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Main author(s)	Aet Annist, Kaire Holts, Anneli Kährik, Lilian Pungas (UT) Fiona Lilith de Fontana, Michael Klingler, Nathalie Spittler, Daniel Körner, Jana Plöchl, Patrick Scherhaufer (BOKU) Laura Valdés, Joana Mundó (ECO) Maare Käis, Heppu-Eemeli Honkanen, Niina Kiviluoma, Matti Kojo (LUT) Álvaro Sánchez-Robles, Natalia Aguilar-Ruiz, Juan Carlos Osorio-Aravena, Marina Frolova (UGR) Claudia Ledderucci, Andrea Taffuri, Valeria Marina Borodi, Alessandro Sciullo (UniTo)

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DEM	Demonstrator, pilot, prototype, plan designs	
DEC	Websites, patents filing, press & media actions, videos, etc.	
DATA	Data sets, microdata, etc.	
DMP	Data management plan	
ETHICS	Deliverables related to ethics issues	
SECURITY	Deliverables related to security issues	
OTHER	Software, technical diagram, algorithms, models, etc.	

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PROJECT ABSTRACT

In Western democracies, traditional institutional participation is on the decline while non-institutional participation has been increasing. Non-institutional participation for the climate transition often relies on a prefigurative approach, thus creating spaces to incubate alternative ideas and novel forms of political participation (niches). Empowering these forms of political participation to encourage niche innovations will provoke the radical yet necessary changes in the socio-technical system for a climate transition. The CO-SUSTAIN project seeks to address this opportunity for a democratic climate transition, by defining and testing new democratic pathways enabling local policymakers to support various and novel forms of political participation and empowering citizens to act for a sustainable transition.

To develop a better understanding of political participation linked to environmental, political and societal imperatives, CO-SUSTAIN will study 18 historic examples in 6 different European countries for each of the latent and manifest forms of political participation underlined by Ekman: involvement, civic engagement, formal political participation, and activism. It will use institutional ethnography and system mapping to understand the dynamics of the participation and its management, thus delivering best practices to stimulate and support political participation around these imperatives. These best practices will serve to define interventions for solution co-creation in 4 case studies, one for each form of political participation: involvement through Spanish energy communities, civic engagement through Food Solidarity in Turin (IT), manifest political participation through participatory processes promoted by the government in Northern Europe (EE, FI) and activism through the Lobau Bleibt social movement (AT). The outputs and outcomes of the deliberations will be assessed to draw conclusions for more democratic climate policymaking across Europe.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the assessment of the outputs (direct activities and deliverables produced by an intervention) and short-term outcomes (changes in participants' actions, attitudes, understandings, relationships) of the deliberation processes conducted within the CO-SUSTAIN project, examining their potential to support a sustainable and inclusive transition. Guided by the Impact Assessment Framework (IAF) (Deliverable D1.3), the assessment combines qualitative and quantitative evidence from participant surveys, interviews, impact stories, and participatory observation to examine changes at individual and group levels. It considers how the deliberative processes and tools used influenced participants' understanding of the challenges addressed, recognition of their systemic nature and identification of possible solutions, alongside changes in social cohesion, empowerment, inclusion and exclusion, and capacity and community building. The assessment focuses on outputs and short-term outcomes that can be examined within the project's timeframe, providing a basis for understanding how deliberation may contribute to longer-term change.

GLOSSARY

Glossary 1 - Acronyms	
Acronym	**Definition**
CAI	Collective Action Initiative
CLD	Casual Loop Diagram
CS	Case Study
DA	Deliberative Arena
DP	Deliberative Panel
IAF	Impact Assessment Framework
KoM	Kick-off Meeting
MLP	Multi Level Perspective
NPP	nuclear power plant
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PSM	Participatory System Mapping
SG	Serious Game
SM	System Mapping
SMR	Small Modular Reactor
ToC	Theory of Change

Glossary 2 – Forms of Political and civic participation[1]	
Term	**Definition**
Activism	Extra-parliamentary forms of political participation are directed towards influencing governmental decisions and political outcomes.
Civic engagement	Activities by ordinary citizens that are intended to influence circumstances in society.
Involvement	Activities that illustrate an awareness of being part of a political context.
Formal political participation	Activities intended to influence political outcomes through institutional channels.

[1] Ekman, Joakim & Amnå, Erik (2012). Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology. Human Affairs, 22(3): 283-300.

1. INTRODUCTION

The transition towards a sustainable society presents a democratic challenge as well as an environmental one. Understanding how citizens, public authorities and other stakeholders can work together is central to developing responses that are both sustainable and inclusive. To respond to growing calls for improved democratic representation and expanded opportunities for public involvement in decision-making, governments at all levels have increasingly adopted citizens' assemblies, citizens' juries, and other representative deliberative processes to address complex policy challenges (OECD, 2020; Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007; Dryzek, 2000). Since their emergence in the 1980s, such participatory mechanisms have expanded significantly in both scale and ambition, particularly in recent years (Curato et al., 2022), reflecting a broader shift towards experimental and participatory forms of governance aimed at addressing legitimacy deficits in contemporary democratic systems.

The crises of the 2020s have accelerated this trajectory. The radical changes needed to heed climate change, to react meaningfully to catastrophes, waves of migration, financial and supply chain challenges, etc. Climate change may be global, but their most important effects are local. It thus depends on how the people are facing their particular challenges in the places they inhabit and in the contexts which channel the crises as well as the processes of preparation, mitigation and adaptation related to such crises. In any of those processes, any level of societal management needs to include people in all processes affecting them, making it more likely to succeed when the practical arrangements for change are deliberatively decided. Furthermore, such an approach would best be prefiguratively practiced. For this, spaces are required for people to practice how to live side by side, collaborate and flourish in a world in permacrisis.

Despite the obvious need for representative deliberative practices, a significant gap remains in understanding how their effects are assessed. While numerous initiatives have been implemented across diverse institutional and national contexts, consistent, comparable, and operationalised methodologies are lacking for evaluating both their implementation quality and their longer-term impacts. In response, organisations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (OECD 2021a; 2021b) and others (e.g. Demski et al., 2024) have developed emerging guidelines and standards for assessing deliberative processes. These frameworks offer important benchmarks for evaluation but their application across contexts and projects remains variable.

Against this backdrop, the CO-SUSTAIN project developed the IAF during its preparatory phase. The Impact Assessment Framework (IAF) draws on OECD evaluation guidelines, a critical and partial application of the Logical Framework Approach (Chambers & Pettit, 2004), and complementary approaches to participatory evaluation. Its purpose is to assess the quality, effectiveness, and broader impact of CO-SUSTAIN's deliberative panels across the chain of effects: from project outputs to immediate outcomes, while also identifying potential pathways towards medium- and longer-term impacts.

CO-SUSTAIN's overarching objective is to define, test, and refine new democratic pathways that enable local policymakers to support innovative forms of political participation, while also empowering residents to contribute actively to sustainable transitions. Its scope extends beyond formally organised participatory processes to include civic engagement, activism and less visible forms of participation. Within this framework, the IAF serves two primary functions. First, it provides a coherent and shared evaluation structure for project partners and stakeholders to assess the design, implementation, and outcomes of deliberative processes across the six case studies (see Deliverable 3.1, "Deliberation processes of the CO-SUSTAIN case studies"). Second, it enables comparative analysis across these cases, thereby generating

systematic insights into how deliberative governance could operate under different institutional, social, and environmental conditions.

More specifically, the IAF is designed to support learning among policymakers, practitioners, and project partners by identifying strengths, limitations, and conditions of success in deliberative processes aimed at sustainability transitions. It also aims to inform future practices by improving the design and adaptability of similar participatory processes, while generating structured data for cross-case comparison and synthesis. In this sense, the framework connects the assessment of deliberative processes with the identification of lessons applicable to future participatory initiatives.

Importantly, the IAF is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. Rather, it provides a flexible set of evaluation dimensions and indicators that guide assessment while allowing for adaptation to specific case study contexts. The framework has been further refined through iterative engagement with case study teams and stakeholders and has been adapted to reflect context-specific conditions, priorities, and constraints. These adaptations were finalised through the case study design process completed in March 2025 (see Deliverable 1.3, "Impact Assessment Framework").

As an overarching conceptual and methodological framework, the IAF has been operationalised across six case studies. These cases differ in institutional settings, governance arrangements, and thematic focus, allowing for a comparative assessment of deliberative practices under varying conditions. Across these cases, the IAF enables the systematic collection and analysis of data relating to the outputs and outcomes of the CO-SUSTAIN deliberative processes.

This report focuses on the outputs and short-term outcomes of those deliberation panels. Drawing on the IAF it examines both what the panels produced and how participation affected individuals and groups. The assessment considers changes in participants' understanding of the issues and possible solutions, alongside changes in relationships, inclusion, empowerment and capacity for collective action. It thereby addresses a central question for CO-SUSTAIN: whether and how deliberative processes can help translate political participation into opportunities for a sustainable and inclusive transition.

This report presents the results of the application of the IAF across the CO-SUSTAIN case studies. It synthesises findings from the access surveys and reflections, pre- and post-panel surveys and interviews or retrospective interviews, observations, and focus group interviews. It provides an integrated assessment of the effectiveness, limitations, and transformative potential of deliberative governance in the context of sustainable transitions.

The structure of the report is as follows. Section **2** outlines the theoretical and methodological approach and evaluation design. Section **3** presents the deliberative context of the cases, their central problem and the panel process and the participants. Section **4** gives an overview of access and related findings, section **5**, an overview of the findings on outputs and outcomes. Section **6** traces the impact stories and section 7 offers the emergent patterns, case by case as well as across cases.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Theoretical framework

The assessment of the outputs and outcomes of the CO-SUSTAIN project is grounded in the understanding that political participation and deliberative processes can contribute to democratic innovation, citizen

empowerment, collective action, and sustainability transitions. As governments, local authorities, and civil society organisations increasingly seek new ways to address complex environmental and societal challenges, it becomes important to understand how the implementation of these processes generates actual changes for the individuals, groups and institutions involved, as well as how it advances the capacity of niche level groups to capture the attention and support in the society. The following report examines the quality of the project's deliberative interventions and explores how and what kind of change participation in these processes may have contributed to.

The theoretical foundation of this assessment draws on the original CO-SUSTAIN IAF. The assessment draws on the conceptualisation of political participation developed by Ekman and Amnå (2012), which distinguishes between latent and manifest forms of participation and provides a basis for understanding the different ways in which citizens engage with public issues. Together, these perspectives establish a theoretical basis for understanding the relationship between deliberative interventions, political participation, and sustainability transitions and demonstrate that outcomes emerge through interactions between individuals, local level initiatives, local governments and other authorities as well as wider socio-technical structures, and are influenced by a variety of contexts, power relations, resources, and opportunities for collective action.

Consistently with the original Impact Assessment Framework, the assessment adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence to examine both the project's outputs and the outcomes associated with the interventions across the case studies. The theoretical framework therefore provides the conceptual foundation for the methodology used for impact assessment from the start of the deliberative processes to its end.

2.1.1 From outputs to outcomes and potential impact

Outputs, outcomes, and impact can be distinguished, drawing on Ebrahim and Rangan (2014), as follows: outputs are the direct activities and deliverables produced by an intervention; outcomes are the changes in participants' actions, attitudes, understandings, relationships, etc.; and impacts are the lasting and stabilised change emerging through the interaction of different actors and processes.

Within CO-SUSTAIN, the deliberation panels together with various participatory activities are the main interventions assessed. These outputs are examined in terms of the quality and integrity of the deliberative processes, including the extent to which the deliberative panels provided meaningful opportunities for participation, facilitated the exchange of perspectives, and supported constructive deliberation. The assessment of outcomes of interventions, on the other hand, can only focus on the changes that have started to emerge through these processes. At the individual level, relevant outcomes may include changes in participants' knowledge, understanding, attitudes, motivation, confidence, perceived agency, and willingness to engage with participatory processes. At the collective level, outcomes may include strengthened social cohesion, greater capacity for connection between stakeholders, signs of shared visions, and the emergence of new ideas, agreements, groups, plans, or initiatives. At the institutional level, outcomes are reflected, for example, in changes in stakeholder priorities, local governments' or other public authorities' willingness to consider proposals that emerge from participatory processes, but also in new forms of cooperation between citizens and decision-makers.

2.1.2 Theory of change

Theory of Change (ToC), as one of the central conceptual foundations of CO-SUSTAIN (Deliverable 2.1, "Literature review on the triggers and management of latent and manifest forms of political

participation"), contributes to the assessment as a framework that allows examining how and why particular interventions might generate specific outcomes, and facilitate or constrain change (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2021). ToC provides a basis for examining the anticipated pathways connecting deliberative activities with individual and collective outcomes. When structured opportunities are enabled for citizens, policymakers, and other stakeholders, these are expected to encourage collaboration and lead to shared approaches to solving local problems. This may turn out to be scalable, leading to further, potentially cascading change.

The extent to which deliberative processes generate change depends on several factors, including participants' initial knowledge and attitudes, the inclusiveness and quality of the process, the distribution of opportunities to contribute, the relationships between participating actors, and the wider institutional and political conditions within which participation occurs. The assessment therefore considers both the intended outcomes and the factors that may enable or constrain their realisation.

2.1.3 Participation in context

The broader literature on political participation highlights the factors that motivate individuals to become involved in collective and political processes. Brady et al. (1995) identify three important dimensions: access to resources, individual motivation, and recruitment networks. Resources include the knowledge, skills, time, and financial means required to participate. Motivation relates to individuals' interest in an issue and their perceptions of agency and effectiveness. Recruitment networks encompass the social relationships and organisations through which individuals are introduced to political participation or encouraged to become involved. Klandermans (2022) further distinguishes between instrumentality, identity, and ideology as sources of participation. Individuals may participate because they seek to change a particular situation, identify with a group or community, or wish to express their values and beliefs. These motivations may overlap and interact, influencing both the forms of participation adopted and the extent to which individuals remain engaged. ToC also encourages a reflective approach to evaluation which should enable consideration of unexpected outcomes, differences between anticipated and observed changes, and the assumptions underlying the intervention. Comparing participants' experiences and perspectives before and after the deliberative processes provides a means of examining whether, and in what ways, changes in understanding, attitudes, motivation, or perceived opportunities for participation have occurred. With this, we can examine the mechanisms through which deliberation may contribute to change, while recognising that outcomes are shaped by the interaction between the intervention, participants' characteristics, and the surrounding context.

2.1.4 Transition theory and the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP)

Transition theory provides a basis for understanding how socio-technical systems change over time. Within the CO-SUSTAIN conceptual framework (see Deliverable 2.1 "Literature review on the triggers and management of latent and manifest forms of political participation"), the MLP is particularly relevant because it examines the interactions between emerging innovations, established systems, and broader contextual developments. The Multi-Level Perspective distinguishes three analytical levels: niches, regimes, and landscapes. Niches - in CO-SUSTAIN, Collective Action Initiative (CAIs) - represent spaces in which new ideas, practices, and innovations can emerge and develop, such as grassroots initiatives, community-based projects, or experimental forms of governance that challenge established approaches. Regimes refer to the more established structures, rules, practices, and relationships that stabilise existing systems. These include, for example, public authorities and policy frameworks within which the CAIs operate. Landscapes encompass wider sustainability imperatives and societal developments, and other

external conditions that influence the development of regimes and niches. Transformations are expected to arise through interactions across these levels by challenging established practices, while institutional responses may support, constrain, or reshape their development. The impact assessment examines whether there are observed outcomes on the niche and regime level and to what degree is there capacity to go beyond.

2.1.5 Inclusion and accessibility

The quality and potential outcomes of deliberative processes depend partly on the conditions where participation takes place, such as the composition of a panel, the accessibility of the process, and the opportunities available to different participants to express their perspectives at the panels. All these influence the quality and potential for impact that deliberative activities might have.

Accessibility may be influenced by practical considerations such as timing, language, technology, but also the way in which the panels were organised and structured. Various economic factors, social inequalities, institutional arrangements, and unequal access to resources influence such access and thus, whose perspectives are represented and receive attention. This dimension is thus carefully examined to be able to fully comprehend whether or not the deliberative processes reproduced existing exclusions or enabled new, inclusive forms of governance. The quality of participation also depends on how contributions are received, how disagreements are addressed, and whether participants have meaningful opportunities to shape the process.

The access analysis that follows this theoretical overview therefore examines the practical and contextual conditions affecting participation and provides a basis for interpreting the reach of the impact.

2.1.6 Tools within panels

Deliberative panels utilised various methods to facilitate both relations between the participants and their contributions, encourage people to discuss sometimes complex and sensitive topics, and to enable a new, deeper understanding of societal processes behind some of what the panels aimed to change. Although the aim of the IAF was not to assess each of those tools separately, they played an important part in the process and as such need to be understood. In addition to Participatory System Mapping (PSM) and Serious Game (SG), the panels used gamification as ice breakers and to alternate the lengthy and sometimes complex and difficult discussions with lighter activities and moments of rest.

PSM draws on systems thinking and system dynamics, and makes visible the relationships, feedback mechanisms, stakeholder interactions, and underlying assumptions that influence developments within a particular context (Tourais and Videira 2021). Within CO-SUSTAIN, the main output of PSM were Casual Loop Diagrams (CLDs) the aim of which was to make the assumptions about causal relationships more explicit and reveal how existing practices and power relations sustain particular patterns, as well as where interventions might create opportunities for change. This approach encourages attention to the connections between events, stakeholders and processes on the ground and over time. This perspective is particularly relevant when assessing collective outcomes which are shaped by interactions between participants, relationships between organisations, and the institutional arrangements within which collective action develops.

2.1.7 Linking interventions and results

The structural basis for connecting the project's activities with their immediate outputs, subsequent outcomes, and potential longer-term effects is provided by the Logical Framework Approach (see also

Chambers & Pettit, 2004). This perspective organises the assessment around two interconnected dimensions: 1) the quality of the deliberative interventions, showing how the panels were implemented and to what extent their design and delivery supported meaningful participation and 2) the outcomes associated with these interventions, specially the changes at individual and collective levels and their significance within the case-study contexts. This connects the evaluation of deliberative processes with the examination of change. A well-designed process could create favourable conditions for learning, dialogue, cooperation, and identification of future intervention points.

2.2 Methodology

Consistently with the original CO-SUSTAIN IAF, the assessment adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative evidence, allowing assessment of changes in participants' knowledge, attitudes, or experiences, as well as a contextual understanding of relationships, interactions, and evolving collective practices. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence is central to the assessment. Quantitative findings can indicate the nature and extent of reported changes, while qualitative findings can help explain how those changes occurred, why they may differ across participants, and what significance they hold within the case studies. This approach also supports comparison across the case studies while retaining sensitivity to their distinct political, social, and institutional contexts. A shared analytical framework enables common dimensions of change to be examined across the project, while qualitative analysis helps explain why outcomes may differ between initiatives and settings.

The assessment follows the framework while recognising the differences between the six CO-SUSTAIN case studies. Thus, the analysis remains case-specific, allowing the findings to be considered both within their individual settings and in relation to the project's broader objective of supporting democratic innovation and sustainability transitions.

In what follows, we explain what were the different parts of the assessment process, starting with access, assessing who were included in the panel process, then the surveys and interviews carried out before and after the panel process, the observations documenting how the panels unfolded, and finally the approach to focus groups and to impact stories, offering a full account of the deliberative process with the identified impact in its local and/or regional context. These elements inform the structure of the data analysis and presentation.

2.2.1 Access assessment

In the preparatory phase, to assess whether all potentially relevant stakeholders and vulnerable groups have access to and feel comfortable being part of the deliberation panels, people who made it to the panel were asked to fill in an access survey to assess the ease of access in terms of timing, language requirements, technology, and more. The access surveys developed assessed different aspects and moments in the access process (see all surveys in Appendix 8.1) To further bolster the meaningfulness of this assessment, the partners reflected on any notable aspects of access. Overall, the analysis treats access to deliberative panels as a process with three connected dimensions:

1. *Access to the panel itself* - who is reached and invited (assessed with the teams' access reflection)

   This concerns whether the organisers identified the relevant and potentially interested groups, including people who are difficult to identify or reach, and how decisions about inclusion/exclusion

were made. The analysis therefore considers not only who attended and whether their attending created difficulties, but also who was overlooked and why.

2. *Access to the event* - whether invited people could actually participate (assessed with access survey as well as the teams' access reflection)

   This covered the practical conditions between invitation and attendance: clarity and accessibility of information, registration, timing, travel, costs, caring responsibilities, language and communication, and physical or other accessibility needs. It also considered those who declined or failed to attend, rather than treating non-attendance as irrelevant.

3. *Access during the deliberation* - the quality of participation once present (assessed with access survey, observations and teams' access reflection)

   This concerns whether participants could actually take part on equitable terms once they were in the room: the dynamics of interaction, communication and participation, and whether different participants are able to contribute meaningfully. This is assessed through observation of interactions and other aspects of the deliberative process.

These three dimensions make access a cumulative concept: access goes beyond successfully inviting a diverse group or even by making the venue physically accessible. A person must first be recognised and reached, then enabled to attend, and finally able to participate meaningfully once there. The overall analysis therefore looks across the whole pathway to identify exclusions and barriers at each stage, including barriers created by the organisers themselves.

2.2.1 Pre-/post-panel surveys and interviews

The IAF utilises longitudinal mixed-methods assessment of individual-level change, embedded within the broader evaluation of the deliberative process. The pre/post design assesses changes associated with participation in the deliberative panels. The surveys provide a structured measure of change and the qualitative interviews provided participants' accounts of how and why those changes occurred. The methodological rationale for this approach is supported by the OECD's evaluation framework which explicitly recommends using multiple methods, including surveys, interviews and observation, to assess deliberative processes, and identifies both the deliberative experience and pathways to impact as components of evaluation (OECD 2021). The use of pre/post measures is well established in deliberative research and the methodological guidance also emphasises that matching the pre- and post-measures to issues actually addressed during deliberation is important when interpreting change (Fishkin 2021; Dordevic and Vasiljevic 2022; Grönlund et al 2022).

The individual-level outcomes of the deliberative panels complement the process/output evaluation undertaken through expert assessment and observation. The same core domains, particularly, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and openness, were explored before and after participation, allowing the assessment of changes associated with the deliberative experience. To understand the impact on participants, each participant was asked to fill a pre-panel survey upon entry to the deliberative process (e.g. if their first contact was during Panel 2, they would be asked to fill the pre-panel survey then) and in some cases, the pre-panel interviews. At the end of the last panel, everyone who had come there was asked to fill in a post-panel survey. Some people were later asked to participate at post-panel or retrospective interviews. Following the panels, the post-panel survey repeated the relevant measures to identify changes in knowledge and openness. Where pre-panel interviews could not be carried out, or

were carried out with respondents who could not commit to post-panel interviews, other participants were invited instead to a retrospective interview.

