **Initial corpus formation** – From 444 initial records (209 from WoS, 185 from Scopus, 50 from Google Scholar), duplicates were removed.
3. **Screening and selection** – Using CADIMA software, articles underwent title/abstract screening and full-text eligibility checks by independent reviewers applying agreed inclusion/exclusion criteria, achieving full reviewer agreement (Kappa → 1).



4. **Final selection** – 77 articles were retained for qualitative and quantitative analysis.
5. **Analytical tools** – The team used VOSviewer (keyword network mapping), SciSpace (tabular queries), and Zotero for reference management.
6. **Framework application** – The review assessed the use of theoretical approaches such as Transition Theory, Multi-Level Perspective, Strategic Niche Management, Technological Innovation Systems, Transition Management, and Collective Action Initiative to analyse political participation in climate transitions.

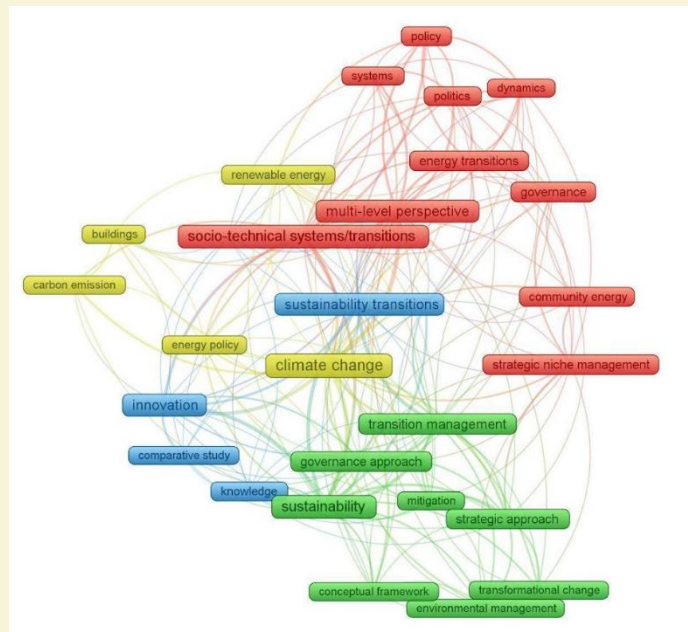


Figure 1: Visualisation of keywords network within analysed papers

Key results

1. Forms of political participation

- Latent participation (pre-political or indirect):
 - *Social involvement* – attention to public issues without direct action (e.g., citizen science, awareness engagement).
 - *Civic engagement* – indirect but active influence (e.g., participatory budgeting, community resource management).
- Manifest participation (direct, observable actions):
 - *Formal political participation* – voting, lobbying, structured consultation.
 - *Activism* – legal or illegal extra-parliamentary action (e.g., protests, direct action).
- Participation spans conventional/unconventional and legal/illegal forms, reflecting a diverse spectrum of engagement in climate transition.

2. Triggers of participation

- Knowledge and awareness of ecological crises and climate emergencies.
- Personal/community experiences of environmental change or historical events.
- Influence of discourses and narratives shaping perceptions and motivation.
- Communication channels (media, education, knowledge transfer).
- Community identity, social capital, and shared needs fostering mobilisation.

3. Strategies to foster participation

- Multi-level governance integrating bottom-up and top-down approaches.
- Clear governmental objectives and regulatory frameworks aligned with climate goals.
- Enabling environments for broad stakeholder inclusion, including marginalised voices.
- Mechanisms to build ownership and responsibility within communities.
- Transparent, accessible, and inclusive communication processes.
- Strategic narrative-building and discourse management to mobilise support.



Policy implications

The findings suggest that policy-makers should:

- **Adopt inclusive governance models** that bridge top-down policy direction with bottom-up citizen initiatives to strengthen legitimacy and acceptance of climate transitions.
- **Prioritise regulatory clarity** by setting binding climate targets and ensuring policy coherence across governance levels.
- **Institutionalise participatory mechanisms** to engage diverse stakeholders, including vulnerable and opposition groups.
- **Support capacity building** for communities to foster ownership and sustained engagement in transition initiatives.
- **Leverage narratives and communication** to align public perception with sustainability objectives, counter resistance, and keep participation focused.

“Community identity and needs serve as important triggers, with grassroots initiatives often emerging to solve self-defined community problems and leverage social capital to increase civic engagement. Recognizing these various factors is important for understanding the underlying motivations for climate action and adjusting engagement strategies accordingly.”

Key takeaways

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- **Diversity of engagement is essential** – Successful climate transitions require activating and valuing the full spectrum of participation forms, from latent awareness-raising to direct activism.
- **Motivations are multi-layered** – Factors such as knowledge, lived experience, identity, networks, and prevailing narratives interact in shaping citizen engagement.
- **Governance determines impact** – Multi-level, inclusive, and coherent governance structures, reinforced by enabling environments and narrative strategies, significantly increase both the quality and reach of political participation.



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