With the pre-panel survey (see Appendix 8.3) we aimed to establish a quantitative baseline on knowledge and attitudes to political, participatory and deliberative processes more generally, as well as on the expectations and understanding of the particular process at hand more specifically. The semi-structured pre-panel (see Appendix 8.5) interviews with 2–3 participants provided qualitative insight into participants' initial understanding, attitudes, expectations and openness, helping to contextualise the quantitative baseline. The aim of the post-panel (Appendix 8.5) and retrospective interviews (see Appendix 8.6) was to get the respondent to reflect on whether they felt the panels changed their understanding of the cases, causes of problems, and solutions, as well as on being active in society.

This individual-level assessment forms part of the wider outcome dimension, which examines changes associated with the panels, both for individual participants and for the groups involved. Individual changes identified through surveys and interviews are complemented by group-level evidence from impact stories, focus groups and observations of the panels, including the serious games. This evidence can then be considered alongside the output dimension, which assesses the quality and integrity of the deliberative process through neutral expert assessment and observation.

2.2.2 Observations

Participant observation provides a core qualitative method for assessing how deliberation is enacted in practice across the six European cases. Drawing on both anthropological participant observation and institutional ethnography (Smith 2005), researchers combine systematic observation and fieldnotes with sufficient participation to understand both observable interactions and less explicit norms and practices.

The approach examines deliberation at three interconnected levels:

- *Micro level* – interaction: how participants communicate and interact, including turn-taking, language use, emotion, disagreement, listening, expertise and patterns of inclusion or exclusion.
- *Meso level* – deliberative process: how room arrangements, facilitation, panel formats, expert presentations, games, small-group work and synthesis procedures structure participation and shape group dynamics.
- *Macro level* – institutional context: how protocols, procedures and any forms of scientific or institutional authority influence what can be said, whose contributions are recognised, and how deliberation is translated into outcomes.

Observation therefore covers both formal deliberative activities and informal interactions, including spatial and material arrangements, multilingual communication and translation, use of technical language, facilitation practices, participation inequalities, engagement and fatigue, emotional and pragmatic reasoning, and the handling of disagreement.

During the panels, standardised observation sheets (Appendix 8.2) were provided for the teams to follow specific aspects of the deliberative process. Dedicated observers of the case study teams were paying particular attention to how equality and inclusiveness were realised in practice: who spoke and who remained silent, how authority and expertise were distributed, whether language, pace or procedural requirements created barriers, and how facilitators responded to these dynamics. The observation also

followed how deliberation was converted into collective outputs through consensus-building, voting, ranking, synthesis and compromise.

The multi-sited design across five countries enables comparison of these processes across different institutional, linguistic and facilitation contexts while retaining sensitivity to case-specific dynamics. Overall, the method shifts the assessment from whether deliberation formally meets normative standards to how participation, equality and deliberation are actually produced, negotiated and sometimes constrained through interaction, material arrangements and institutional structures.

2.2.3 Focus group interviews

A focus group interview is a qualitative research method in which a small group of participants discusses a defined topic under the guidance of a facilitator. It is used to explore how people understand an issue, how they respond to each other's views, where they agree or disagree, and how meanings or interpretations develop through interaction. The group interaction is therefore itself part of the data.

In this case, the focus group discussion was used as a retrospective qualitative assessment of the deliberative process (see Appendix 8.7). Participants and external experts reflected on their experiences of the panels and related engagement activities, including group dynamics, relationships between participants, the methods used, changes in perceptions, and the perceived effects of the process. The discussion also explored more specific elements such as role play, system mapping, the attention given to climate, the choice of venues, and possibilities for continuation. This made the focus group particularly useful for identifying mechanisms of change that would be difficult to capture through a pre/post survey. Its value is primarily interpretive and explanatory as it helps explain how participants experienced the process and what kinds of change they associated with it.

2.2.4 Expert validation

Experts were involved at different stages of the deliberative process and contributed both into a quantitative assessment (see Appendix 8.8) as well as during the focus group discussions. This is considered separately in each case.

2.2.5 Impact stories

Impact stories are collections of extended case materials that enable narrativizing change across the timeline of the initiative from its inception to the period after the deliberation panels, aiming to assess shifts in community building capacity and practices, including social cohesion, empowerment and inclusion/exclusion; deliberative practices and dealing with conflicts and change; and capacity for/focus on sustainability transitions on different levels (from individual and group level to system-level). Impact stories provide qualitative insights into how initiatives evolve, engage communities, and overcome barriers, aligning with institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005), which examines how institutional structures shape social practices and experiences.

Here, this approach offered a lens to analyze how deliberative panels interact with broader policy and governance systems as well as the CAIs internal discourses and practices. The case materials comprise the data collected before, during and after the Deliberation Panels (field notes, interviews, media, etc). Although a broad framework of questions (see Appendix 8.9) was proposed to keep the impact stories focussed, each case study was able to choose their own more specific avenue to building up their impact story.

3. DESCRIPTION OF CASE STUDIES

This section introduces the six CO-SUSTAIN case studies and provides context for the assessments that follow. Each subsection outlines the local context of political participation and deliberation, the topic or challenge addressed, the organisation of the panels, and the participants involved. These descriptions help explain the different settings in which the deliberative processes took place.

3.1 Annelinn district case study, Tartu, Estonia (UT)

3.1.1 Context of political participation and deliberation in Estonia

The Collective Action Initiative (CAI) took place against a broader Estonian context in which formal opportunities for participation exist, but participation and perceptions of political influence remain relatively limited. The City of Tartu actively promotes participation through mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, consultations and neighbourhood activities, yet there is relatively low participation in these formal processes despite substantial stated interest in community activities. This suggests a gap between willingness to engage and actual engagement through established participation channels.

National evidence points to a similar tension. In the OECD's 2024 Trust Survey (OECD 2024), only 17% of people in Estonia felt that the political system allows people like them to have a say in what the government does. This is important for the case because low participation should not necessarily be interpreted as lack of interest. People may be interested in their neighbourhood and willing to contribute while simultaneously doubting whether formal participation will influence decisions. Indeed, across the OECD, perceptions of having a political voice are strongly associated with trust in government. The Estonian context therefore creates a relevant setting for examining whether more intensive, inclusive and deliberative forms of participation can bridge the gap between interest, participation and perceived influence. Estonia has recently publicly discussed cases of participatory mechanisms as tick-box exercises (especially in the context of KAH-areas - *kõrgendatud avaliku huviga alad*, i.e heightened public interest areas, such as forests near or highly relevant to communities or settlements - KAH-alad n.d). Equally, there are new efforts to establish climate and people's assemblies which may have had a more positive impact on the general understanding of deliberation as an achievable aim (Mehine 2024).

The studied initiative was not a stand-alone participation exercise. It was embedded in an existing participatory planning process developed through Greener Annelinn (Rohelisem Annelinn) and other relevant projects involving the City of Tartu, the Institute of Baltic Studies and local stakeholders. The case study focused on a 10-hectare area of Annelinn in Tartu, a large Soviet-era housing estate dominated by prefabricated multi-storey apartment blocks. Although Annelinn remains one of Tartu's main residential areas, its public spaces are characterised by extensive mown lawns, limited multifunctional green infrastructure and relatively weak community cohesion and civic participation.

Before and alongside the case study deliberations, the municipality and its partners have used various participatory methods, most notably participatory budgets (Tartu 2026), but also some other methods such as public consultations, street surveys, and community events to gather local knowledge and develop ideas for nature-based solutions. These activities have involved residents, housing associations, local

organisations, young people, library users and public institutions, including work around the Anne Street - Kalda Road green corridor and the Annelinn Library.

The CO-SUSTAIN-led initiative added a more structured deliberative layer to the existing participatory ecosystem by introducing systems thinking, collaborative problem analysis and the co-creation of governance pathways and policy recommendations. The case therefore provided an opportunity to examine whether deliberative approaches can deepen existing forms of participation, strengthen interaction between citizens and institutions, and help translate local knowledge and preferences into climate-adaptation planning.

3.1.2 Topic, challenge and problem brought to the panels

The CAI responded to interconnected environmental and social challenges. The area is vulnerable to urban heat, heavy rainfall and reduced biodiversity, while the limited quality of public green space particularly affects residents who have little access to private gardens or cars, including children, older people and parts of the Russian-speaking population. The initiative therefore aims to transform approximately 10 hectares of underused green space into more functional, climate-resilient and attractive public space, while strengthening community connections, local climate awareness and cooperation between residents, housing associations, public authorities and other local organisations.

The intervention had both physical and social objectives: in the short term, residents and housing associations were to be involved in co-designing improvements to green infrastructure and water management; in the longer term, the initiative aims to increase climate resilience, community capacity and local partnerships.

In summary, the case combined a concrete climate-adaptation challenge with a broader democratic challenge: how to transform an underused and climate-vulnerable urban space while engaging residents who may value community life but have relatively limited participation in formal decision-making. This makes Annelinn particularly relevant for assessing whether deliberative approaches can broaden participation, strengthen perceived political agency and improve the relationship between residents and local institutions.

3.1.3 Overview of the panels

CO-SUSTAIN organised four distinct workshops in Tartu. Participants with roles in the Tartu City Government and in the local Annelinn area, as well as local inhabitants were invited to participate in the co-creation of the changes needed to respond to local problems. Firstly, they were asked to jointly identify the problems and the desired changes for the area between Anne Street and Kalda Road in Annelinn. Secondly, they were asked to analyse with system mapping what may be the causes of the problems that characterise the area. Thirdly, they used role play to explore how different stakeholders could work together to identify intervention points to find solutions.

The kick-off meeting introduced the project and identified key issues concerning the future development of public space in Annelinn. Participants used small-group discussions, thematic posters and keyword mapping to explore local challenges and priorities. Panel 1 focused primarily on institutional actors and explored how public space could support the Green Annelinn initiative while responding to residents' needs. Panel 2 focused on residents and local organisations, considering community needs, accessibility and environmental issues. Both panels used interactive, small-group activities and visual tools to support discussion and systems thinking. Panel 3 brought together previous participants to validate earlier findings,

prioritise intervention points and develop concrete actions. Participants used voting, small-group work and role play to explore implementation, responsibilities and potential partnerships. The process was subsequently complemented by interviews, focus groups and a round-table discussion to validate findings and consider pathways for implementation.

The deliberative panels identified three interconnected dimensions of change in Annelinn: strengthening community relationships and collective ownership, improving the quality and inclusiveness of public space, and establishing more continuous cooperation between residents and municipal institutions. Participants emphasised the need for places and activities that encourage social interaction and longer stays, alongside diverse greenery, accessible amenities, opportunities for recreation and quiet use, and safer environments. They also highlighted that lasting improvements depend on meaningful resident participation, regular communication, institutional responsiveness and clearer opportunities for community-led initiatives. The system mapping revealed reinforcing relationships between public-space quality, social presence, participation, trust and collective responsibility, suggesting that physical improvements and stronger community–municipality cooperation need to develop together to support the long-term stewardship of public space.

3.1.4 Brief description of the deliberative process participants

Across the kick-off meeting on 9th January 2026 and three deliberative panels between 6th February and 12th May 2026, approximately 50 participants took part in the process, including city government specialists, representatives of community and external organisations and local residents. The panels brought together actors from different positions within the urban governance system. Regime actors included representatives of Tartu City Government, particularly the Urban Design, Municipal Property, Urban Management, and Social and Health Departments, as well as local police. They contributed institutional knowledge on planning, governance, implementation and public-space management. Niche actors mainly consisted of Annelinn residents and representatives of local community and civil-society organisations, including the neighbourhood association, apartment associations, community garden, local church, library and welfare organisations. They contributed lived experience, local knowledge and perspectives on everyday public-space use, accessibility, community needs and neighbourhood development. Intermediary and hybrid actors included municipal staff involved in the initiatives such as Greener Annelinn, as well as representatives of the Institute of Baltic Studies and University of Tartu. They supported dialogue, knowledge exchange, experimentation and collaboration between institutional and community participants. Participation varied across panels but young people, older residents, Russian-speaking residents and apartment owners' associations remained underrepresented.

3.2 La Traginera energy community case study, Spain (ECO)

3.2.1 Context of political participation and deliberation in Spain and the region

In El Raval, one of Barcelona’s most densely populated and socially diverse neighbourhoods, the energy transition presents a particular challenge: how can its benefits reach residents who are most at risk of being left behind? Low incomes, housing vulnerability and poor building conditions contribute to high levels of energy poverty. Yet El Raval also has a long-standing tradition of community action, supported by a dense network of foundations, cooperatives and civil society organisations working on social, cultural and environmental issues.

It was within this local ecosystem that La Traginera, a network of social organisations with a longstanding history of work together for improving the neighbourhood conditions, began developing Energies Compartides al Raval. Its ambition is to demonstrate that renewable energy can be more than a technological or environmental solution: it can also become a tool for social inclusion. The initiative aims to engage public and private organisations with suitable rooftops in generating solar energy and allocating at least 10% of the electricity produced to energy-vulnerable households in the neighbourhood.

At the time of the CO-SUSTAIN deliberative process, the initiative was still experimental. Its first solar installation was being developed at the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA), while the criteria for identifying beneficiary households were still under discussion. The model therefore represented both a practical response to energy poverty and an opportunity to explore how energy communities could become more inclusive.

An important feature of Energies Compartides al Raval is that it is built around organisations rather than individual residents. Foundations, cooperatives, community organisations, and public institutions contribute different forms of expertise, relationships, and resources. Some institutional actors also act as bridges between the initiative and the wider public administration, helping connect community-level ambitions with institutional procedures and constraints. Therefore, these relationships between the community and the public institutions did not begin with the CO-SUSTAIN deliberative process. Before the deliberative process, La Traginera had already established working relationships with district-level technical staff, and a public building had committed to serving as a pilot for the model. These existing connections provided a foundation of trust and credibility, making it easier to approach additional institutional stakeholders. The initiative also operated within a policy context in which energy communities, climate action and social innovation received institutional support. However, support for the development of inclusive energy communities remained an ongoing challenge: the question was not simply how to establish an energy community, but how to ensure that its governance, participation and benefits genuinely included vulnerable households.

Against this background, La Traginera sought to move beyond a successful local experiment. Its longer-term ambition was to demonstrate that inclusive shared-energy models were viable and could eventually be adopted and mainstreamed by public authorities. The CO-SUSTAIN deliberative process offered an opportunity to explore what would be needed to make that ambition a reality.

3.2.2 Topic, challenge and problem brought to the panels

The central question guiding the deliberation was straightforward but challenging: how can energy communities become genuinely inclusive, and what changes are needed for a model such as Energies Compartides al Raval to succeed and be replicated?

Energy communities are widely promoted as a way to democratise energy production and accelerate the transition to renewables. However, participation in these initiatives is not necessarily equally accessible to everyone. Financial resources, technical knowledge, administrative capacity, and access to suitable rooftops can all influence who participates and who benefits. For households experiencing energy poverty, these barriers can be particularly difficult to overcome.

For La Traginera, addressing these challenges required more than designing an appropriate energy-sharing arrangement. It also meant understanding how public authorities could support the initiative, how social organisations and institutional actors could work together, and how an experimental local model might influence broader policies and practices.

The deliberative panels created a space in which actors with different responsibilities and perspectives could examine the system surrounding inclusive energy communities, identify the barriers that mattered most and consider realistic ways to address them.

3.2.3 Overview of the panels

The Catalan deliberation process comprised two sessions. On the first day, the inners (CAI members) and outers (external stakeholders) took part in a kick-off meeting, after which they split into two discussion panels: Panel I, where the inners analysed the factors influencing the initiative, and Panel II, where the outers analysed the factors influencing the inclusion on the energy communities. In the second session (Panel III) the inners and outers worked together to develop collaborative solutions.

Creating a space for actors who do not often deliberate together

For the CAI, the panels offered an opportunity to reflect collectively, build new connections and strengthen engagement with public authorities. Strong interest from public authorities and third-sector organisations confirmed that inclusion in energy communities was a shared concern. Participation extended to the Government of Catalonia, including a senior official from the Department of Social Economy. Other stakeholders who could not attend requested the results, leading to further discussions with Ecoserveis. This engagement highlighted a key tension in the energy transition: although energy communities receive institutional support, they do not automatically reach all social groups. The deliberation connected an established local initiative with a broader institutional discussion on how to make community energy more inclusive.

From different perspectives to a shared understanding of the system

The panels brought together CAI members and external stakeholders to explore how practical barriers, such as regulation, financing, administrative complexity and rooftop access, relate to wider institutional, political and social conditions. Differences in knowledge and experience, as well as strong involvement with the topic from the majority of the participants sometimes made the causal loop diagram (CLD) challenging to develop due to the complexity of the discussions within the outers group. However, these differences also fostered mutual learning, helping participants understand both community-level challenges and institutional constraints. The ToC exercise was particularly valuable in identifying institutional blockages and feasible solutions. Contributions from local and regional government representatives helped ground proposals in administrative realities, while institutional participants gained a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by community organisations. This exchange helped translate broad ambitions into more concrete actions that different actors could realistically pursue.

Identifying leverage points for change

The joint panel identified three interconnected leverage points:

- Stronger political and administrative commitment to make inclusion integral to the development of energy communities.
- Improved collaboration and coordination among public authorities, social organisations, civil society and private actors.
- Successful consolidation of the CAI's model, demonstrating the feasibility of inclusive shared-energy arrangements and their potential for replication.

The resulting ToC linked these priorities to potential actions and clarified the complementary roles of different actors. It highlighted that inclusive energy communities require not only local initiative but also institutional engagement, cross-sector cooperation and enabling conditions. The process helped participants identify where change was needed, connect different perspectives and develop a more shared and actionable direction for future work.

3.2.4 Brief description of the deliberative process participants

The deliberative process brought together representatives of the CAI and external stakeholders from public authorities, civil society and organisations working on energy, social inclusion and local development. The participant selection aimed to combine knowledge of the initiative and its local context with perspectives on the wider institutional and regulatory conditions affecting inclusive energy communities.

Across the three deliberation panels, 49 organisations were invited, and 30 participated in at least one session. These included 12 organisations associated with the CAI and 18 external organisations. In total, 33 individuals participated across the panels: 13 from the CAI group and 20 from the external stakeholder group. The participation of institutional actors was particularly relevant to the process. Existing relationships between La Traginera and district-level technical staff, together with the commitment of a public building to pilot the model, helped establish a foundation for engaging additional stakeholders. The wider interest in inclusion within energy communities also helped attract representatives from higher levels of government, creating opportunities to connect local experience with broader policy discussions.

The Access Survey provided further insight into the profile of respondents. Of the 30 respondents, 21 were women and 9 were men. Twenty-nine were from Catalonia or elsewhere in Spain, while one reported another origin. Six held a Bachelor's degree, 22 a Master's degree and 2 a doctorate. Regarding household income, 17 reported an income around the national average, 12 above it and 1 below it. None reported accessibility needs. Seven participants completed both the pre- and post-surveys. Of these, four were women and three were men, and all were from Catalonia or elsewhere in Spain. Two held a Bachelor's degree and five a Master's degree. Four reported household income around the national average and three above it; none reported income below the average or accessibility needs. These figures suggest that the respondents were relatively homogeneous in terms of education and reported income. The findings should therefore be interpreted in light of the professional and organisational focus of the deliberative process.

3.3 Food Solidarity case study, Turin, Italy (UniTo)

3.3.1 Context of political participation and deliberation

Turin has a long-standing tradition of collective political engagement, shaped historically by its industrial development (particularly the FIAT automobile company) and strong working-class movements. With the transition to a post-industrial economy, many forms of mass political participation have declined, yet collective action has persisted through neighbourhood-based initiatives, mutual aid and urban commons, as well as collaborative governance. With regards to food, this grassroots-based social fabric finds echoes in a complex governance landscape populated by third-sector organizations, grassroots movements and initiatives, and institutional actors.

At the municipal level, structures such as the *Gruppo Interdipartimentale per le Politiche Alimentari* (GIPA), *Torino Solidale*, and the regulatory framework for urban commons provide formal spaces for coordination and collaboration. Conversely, civil society initiatives continue to operate through more flexible and relational forms of organization. Notwithstanding the political and public attention given to food, tensions persist around unequal participation in the decision-making and policy processes, paired with limited resources and the structural discrepancy between short-term funding cycles and the longer-term relational work of community-based initiatives.

3.3.2 Topic, challenge and problem brought to the panels

The case study focuses on the governance of food solidarity initiatives and the conditions under which food-related collective action can contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable urban food system. Over the years, the city of Turin has developed a diverse ecosystem of food-surplus recovery, redistribution and mutual aid initiatives involving civil-society organisations, public institutions, retailers, producers and local networks.

The deliberative process implemented within CO-SUSTAIN examined the coexistence of two broad (and divergent) approaches: a charitable model centered on food provision, and a transformative model which stresses the embeddedness of food solidarity actions in social empowerment and community building.

The central challenge encountered during the deliberative process concerned the power imbalance between these approaches, and specifically between the activities organized by civil society during emergency situations (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) and the institutional and welfare structures within which they operate. One of the first pieces of evidence highlighted by niche participants, for instance, related to the paradox of recognition: on the one hand, institutional support can contribute to the consolidation of CAIs innovative practices; on the other, it could also constrain their autonomy. The key question brought to the deliberative arena was therefore whether, and under what conditions, food solidarity can become a site of democratic innovation (avoiding the reproduction of emergency-based logics and the depoliticization of welfare provision).

3.3.3 Overview of the panels

The deliberative process comprised four sessions: a Kick-off Meeting (10 December 2025), two separate deliberative panels (DP) focusing respectively on niche actors (DP1, 11 February 2026) and regime-level actors (DP2, 12 February 2026), and a final joint panel (DP3, 15 June 2026). The first two panels enabled participants to examine the food solidarity system from different organisational and institutional positions, using historical reconstruction and PSM to identify key dynamics, relationships and systemic tensions. DP3 brought the two groups together to integrate these perspectives, develop a shared vision of the future food solidarity system, identify strategic leverage points and co-produce a preliminary ToC, in order to identify future strategies and transformative actions.

<u>Creating a new space for deliberation in the Turin's food system</u>

The panels offered a rare opportunity to reflect jointly on a system in which niche and regime actors normally navigate separately. Eighteen organisations were invited (from small community initiatives to large institutional bodies, and most attended despite the time-demanding process. The deliberation created direct dialogue that had not previously existed. For example, one Arci Torino representative noted that the process produced a first-ever direct exchange with Banco Alimentare, despite years of parallel collaboration. This confirms the necessity to provide coordination mechanisms and structures.

From different perspectives to a shared understanding of the system

Both DP1 and DP2 used the Life Line exercise and PSM to reconstruct the trajectory of Turin's food solidarity initiatives, from the founding of early redistribution networks through the pandemic-era peak. Discussion was informal and experience-based, reflecting participants' direct relationship and experience. Both panels were able to produce mutual learning and foster new relational and trust-based collaboration between participants. The DP3 panel prioritised three interconnected leverage points:

1) stabilising resources and the time available for collaboration;

2) creating stable spaces for co-design and collective learning;

3) strengthening information flows and data integration across actors.

These were explored through the role-play exercise involving three groups, each assigned to one leverage point and produced three priority actions for it. The resulting ToC linked these priorities to concrete next steps. This helped the participants to reposition food solidarity from an emergency/surplus-management logic to one more centred on dignity, justice and long-term transformation.

3.3.4 Brief description of the deliberative process participants

Participants to the deliberative arena were selected using stakeholder and context mapping to ensure their heterogeneity, especially for those working with vulnerable groups. Territorial coverage was also taken into consideration to guarantee representativeness of the city's most vulnerable areas.

The regime comprised public institutions, established food organisations, and a research institution. The niche included third-sector organisations, civic networks involved in food recovery, redistribution, mutual aid and community-based action. Particular attention was paid to initiatives operating in the neighbourhood networks and to organisations with access to hard-to-reach populations, that are often underserved by institutional support.

Hard-to-reach populations, including undocumented migrants, unemployed individuals and people with no fixed abode, were not directly included in the deliberative process. They were represented primarily through third-sector organisations, social workers and volunteers working directly with them. This was preferred to avoid possible tensions, embarrassment, and language barriers with hard-to-reach people. At the same time, the research team preferred to involve social actors who had in-depth knowledge of the urban food system and policies and who could best represent hard-to-reach people (such as third sector workers and representatives of migrants associations).

3.4 Espoo Small Modular Reactors case study, Finland (LUT)

3.4.1 Context of political participation and deliberation

The Finnish case study explored how to support meaningful participation in the context of large-scale energy projects, such as Small Modular Reactor (SMR) in the city of Espoo. Although voting in parliamentary and municipal elections remains the most popular and influential pathway for political participation in Finland, a trend of the diversification of political participation has been observed (Kestilä-Kekkonen & Korvela 2017, 11; Huttunen & Christensen 2024, 74). Citizen initiatives, social media platforms, boycotting and civic organizations have become increasingly popular forms for public participation. It has been argued that the traditional pathways for formal participation offered by the

political institutions no longer match the needs of the citizens, especially among younger generations (Huttunen & Christensen 2020, 176) and over the years statistics have shown a growing distrust towards national and local governments and political parties (OECD 2026). A similar trend has been noted regarding trust on political decision-making and confidence in their ability to participate politically. In fact, Finns are slightly less confident in their ability to participate politically than the OECD average and 6% less that the political system allows people to have a say (ibid).

Novel forms of citizen engagement and political participation have been explored for example through deliberative processes, such as online deliberative mini-publics (Leino & Kulha 2023; Setälä et al 2023), citizen juries on curbing carbon gas emissions (Saarikoski et al 2023) and citizen assemblies to develop regional plans (Kulha et al 2021a) and to estimate the government's climate plans and to conduct a statement of recommendations (Kulha et al 2021b). Deliberative panels have been tested in nuclear energy related questions previously by Setälä et al in 2010. They organized a deliberative process that discussed whether a sixth nuclear power plant unit should be built in Finland. Despite these examples, deliberative processes remain quite rare in Finland (Himmelroos et al 2026, 7) and have not been implemented in large-scale decision-making.

The main pathways for participation in the context of nuclear facilities have been defined by the legislative infrastructure of the Nuclear Energy Act and the Act on Environmental Impact Assessment Procedure (EIA Act). The former has just been revised, and Parliament passed the new law in June 2026. In Finland, municipalities hold a monopoly on land-use planning, and the planning process also includes procedures for public participation. The decision-making regarding the building of new nuclear facilities has traditionally been with the national and municipal governments and citizens have had the opportunity to influence through voting in parliamentary and municipal elections, issue statements and influence through civic associations. The key leverage points for participation for residents have been local public hearings as part of the Decision-in-Principle procedure under the Nuclear Energy Act and the EIA Act, which includes an evaluation of impacts of the potential project to the environment and the local community and the strategy for public participation. The public and civic organizations can comment and issue statements regarding the assessment (Finnish Supervisory Agency 2026).

Therefore, the Finnish case study takes place with the setting of growing interest towards novel forms of participation in decision-making and a changing regime regarding nuclear facilities.

The Finnish case study set out to organize deliberation panels on potential SMRs in the city of Espoo. The background for the case study is that Espoo, one of the biggest cities in Finland, had set itself a goal to be carbon neutral by 2030. As one potential solution to decrease its CO2 emissions, the city investigated the potential of SMRs. A council initiative on SMRs was submitted in 2017, and the following year the city council eventually decided after a vote not to pursue SMRs. However, in 2021, the new city council included the conducting of an SMR study among the objectives for its term and SMRs continue to be mentioned in the city's current "Carbon neutral Espoo 2030" roadmap as a technology to look into in the future (Kojo et al 2026; Espoo 2025a, 36).

Espoo has not been the only city in Finland to investigate the potential of SMRs (Kojo et al 2026). An overall reform of the Nuclear Energy Act of 1987 was passed in June 2026 (Eduskunta 2026). The comprehensive reform of the Nuclear Energy Act outlines questions regarding SMR regulation and licensing as well. The reform of the Act will be outlining communication and public participation frameworks, processes in which resident consultation will be done, and the decision-making powers of the host municipality. Public

participation and local acceptance present one of the key issues in SMR implementation, since unlike large nuclear power plants in Finland, new SMR facilities would be located relatively near to the residential areas and urban settlements if they were to be connected to district heating networks.

3.4.2 Topic, challenge and problem brought to the panels

The Finnish case study focused on engagement in a potential SMR project in Espoo, but due to the feedback on the nuclear topic received in the KoM, the focus was moved towards participation in a large-scale energy project. During the KoM event in November 2025, misunderstandings arose regarding the motivations of the case study. One participant questioned if the SMR case study was lobbying nuclear power in Espoo. The misunderstanding seemed to have risen from the invitation letters not being clear enough to emphasize that Espoo is currently not pursuing SMRs and the goals of the CO-SUSTAIN project although the KoM invitation stated that "The subject of the Finnish case study is public engagement in a potential small modular reactor project in Espoo". These issues should have been covered more thoroughly in the introductory part of the KoM. At the same time, it should be noted that the preparation of the SMR study was included in the objectives approved by the City Council in 2021. However, while SMRs are not mentioned in the latest Espoo city strategy from October 2025, the Carbon-Neutral Espoo 2030 Roadmap and the Espoo 2060 Master Plan background report include references to urban planning related to SMR (Kojo et al 2026).

These doubts combined with the uneasy atmosphere of the KoM led to the adjustment of the case study context towards participation in the panels. In the beginning of the panels, it was made clear that the city of Espoo is currently not pursuing SMRs and that the purpose of the case study is to research participation in large-scale energy projects. However, SMRs remained as a context of the discussion in the panels.

The change of emphasis towards participation was noted in the guiding questions of the panels. The overall guiding question for the panels was "How can participation be strengthened in the preparation and decision-making of individual significant projects in the city?" The first two panels had their own specific guiding questions as well. The first panel's guiding question was "How can participation be supported to enable impactful participation in the preparation and decision-making of individual large-scale projects?" The second one focused on the question "What are the prerequisites for meaningful and impactful participation in the preparation and decision-making process for a single large project?" These questions were used to draft causal loop diagrams and to guide the general discussion during the panels.

3.4.3 Overview of the panels

During the first two panels in February 2026, participants were initially asked to outline a timeline of an imaginary situation in which a major energy project is being prepared in the city. The timeline served as a tool for identifying key factors. Based on the discussion surrounding the key factors, system maps were drawn, describing the variables identified by the participants as well as the impact on relationships between them. After both panels, the system maps drafted during the panels were combined into a merged causal loop diagram (CLD) by the LUT research team members and simplified according to the feedback received from colleagues at the Krakow general assembly. During this phase, key points of influence (leverage points) for the system were identified through which change could be promoted.

The merged CLD served as the starting point for the third panel, which was held in May 2026. The CLD was presented in addition to the shared vision: Significant energy projects in cities support residents' effective participation in both preparation and decision-making. Based on the vision, the participants assessed the identified influence points and developed new possible intervention points. This was followed by a role

playing exercise in which participants viewed the phenomenon from fictional stakeholder roles. The aim of the exercise was to increase understanding from the perspectives of different actors.

The key themes of the panels included communication, political will to act and concrete ways of involving citizens. Up-to-date, continuous and easily accessible communication was seen as a significant motivator for public participation. The participants felt that the residents should receive regular information on the progress of the project that would be easy to find, understand and reach. Access to information was considered as a key enabler of participation. The emphasis on information may also be due to the background of the participants. A significant proportion of the panel participants were experts, which may highlight the importance of knowledge and information for increasing participation. The participants of the panels also emphasized how motivation to participate is strongly linked to the experience that their views can be heard and participation can have an actual impact on decision-making.

The panels also identified possible practical measures to increase inclusion. The participants identified land-use planning to be a significant leverage point, where the participation of residents could be increased. In addition to land-use planning, one of the impact proposals was related to how participation strategies could be tested in small scale settings prior to their actual implementation. Participants discussed examples of previous experiments, such as land-use contract models, and considered the possibility of testing or piloting new types of inclusion strategies. Thus, piloting could produce positive experiences that could then be tested also in larger settings.

3.4.4 Brief description of the deliberative process participants

The invitation process for the kick-off event and the panels aspired to reach a diverse group of key stakeholders representing regime and niche in the Espoo case study. Unfortunately, the number of participants in the KoM and the panels was lower than expected. Seven people took part in the KoM, ten participants took part in the panels in total. The first panel had representatives from energy companies, institutions, and civil servants, whereas the second panel participants represented civic organizations and residents of the city of Espoo.

The invitations for the third panel were sent only to the participants of the first two panels. However, it should be noted that two of the participants in the third panel attended as substitutes for previous participants from the same organization. Therefore, the attendants of the third panel represented the city council, civil servants, residents of Espoo and civic associations.

3.5 Alpujarra Energy Community case study, Spain (UGR)

3.5.1 Context of political participation and deliberation

Órgiva is the capital of the Alpujarra region. It is a relatively isolated mountainous area located about an hour's drive from the nearest city, Granada, in southern Spain. The territory has been the target of major projects that have threatened the landscape. In response to this reality, Órgiva has a long history of environmental advocacy and activism against large-scale projects such as high-voltage power lines and massive photovoltaic installations.

Political participation constitutes a central dimension of the Alpujarra Energy Community (AEC). The initiative emerged directly from local mobilisation against external renewable megaprojects and therefore

reflects important debates about energy democracy, territorial justice, and citizen participation in the green transition. The founding members possess previous experience in activism, collective organisation, and environmental defence, which has facilitated the creation of participatory structures within the energy community. The governance model of the AEC is based on democratic assemblies, transparency, and collective decision-making. Members actively participate in defining the strategic direction of the project, while public meetings and workshops are organised regularly to broaden participation and share technical knowledge. The initiative also incorporates mechanisms aimed at social inclusion, such as reduced-cost energy access for vulnerable households and differentiated membership contributions depending on economic capacity.

At the institutional level, the project demonstrates both the importance and the limitations of multilevel governance in supporting community energy initiatives. The Provincial Council of Granada, through OTC-ECO (Community Transformation Office), has played a decisive role by providing technical guidance, legal assistance, organisational support, and mediation with public authorities. National funding from the Ministry for Ecological Transition has also been fundamental for launching the first installation. In contrast, relations with the local municipality of Órgiva have been more difficult. Municipal authorities have shown reluctance to collaborate fully with the initiative, particularly regarding the use of public rooftops. Interviews conducted during the context analysis suggest that political scepticism toward the project is partly linked to social tensions surrounding the presence of foreign residents and alternative lifestyles in the area. The local socioeconomic fabric remains conservative and rooted in family and neighborhood ties, leading to skepticism regarding association-based initiatives and community projects led by foreigners. This situation illustrates how cultural perceptions and local power relations can shape, as they have done in the AEC, the implementation of participatory energy projects.

Another important point concerns the fragility of institutional support mechanisms. While provincial and national programmes have facilitated the emergence of the AEC, future uncertainty remains regarding the continuity of technical and financial assistance for energy communities in Andalusia and Spain. This dependency on external support reflects the structural vulnerability of grassroots initiatives operating within complex regulatory systems.

3.5.2 Topic, challenge and problem brought to the panels

The AEC emerged as a grassroots response to the socio-environmental conflicts associated with the ongoing energy transition in rural Southern Spain. The initiative was created in Órgiva, in the Alpujarra region of Granada (Andalusia), following local opposition to a large-scale photovoltaic megaproject that threatened agricultural land, irrigation systems, and the cultural landscape of the area. Residents perceived these large-scale renewable developments as externally imposed and disconnected from local needs, motivating the creation of a community-led alternative based on collective self-consumption and local ownership.

In this context, the AEC combines collective self-consumption with democratic governance and social objectives, particularly support for vulnerable households affected by energy poverty. It aims to demonstrate that the energy transition can be implemented through small-scale, socially embedded, and environmentally sensitive approaches rather than through centralized and profit-oriented megaprojects.

However, the initiative faces multiple challenges, such as important regulatory and bureaucratic obstacles, including delays related to legal procedures and difficulties securing rooftops for the first photovoltaic installation. The limited collaboration of the local municipality has also created barriers, particularly

regarding access to public infrastructure. Another important challenge relates to social cohesion and participation. Órgiva's multicultural population has created both opportunities for innovation and tensions regarding trust and local legitimacy, particularly toward initiatives perceived as being led by foreign residents. As a result, the AEC must continuously negotiate issues of legitimacy, trust, and local identity while expanding participation and building alliances within the territory.

At the same time, beyond energy production, the initiative promotes civic participation and technical learning through workshops and environmental awareness-raising activities.

3.5.3 Overview of the panels

The deliberative process began in January 2026 with the kickoff meeting and concluded in May of the same year with Deliberative Panel III. The process was characterized by a very positive atmosphere, with participants demonstrating a high level of engagement and active involvement; consequently, the results are the product of the participants' own work.

Theory of Change and Systemic Thinking methodologies were applied during the deliberative process. Through these approaches, participants developed several Causal Loop Diagrams representing the organizational ecosystem of the Alpujarra region. This diagnostic work helped us understand and prioritize the issues to be addressed.

Key findings focused on enhancing organizational capacity and management skills; fostering spaces for dialogue, credibility, and trust; and increasing local engagement through effective communication. The process yielded rich results. As planned, we identified a series of inputs, outputs, and outcomes that the AEC and other organizations can leverage to achieve the shared goal: consolidating a cohesive Alpujarra region that drives a just ecological transition through local collaboration. These results have been made available to the participants.

3.5.4 Brief description of the deliberative process participants

A total of 17 people participated throughout the process. The identification and selection of participants, based on the stakeholder analysis, sought to ensure representation from the social, economic, and political spheres. Social actors were the most strongly represented, while participation from the economic and political spheres was more limited. In relation to the economic sector, the deliberative process did not spark enough interest among the various stakeholders who were invited, as the only company involved was one that was already working with the AEC. Regarding the political sphere, it was not possible to secure the participation of any politicians from the municipal government due to the tensions that already existed with the AEC. Since the initiative began, the municipal government has provided no support, despite the AEC's attempts to build bridges. There are political differences, further complicated by the fact that several AEC members are opposition politicians, and the municipal government has refused to grant access to the public rooftops requested for the installation of the photovoltaic project. The only elected municipal representative who participated was an opposition councillor, who was also a member of the AEC. Participation was predominantly male despite efforts to achieve a more balanced gender representation, as discussed below. Particular attention was also paid to the inclusion of vulnerable groups, resulting in the participation throughout the process of an occupational centre working with people with disabilities.

3.6 Westbahn case study, Vienna, Austria (BOKU)

3.6.1 Context of political participation and deliberation

The Austrian case study is situated in the context of urban planning and urban development in Vienna, a field that has been historically characterized by top-down, centralized decision-making, at first embedded in socialist values during the post-war era of social democratic "Red Vienna", and later, increasingly dominated by private actors due to processes of liberalisation in the 1980s and 1990s (Novy et al. 2001, Novy & Hammer 2007). At the same time, the city government reacted to growing public opposition to some of the large-scale projects developed in the city during the late 1960s and early 1970s by slowly incorporating different formats of citizen involvement into urban planning, leading to the development of what has been called the Vienna Model over the subsequent decades (Ahn & Mocca 2021). Analyses of these efforts to increase inclusivity and participatory opportunities in Vienna's policy-making have frequently observed challenges due to clientelism (Dangeschat & Hamedinger 2009) and a reluctance to truly delegate decision-making power (Ahn & Mocca 2021), thus increasing the likelihood of participatory initiatives being diluted to tokenistic forms (cf. Arnstein 1969). At the same time, the city administration has attested a growing democratic deficit in Vienna's representative government, as a large proportion of the city's inhabitants (>33%) hold non-Austrian citizenships and thus cannot participate in city government elections (MA 17 2023). This democratic deficit underscores the urgency of improving participatory and collaborative practices in Vienna's urban planning and urban development context.

3.6.2 Topic, challenge and problem brought to the panels

The case study is situated in Vienna's 15th district, where an area of land next to the Westbahnhof train station is currently up for redevelopment. For several years, different civic actors and initiatives have been advocating for a new green space to be created on the site, arguing that a park could ameliorate the significant lack of green space in the densely built 15th district, as well as strengthening a cold air corridor to counter heat and reconnecting the northern and southern half of the district. At the same time, the area presents a rare opportunity to Vienna's urban development planning for creating new inner-city housing, thus leading to a trade-off between the dual challenges of affordable housing and sufficient urban green spaces for health, climate and well-being. The CAI WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE is a group of activists focusing on creative, art-based and prefigurative activities and protest forms to call for the preservation of this rare area of unbuilt inner-city land as an open, continuous public park.

A formal urban development process for the area was implemented between 2022 and 2024, following which the city of Vienna and the Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB), as owners of the land, presented a preliminary development concept with two building plots for housing and commercial venues, as well as a terraced landscape park. Although the design includes green spaces, many activists still view it as "overbuilt" and continue to demand an open green space without soil sealing. The participatory process implemented during the concept development is criticized for lacking transparency, inclusivity and honest consideration of citizens' preferences. The process maintained a top-down structure, with extensive information and consultation opportunities for citizens, but final decision-making remained firmly with city authorities and ÖBB – a format which is criticized by the CAI as being a tokenistic form of civic participation rather than empowering citizens to engage in urban planning. This criticism is not uncommon in the context of Vienna's urban development. Although the city has been strengthening its efforts of introducing participatory forms of planning in recent years, e.g. through the establishment of an "office

for participation"[2], urban development projects are frequently called out for being overly top-down, lacking opportunities for collaborative decision making and active participation.

3.6.3 Overview of the panels

The kickoff meeting, in particular, was central to creating a shared understanding of the case's context and past developments, as some participants (mainly CAI members) had more case-specific knowledge about the Westbahnareal and its past, while others (mainly stakeholders) brought more general expertise to the process which needed to be contextualized. The storytelling exercise was especially helpful for fostering knowledge exchange between the participants, as well as creating a strong moment of collaboration to support a sense of process ownership.

During DPs I and II, stakeholders and CAI members worked with different guiding questions to explore their perspectives on the system. As a consequence, the stakeholders were more focused on a governance perspective of participatory urban planning, exploring barriers and hindering factors to participation as well as possible mitigating factors. The absence of stakeholders with decision-making power regarding the case of the Westbahnareal was challenging, as it was difficult for the participants to assess the accuracy of their understanding of the system in the context of the specific case. Nevertheless, the stakeholders identified democratic deficits in urban planning and barriers to participation as key challenges for creating sustainable and inclusive urban spaces, a perspective that was largely shared by the CAI members participating in DPII.

At the same time, important differences in perspectives on the system emerged during DPII. The CAI members focused more strongly on systemic issues of uneven power distribution and intransparency of planning processes. They tended to discuss deep systemic changes rather than concrete governance measures within the constraints of the current system. On the other hand, they reflected on the dynamics within the CAI itself and the factors enabling or hindering activism for sustainable urban development – a perspective which was absent in the stakeholder panel.

Panel 3 (9 June 2026) presented the merged diagram, draft vision and proposed leverage points, then used role play to develop Theory of Change activities. Because attendance was low (five participants, four from the initiative), the team replaced three planned role play groups with a single group alternating between initiative and municipal perspectives. Across the panels, discussion remained constructive despite occasional difficulties with systems mapping and frustration about limited engagement from decision-makers. The results informed draft policy recommendations, which were to be reviewed by scientific and policy experts and shared with participants.

3.6.4 Brief description of the deliberative process participants

The process brought together members of the WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE initiative and stakeholders with expertise in urban development, municipal administration, workers' interests, accessibility, urban research and public space. Six stakeholders participated in Panel 1, seven initiative members in Panel 2, and five people in Panel 3, four of whom were initiative members. City politicians, the plot owners, relevant city administration representatives and agencies involved in the formal Mitte 15 participation process declined to participate. The high-conflict context and perceived limited benefits of participation were cited as reasons, alongside concerns that participation could intensify tensions or affect prospects

[2] Büro für Mitwirkung, https://mitwirkung.wien.gv.at/

for future work with the city. Their absence limited the range of perspectives represented, particularly those with decision-making authority.

4. ACCESS

This section examines access to the deliberative panels across the CO-SUSTAIN case studies. Access is understood as a process that extends from decisions about whom to invite to the opportunities people have to attend and contribute. The following subsections distinguish three access levels to identify where barriers arose, whom they affected, and why. Access level I concerns how and why decisions were made to invite particular participants. It examines the recruitment criteria, approaches and channels used, and how these shaped whose perspectives were sought and whose may have remained outside the invitation process.

Access level II concerns whether those invited could attend the panels. It examines practical and contextual barriers to attendance, the resulting composition of the panels, and identifiable absences and their possible explanations. This level distinguishes being invited from being able or willing to participate. Access level III concerns the opportunities of those present to contribute meaningfully to the deliberations. It examines whether factors such as language, knowledge, confidence, facilitation, group dynamics or unequal influence restricted participants' ability to express their views, engage with others and shape the discussion. Attendance therefore does not, by itself, demonstrate that participants had equal opportunities to contribute.

Each case study concludes with a reflection on how access across these three levels may have influenced the panels' outcomes and potential impact. Recruitment decisions shape the range of perspectives invited; barriers to attendance affect which of those perspectives are present; and conditions during deliberation influence which contributions are heard and considered.

4.1 Annelinn case study (UT)

4.1.1 Access level I: Decision-making for invitations

Participants were identified across the whole deliberation process by combining stakeholder mapping, existing contacts and engagement activities, and discussions during and between the panels. The overall aim was to bring together actors occupying different positions in relation to the Annelinn intervention, including municipal specialists, local residents, community organisations, housing-related actors, welfare and social-service organisations, and other relevant local or external organisations as well as local people. Actors with direct knowledge of spatial planning and municipal property were invited alongside Annelinn residents, community organisations, and groups whose perspectives might otherwise be less visible.

Invitations to the Tartu Annelinn panels were extended to municipal representatives with expertise in urban planning, municipal property, urban maintenance, green spaces, climate and social welfare, local neighbourhood police officers, alongside local residents and community organisations, including a local welfare NGO and a local Christian organisation. Those invited also included representatives of older residents and youth groups, as well as parents and apartment association leaders, to bring a range of local experiences and perspectives into the deliberations. No stakeholder group was deliberately excluded from

consideration at the invitation stage; however, the invitation process did not ensure representation of every group within Annelinn.

Recruitment subsequently differed according to the purpose of the panels. Kick-off was meant to establish early connections between municipality, project and resident actors. For the institutionally oriented Panel 1, stakeholders were identified through internal mapping within the City Government and relevant external organisations. The recruitment prioritised municipal specialists working on spatial planning and municipal property, alongside social and welfare services connected to Annelinn and organisations working on community issues. For the resident-oriented Panel 2, stakeholders were identified through community mapping, previous engagement activities and preparatory-phase contacts. Priority was given to Annelinn residents and organisations representing youth, older people and local community initiatives, with the explicit aim of broadening lived experience and achieving intergenerational diversity. Panel 3 combined the two panels' representatives and aimed to include as many of the previously present participants as possible. However, the representatives of the regime (including the researchers) were able to attend during their working hours as this activity was part of their work, whereas local people were only able to come after work or during the weekend as this was not part of their work. The majority of the residents declined the invitation because of the timing, which was confirmed by phone calls. They were nevertheless encouraged to come even if they arrived a little late.

Recruitment combined individual email invitations with follow-up telephone calls to confirm interest and participation. Most invitations were issued by the research team, while Tartu City Government also contacted Annelinn residents through its existing residents' networks. These direct approaches were complemented by public invitations displayed at the local library and youth centre, alongside a dedicated social media event shared through university and municipal networks. This was a realistic strategy for reaching a range of local stakeholders and residents, although it relied partly on existing networks and voluntary responses. It therefore carried a risk of self-selection, with more active residents and those already interested in neighbourhood development more likely to participate.

4.1.2 Access level II: Presence and issues with access to panels

Kick-off

21 people connected with the organisations supporting or implementing the initiative, alongside representatives of the local library, community initiatives and local residents, attended the event. The relatively strong representation of organisational actors arose from the recruitment strategy and existing relationships around the project.

Panel 1: institutional actors

For Panel 1, 26 stakeholders were invited through internal City Government mapping and relevant external organisations; 15 attended. The Urban Design Department and Municipal Property Department were particularly strongly represented because of their central responsibilities for the intervention. Indeed, more Urban Design specialists attended than had initially been invited, including a landscape architect, city architect, climate specialist, mobility specialist and public-space specialist. Participants also included representatives of four municipal departments, the local library, local police and AS Hoolekandeteenused, a provider of social care services for people with special needs. However, most of the twelve municipal specialists invited from five additional departments did not attend, and several other invited organisations were absent. The resulting group therefore provided substantial institutional and technical expertise but was narrower than intended, with a particularly strong concentration of urban-design expertise. Gender

representation was also uneven, with only two men attending (seven had been invited). The reasons for individual absences were not systematically established. The lower participation of property-management specialists may reflect the intervention's emphasis on spatial design, which they may have perceived as less directly connected to their day-to-day responsibilities. Overall, no systematic pattern of non-attendance was identified, although the absences narrowed the range of departmental perspectives represented.

Panel 2: Residents and their representatives

For Panel 2, 29 people were invited and 20 participated. Participants included representatives of the neighbourhood association, local church community, community garden initiative and AS Hoolekandeteenused. However, although young people and older residents were prioritised, this aim failed and representatives of the elderly day centre, local high school, Anne Youth Centre and other youth-oriented organisations remained absent alongside a local kindergarten and some housing associations' representatives. Women were again clearly overrepresented. The resulting group therefore provided strong community and resident perspectives, but more limited intergenerational and stakeholder diversity.

Panel 3: Bringing people together

The final panel was organised to validate and refine earlier discussions, and therefore, only previous participants were invited. 21 of 37 invitees attended, including 12 external participants. Resident participation fell compared with Panel 2, with only 5 of 15 invited residents attending, possibly partly because the meeting took place during working hours. Municipal participation was limited, with only one of ten invited municipal actors attending, while community organisations were relatively well represented. External participation included the Institute of Baltic Studies and a landscape architecture office, while the welfare/social-care organisation was absent, and women remained overrepresented. Overall, the panel ensured continuity and strong local input but had limited institutional and social diversity. The need to rely on previous participants prevented bringing in previously absent or more vulnerable groups.

Access to deliberative space

Among respondents, the overall experience of access was positive. Most reported in the access survey carried out at the beginning of the deliberative process that they had no significant difficulties concerning travel, timing, cost, information or communication. Two respondents nevertheless reported difficulties with parking, one experienced some difficulty with timing, and one identified difficulty in obtaining unpaid time off. Two respondents would have preferred to receive materials in advance. Nobody reported that costs prevented participation, and no language or communication barriers were identified. Timing was nevertheless a major issue: all six non-attending kick-off invitees who provided a reason for non-attendance identified timing mismatch as the reason. Timing was also discussed during the event and finding the best suitable time was something the team grappled with. When deciding the timing of Panel 2, it was the needs of the local residents that were given priority whilst for Panel 3, it was the municipal workers.

Timing is likely to have substantially affected both the size and composition of the participating groups. The absence of youth, older people, some housing associations and organisations representing particular vulnerable groups is an important dimension for assessing access, even against the background of the relatively positive accessibility assessments among those who did attend. The observation data also indicates that participants themselves noticed absent groups. Some participants explicitly discussed the

fact that several groups were not represented and suggested ways of reaching them; the issue of reach appears to have been a recurring concern.

4.1.3 Access level III: Access during panels

For participants who reached the deliberative events, observation suggests that the physical and interactional arrangements generally supported participation. Sitting around tables encouraged interaction and eye contact, while smaller-group and World Café formats facilitated discussion. Facilitators explained tasks clearly, summarised contributions, connected individual experiences to collective discussion and encouraged less active participants to contribute. Games, movement, breaks and informal interaction also helped sustain engagement.

The observed communication culture was generally inclusive. Participants listened actively, interruptions were limited and participation appeared relatively balanced, nevertheless, some participants dominated certain conversations, although that was also in parts welcomed by others, for example when the dominant speaker had valuable access to knowledge (e.g. town architect, policeman) or was in a position from which to explain something in relation to the area and the issues people were facing (e.g. a person working for the town council). Organisers mostly used accessible language rather than academic or highly technical terminology. Participants whose first language was not Estonian were nevertheless observed communicating clearly in Estonian, and nobody identified significant linguistic barriers.

Some limitations nevertheless remained. A small number of participants spoke very little or appeared tired towards the end of longer discussions, and some younger participants appeared less active towards the end, although the observations cannot establish the reasons for this. Time management also created minor constraints: one discussion was considered somewhat too long, subsequent transitions were relatively rushed, and some participants left early because of other commitments.

4.1.4 Reflecting on access' impact to panels

Overall, the main access concerns relate to who was successfully identified, reached and able to attend, including being able to understand the process in Estonian. The absence or limited representation of younger and older residents, housing representatives and groups in vulnerable situations suggests that more targeted recruitment and greater attention to timing and practical participation constraints could have broadened participation. These limitations may have shaped which issues were prioritised, which experiences informed the discussion and which solutions were considered feasible. The concentration of institutional and technical expertise provided a strong basis for discussing spatial design, but less-heard residents' everyday needs and concerns may have received less attention. Limited reach may also have reduced wider awareness and ownership of the proposals, particularly if residents perceived the panels as intended for a select group. These are plausible implications of the participation profile rather than demonstrated effects: the assessment cannot establish whether broader participation would have produced different outcomes.

4.2 La Traginera case study (ECO)

4.2.1 Access level I: Decision-making for invitations

The selection focused on organisations and professionals rather than on recruiting individual citizens directly because the initiative itself is composed only by organisations. This way, the panels reflected the specific characteristics of the initiative, which is uniquely structured around organisations and institutions

working with or representing local communities. This includes several organisations that work directly or represent vulnerable households and groups in the neighbourhood.

For the inner group the participants were representatives of the organisations launching the initiative; therefore, no selection process was required in this case. The group carrying out the initiative includes public and private institutions with available roofs, as well as institutions from the *Tot Raval* platform working in the energy, social, and housing sectors.

The date, time and duration of the meeting were agreed with the inner group to ensure their availability. In addition, the invitations sent by Ecoserveis were distributed by one of the initiative's members through their internal channels to receive the invitation through a trusted contact and increase participation. Many of the member organisations from the CAI are social entities representing vulnerable groups.

A total of 12 inner organisations (all the organisations participating in the CAI) were invited to participate in the deliberative process. All of them were represented in at least one session, and 5 attended both sessions. 13 individual inner participants took part in at least one session, and 7 individuals of them participated throughout.

For the outer group, an initial list of actors was drawn up, including key public authorities and civil society organisations involved in the development of policies and advocacy at the intersection between social and energy issues. Participants were selected through a purposive and context-sensitive approach to incorporate a diversity of relevant perspectives rather than achieve statistical representation. This first identification aimed to include organisations from different levels of the public sector, ranging from the city council's energy and social agencies to representatives of the Catalan Government. Civil society organisations working to advance the energy transition in Catalonia were also invited, seeking the broadest possible representation in terms of geographical location and scope of activities. In addition, other actors were included, such as third-sector entities and umbrella organisations for cooperatives, energy communities, municipalities and the social sector. The first list was also checked with the CAI representatives in order to ensure no one was missed. Once the list had been completed, it was reviewed to include additional actors who could better represent the realities of energy communities in Catalonia, considering that the CAI is itself a collective energy project. As part of this refinement, a short meeting was held with an expert in the field to identify any key organisations not previously included. From the additional organisations suggested by the expert, several of them were included based on their institutional relevance and connection to the topic, while maintaining institutional diversity.

After this process, the external actors were invited to participate. Some invitees suggested additional participants who were not on the original list, and these were later invited to the session. The most notable barrier in contacting participants was the lack of contact details for some of the selected invitees. This was addressed by asking other actors who were closely connected to them and, in some cases, by conducting a detailed online search. Most contact details were eventually found, although two invitees were excluded as there was no way to reach them. For the first panel a total of 45 outer actors, from 35 organisations, were invited. Of these, 21 people confirmed their attendance and 18 individuals, from 17 organisations, ultimately participated.

With regard to the Panel III, priority was given to inviting outer participants who had already attended the first session, reflecting the cumulative nature of the deliberative process. The same criterion was not applied to the inners. All the CAI members were invited again because they are understood to be a homogeneous group. In addition, some relevant outer stakeholders who had been unable to attend the

first session were invited in order to help the CAI strengthen support among key public-sector actors. These included public authorities linked to the neighbourhood, the district, the metropolitan area and provincial-level public authorities. 9 new outer organisations were invited, 4 of which confirmed their participation and 2 attended. Overall, 26 outer organisations were invited to the second panel, 8 confirmed their attendance and 6 ultimately participated.

Some confirmed participants could not attend due to scheduling constraints or last-minute availability issues. The final group still represented a diversity of organisational types, governance levels and professional backgrounds, creating a rich discussion.

After efforts by one of the CAI members to involve district-level representatives, a representative of the District was expected to attend Panel III but ultimately did not participate. However, a technical officer from the Raval neighbourhood did attend, although only for approximately half of the session, but showing strong interest and willingness to follow-up the dialogue with the CAI. This partial involvement was consistent with the limited engagement of district-level administration identified by CAI members and with the broader challenge of coordination across public administration that emerged during the deliberative process. More sustained participation from district representatives could have provided additional insights into the potential scalability of the initiative within the neighbourhood, as well as into existing urban infrastructure, local governance dynamics and relevant municipal initiatives.

To facilitate continuity between the first and second stages of the deliberative process, all participants invited to Panel III received an explanatory video summarising the main results of Panel I and Panel II and presenting the combined proposal that would serve as the starting point for the joint discussion. Participants were also asked to reflect on this proposal in advance, assuring that the session could build directly on the work already carried out.

As some newly invited outer organisations joined the process at this stage and some organisations that had participated in Panels I and II were represented by different people in Panel III, new participants were offered an optional preparatory meeting. This meeting aimed to ensure that new participants could engage on an equal footing. It served to introduce the project, explain the methodology, and review progress made in previous sessions. Three people attended the meeting, although only one subsequently participated in Panel III. Ultimately, 4 of the 15 participants on Panel III were new to the process.

Summarising, across the three deliberation panels, 49 organisations were invited, with 30 organisations ultimately participating in at least one session. The CAI group included 12 invited organisations, of which 10 participated in Panel I and 8 in Panel III, while the Outers group included 37 invited organisations, with 17 participating in Panel II and 6 in Panel III. Overall, the panels involved 33 individual participants, comprising 13 participants from the CAI group and 20 from the Outers group.

4.2.2 Access level II: Presence and issues with access to panels

A total of 37 accessibility surveys were completed by 30 different individuals throughout the deliberative process: 27 came from Panels I and II and 10 came from Panel III. The results indicate that the deliberative sessions were generally perceived as accessible and inclusive. Almost all respondents reported no difficulties accessing the sessions, considered the communication and facilitation inclusive and clear, and stated that participation costs did not represent a barrier.

The main accessibility challenge identified was the length and intensity of the sessions, with several participants reporting that this made participation more difficult; in some cases, participants were unable

to remain until the end of the session or to be present at the beginning. This was the reason why some participants did not complete the accessibility surveys or the pre- and post-questionnaires, which were carried out at the start of Panels I and II and at the end of Panel III. A smaller number also mentioned scheduling conflicts with work or care responsibilities. Despite these specific barriers, all but one respondent described their overall accessibility experience as “easy and inclusive”.

Participants who did not attend the sessions did not complete the accessibility survey, so barriers among non-participants could not be assessed systematically. Some interested invitees nevertheless reported that work commitments prevented them from attending. The Panel III also had some mobility issues due to a strike, with demonstrations cutting accesses to the city.

The sessions were held during working hours because most participants joined in a professional capacity, representing organisations whose work was directly related to the topics discussed. Even so, competing professional responsibilities remained a barrier for some participants.

In addition, the profile of the participants invited should be considered when assessing the inclusiveness of the deliberative process. Although several participating organisations work directly with vulnerable groups and brought their perspectives into the discussions, the socioeconomic profile of questionnaire respondents did not reflect the diversity of the populations potentially affected by energy vulnerability in El Raval. The representation of vulnerable interests through intermediary organisations should therefore be distinguished from the direct participation of people experiencing vulnerability.

4.2.3 Access level III: Access during panels

At each panel, there was an external observer who took notes on the group dynamics and the atmosphere of the discussions. This section presents the results of these observations.

The methodology was generally well understood and positively received across the panels, supported by participants’ professional backgrounds and prior knowledge of energy, social and participation-related issues. Although some concepts initially required further clarification, the use of simple language, examples, visual materials, pair and small-group work helped participants engage with the methods and apply them successfully.

Discussions were active and constructive, and the diversity of professional backgrounds, particularly between energy and social profiles and, in the joint panel, between CAI members and external stakeholders, enabled different perspectives and forms of expertise to be brought into the discussion.

In Panel III, the role playing exercise further encouraged participants to consider proposed actions from the perspective of different actors, including their respective capacities and constraints. This supported the transition from discussing what should change to considering who would need to act and how different roles could complement one another.

Participation was generally balanced, with no clear dominant voices. Across the three panels, participants listened to each other, expressed disagreement openly but respectfully, and generally reached decisions through consensus. No significant conflicts were observed, resulting in an overall collaborative, respectful and engaged deliberative climate.

4.2.4 Reflecting on access’ impact to panels

Access conditions likely influenced both the nature and the extent of the observed impact. The process successfully brought together a diverse range of organisations and professional perspectives, and the

accessibility measures supported generally balanced and constructive participation. However, participants were predominantly highly educated professionals attending in an organisational capacity, while people experiencing vulnerability were mainly represented indirectly through intermediary organisations. This composition was intentional in order to respect the ethos of the CAI, which was composed uniquely by organisations' representatives, but it may have shaped the perspectives and forms of knowledge incorporated into the deliberation. In addition, the length and intensity of the sessions, scheduling constraints and participant turnover limited continuity and reduced the number of individuals for whom longitudinal change could be assessed. Therefore, the observed impacts primarily reflect changes among professionally engaged actors and should not be interpreted as representative of the wider or more vulnerable population of El Raval.

4.3 Turin case study (UniTo)

4.3.1 Access level I: Decision-making for invitations

Participants were identified through a preliminary mapping process combining literature review, exploratory interviews and stakeholder networking. Preliminary interviews were conducted with a variety of stakeholders, including NGOs, local and grassroots associations, third-sector organisations, researchers, and public administrators. The information gathered helped trace Turin's food solidarity ecosystem, its historical and political development, and the main actors involved. Snowball sampling was subsequently employed to further expand the network and identify additional relevant stakeholders. The selection of actors aimed to guarantee diversity and representativeness in both positioning and forms of influence within the local food system. Actors represented civil society, faith-based organisations, informal networks, municipal actors, the private sector, and research institutions. Some of these stakeholders were particularly important given their work and proximity with vulnerable and marginalised groups, including undocumented migrants, homeless individuals and people experiencing food insecurity. Trusted intermediaries facilitated access to these networks.

The deliberative process involved three panels: the "niche" panel composed mainly of grassroots initiatives, associations and organisations directly engaged in food solidarity practices; the "regime" panel including more institutionalised actors such as municipal representatives, welfare organizations, food banks and umbrella networks; and the final panel which combined participants from both the niche and the regime.

4.3.2 Access level II: Presence and issues with access to panels

Despite efforts to ensure diversity, recruitment inevitably privileged actors already visible within existing food solidarity networks. The methods explained above (among which exploratory interviews and snowball sampling), together with a facilitated communication with institutional structures, eased access to well-connected organisations. Consequently, more informal, marginal or other actors explicitly critical of public establishments were more difficult to involve. For instance, some grassroots initiatives were particularly critical of institutionalised and charitable models of food solidarity and decided not to participate in the deliberative arena. They were therefore underrepresented during the process and this, in turn, reduced the visibility of internal political disagreements and competing understanding of the role of food solidarity.

The direct involvement of the hard-to-reach population also remained limited, and the approach remained primarily representational. Migrants, undocumented individuals, homeless people and food-aid recipients were predominantly represented through organisations, social workers and other intermediaries. This was preferred by the research team and reflected practical constraints, issues of trust and accessibility, as well as the difficulty of involving people facing precarious living conditions in a multi-session deliberative process.

4.3.3 Access level III: Access during panels

Several practical barriers affected participation. Among these, time constraints: panels were held during working hours and this created difficulties for participants balancing employment and other volunteer-based activities (e.g., one participant representing migrants could not participate as he had to supervise a legal counselling desk, which in turn was very important for migrants in need). Moreover, interruptions of various nature (such as work-related calls) and competing commitments occasionally affected participation. Additionally, a few participants experienced difficulties locating the room within the university campus, and this contributed to delays, particularly during the first panel. Food and transport vouchers, refreshments and accessible university spaces were used to reduce some of these barriers.

Methodological accessibility represented a further challenge. While the overall deliberative process was considered accessible, some participants were unfamiliar with PSM and CLDs, and found the graphical and abstract nature of these exercises more difficult than narrative discussion. This was particularly evident during the regime panel. Time constraints meant that not every issue could be explored in depth; the research team nonetheless made a point of addressing participants' questions and doubts as they arose, so as to ensure a shared understanding of the exercises. The use of technical terminology also became an occasion for clarification and negotiation: drawing on their practical experience, participants from third-sector organizations reframed some of the institutional language and brought in more relational understandings of food solidarity, which enriched the discussion.

Linguistic accessibility was not a major obstacle. The majority of the participants were Italian speakers and therefore the workshops were conducted in Italian. There were two non-native Italian speakers but they were fluent in Italian and it cannot be determined whether a language barrier may have influenced their participation. Conversely, differences in professional jargon, organisational culture, and pre-existing familiarity with participatory methodologies shaped participants' ability to intervene equally.

4.3.4 Reflecting on access' impact to panels

Access conditions were influential in determining the dynamics of the niche and regime panels. The niche panel (DP1) was relatively informal and highly participatory, backed by participants' shared experience in grassroots and solidarity initiatives. Conversely, the regime panel was more formal and institutionalized, and a few participants were less familiar with deliberative methodologies. Differences in institutional positions, professional experience and familiarity with the topic also affected participation and involvement: actors with long-standing engagement in food solidarity tended to intervene more frequently and critically, while younger or less experienced participants were sometimes more reserved.

Notwithstanding these differences, the panels (especially the third one) were successful in bringing together actors occupying different positions within Turin's food solidarity system, enabling dialogue across grassroots, institutional and research stakeholders. At the same time, the process demonstrated the limitations in engaging particularly third sector organizations, vulnerable categories and their representatives. Even though deliberative processes tend to overcome several barriers, particularly

related to institutional power, professional culture, and methodological familiarity, our deliberative panels were influenced more by the systemic lack of resources that many participants faced: they were short of time and organisational capacity (affecting particularly third sector actors), which can limit even short-term participative sessions. In addition, distrust in institutions, alongside the perception that vulnerable and marginalized groups face particularly significant barriers to participation, have been reported by participants (more information can be found in section 5.3).

These conditions should therefore be considered when interpreting both the compositions of the deliberative groups and the outcomes of the process. These access dimensions suggest the panels' impact was shaped as much by who could participate fully, as by the deliberative design itself. Because recruitment relied on trusted intermediaries, exploratory interviews and snowball sampling , the process tended to reach already well-connected, institutionally visible actors.

4.4 Espoo case study (LUT)

4.4.1 Access level I: Decision-making for invitations

Identification of the relevant stakeholders in the Espoo related to SMR implementation was challenging since although conducting an SMR study was included in the objectives for the 2021–2025 council term, there has been no interest in initiating the planning of a specific project in Espoo. From stakeholder identification perspective, it was useful to investigate previous Finnish nuclear power plant siting cases, both failed and some actualized projects related to large nuclear power plants (NPPs) to find relevant actors possibly involved in later SMRs as well. Also, interviewing a researcher who specialized in the Finnish nuclear energy field, a case study representative, gave additional insights to analyze the sociopolitical landscape that such SMR implementation might face in the Espoo area too. Most of the key stakeholders represented governmental and municipal decision-making bodies and authorities, who are involved in the Finnish national nuclear energy regime. These research steps were used by a member of the LUT research team to conduct a stakeholder analysis. Two research team members created a template for the identification process of vulnerable groups.

Potential stakeholders were mapped out according to the stakeholder analysis template and the template for vulnerable group identification. This process resulted in a list of 49 stakeholders that was used as a guideline for a research team member to start drafting a list of invitees. Additions to the invitee list were made by the team leader and the research team member responsible for the invitation process.

4.4.2 Access level II: Presence and issues with access to panels

Accessibility of Espoo case study deliberation process faced challenges before and during project KoM and deliberation panels. Some of these challenges occurred already in the stakeholder identification and contacting phases, as there were no active civic movement or actualized SMR project that could have organically made a clear objective and focus point of the research. This was the result of the change of the Espoo city council initiative regarding SMRs, which was dismissed in the middle of the CO-SUSTAIN research project, just before identification and invitation of case study stakeholders started.

Although the aspiration was to have a diverse sample of participants at the KoM, mainly regime representatives participated. This led to the decision to expand the list of invites in order to engage civic organizations and vulnerable groups.

In total 32 invitations were sent for the first panel, and 51 invitations were sent for the second panel. Although the list of invites was expanded, the invitation process was not successful in recruiting the hoped number of participants, as both panels only had four people attending them. For the third panel, it was decided by the team leader that the invitations would only be sent for the participants of the first and second panels. The motivation behind this was to have continuation from the first and second panels, as the third panel would discuss topics covered in the previous panels.

Regardless of the robust theoretical analysis of vulnerable groups in this case study context and a thorough stakeholder analysis, vulnerable groups were not reached. Some factors that could have contributed to this are related to practicalities of the invitation process and the organisation of the panels. The absence of vulnerable groups in the panels was noticeable and discussed during the panels. The participants shared thoughts on how invitation processes could be improved in order to reach marginal groups. It was suggested that instead of a general invitation sent for everyone, vulnerable groups should be contacted directly and the invitations should be tailored to them. This way the invitations would have been more convincing on why the invitees participation would have been meaningful.

In general, the events had a low turnout. The invitation process could have taken place earlier so that participants would have had the opportunity to adjust their schedule. Additionally, it was noted by the participants that the information package sent with the invitation was not convincing enough on why *their* participation was needed. Other factors that might have contributed to the low turnouts were the timing and place of the events. Most of the events took place in the middle of the day, which is why it could have been challenging to integrate it into a workday schedule. This probably made some potential invitees decline the invitation. Additionally, the terminology used to describe the event could have made some potential participants hesitate to attend the events. The term “panel” in Finnish refers to top-down participation in which the speakers and the audience are in clearly distinct roles and the term “deliberation” is academic. The discussion regarding the interpretation of the term “deliberation panel” was sparked by a question from one of the invited stakeholders, who inquired about his own role in the panel. Due to feedback, the term "puntaroiva paneeli" was used in the invitations for the panels 1 and 2, instead of "deliberatiivinen paneeli”. In addition, the invitations emphasized that everyone invited would have a chance to speak during the panel. The invitation by LUT stated: “In the deliberative panel [*puntaroiva paneeli* in Finnish], all invited participants have the opportunity to present their views. The discussions focus on civic engagement, as well as the means available to decision-makers to support such participation and sustainable development. The case study in Espoo focuses on effective civic engagement within the context of a hypothetical small modular nuclear reactor project.” One might also consider to what extent the event—the topic of which (SMRs and participation) was likely not already familiar to all those invited—led to non-attendance. The term "työpaja” (workshop) was used in the invitations for panel 3 held in May 2026.

4.4.3 Access level III: Access during panels

Some of the restrictions contributing to low participation levels or dropping out from the deliberation panels included questions regarding event timing and suitable hours for participation. Time from receiving the invitation to the actual event was relatively short, less than a month to react and respond for the invitation was challenging to some. Others raised questions for what the most suitable hours are, so that many stakeholder groups would be able to participate. Many panelists expressed in the KoM and rest of the panels that they were able to participate due to their employment status, which allows flexible participation of such events during the working hours. This flexibility for scheduling was not deemed

accessible to all, excluding many working during the daytime. On the other hand, evening hours during the work week were also challenging, due to other commitments and activities that people may have. Those able to participate during working hours also had to plan their transportation to the panel locations, which made some adjustments to the breaks and event schedules, so that many had the opportunity to use public transportation or avoid parking tickets outside event venues.

Besides practical restrictions, the topic itself made some of the stakeholders express their disapproval for the chosen Espoo SMR case as a topic, which could have contributed to their dropout from the rest of the deliberation panels after the KoM. Some of those dropping out were connected to the nuclear energy industry and SMR actors, who did not wish to be associated with the Espoo area without official SMR plans. These stakeholders expressed that these companies have commitments and ongoing SMR activities to other Finnish cities, such as Helsinki and Loviisa, and they do not wish to confuse or mislead locals with hypothetical case example for Espoo. Due to these concerns, deliberation panels' case focus shifted to public participation in large-scale projects, but these actors were no longer taking part in the research project. Also, as the SMR case in the Espoo area was based on an older city council initiative that had since been removed from the city of Espoo objectives, SMRs as a topic were deemed irrelevant and heavily scrutinized by those who dropped out from the panels.

4.4.4 Reflecting on access' impact to panels

For the case study to reach its fullest potential, it could have been beneficial for deliberation panels to have a concrete and ongoing energy initiative in the area. This could have made local interest towards case study more organic and perhaps made participation to deliberation panels more accessible to many more different stakeholders, who might not otherwise be familiar with nuclear energy initiatives. On the other hand, since there was no concrete project and SMRs were mentioned only as an option within various city plans, this allowed for a more general discussion—one in which, for instance, potential sites were not opposed.

With the given research outline and objectives, some future improvements would be necessary for stronger and a more valid impact. For instance, identification of potential participants a better structured invitation process could have led to more people attending the panels. A higher number of attendees would have also improved the survey sample and thus provided a better starting point from which to observe and analyse change.

4.5 Alpujarra case study (UGR)

4.5.1 Access level I: how were the decisions made to invite participants and why

Identification of participants

Before the deliberative process began, a stakeholder analysis was conducted to identify potential participants. The first step was to identify actors already involved in the AEC, either as members of the initiative or as external actors who had previously collaborated with it. Information was gathered through interviews and complemented by a review of news articles, websites, and other publicly available online sources. The second step was aimed to broaden the initial network by identifying actors not directly involved with the AEC but whose participation could bring valuable perspectives to the deliberative process. Some of these actors recommended the future interviewees, and were already regarded as potential future allies or partners of the initiative. However, the vast majority were identified through

additional online searches aimed at ensuring representation of the main stakeholder categories considered in the analysis: political, social, and economic actors, as well as vulnerable groups.

Vulnerable groups

Special attention was paid to vulnerable groups. First, a social worker was contacted whose contact information was provided by the AEC, and second, we contacted several local associations, such as women's associations and a vocational center for people with disabilities. Greater efforts were made to encourage the participation of these stakeholders. When initial invitations received no response, follow-up contact was made through different channels, including messages and telephone calls. Reaching some of the relevant actors nevertheless proved difficult. In particular, the local women's association was less active than in previous years, and initially we were unable to establish contact with the municipal representative responsible for gender issues. To overcome these difficulties, we approached a trusted local collaborator, who helped us establish contact with both. Despite these additional efforts, neither participated in the deliberative process.

Selection of participants

Participant selection was based on the following criteria: 1) Relevance of the actors' participation in the process; 2) Number of actors who could participate; 3) Representation of vulnerable groups. Posters were also prepared and circulated alongside the invitations and through local WhatsApp and Facebook groups to broaden participation in the KoM, DP I and DP II. Particular efforts were made to involve political actors, especially representatives of the municipal government. They were invited to the KoM, DP I and DP III. The only exception was DP II, which was specifically designed for members of the AEC and therefore did not include invitations to external political actors.

Organisation of the deliberation process

Once the stakeholders we wanted to participate in the process were identified and selected, the invitations were sent out.

These were primarily sent via email, although we also sent WhatsApp messages to some people for whom email was not the preferred means of communication. Several weeks before each event, a formal invitation was sent to the political actors and another version to the other stakeholders. We decided to send a separate invitation to the political actors because the tensions between them and the AEC required a more detailed invitation to build trust and ensure that they understood the importance of their participation in the deliberative process. Both messages presented the project, the process (methodologies, phases, objectives, expected results, etc.), the date, time, and location, and included a poster for distribution.

A few days before each event, a follow-up email was sent as a reminder, providing more detail on the day's agenda and the event itself, and requesting confirmation. A reminder was also sent via WhatsApp to some members of the AEC to ensure their attendance. The posters we included in the invitations were also distributed by the AEC through WhatsApp and Facebook groups.

At the end of each event, a follow-up message was sent to participants thanking them for their participation, summarizing the main results, asking them to complete a survey where applicable, and inviting them to participate in the next phases of the deliberative process.

In the validation process, three people were contacted to participate. These individuals met the established requirements: they were not all affiliated with academia, they had not participated in the deliberation panels, they worked on related topics, and they had sufficient knowledge of the case study to provide informed opinions during the validation process. Prior to the validation meeting, participants received an explanatory report detailing the entire process and providing the necessary information for the validation. They were also provided with a Prezi presentation summarizing the results of the deliberative process.

4.5.2 Access level II: Presence and issues with access to panels

The entire deliberative process took place in the Órgiva Town Hall. We chose this space for several reasons: 1) it is located in the center of Órgiva, the main town of the Alpujarra region, making it more accessible to a wider audience. Furthermore, most of the people involved in the initiative live in Órgiva; 2) it is a public space, and its use was free of charge; 3) the building and the meeting room were accessible to people with reduced mobility; and 4) we felt that holding the events there could facilitate the participation of the municipal government, as it is their workplace.

We also acknowledge that using municipal premises could potentially have discouraged participation by actors who are critical of local authorities. However, no participant raised this issue as a concern during the process.

We conducted access surveys with participants before and after the KoM. The only restriction that emerged as an impediment to participating in the process was one person with hearing difficulty who did not return to the other events. We do not know to what extent these difficulties influenced their decision not to return, nor whether and how we could have better adapted the process to their needs.

4.5.3 Access level III: Access during panels

<u>Interaction with the room during the deliberation process</u>

In every panel, we began with a round in which participants shared how they were feeling, and at the end, we shared again how we were feeling and how the event had gone.

Some people trusted the process from the beginning, while others were initially relatively skeptical but remained involved throughout the process. Others participated in the KoM, but did not return for subsequent panels.

At the beginning of DP I and DP II, lower-than-expected attendance generated some disappointment. However, as the events progressed, the situation improved as participants realised that they could continue with fewer people, and that this would actually provide more opportunities for those present to participate.

In short, throughout the entire deliberative process, there was a very healthy and participatory atmosphere. People came eager to participate. Participants actively engaged with the proposed methodologies and gradually developed a shared understanding of the systemic challenges affecting the AEC. Likewise, we did not identify any significant power dynamics where some participants dominated the discussion or others felt inhibited from expressing their opinions, although male participation was considerably higher. The president of the AEC participated in one of the events and was perceived as speaking with a certain degree of authority, but we do not believe that this prevented other participants from expressing their views.

The results of the validation meeting also supported the relevance of the issues identified during the deliberative process, as the challenges and proposed actions were broadly consistent with the validators' understanding of the case.

Lack of representation of certain sectors

Economic and political actors

Despite the broad and diverse selection and invitation of participants, participation in the deliberative process in Órgiva was primarily attended by social actors operating at the local level. The only economic actor who participated in the deliberative process represented a consulting firm that is working with the AEC. Only two public-sector actors participated in the deliberative process: a councillor from the Órgiva City Council and a representative of the Granada Energy Office of the Granada Provincial Council. Most of Órgiva's political actors neither participated nor responded to our invitations, and the only representative from the municipal government was an opposition councillor who was also a member of the AEC. As discussed during the validation meeting, the absence of the municipal government was considered a common challenge in participatory initiatives rather than necessarily a weakness of the methodology itself. The validators acknowledged the considerable efforts made by the research team to encourage institutional participation, including repeated invitations and the decision to hold all meetings at the Town Hall.

Women, gender-diverse people and youth participation

We acknowledge the relatively low participation of women and young people. We recognise that this may partly reflect broader patterns commonly observed in the energy sector, where participation often remains male-dominated and centred on homeowners. Nevertheless, we consider it is necessary to adopt a more proactive recruitment strategy in future initiatives. This could include reviewing stakeholder lists from a gender perspective, actively identifying women and gender-diverse people in relevant organisations, and linking energy transition topics to sectors where they may be more strongly represented, such as education, community development, or social innovation. Moreover, we could have done more to tailor the invitations to the different social groups and organisations we were trying to involve. We did this to a certain extent, but in retrospect, the recruitment strategy could have been more targeted and intentional.

Regarding young people, participation barriers may be linked less to environmental awareness than to structural factors, such as limited access to stable housing and therefore reduced opportunities to engage directly in energy community initiatives.

In general terms, it was very challenging to explain how participation in the panels could be relevant to each type of actor and what they could gain from the process in their particular context. Since the methodology is complex, it was also difficult to convey in simple terms what the workshops would involve. Finally, because the workshops were relatively long, encouraging people to commit to the process and maintaining their participation across successive events was also challenging.

4.5.4 Reflecting on access' impact to panels

The results of the deliberative process are shaped both by the individuals who participated and those who did not. In this regard, the absences noted earlier offer clues to the limitations of the results yielded by the deliberative process. The absence of municipal government representatives prevented participants of an adequate addressing of the existing conflicts between the AEC and the city council. This was one of the

major issues highlighted by AEC members at the beginning of the process, an issue on which no progress could be made during deliberation. Furthermore, the lack of participation of women, gender-diverse and young people deprived the process of more diverse perspectives. On one hand, this reflects the AEC's struggles to engage these demographics; on the other, it is problematic because the process offered a valuable opportunity to foster dialogue and collaboration. Consequently, it was not possible to gain a deeper understanding of why these groups did not participate in the AEC, nor to identify the measures needed to encourage their involvement.

Therefore, the final results of the deliberative process do not incorporate the perspectives of the groups that were absent, which limits the quality of the results.

4.6 Westbahn case study (BOKU)

4.6.1 Access level I: Decision-making for invitations

The potentially relevant groups were identified from newspaper articles, documents of the city of Vienna regarding the redevelopment plans of the area, an explorative interview with an administrative representative of the city of Vienna, and an interview with four case study representatives. Furthermore, each contacted stakeholder was asked to name further stakeholders they deem relevant/think should participate in the deliberative panels. From the context and stakeholder analysis, it emerged that vulnerable groups (groups disproportionally affected) are low-income households, especially those living in energy inefficient buildings, and have limited mobility. They in particular suffer from increasing urban heat. People with low mobility cannot cross the Westbahnareal easily due to elevation differences in the terrain (10-meter steep slopes bordering the area and flat areas near the traction rails). The second group includes elderly people, disabled people, and families with small children.

The decision process for recruitment was structured in three phases: 1) deliberation in the team, determining the priority for inviting the identified stakeholders; 2) research, who within the institutions/organisations should be invited, including back-ups; and 3) extension of the invitation list with recommendations from invited stakeholders.

Phase 1 draws from the research and analysis mentioned above. Furthermore, prior to inviting stakeholders we deliberated whether to invite citizens, especially vulnerable citizens; however, as we felt the process was inadequate to bridge power gaps between political/administrative representatives, institutional representatives, the highly educated/professionalised members of our CAI, and vulnerable groups, we decided to invite representatives for the identified vulnerable groups. Phase 2 built both on online research, recommendations from interviews, and stakeholders we have already had contact with in prior transdisciplinary projects, as information on the power and decision structures within the city administration and between its units are somewhat inaccessible. For Phase 3 we added an invitation to recommend additional stakeholders to each invitation sent out, which resulted in eight additional invitations.

4.6.2 Access level II: Presence and issues with access to panels

The stakeholders who ultimately partook in the process represented a range of intermediary, media, cultural, administrative, and community-based organisations. Intermediary organisations were represented by the Arbeiterkammer (AK), Gebietsbetreuung, and the Österreichischer Behindertenrat. The media perspective was represented by derive.at. The process also included WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE as

the CAI, as well as the cultural organisation Westwaerts as part of the stakeholders. From the city administration, Municipal Department 22 (Climate Protection) participated. These stakeholders contributed perspectives on social vulnerability, accessibility, local knowledge, public communication, cultural practices, community engagement, and environmental administration.

At the same time, several actors with particularly important formal responsibilities or resources remained absent. These absences were lamented by the present participants in the panels, and the pre-panel interviews. Political stakeholders did not participate, especially representatives of the district, who would have been important for understanding local political priorities and the political feasibility of potential interventions. Important administrative stakeholders were likewise absent, most notably Municipal Department 18 (Urban Development and Planning) and Municipal Department 21 (Neighborhood Planning and Land Use Zoning). Their non-participation limited the process's ability to engage directly with questions of spatial planning, urban development, and the institutional coordination of redevelopment. The Österreichische Bundesbahnen (ÖBB), as the owners of the area, also remained absent. This was particularly significant because ownership confers substantial influence over the possible uses, transformation, and accessibility of the site. Moreover, crucial stakeholders involved in the official participatory process, art:phalanx and superwien, did not participate either. Their absence meant that the deliberative process could not draw directly on the experience, procedural knowledge, and networks developed through the formal participation process surrounding the area. Consequently, although the process included several intermediary organisations and actors with relevant community, cultural, accessibility, and environmental expertise, it lacked direct participation from several of the actors most closely connected to political decision-making, administrative planning, site ownership, and the official organisation of participation. Reasons for their absence (e.g., directives from higher management, conflict proneness of the area) were provided in the responses and pre-participation phone calls with the invited stakeholders.

The responses to the invitations were generally friendly. Nevertheless, a notable pattern emerged: the closer stakeholders were institutionally or spatially linked to the area and its redevelopment, the less interest they showed in participating in the research project, particularly in discussions or deliberative panels. This produced a form of selective participation. Actors with relevant knowledge and influence were identified and approached, but those with the greatest proximity to the site and the most direct responsibility for its planning and transformation were, in several cases, among those who remained absent. This can be traced back to the controversy surrounding the city's development plans and following dissatisfaction with the formal political participation process, which can generally be classified as a consultation process.

The results of the access survey show that practical and logistical aspects were largely assessed as unproblematic. Most respondents reported no difficulties with travel, timing or costs, and indicated that information about the workshops was clear and sufficient. Where difficulties were mentioned, they primarily concerned the timing or duration of the event, and, in one case, the need for a budget to compensate activists for their unpaid work. Comments on wayfinding and signage suggest that some participants experienced minor obstacles in locating the room or the entrance.

4.6.3 Access level III: Access during panels

The feedback (feedback survey) and accessibility items (access survey) collected after the kick-off meeting and the three panels indicate a consistently positive evaluation of the workshop design and facilitation,

alongside recurring suggestions for improving accessibility and participation conditions. Across all four events, participants overwhelmingly agreed that they had broadened their knowledge of the Westbahn area, that the workshops were useful, and that they felt well informed about their role, the rules of collaboration and their possibilities for influence. Participants also rated the communication of content and objectives by the project team as clear and comprehensible, and reported that they were able to express their opinions freely without feeling pushed in a particular direction. The statement that their views were taken on board and their knowledge was valued received uniformly positive responses across all sessions.

Most respondents indicated that their accessibility needs had been taken into account or were not applicable, and described the workshops as simple and inclusive. At the same time, several comments highlighted that additional measures would be needed for people with disabilities, and that accessibility should be considered in a differentiated way. One respondent noted that the method was partly complicated or somewhat high-threshold, and another mentioned that the theoretical and methodological input was difficult to understand. These responses suggest that, while the overall design was experienced as inclusive, further attention to cognitive and methodological accessibility, as well as to physical accessibility, would strengthen future events.

Open-ended feedback was predominantly positive. Participants described the workshops as “exciting” and “inspiring”, thanked the team for the pleasant and collegial atmosphere, and expressed appreciation for the selection of the WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE as a CAI. Some respondents indicated that they were looking forward to the documentation of results, and others noted that they had not engaged sufficiently with the content in advance, pointing to a desire for better preparation materials or clearer visualisations. Overall, the feedback suggests that the workshops succeeded in creating a supportive and respectful environment in which participants felt heard and valued, while also revealing opportunities to further lower thresholds, improve wayfinding and signage, and strengthen accessibility for people with disabilities and for those less familiar with system thinking.

The feedback provided by the participants was mirrored by our observational protocols: most participants contributed freely and frequently. No disparities in contributions based on gender or assignment to groups (CAI or stakeholders) could be noted, however, within the CAI some hierarchies could be observed based on the activity of participation: longer-standing members and members of the decision-making circle were more vocal, while younger participants tended to hold back unless directly addressed by the facilitators in group settings.

4.6.4 Reflecting on access’ impact to panels

Taken together, the three access levels suggest a mixed impact profile. The panels achieved high deliberative quality, inclusive representation of vulnerability perspectives via intermediaries, and a respectful, well-facilitated environment that participants experienced as meaningful and influential. However, the absence of core political, administrative, and ownership actors, combined with selective participation by those closest to the site, likely constrained the panels’ ability to directly shape formal planning decisions, resource allocation, or implementation pathways. Future iterations could increase impact by (i) establishing earlier and more targeted engagement with ÖBB, district politics, and key municipal departments; (ii) complementing representative participation with carefully designed formats for direct citizen involvement; and (iii) further lowering cognitive and logistical thresholds through improved pre-materials, visualisations, and accessibility measures. In sum, the panels’ design and

recruitment logic fostered a credible and inclusive deliberative space, but their impact on concrete transformation trajectories is likely mediated and indirect, contingent on subsequent translation of results into formal planning and ownership processes.

5. OVERVIEW OF THE DATA AND IMPACT

This section brings together quantitative and qualitative evidence to examine changes associated with the deliberative panels across the six case studies, in other words, it offers an overview of the possible changes the processes helped trigger. Each subsection considers survey results alongside shifts in participants' qualitative accounts of the three main assessment topics. These are combining open-ended survey responses, pre- and post-panel or retrospective interviews, and focus group discussions, where available. These findings are considered alongside expert assessments and observations, to identify patterns, differences and limitations across the sources, and to assess what they suggest about the changes emerging through the panels.

5.1 Annelinn case study (UT)

5.1.1 Quantitative change based on surveys

Pre- and post-panel surveys were used to explore changes in participants' knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and openness in relation to the issues addressed through the deliberative process. The design was longitudinal in intention, with the aim of comparing responses at the beginning and after the end of the deliberation experience for the participants. However, because participation at different panels fluctuated, the number of respondents differed between the pre- (n=33) and post-panel (n=5) surveys and only a relatively small proportion of participants in the earlier panels also attended the final panel and could therefore complete the post-panel questionnaire; others attended but did not complete all survey questions.

The resulting data therefore do not constitute a fully matched pre/post panel dataset. The analysis thus treats the pre- and post-panel results primarily as exploratory evidence of changes in patterns of responses. Where individual-level matching is possible, this provides clearer evidence of change but where the respondent groups differ, comparisons are interpreted descriptively and with caution. As a result, the quantitative assessment of the Estonian case's impact is limited and therefore, we are placing greater importance on the qualitative study. Nevertheless, the survey does offer an overall background picture in particular for the pre-panel situation which is useful for understanding the qualitative picture emerging of the changes.

As the panels were aiming to have an impact on both the understanding of the value of participatory approaches in transformation as well as the relevance of climate change for local initiatives, the latter was an important change to measure. Looking at the whole pool, the vast majority of the participants do consider climate change the most important (33%) or quite important challenge of our time (58%). The individuals who have filled both, pre- and post-panel surveys, have not, however, changed their minds in any way at all, including the respondent who did not consider this a particularly important issue. Since the panels had a relatively limited attention to the climate topic and concentrated on the deliberative process, this is not particularly surprising.

Feasibility of the sustainable transition was perceived to be completely possible by 50% of the pre-panel respondents, 25% somewhat possible and 12.5% were uncertain. Change for the 5 who filled both surveys was, interestingly, towards loss of trust, with two respondents lowering their expectation - however, one respondent also switched from "uncertain" to "somewhat possible". That could plausibly reflect greater appreciation of the complexity of the transition that the panels may have revealed.

The vast majority of participants, expectedly, considered the deliberative discussions useful or somewhat useful, with 15% considering it essential, and there was no change for the respondents who filled in both surveys.

Most respondents were somewhat politically active, with the majority voting in both national and local elections; a small number participated also in demonstrations and other more intense actions and about 10% stated no interest or participation at all. Nearly 1/3 had no experience with deliberative processes, 1/3 had limited experience and 1/3 were very experienced or with an average experience.

The participants reported that for them, obstacles to participation were overwhelmingly related to lack of time - around 60%. However, the sense that participation has little impact was also relatively common, with 20% of respondents listing this as a major reason for lack of participation. Also, it appears that some respondents who participated in both pre- and post-panel surveys lost confidence in participation: two participants reported that their sense of lack of impact has driven them away from participation. This could suggest that deliberation increased their awareness of how important it is that participation actually has consequences. One reported post-panel that the fear of conflict or negative consequences was an issue for them, even though in the pre-panel survey, they had responded participating sufficiently in political processes. This might suggest exposure to such issues in participation, although there were no occasions where clear conflict was reported. The small number of responses does not allow making far-reaching conclusions, however, and panels may have provided food for thought and people may have simply been able to imagine potential conflicts in these situations. When assessing others' obstacles to participation, lack of impact moves to the first position and lack of time to second position, followed by lack of trust in civil society and irrelevance of political life. The post-panel responses place emphasis also on structural and social barriers - time, trust and political alienation.

The questions that targeted the deliberative activity more particularly indicate interesting patterns. When assessing what results such activities might bring, pre-panel respondents expect improved quality of life (more than 70%) and better leisure opportunities (nearly 70%), community creation (nearly 60%), and improved interaction between residents (more than 50%). Climate change adaptation and sustainable transition is on the 6th and 7th position.

The expectations regarding the potential of such activities to bring on change were relatively high pre-panel (30% expected it to have significant potential or stated this has already contributed to achieving change, and a further 47% considered it to be likely). However, post-panel respondents had lost some of this confidence with two respondents who had expected there to be "significant" potential downgrading their assessment to "likely". One plausible interpretation is that experiencing the deliberative process made participants more realistic about the difficulty of translating deliberation into actual institutional change. This would fit particularly well with the qualitative responses, where participants emphasised that discussion should lead to something tangible to have an impact.

The readiness to use participatory methods was already high with more than 50% of respondents using some form of such practices, of them, 10% used these routinely.

The quantitative assessment suggests that the panels' effect was possibly increasing the understanding of the complexity of collective action and the difference between having a deliberative process and having that process produce institutional or material change. These results need to be qualitatively analysed to fully understand their meaning and how any change was arrived at.

5.1.2 Qualitative change based on surveys and interviews

Survey's qualitative dimension

Overall, the open-ended survey questions had a very low response rate, so cannot be used for assessing the actual impact of the panels, except for some broad guesses regarding the understanding of the problem - pre-panel, the responses were rather broad, but have become more specific in post-panel answers. The reason for such low rates had to do with the timing of the post-panel responses after a long day of deliberations. Also, the pre-panel survey probably felt somewhat rushed to some participants as they were eager to get to the actual meeting and were not sufficiently motivated to give detailed replies to open questions.

Retrospective interviews

In the Estonian case, retrospective interviews were carried out with 4 respondents who had participated in 1st & 3rd panels (1) 2nd and 3rd (1), kick-off, 2nd and 3rd (1) and all events (1). The interviewees included a municipal official (INT1) and 3 locals, one of whom was also a politician (INT2), one was a young person (INT3) and one a representative of the local neighborhood association (Annelinna selts) (INT4).

The panels and the problem: lack of contact and community

The interviewees expected the panels to offer insight into (other) locals' views in deciding what should be done in Annelinn to plan it better, with a more realistic view of what can be achieved, to learn about the organisation of such panels on a new, important and hot topic and improve local life, whilst adding their own input. Gaining new insights into others' views and the diversity of opinions was seen as valuable, alongside learning practical skills. The actual deliberative process fitted people's expectations, and was considered thought through and understandable; expectations were not high when it came to being able to involve other residents, but these grew as a result of the experience.

"The problem" was understood rather differently by the interviewees. One interviewee, a municipal official, emphasised the lack of sense of ownership of solutions which are currently provided by the municipality, and saw the need to change this situation. For two interviewees, green projects/nature based solutions in Annelinn and bettering the lives of the locals were paramount, implying that such activities were either missing or insufficiently understood and/or addressed. The youngest interviewee saw the root of the problems to be the lack of sense of community which prevents finding solutions together. Furthermore, the lack of interesting things to do drives people out of the area - diminishing the community further. Broadly, then, the assessment was that the problem is the lack of local involvement in owning the and sharing the process of solving any local issues.

When assessing whether their understanding of the problem changed during the panel, there was an agreement that the panels' struggles to involve a broad enough group of residents reinforced the original sense of lack of community, ownership, and willingness to participate, leading to the conclusion that it is always the same group of "spark people" and that these people are not connected with the rest of the locals. At the same time, there was also a sense that such panels allowed the participants a sense of being heard and having a say, in particular for the young and the elderly, and enabling them to see and understand other groups' reasons for both lack of participation as well as any issues they faced and tasks and responsibilities they had.

When analysing the causes of this lack of participation, it was partly seen to depend on the ability to directly approach the potential participants. Difficulties in getting through to people, in particular to

Russians, was evidenced for the interviewees in the mix of panel participants, and the choice of methods of contacting them was questioned. There was also a sense it is specific to the area - “apartment life” may make people less likely to join, as well as the lack of shared “third spaces” outside home, office, school, which means that whenever people need to meet anyone, they leave the area. However, there was also an overarching issue of the municipal (and other institutional) attitude of ignoring the locals whose lives are impacted: there is a tendency of “making especially larger financial and development related decisions without consulting Auntie Maali [a generic reference to a local elderly person]”. This was seen to generate an air of lack of agency, switching people off participation.

Nevertheless, the interviewees suggested people were actually very grateful for the public spaces built and restorations made. On these aspects, the panels had, again, a confirming role, but with some new insights. For some, the panels demonstrated that people, including young people, are interested, and that “everything is possible also in Annelinn”, as people are yearning for shared spaces – for example, the young interviewee mentioned they heard a cafe as a solution mentioned “at every panel”.

“De-othering”

Having a direct contact up close allowed the interviewees to recognise others as “interesting and nice people in Annelinn”, rather than “wolves” and “enemies”. This “contact” “with the outside” enabled learning and hearing others’ stories, seeing others to have “super ideas” (e.g. creating maker spaces), understanding what affects them and what problems they experience (one example mentioned was children playing next to an alcohol shop, another refers to vandalism that was mentioned frequently without recognising the youngsters might need better things to do). But most importantly, this exposure to others in the panel environment offered evidence of others’ willingness to share resources, of creating change, such as establishing community gardens, and to see change emerging, if only in the form of a new WhatsApp chat group formed as a result of the discussions at the panels. The interviewees felt that the panels made them care more, created a “wakefulness” to the surrounding town and its flaws and potential, and raised their trust that “something can get done”, or “get done better” “even in Annelinn”, where they previously thought nobody does anything anyway. For the participants, Annelinn is no longer anonymous, which they translate to a sense that there is a process of acquiring ownership now in gear. In sum, new contacts and evidence of other active people helps cooperation between town and the residents as well as between residents, now known to be nice and active to form a group with whom to achieve change, and find and enact new ideas. This is translated into a more detailed vision of a future where something positive for the area can be achieved as it is populated with others with similar aims and attitudes, and for the municipal officials/politicians, with citizens who can be supported.

Realism

However, there is also caution: unfulfilled expectations and new responsibilities may lead to distrust. A certain sense of realism arose from the panels, especially regarding the speed of changes and the long road ahead to properly see the rise of a community in the area. Panels also highlight that people are “not used to such participation” but rather, to “coming and yelling and criticising” instead of “coming early on [in the process of changes] to discuss what is needed”. The realism included also a recognition that in the majority of cases outside the panels, there still was a lack of safe spaces, there still was lots of “yelling”, and as a result, only some people were willing to come forward whilst others remained “silent”. Even when there is evidence of sharing plans and communicating, the desire to put oneself forward when something actually needs doing was also clearly low, as the discussions on WhatsApp demonstrate following the

panels. The panels also showed that a positive mindset and togetherness are rare, even with knowledge. Several interviewees conveyed a sense of doubt, remaining unsure about the ways of achieving the envisaged future. Crucially, this lack of certainty was predicated on the expectation that everything depends on "what the town decides".

Panels: continuity, practice and a holistic picture

When assessing the individual elements of the panels, interviewees suggested that such exercises were useful. Whilst system analysis was seen to have been complex by most (but not all), it was seen to be important to acknowledge how everything is connected. These recognitions came despite the fact that some activities, including system mapping, were also seen as confusing, excessive, too long or boring. Overall, the panels were seen to have provided a warm, safe atmosphere, supportive of more open and creative thinking, freedom of choosing to take responsibility and charge. Some methods supported these processes, as did the sense of getting to know each other. In particular, the icebreakers were seen as useful, as were the games helping people understand connectedness. The more detailed and practical exercises as well as brainstorming and discussions were considered useful and for those present across the panels, there was a sense that the activities were all part of a larger whole.

There was a general sense that more was needed, however: regarding system mapping, one interviewee commented that "doing this once is however probably not enough to learn to think systematically". Similarly, those who had been to more than one panel felt that continuity could have been beneficial for everyone. Rather than starting from zero, they could pick up where they stopped the previous time, and build up to becoming the core group for the local area. Involving more people in this way seemed like a good approach.

A number of exercises received mixed reviews. The thematic work with maps at different tables was reported as useful. On the other hand, maps which were AI created for role games were seen not to have helped support thinking about real situations. Role games were thought to have helped thinking about other people's lives and what their needs might be. On the other hand, several felt that representing a group they do not really know, based on stereotypes, is not really realistic or helpful in learning about others' lives. In line with the sense that one of the most valuable things the panels provided them with was insight into people's worlds in their own words, they considered direct insight into others' daily joys and problems the best way to understand their daily lives and what affects them. It was within this context that one interviewee had felt that rather than their own selves, they were valued merely as performers of a role for the workshop. Another concern that was aired in relation both to discussions at the panels and the reasons why changes are doubted was the lack of shift from discussions and opinions to actual activities.

Assessing whether any of those approaches would be worth incorporating in their own organisations activities, the municipality official agreed that it helped them see how important it is to plan such activities carefully - thinking what are the aims, how to give feedback and what results from such meetings - and acknowledge how valuable people's time is.

Challenges of participation

People's opinions of their own activism as citizens was not very high. The municipal official divided people into "active spark people", vocal about their convictions, and "passive people" who do not contribute, and thus cannot expect that their wishes come true. They slotted themselves into the passive group and admitted they do not really care what happens around them, living in their own castle and limiting their

efforts to what they do at work. Another interviewee considered themselves to be active, but not politically. They saw this as a potential negative label and association with a particular party, leading to exclusions from some other discussions. They preferred the position of a socially active expert who values a great living environment and wants to improve it further alongside others. They disliked the political element so much that they suggested if a political element was required for panel participation, they would not turn up at the next event. Such assessments had not changed as a result of the panels.

The interviewees had rather diverse views on which forms of activism are the most effective, useful, or democratic. Probably based on their own experiences, the town official noted that those who are the loudest and most active, or have the best acquaintance networks are the most effective - but pointed out that this is not the most democratic. The youngest participant saw it differently. For them, the most democratic forms of activism were projects that people initiate and organise themselves, such as community work bees, and the participatory budget in which residents vote on proposals. Even more, really listening to others and expressing one's own views are actually the most democratic thing one can do. For another interviewee, it is public discussions and listening to each other as well as getting involved in actions and being a role model that are needed. Others will join in when you take the lead. Again, people did not think these views were influenced by the experiences at the panels. Rather, it was their pessimism regarding others' activism that was confirmed: the same people always turn up - there was a general lack of trust towards politicians and that anyone listens to people's opinion.

Their own political activism was seen to depend on being properly interested or possessing information, and on feeling heard. The town official noted that they were content with the comfort of their own bubble and that political decisions do not influence their life to the degree that they would be pushed to demand change. The youngest interviewee felt they lack information, knowledge and experience, and that their opinion does not count. For the town official, participation depended on having time, as that is limited, nothing could motivate them. The youngest interviewee already felt they are more active than ever, but to be even more active would depend on others to share this activism with, and know-how on becoming effective politically. Becoming active is seen to be a difficult process.

The lack of ease in becoming more active was seen to also dissuade others. Estonians, rather than going to the frontline, were seen to be particularly prone to just accepting things as they are. One of the interviewees suggested there is a particular Estonian sense that "if it is as it is, let it be, there is no point busying oneself". There was a lack of belief that one can change the world - and as a result, the interviewees felt, bringing people together and moving towards a shared goal is harder for Estonians. It is seen to depend on trusting people, promises and activities. However, this process was also seen as slow: it may be that some people do want to get involved but not immediately - some are thought to want to just listen at this point and become active in a couple of years, some need to prioritise as they have young children etc – they might want to join but need to optimise their time. Being part of public discussions is hoped to lead to becoming a lifestyle - Holland was given as an example where this is part of a lifestyle. Ease of process is key.

Panels confirmed that there are always some active (spark) people, but also that getting others to join is difficult. Furthermore, even though everyone is willing to contribute with ideas, think along, but it is time to take responsibility, they expect it to be someone else. Panels made the interviewees feel that participatory approach can work, and that we should not be afraid of it: different groups of people did turn up, such as town government, which showed they were interested and willing to come and give answers, and others turned up and shared their views, planned specific activities.

When considering whether politics needs to change, the interviewees noted that all of this is a process of change, politics changes when it is clear that community is active and that new people become spark people or those who 'break through'. If they can make others join, this leads to people power, and if people can express what they want, politicians have to take this into consideration. So that in the end, it is not one single but loud person pushing for decisions. The youngest contributor pointed out that current politics is dominated by "middle aged and old men", which needs to change, along with LGBT rights, more opportunities for youth, and everyone should be treated like humans, even if they have no rights and property. Politicians should listen to people more and there should be a way to send all this straight to parliament, and info needs to move more easily. There should be a collective shared care for each other rather than the current arguing which leads nowhere. Also, certain strategic aims should not depend on the party that leads.

Future visions

Regarding the future, continuation of the cooperation that the panels modelled is one of the shared hopes. However, it is also recognised that these are likely small steps on a long path. The continuing participation would lead to a sense of ownership - a feature that can be supported by the municipality, as people's views guide the changes in the area. One of the residents envisaged Annelinn days, full of people, and applying "participative budget" also in Annelinn, the largest district in Tartu and yet not part of it. Annelinn could become "a destination, not just a drive thru", a home, not a forced place where people have to be. This is corroborated by another interviewee who would like to see the development of a public space that matters to many people. Such a space needs to be communicated, cooperated on and cocreated. Normalising the approach that the panels exemplified - that the residents are the experts and must have a say - would lead to a great future.

Some interviewees felt that the panels shifted the situation considerably regarding the future - the municipal official stresses that the town government now has the contacts of all those spark people which helps to know who and with what ideas could be supported and empowered to carry out some projects or mediate community wishes. In other words, the panels provided a direct practical benefit to the municipality as well as the residents by scooping out the right people and delivering them to the municipality. Furthermore, as this official says, "We definitely take the great ideas from the panels and try to do things better".

5.1.3 Focus group discussions

The focus group evidence suggests that the deliberative process did not produce a radical change in participants' attitudes, but it did contribute to greater mutual understanding, safer interaction and a stronger sense that cooperation in Annelinn is possible. Participants described the panels and related engagement activities as bringing people closer together and creating a space where different views could be discussed without major conflict. The Youth Centre workshop was particularly valued because it brought together a cross-section of residents who initially did not know one another, while the methods and setting helped participants become integrated and gave everyone opportunities to speak and think.

One of the clearest changes concerned how participants understood other actors. A municipal participant described gaining a stronger understanding of residents' perspectives and becoming more willing to challenge previous scepticism. The process also prompted reflection on the assumption that Annelinn residents are passive or difficult to engage, with a greater recognition that there are residents who want to contribute but may lack confidence or external support. Participants also noted that Annelinn's negative

reputation can become self-reinforcing, as both residents and outsiders reproduce the image of an inactive community.

The role play and other playful methods produced mixed results. They could create a relaxed atmosphere and encourage perspective-taking, but some participants felt that role play relied on stereotypes or was less useful for developing concrete solutions. Its effectiveness also depended on facilitation and group dynamics. System mapping and other more complex activities similarly helped some participants see connections, while others found them difficult to understand or were unclear about their purpose. The focus group therefore points to a mechanism in which methods can support openness and perspective-taking, but their impact depends strongly on accessibility, facilitation and the ability to connect abstract exercises to participants' own experiences.

Climate was another area where the focus group identified limited change. Attention shifted during the process from climate concerns towards community and everyday local issues. Some participants saw this as appropriate because climate is connected to ordinary aspects of public space and community life, while others felt that the climate dimension became too much of a background issue.

Finally, participants stressed that the process itself cannot secure lasting impact. The emerging network, community activities and communication channels were seen as important foundations, but discussion alone was insufficient. Continued contact, community initiatives and visible follow-up were considered necessary to maintain confidence and turn the relationships and ideas developed through the panels into action.

5.1.4 Expert validation

The expert validation broadly confirms the potential of the deliberative approach, while identifying important limitations concerning representation, resources, methodology and follow-up. Experts valued the deliberate attempts to reach harder-to-reach groups through intermediaries and support persons, as well as the structured nature of the process. The use of prepared materials, role play, voting and the cyclical connection between themes was seen as useful. Role play was particularly appreciated as a way of encouraging participants to consider perspectives other than their own, while voting was regarded as a simple and effective method that could have been used more extensively.

At the same time, experts questioned whether the process achieved a sufficiently balanced participant mix. Young people and older residents remained underrepresented, while organisers and officials were considered too numerous in some sessions. Experts noted that this could make the setting feel uncomfortable or intimidating for residents. They also questioned the relationship between the resources invested and the results achieved, particularly where different workshops covered similar ground. A stronger connection to the physical setting of Annelinn was recommended, including more on-site discussions and walks. These observations reinforce the importance of access and representation as conditions for meaningful deliberation.

Experts also identified methodological limitations. System maps were considered valuable in principle because they help participants see relationships and a wider system, but the formats used were seen as too complex for some residents. Experts recommended simpler, more intuitive representations and more participatory ways of identifying and prioritising relationships. More generally, conclusions and materials should be understandable in everyday language. The principle that local residents should be treated as experts in their own environment was highlighted as particularly important. Experts also felt that the

climate dimension was sometimes insufficiently visible and should have been kept more explicitly present throughout the process.

The strongest point of agreement concerned what happens after deliberation. Experts saw the process as having potential to contribute to sustainable urban planning and community engagement, but stressed that this potential depends on visible follow-up. If residents perceive that their ideas simply remain with the municipality, trust and credibility may decline. Continuity, political interest and a local organisation or community network capable of carrying the process forward were therefore seen as essential. The experts also suggested that wider application would require a simpler, cheaper and quicker format, using existing community spaces and fewer organisers.

Overall, the expert validation supports an interpretation of impact centred on relationships, awareness and collective capacity rather than demonstrated institutional or physical change. The process can create new connections, increase awareness and strengthen confidence that local cooperation is possible. Whether these early changes become durable participation or concrete changes in Annelinn depends on continuity and on whether participants can see that their contributions lead to subsequent action.

5.2 La Traginera case study (ECO)

This section explores the changes observed among individuals participating in the deliberative process. The analysis draws primarily on a comparison of pre- and post-panel questionnaires, combining a quantitative analysis of the closed responses with a qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses. It examines changes in how participants understand the challenges addressed by the CAI and their underlying causes, envisage desirable futures and possible pathways towards them, perceive the just transition and political participation, and assess the role and potential of the CAI. Attention is also paid to changes in participants' views on collaboration, stakeholder engagement and the relationships needed to advance the initiative.

As participants often represented organisations or institutions, these individual-level changes should not automatically be interpreted as organisational change. Similarly, collective outputs developed during the panels provide evidence of what participants were able to articulate together, but do not in themselves demonstrate subsequent organisational or systemic change.

The impact assessment combines this questionnaire evidence with several complementary qualitative sources. Three interviews conducted with external stakeholders before the panels provide contextual evidence on perspectives already present among some outers before deliberation. As these interviewees were not the same individuals included in the matched questionnaire analysis and comparable post-panel interviews are not available, the interviews are not used as longitudinal evidence of individual change. Participatory observations and the collective outputs developed through the panels, particularly the systemic analyses and Theory of Change, provide group-level evidence on how perspectives were discussed and articulated during the process. In addition, a retrospective focus group with CAI members is planned to explore how the process is perceived after its completion, while the resulting pathway for change has been presented to external experts to assess its relevance and feasibility.

Participants' availability and changes in organisational representation at the different Panels affected the longitudinal component of the impact assessment. Only 7 participants completed both the pre- and post-questionnaires (3 inners and 4 outers), allowing their responses to be matched longitudinally. Their

sociodemographic profile was broadly similar to that of the wider group of questionnaire respondents, as described in Section 3.2. This was largely because participants attended as representatives of organisations rather than as individuals and, in several cases, different people represented the same organisation at different stages of the process. While this maintained a degree of organisational continuity, it complicated the assessment of individual-level change. The 7 matched questionnaires therefore constitute the main pre-post dataset used for the longitudinal analysis, while unmatched questionnaires are used descriptively to characterise the wider participant group.

5.2.1 Quantitative change based on surveys

The quantitative analysis focuses on the closed and multiple-choice questions that provide relevant information on participants' views of the just transition, political participation, deliberative processes and the potential contribution of the CAI Energies Compartides al Raval. Given the limited number of matched pre- and post-questionnaires, the quantitative results are used primarily to characterise the participants and establish the context in which the observed qualitative changes should be interpreted, rather than to measure statistically significant changes resulting from the deliberative process. Where relevant, responses from the seven participants with matched questionnaires are compared to identify changes between the beginning and the end of the process.

Perceptions of climate change and the feasibility of a sustainable transition

Participants entered the deliberative process with a strong concern for climate change. Across the questionnaires analysed, all respondents considered climate change either 'important' or 'the most important challenge of our time'. This perception remained highly stable among the seven participants with matched questionnaires, with only one moving from 'important' to 'the most important challenge of our time' after the deliberation process.

Similarly, most participants were optimistic about the feasibility of a sustainable transition: 15 considered it 'totally possible', 12 'somewhat possible' and 3 selected the intermediate response. Among the seven matched participants, four considered a sustainable transition 'totally possible' in their final response. Three participants changed their assessment during the process, but these changes did not follow a common direction. Overall, the results therefore indicate a group that was already strongly committed to sustainability before deliberation, with no clear quantitative shift in these general attitudes.

Political participation

Participants also showed a high level of political and civic engagement. When asked to rank the forms of political participation they considered most effective for achieving a just transition towards a greener society, non-violent civil disobedience and protests, demonstrations and marches, citizens' assemblies, and petitions received the highest overall rankings. State elections occupied an intermediate position, while local elections were ranked lower. Actions against property, violent protest and decision-making by an authoritarian leader or party were considered the least effective forms (the full results are shown in Table 1, which is included in the appendices under the section *Tables of results from the pre- and post-surveys for the Spanish case study*).

Actual participation broadly reflected this highly engaged profile (see Table 2 in the appendices). Of the 30 participants included in the analysis, 28 reported participating in local elections and 27 in state elections. Participation also extended considerably beyond electoral politics: 25 reported taking part in demonstrations and marches, 21 in citizens' assemblies, 17 in strikes, 15 in petitions and 10 in non-violent

civil disobedience or protests. When asked about other forms of political participation, they referred to their involvement in self-managed projects, initiatives in the Social and Solidarity Economy, and political advocacy through social organisations.

These findings indicate that the deliberative process brought together participants with substantial previous experience of different forms of civic and political participation.

Despite this high level of engagement, participants identified barriers to their own political participation (see Table 3 in the appendices). Lack of time was by far the most frequently reported barrier, selected by 18 of the 30 participants. 10 referred to feeling politically disconnected because of the current political situation and 7 to a perception that participation has little impact. At the same time, 7 stated that they already participated actively and did not identify a personal barrier. Economic constraints, lack of participatory spaces, health or disability, digital skills and fear of conflict were only occasionally identified as barriers affecting participants themselves.

However, participants perceived considerably more barriers when considering the general population. Lack of time was again the most frequently selected barrier (21 participants), closely followed by the perception that participation has no impact (20) and fear of conflict or negative social consequences (20). Lack of trust in civil society was identified by 11 participants and economic constraints by 7.

When asked who was most affected by these barriers, responses overwhelmingly referred to people in vulnerable situations, with some participants explicitly highlighting intersectionality and different axes of inequality. As previously described, participants were generally highly educated and had household incomes at or above the national average. Their responses suggest that, while they perceived themselves as relatively politically engaged and able to participate, they also recognised that participation is considerably more difficult for other social groups.

Experience and perceptions of deliberative participation

Participants generally had previous experience of participatory processes. Of the 30 respondents, 24 described their previous experience with participatory panels as limited, medium or extensive, while only 4 reported having no previous experience and none expressed a lack of interest in participatory panels. Participation was also embedded in many participants' professional practices: 22 of the 30 respondents reported already using participatory methods in their work, while 1 indicated an intention to start using them.

Consistent with this background, perceptions of deliberative activities were positive from the outset. Half the participants (15) considered activities such as deliberative panels useful to some extent, 11 considered them considerably useful and 3 regarded them as vital for a democratic transition towards sustainability; none considered them useless or an obstacle.

Among the 7 participants with matched questionnaires, two moved from considerably useful to useful to some extent, while another two moved in the opposite direction. There was therefore no clear quantitative change in perceptions of the usefulness of deliberation. This is important when interpreting the impact of the process: the panels did not need to persuade a sceptical group of the value of participation, as participants were already broadly supportive of participatory approaches.

Perceptions of the CAI Energies Compartides al Raval

The initiative was understood primarily as both a community-building initiative and a contribution to the wider sustainability transition, while its social, climate and democratic dimensions were recognised by smaller but still substantial parts of the group (see Table 4 in the appendices). Participants most frequently associated the CAI with community building, selected by 25 of the 30 respondents, followed by its contribution to a sustainable transition (21). 10 participants associated it with alleviating the cost of living, 10 with climate change mitigation or adaptation and 9 with strengthening democracy.

Participants also generally perceived the initiative as having meaningful potential to contribute to a just transition (see Table 5 in the appendices) Almost half the participants (14) considered that the CAI probably has potential to contribute to change, 11 attributed it considerable potential and 1 respondent considered that it had already contributed to change. No participant stated that it had no potential.

Overall, the process did not result in any changes to perceptions of the CAI's contributions. However, one of its members shifted their focus from 'community building' to broader impacts, such as sustainable transition and climate change mitigation and adaptation. This person also mentioned a local-level impact on people, namely 'alleviating the cost of living'. This change is consistent with other responses indicating that some members of the initiative now view it as part of a broader social and transformative context.

For the 7 participants who completed both questionnaires, only their post-questionnaire responses were included in the overall count. Among them, 3 increased their assessment of the CAI's potential: 2 moved from probable to considerable potential (1 inner and 1 outer), while 1 CAI member moved from considerable potential to also recognising that the initiative had already contributed to change. Although the small matched sample does not allow this to be interpreted as a generalised effect, it provides some quantitative evidence that part of the group viewed the CAI's impact more positively after the deliberative process.

This is consistent with some of the findings from the qualitative analysis, which suggest that CAI members increasingly understood the initiative within a broader framework of a just and sustainable energy transition, rather than only in terms of its immediate local or operational objectives.

5.2.2 Qualitative change based on surveys and interviews

The qualitative analysis draws on the open-ended responses of the 7 participants who completed both the pre- and post-questionnaires (3 inners and 4 outers). Their responses were compared longitudinally to identify changes in how they understood the challenge and its underlying causes, the futures they envisaged, and the pathways through which change could be achieved. Although the small number of matched questionnaires limits the generalisability of the findings, several relevant patterns of change emerge.

The deliberation panels appear to have contributed less to changing participants' already broadly positive views on sustainability and political participation than to deepening how they understood the pathways through which change can be achieved. Across the pre- and post-panel responses, participants increasingly adopted a more systemic and relational perspective, in some cases incorporating concepts and terminology from the system analysis and the Theory of Change. They also placed greater emphasis on relationships between actors, coordinated action and institutional conditions, including trust, shared objectives, dialogue, co-creation and public-sector commitment.

This shift took different forms across the 2 groups: CAI members tended to connect their local and operational concerns more explicitly to the wider just energy transition, while external stakeholders

moved from broader transition-oriented perspectives towards more concrete and territorially grounded understandings shaped by the realities of the case. These changes were not uniform across participants, but together they suggest a deepening of how change was understood.

Three interviews conducted with external stakeholders before the panels provide additional contextual evidence on views and concerns that were already present among some outers before the deliberative process. As these three participants did not attend the second panel, neither post-panel interviews nor post-panel survey responses are available for comparison. Therefore, these interviews cannot be used to explain or corroborate individual-level changes identified in that dataset. For this reason, they are used only to contextualise perspectives present among some external actors before deliberation. These included systemic and relational concerns like unequal access to time, information and knowledge as barriers to participation; the predominance of relatively privileged and technically knowledgeable profiles in energy communities; administrative complexity; and the need for greater coordination across public authorities.

This is important when interpreting the changes identified in the questionnaires, particularly among external stakeholders. Some of the systemic and relational concerns previously identified by external actors also emerged during the deliberative panels. The contribution of deliberation therefore appears to lie less in introducing these concerns than in bringing different perspectives together, exploring their interconnections and incorporating them into a collectively articulated pathway for change.

Defining the challenge: Inners broaden, outers ground

In participants' definitions of the challenge addressed by the process, one notable change was a tendency towards more concrete and context-specific formulations. This was particularly visible among external stakeholders, but also among some inners, whose post-panel responses showed greater alignment with the CAI's shared understanding of the challenge.

For example, 1 CAI member moved from the broad objective of 'promoting energy communities, ecosocial transition and energy sovereignty' to the more specific and shared aim of 'demonstrating that the CAI model works and can be replicated'. Another CAI member showed a similar shift in the subsequent question on the factors causing or maintaining the challenge, discussed in the next section. This suggests that the deliberative process may also have helped strengthen the initiative's internal spaces for reflection and move towards greater alignment around its objectives.

Among external stakeholders, initial responses tended to address inclusion in general terms, emphasising the importance of representing diverse perspectives. Following the panels, their responses became more concrete and territorially grounded, highlighting the need to strengthen the presence of energy communities across different sectors and develop a shared roadmap for their role in the energy transition.

However, for 1 outer participant, engagement with the CAI appears to have provided a reality check that moderated their expectations regarding inclusion and brought their understanding closer to the approach of the CAI as a whole. This participant moved from envisioning vulnerable people as active members of energy communities to the broader objective of making energy communities more inclusive, a formulation that appears more closely adapted to the realities of the local context, where involving vulnerable people directly is not always an option.

Understanding the causes: from practical barriers to relationships between actors

Changes in the factors identified as causing or maintaining the challenge provide particularly clear evidence of a more relational understanding. In several pre-panel responses, participants referred mainly to practical barriers such as funding, technical implementation, knowledge or competing priorities. These factors remained relevant, but post-panel responses introduced additional dimensions concerning relationships between actors.

A CAI member, for instance, added trust to previously identified technical barriers. Similarly, an external stakeholder who initially emphasised economic factors, knowledge and priorities subsequently highlighted differences in perspectives, interests and objectives between the groups involved. Another external stakeholder, who had initially been unable to identify specific causal factors, subsequently pointed to both citizens' limited knowledge of energy communities and energy communities' limited knowledge of existing participatory structures.

The challenge was therefore increasingly understood not only in terms of individual barriers, but also through the interactions, interests and relationships between the actors involved.

Envisaging the desired future: greater attention to shared responsibility

Participants' descriptions of their desired future also evolved. CAI members already expressed ambitions for broader change before the panels, but their later responses placed greater emphasis on the role and responsibility of actors outside the initiative. For example, an initial aspiration to develop a replicable and scalable model evolved into a vision of implementing an energy model with the support and shared leadership of public administration and citizens.

External stakeholders, meanwhile, tended to make their desired futures more concrete. Their post-panel responses included proposals to simplify requirements, infrastructure and administrative procedures to make participation more accessible, as well as the aspiration to establish a shared vision and roadmap involving social organisations, public authorities, citizens and economic actors. These changes suggest greater attention to the institutional and social conditions required to achieve an inclusive energy transition.

Achieving the desired future: inners emphasise co-creation, outers move towards implementation

The responses concerning how these desired futures could be achieved show different but complementary trajectories among CAI members and external stakeholders. CAI members initially tended to focus on operational measures, including photovoltaic installations, financing and regulation. Their post-panel responses gave greater prominence to the processes through which these solutions could be developed, particularly co-creation and stronger commitment from the public administration.

External stakeholders often followed the opposite direction. Several already recognised the importance of collaboration at the beginning of the process but subsequently incorporated more concrete ideas about how this collaboration could translate into action, for example through regulatory changes or the practical design of energy communities. In other cases, the emphasis moved from information towards dialogue. One participant, for example, shifted from stressing the importance of knowledge and capacity building to identifying the need to create 'bridges of dialogue' between public authorities, energy communities and citizens.

Overall, the 2 groups appear to have approached the issue from different starting points while developing more complementary understandings of how change could occur.

Collaboration within the CAI: positive relations but persistent participation challenges

For CAI members specifically, the later questionnaire questions provide additional insight into what remained unresolved. Members continued to assess collaboration within the initiative positively, but their responses indicate persistent challenges concerning participation, coordination and the initiative's capacity to maintain momentum.

Before the deliberative process, suggested improvements included clearer decision-making, more regular internal communication, greater transparency and accessibility, training, the involvement of additional organisations and stronger participation by the municipal administration. The more limited post-panel responses, answered 4 months later, particularly highlighted the challenge of maintaining meetings and engagement within the group.

This provides a useful picture of the instability that can affect citizen-led initiatives relying heavily on voluntary coordination and project-management work, where sustained participation and organisational effort can place a considerable burden on those involved.

Working with policymakers: demand for stronger local authorities involvement persists

Views regarding policymakers within the CAI showed less evidence of change. Before the deliberative process, CAI members already described administration involvement as insufficient, embryonic or predominantly technical, and called for greater participation. Post-panel responses continued in the same direction, including the explicit view that the administration (especially local and district administration representatives) should participate actively in the group. Rather than indicating a new perception generated by the deliberative process, these responses show that the need for stronger and more sustained local authorities' engagement remained a central concern throughout the process.

The pre-panel interviews with external stakeholders provide a complementary perspective. Although they involved different individuals, some outers had also identified stronger institutional coordination as necessary before the panels. Public-sector coordination and engagement therefore emerged as a concern from different positions around the initiative, rather than as the recognition of an issue which can be attributed solely to the deliberative process. Its subsequent prominence in the joint systemic analysis and Theory of Change is particularly relevant because these previously distributed perspectives became part of a collectively articulated pathway for change.

Limitations of the interview-based longitudinal assessment

In addition to the pre- and post-panel questionnaires, the impact assessment methodology initially envisaged conducting interviews with selected participants before and after the deliberative process. However, it was not possible to obtain comparable longitudinal interview data in the Catalan case.

Three pre-panel interviews were conducted with external stakeholders before the first stage of the deliberative process. However, none of these interviewees participated in Panel III, and they were not the same individuals included in the matched pre-post questionnaire analysis. As participant representation changed between sessions, conducting post-panel interviews with different individuals would not have provided comparable evidence of individual-level change. This reflects the particular organisational nature of the case: participants generally attended as representatives of organisations rather than in an individual capacity, and organisations were sometimes represented by different people at different stages of the process.

A further limitation emerged towards the end of the process. The deliberative process itself was relatively demanding in terms of time and engagement, while the research activities conducted alongside it added an additional burden. Participants were asked to complete relatively extensive pre- and post-panel questionnaires and accessibility surveys in addition to participating in the deliberative sessions. Following Panel III, the CAI steering group explicitly requested that participants should not be approached for further questionnaires or interviews because of the accumulated burden and fatigue associated with the process. The research team therefore decided not to conduct additional post-panel retrospective interviews.

This decision reduced the amount of longitudinal qualitative evidence available for the impact assessment, but it also provides an important methodological lesson. Evaluating participatory processes can itself place demands on participants, particularly when several research instruments are added to an already intensive deliberative process. In this case, avoiding additional demands on participants was prioritised over completing the originally planned interview design.

The 3 pre-panel interviews have therefore not been used as evidence of individual-level change resulting from the deliberative process. Instead, they are used selectively as contextual pre-panel evidence of perspectives already present among some external stakeholders before deliberation. In particular, they help identify concerns that pre-dated the panels and therefore avoid attributing all issues subsequently articulated through the deliberative process to the process itself.

5.2.3 Focus group discussions

A retrospective focus group with CAI members is planned to complement the individual-level evidence and provide a retrospective group-level assessment of the deliberative process after its completion. The focus group is intended to explore how CAI members perceive the process retrospectively, whether they consider that it influenced their understanding of the initiative and its wider system, and whether any changes in relationships, ways of working or engagement with external actors can be identified after the panels.

Rather than organising an additional stand-alone research session, the focus group is planned to take place within one of the CAI's regular assemblies. This approach was chosen both to reduce the additional burden on participants and to embed the evaluation within an existing space in which CAI members already meet and collectively reflect on the development of the initiative. However, due to the CAI's own meeting schedule, it has not been possible to conduct the focus group before the preparation of this report.

This also highlights a methodological consideration when evaluating citizen-led collective action initiatives. Research and evaluation activities need to adapt to the rhythms, availability and existing governance spaces of the initiatives involved, rather than expecting them to adjust their activities to the research timetable. In this case, prioritising the CAI's regular assembly schedule limits the retrospective evidence available at the time of reporting, but reduces additional participation demands and is intended to integrate the assessment into the initiative's existing working practices.

5.2.4 Expert validation

The pathway for change developed through the deliberative process was presented to two external experts who had not participated in the panels, providing an external assessment of its relevance and feasibility. The experts brought complementary perspectives: local public policy and municipal sustainability, and energy poverty and energy justice. Their feedback broadly validated the pathway

developed by participants, while identifying conditions that would need to be considered during implementation.

From a local governance perspective, the expert assessment supported one of the central findings emerging from the deliberative process: inclusive energy communities cannot rely solely on technical solutions or community initiative but require an enabling institutional environment. The emphasis placed in the ToC on political commitment, intersectoral coordination and citizen participation was considered particularly relevant. Actions such as permanent coordination spaces, stronger neighbourhood participation and public-private collaboration were regarded as realistic ways of strengthening the position of energy communities within municipal agendas. At the same time, one of the experts stressed that implementation needs to reflect differences in municipal capacity, particularly the more limited resources available to small and medium-sized municipalities.

The assessment also reinforced the importance of connecting local experimentation with broader policy objectives. Linking inclusive community energy to existing climate and social-justice frameworks was considered important for building political support, while awareness-raising and advocacy could contribute to increasing its visibility and legitimacy. However, political support was also considered likely to depend on the initiative's ability to demonstrate tangible results and benefits. This provides external support for the relationship identified during the deliberative process between the successful demonstration of the CAI model and the possibility of wider institutional engagement and replication.

From an energy-poverty perspective, the external assessment particularly validated the centrality given to vulnerable households in the pathway for change. The expert highlighted that participation in energy communities can be constrained by inequalities in knowledge, available time and resources, and therefore supported the proposed combination of training, awareness raising, administrative simplification and intermediary support. Importantly, the assessment also emphasised the need to combine longer-term structural change with practical short-term support for vulnerable households, including assistance in understanding energy consumption, energy bills and administrative procedures.

Taken together, the two assessments provide external support for the multi-level and systemic character of the pathway developed through deliberation. Both experts considered it coherent that change was addressed simultaneously through community participation, local implementation, institutional coordination, political commitment and broader regulatory conditions. They also introduced an important implementation perspective: transformation is likely to require an adaptive and incremental approach, with early and demonstrable results helping to build trust, political support and momentum for wider change.

Overall, the external validation strengthens the plausibility of the pathway for change collectively developed through the panels. In particular, it supports the participants' understanding that the success of an inclusive shared-energy model depends on combining community-level action with changes in institutional relationships and enabling governance conditions. At the same time, the experts' emphasis on municipal capacity, practical support for vulnerable households and demonstrable early results adds important conditions for translating this collectively developed pathway into implementation.

5.3 Turin case study (UniTo)

The assessment of changes emerging from the deliberative process combines three sources of evidence: the quantitative comparison of pre- and post-panel survey responses, the qualitative analysis of open-ended survey questions and retrospective interviews with panel participants, and the external validation workshop conducted with three experts who had not participated in the deliberative panels. Since the respondents to the pre- and post-panel surveys could not be systematically matched at the individual level, the comparison of open-ended responses cannot be interpreted as a longitudinal measure of individual change. Instead, the responses provide indications of shifts in the collective framing of the food solidarity system. The retrospective interviews provide a direct account of participants' insights on change, learned methods, and what they deemed useful and would like to transfer into their own practices. Finally, the validation workshop has offered an external assessment of the relevance and consistency of the dynamics and pathways identified through the deliberative process.

Creating a new deliberative space for Turin's food systems

The panels offered a rare opportunity to reflect jointly on a system that niche and regime actors normally navigate separately. Eighteen organisations were invited across DP1 and DP2 (from small community initiatives to large institutional bodies) and most attended despite the multi-session process. For several participants, the deliberation created direct dialogue that had not previously existed: one Arci Torino representative noted that the process produced a first-ever direct exchange with Banco Alimentare, despite years of parallel, uncoordinated collaboration. This confirms the necessity to provide even more coordination structures and mechanisms in order to bring these organizations into the same room.

From different perspectives to a shared understanding of the system

Both the niche and regimes panels used the Life Line exercise and PSM to reconstruct their trajectory on Turin's food solidarity initiatives, from the founding of early redistribution around the first decade of XXI century, their reshaping and and improving during COVD-19. Discussion was informal and experience-based in both arenas, reflecting participants' direct, hands-on relationship with the problem. In the regime panel, the higher density of system variables and more limited whiteboard space made the CLD harder to follow, generating moments of confusion and partial disengagement among some participants. Despite this, both panels fostered mutual learning: niche actors gained a clearer view of the administrative and funding constraints shaping institutional response, while regime actors gained visibility into the relational, trust-based practices sustaining grassroots solidarity work.

The DP3 prioritised three interconnected leverage points: stabilising resources and the time available for collaboration; creating stable spaces for co-design and collective learning; and strengthening information flows and data integration across actors. These were explored through a role-play exercise involving three groups — Public Administration, Local Actors, and External Actors — each assigned one leverage point and tasked with producing three priority actions for it. The resulting ToC linked these priorities to concrete next steps and reframed the system's underlying problem: participants explicitly described the shift as moving "from waste reduction to food justice," repositioning food solidarity from an emergency/surplus-management logic to one centred on dignity, systemic integration and long-term transformation

5.3.1 Quantitative change based on surveys

The pre- and post-panel surveys were used to explore whether participation in the deliberative process was associated with changes in participants' perceptions of climate change, sustainable transition,

democratic participation, and the role of food solidarity initiatives in Turin. The pre-panel survey received 16 responses, while the post-panel survey received 9 responses. The two sets of respondents cannot therefore be treated as fully matched cohorts, and the reduction in the number of responses substantially limits the conclusions that could be drawn, with regard to individual-level change. Given the heterogeneity of the respondents and their non-statistically relevance, the results are used here as descriptive and exploratory evidence of shifts in response patterns. The quantitative findings are consequently interpreted together with the open-ended survey responses and retrospective interviews to provide more substantive evidence for understanding how participant's views may have evolved.

The pre-panel survey already showed a relatively high level of awareness of and engagement with the issues addressed by the deliberative process. Climate change was considered at least “quite important” by all respondents, with 60% describing it as “the most important challenge of our time”. Similarly, 80% considered a sustainable transition “rather possible”, while only 20% considered it “rather unlikely”. Deliberative panels involving different actors were also viewed positively: 73% considered them at least “quite useful” for the transition towards a more sustainable society and economy (or at least in increasing awareness on such topics). At the same time, respondents identified significant barriers to participation, particularly lack of time and distrust in institutions, and perceived vulnerable or marginalized groups as being particularly constrained in their ability to participate. This reflects evidence presented in the Access reflections (section 4.3). The baseline therefore highlights that participants entered the process with relatively strong awareness of the topic being discussed and with broadly positive expectations concerning participation, while holding more differentiated views on the capacity of existing initiatives to generate broader change.

The post-panel responses show a relative shift in this overall picture. The proportion of respondents considering climate change “the most important challenge of our time” increased from 60% to 78%. More importantly, perceptions of the usefulness of deliberative processes became more concentrated towards the positive categories: the proportion considering deliberative panels at least “quite useful” increased from 73% in the pre-panel survey to 89% in the post-panel survey, while the share describing them as of “limited usefulness” declined from 27% to 11%. This pattern is consistent with a more favorable assessment of the value of deliberative spaces after the process. However, given the small and non-matched samples, it cannot be interpreted as evidence that participation in the panel itself caused this change. The post-panel respondents also reported somewhat greater experience with deliberative processes than those in the pre-panel survey, which may itself be relevant to the assessment.

The feasibility of the sustainable transition, on the other hand, showed a different pattern. The proportion considering the transition “rather possible” declined from 80% before the panels to approximately 67% afterwards, and respondents considering it “rather unlikely” increased from 20% to 33%. Cautions are in order to interpret this result: it should not necessarily be interpreted as a decline in commitment to sustainability. One possible interpretation could be that the deliberative process may have made the complexity, interdependence and structural constraints surrounding the transition more visible. Therefore, a less optimistic assessment of feasibility could coexist with a stronger understanding of the systemic conditions required for change. The quantitative data alone, however, do not allow this interpretation to be established.

The most relevant shift concerns the perceived potential of Turin’s food solidarity initiatives to contribute to sustainable transition. Before the deliberative process, responses were relatively evenly distributed across three categories: 36% considered their potential “Limited”, 36% saw a “probable potential to

contribute to change", and 29% attributed them a "considerable potential". In the post-panel survey, by contrast, 75% of responses characterised their potential as "considerable", while 12% selected "probable potential" and 13% "limited potential". Although the different denominators and the small number of respondents require considerable caution, this represents the clearest descriptive shift in the survey data: after the process, responses were substantially more concentrated on the highest category of perceived transformative potential. A similar tendency can be observed in relation to the importance of expanding the network of groups involved in the initiative. Before the panels, 51% considered this "very important" and 49% "quite important"; after the panels, all respondents selected "very important". Taken together, these responses suggest a stronger recognition of the potential value of food solidarity initiatives and of networking among actors, although they cannot establish that these perceptions changed as a direct result of participation in the process.

Other elements remained remarkably constant. Respondents continued to identify lack of time and distrust in institutions among the main barriers to participation[3]. Similarly, the perceived contribution of food solidarity initiatives in Turin remained consistent across both surveys, with respondents particularly associating them with the improvement of living conditions and the strengthening of solidarity networks. The constancy of these responses is relevant: the survey comparison points towards a selective shift in how the existing food solidarity system and its potential may have been understood.

Overall, the quantitative evidence suggests continuity. Participants entered the process with relatively high levels of awareness of climate change and environmental disruptions, positive attitudes towards participation, and recognition of the importance of food solidarity initiatives and their social functions. The most notable post-panel shift concerns the perceived capacity of these initiatives to contribute to long-term change, sustained by the importance and need of expanding and consolidating such networks. Conversely, perceptions of the feasibility of the sustainable transition became somewhat less optimistic, potentially pointing towards a more complex or realistic appreciation of the difficulties involved. Given the limitations of the survey design, these patterns should be regarded as purely descriptive. The open-ended responses and retrospective interviews are particularly important for examining whether these quantitative shifts corresponded to changes in participants' ways of framing the problem, understanding relationships among actors, and imagining possible forms of future action.

5.3.2 Qualitative change based on surveys and interviews

Open-ended survey questions

The comparison of open-ended responses before and after the deliberative process confirms the shift in emphasis in how the food solidarity system and its challenges were articulated, as already emerged in the quantitative analysis. Importantly, this should not be understood as a uniform change in participants' individual positions.

In the pre-panel survey, participants described the problem addressed by the research team through a relatively broad constellation of issues, such as food poverty and broader needs subordinated to a vulnerable position. Yet responses also referred to the fragmentation of existing initiatives, the need to

[3] Interestingly, the groups perceived as most distant from participatory processes remained broadly the same (i.e., those more in need of interventions, see section 4.3).

strengthen networks and increase their impact. Responses also pointed to declining political participation, the relationship between food poverty and climate change, and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. The problem was therefore already understood as multidimensional.

The post-panel responses highlight the increasing understanding of this multi-dimensionality, displaying a relational and systemic vocabulary (greater emphasis was put on coordination, collaboration, shared priorities, organizational fragmentation and the relationships between different actors).

In the post-panel responses, the same broad concerns remained visible, but the problem was more frequently framed in terms of the organization and relationships of the system itself. Respondents referred to the need to improve coordination, define common problems and priorities, strengthen collaboration, create dialogue among different realities, and organize the food solidarity system more effectively. One response explicitly described "organizing and knowing one another" as an important step towards addressing the crisis, while others identified the absence of a common vision and the fragmentation of actors as central obstacles. The comparison therefore suggests a movement from a broad and heterogeneous problem landscape towards a more relational and systemic articulation of the food solidarity system.

A similar pattern can be observed in the identification of causes. Pre-panel responses pointed to a wide range of factors, including inadequate income, individualism, consumerism, political disengagement, lack of trust, climate change, insufficient information, weak relations with decision-makers, inadequate policies and difficulties among territorial actors in networking and sharing resources. Post-panel responses placed greater emphasis on the configuration of the system itself: assistentialist approaches[4], fragmented organizational action, the absence of a common vision, institutional tendencies to address symptoms rather than underlying causes, and the perceived difficulty of imagining effective change. This does not indicate that participants abandoned explanations based on broader structural conditions but it suggests greater attention to the organizational and institutional mechanisms through which these conditions are reproduced.

The desired future also became somewhat more concrete in the post-panel responses. Before the process, participants expressed aspirations for greater participation, more equitable access to food solidarity initiatives, stronger institutional recognition, broader collaboration and a more just transition. After the process, these aspirations were more frequently translated into organizational mechanisms: working groups involving institutions, businesses, associations and citizens; more opportunities for dialogue; permanent research-action spaces; clearer roles and responsibilities; and the involvement of institutional actors and other stakeholders who were currently absent. The post-panel responses retain the normative ambition of the pre-panel responses while giving greater attention to the infrastructures and relationships through which change might be pursued.

At the same time, the responses show important continuity. The majority of participants continued to identify high-level political change and institutional conditions as necessary for effective transformation. The emergence of more concrete local mechanisms did not replace the perception that broader political and structural conditions constrain what can be achieved at a territorial level. The survey evidence should

[4] We use "assistentialist" as synonym of "charitable" to refer to one of the dominant approaches to poverty identified by participants, according to which recipients are considered as passive beneficiaries and vulnerability is framed as an individual condition, rather than being embedded in the socio-economic-political system.

therefore be read as indicating a shift in emphasis and articulation and not a convergence towards a single shared diagnosis or solution.

Retrospective interviews

The retrospective interviews present detailed evidence of participants' deliberative experience. Across the three interviewees' insights, the most consistent pattern concerns a shift towards a more systemic articulation of the food solidarity system. This was particularly explicit among participants who entered the process with an already established knowledge of particular sectors or organizations. One participant described having initially known the system only partially and emphasised that the process made visible the different dynamics, competencies, constraints and experiences of actors who often work separately. The process consequently strengthened the conviction that understanding "who does what" and how different interventions relate to one another is necessary to identify where and how change can occur.

A similar development emerged in the second interview. The participant described the deliberative process as an opportunity to move beyond the problems encountered in her own professional and organizational context and to "open the gaze" towards additional dimensions of the food solidarity system. The process was valued not only for providing information, but for creating the conditions for systematic reflection and for imagining a more complex and integrated system. The participant connected this broader perspective to the need for better information, data collection and monitoring, as well as to more integrated forms of governance.

The interviews also suggest that this cognitive change was closely connected to a relational change. The process made visible the fragmentation of a field in which many organizations operate in parallel, sometimes without knowing the activities, resources or constraints of others. For the first participant, the deliberative process therefore had value as a mechanism for developing mutual understanding and trust, and for creating a basis for forms of coordination that could extend beyond the project itself. At the same time, the second participant stressed that the process mainly deepened existing relationships rather than producing a large number of entirely new collaborations. This distinction is important: the relational effect of the process appears to have concerned not simply the expansion of the network, but the quality and depth of relations among actors already operating within the same ecosystem.

The third interview adds a different but complementary dimension. This participant already possesses extensive knowledge of the Turin food policy and solidarity ecosystem and therefore reported less change in her understanding of individual organizations. The most significant change for her concerned the meaning of political participation itself. She described the deliberative process as a form of participation and activism that she had not previously considered in these terms. In particular, she valued the way in which actors with very different institutional positions were placed on an equal deliberative footing, despite substantial asymmetries in their formal power and resources. The process therefore broadened her conception of participation while also making visible the ways in which deliberative procedures can manage, without necessarily eliminating, differences in power.

This dimension is also reflected in the survey responses, where participation increasingly appears not simply as a desirable outcome but as part of the infrastructure through which the food solidarity system can be transformed. Post-panel respondents referred to common proposals such as working groups, dialogues, representation of different actor categories and shared responsibility. The interview's evidence adds that the value of these spaces lies partly in enabling actors to stop their routine operational activities and engage in collective reflection. In this sense, deliberation itself was experienced as a form of capacity

building: it created a temporary space in which participants could reconsider established assumptions, listen to different perspectives and imagine alternatives. The interviews further show that participants acquired or identified methodological tools that they considered potentially transferable to their own contexts. Role play was repeatedly described as particularly useful for perspective-taking and for engaging with situations from positions other than one's own. Other tools, including system mapping, causal loop diagrams, Theory of Change, Miro and Kumu, were considered useful for representing complexity, although participants also noted difficulties in interpreting or using some of these tools without facilitation. The evidence therefore points to methodological learning, but not yet to demonstrated organizational impact. Participants expressed intentions to transfer specific tools or approaches to their organizations and institutional settings, but the available evidence does not allow us to address whether such transfer subsequently occurred.

5.3.3 Cross-source synthesis

Since in Turin case, focus groups were not feasible, the team has substituted this with a cross-source synthesis. The survey and interviews' evidence points to four interconnected dimensions related to qualitative change.

First, the process appears to have supported a shift from sectoral or partial perspectives towards a more systemic articulation of the food solidarity system. Participants felt increasingly connected with each other, as well as on the institutional level, with regards to resources, vulnerabilities and policy domains that had previously been considered separately. This was particularly visible for those participants whose initial perspectives were closely tied to specific organizations or areas of expertise.

Second, the process contributed to an increase of relational understandings. Participants described greater knowledge of what other actors do, stronger mutual understanding, and in some cases increased trust and strengthened existing collaborations (enhanced through face-to-face interactions during the deliberative panels). The process thus functioned as a space in which relationships within an already existing ecosystem could be reconfigured and improved.

Third, the process provided a wider understanding of participation and collective reflection. For some participants, participation was initially associated primarily with activism, mobilization or engagement in existing institutional channels. The deliberative process introduced another form of participation based on structured dialogue, facilitated reflection and collective construction of knowledge and possible pathways for action. This was particularly explicit in the third interview, where deliberation was retrospectively understood as a previously unfamiliar form of political participation.

Fourth, the process also generated methodological and practical learning, as highlighted by participants. Some of the tools employed during the deliberative panels were identified as particularly interesting and potentially transferable to participants' own organizations or institutional contexts. The role play was valued for its capacity to support perspective-taking, while system-mapping and Theory of Change were appreciated for making complex relations more explicit.

Yet the implementation of these tools also depends on appropriate facilitation, time and accessibility, as highlighted during the retrospective interviews. The main criticalities concern the paradoxical relationship between complexity and functionality: participants valued tools capable of representing systemic relations, but found their complex visualizations (e.g., the CLDs) difficult to navigate or interpret independently. Another tension concerns consensus and transformation. The deliberative process enabled the construction of a shared vision, but the third interview also highlighted a tension between a collectively

negotiated and pragmatic vision and more radical positions concerning the right to food and the role of public institutions. The third concerns local action and structural constraints: both survey respondents and interviewees continued to emphasise the importance of broader political, institutional and resource conditions. Finally, not all substantive problem definitions changed. For example, many participants explicitly maintained the same diagnosis concerning the instability and funding of the food solidarity system before and after the process.

These continuities are analytically significant. The evidence does not suggest that deliberation produced a uniform convergence of participant's positions. Rather, its main contribution appears to have been to create conditions for different forms of knowledge and experience to be connected, made explicit and collectively reconsidered. Change therefore occurred primarily in the articulation of the system, the quality of relationships and the understanding of participation.

5.3.4 Expert validation

The external validation workshop provided an independent assessment of the preliminary findings generated through the deliberative process. Three experts with different forms of expertise in food solidarity, urban food systems, food poverty and food governance reviewed the merged CLD, the ToC and the three proposed leverage points. Overall, they confirmed the broad representativeness of the main dynamics identified through the deliberative process. Several elements were identified that require further integration.

The validation workshop therefore provided strong support for the systemic interpretation emerging from the deliberative process. The experts confirmed the relevance of feedback dynamics concerning funding volatility, trust and mutualism, professionalism and depoliticization, and the so-called click day effect (i.e., a one-time welfare subsidy not directly connected to a structural and holistic intervention on the matter). They also confirmed the importance of education flows as potential leverage points. At the same time, their discussion expanded the system representation by identifying variables that were insufficiently developed, including reciprocity and the culture of gift and generosity as opposed to the assistentialist model, political and policy inertia, the ambivalent effects of user profiling by apps such as SolidApp[5], and the misalignment between food policy and welfare policy.

External validation was particularly insightful regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergency, which we initially framed as a possible window of opportunity and a catalyst for social movements, was reframed as a double-sided phenomenon: for some actors it opened opportunities to enhance territorial coordination and expansion, yet for others it reinforced a return to charitable and logistic-centred models of food distribution. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic therefore depended on the organizational and institutional context in which social actors operated.

Another aspect reinforced by the validation is the importance of continuity of resources that is key in supporting third-sector and grassroots initiatives participation. For instance, the numerous absences during the third deliberative panel (10 of 18 invited organizations) was interpreted by the validators as evidence of the structural lack of available time and resources (as also evidence in LP1). Participation is therefore conditioned by the structural vulnerability of the food solidarity ecosystem.

[5] As discussed by both participants and expert validators, gathering personal data from recipients could be useful but also needs careful precautions on privacy, to avoid misuse or abuse of such data.

The second leverage point, concerning stable co-design and collective learning spaces (LP2), was confirmed by the external experts but with an important institutional qualification. It was suggested that rather than creating new organizations or governance bodies (as it was proposed during the deliberative panels), existing structures (such as *GIPA* and *Atlante del Cibo*) should be formally recognized and strengthened. The validation therefore reinforced participants' emphasis on continuity and stability of both time, resources and shared spaces.

The third leverage point, information flows and data integration (LP3), was considered relevant yet the experts stressed that stronger information infrastructures must be accompanied by explicit data-governance safeguards to protect recipients' privacy. In particular, they highlighted the possibility that profiling vulnerable users can have ambivalent effects depending on who owns and accesses the data and for what purposes. This aspect is particularly important as it demonstrates that greater information cannot automatically be equated with users' empowerment or system improvement.

Finally, the validation introduced a more explicit rights-based framing of the pathways for change. The experts questioned the extent to which food solidarity should continue to be framed primarily through charity, food donation and waste reduction, arguing instead for a stronger emphasis on the right to food, social justice and rights fulfillment. They also identified a structural asymmetry between participation in the implementation of food solidarity measures and participation in the design of food policies. In their view, community and civil society actors are frequently involved in delivering or implementing initiatives without being systematically involved in the policy-design process. This also reinforces the pertinence of co-design spaces, suggesting that participation needs to be understood as a matter of influence over policy design, and not just a nominal consultation.

To conclude, the validation workshop validated the core systemic dynamics emerged during the deliberative panels and extended their interpretation. In particular, it strengthened the importance of resource continuity, formalized co-design spaces, information governance and the distinction between food policy and welfare policy. Finally, a more explicit shift focusing on the right-to-food and social justice framework was confirmed.

The experts' observations support the overall interpretation of the deliberative process as one that generated greater systemic articulation and more concrete pathways for action, while also demonstrating that these pathways remain embedded in broader institutional, political and resource constraints.

5.4 Espoo case study (LUT)

5.4.1 Quantitative change based on surveys

This quantitative analysis draws from pre- and post-panel surveys conducted in the Finnish case study. A web-based survey platform Webropol was primarily used to conduct the surveys, although participants were given the option of using pen and paper if they felt more comfortable using them. Of the eight participants who completed the pre-panel survey five used Webropol and three pen and paper. In the post-panel survey all five respondents used Webropol and altogether ten individuals participated in the deliberative panels. Only three completed both surveys, and therefore they can be used in comparative analysis of the process. Given the very small sample size the quantitative analysis can be seen as descriptive. The pre- and post-panel answers are used to describe views expressed at the beginning and

the end of the process. Therefore the results are not intended to demonstrate in any way a generalisable or statistically significant effect of the deliberative panel process.

During the processing of the data, some discrepancies were identified between the Webropol version and printed version of the pre-panel questionnaire. In one question "Which form of political participation do you consider effective for achieving sustainable transition to a greener society?" three alternatives were available in the printed version that were not included in the Webropol version.

Perceptions of climate change and the feasibility of a sustainable transition

Participants expressed a relatively high level of concern about climate change in the pre-panel survey. All eight respondents regarded climate change as an important challenge, with four considering it as "the most important challenge of our time" and the other four as "quite important". The post-panel results were fairly similar to the pre-panel results. Of the five respondents two considered climate change as "the most important challenge of our time" and two as "quite important", and one regarded it as "not particularly important". It should be noted that pre- and post-panel participants were not all the same people, so the results should not be considered as the result of panels having an effect on peoples' attitudes on climate change.

Before the panel, participants mainly felt sustainable transition to be achievable. Seven out of eight felt that sustainable transition would be either "somewhat possible" or "entirely possible", while one considered it "unlikely, but not impossible". In the post-panel survey, most respondents regarded sustainable transition possible, as four chose to answer "somewhat possible" and one "unlikely, but not impossible".

Overall the findings suggest that people who entered the deliberative process had relatively strong concerns about climate change and a generally positive outlook for the feasibility of sustainable transition.

Political participation

Participants were asked which forms of political participation they considered most effective for sustainable transition. There was a discrepancy between printed and Webropol versions of the questionnaire where three response alternatives were missing from the other, so these three options will be excluded from further analysis.

Among the response alternatives available to all pre-panel survey respondents, traditional democratic participation was strongly supported. All respondents considered democratic national elections as effective and seven of eight thought local democratic elections were effective. Five chose petitions, and two chose protests and action with violence against property. Non-violent civil disobedience and similar protests and violent protests each got one vote. Three respondents chose "other, please elaborate". The following option gained one vote: more direct contact with decision makers would be advantageous, citizen panels/citizen assemblies would be important and citizens' initiative and/or municipal residents' initiative would be effective. In the post-panel surveys, a similar emphasis on political participation can be detected. All five respondents found national elections effective, four chose democratic local elections and four voted also for petitions. Two selected protests or actions involving damage to property. Three also selected "other, please elaborate", but did not write anything down.

The findings indicate that electoral participation and petitions were viewed as effective in both pre- and post-panel surveys. However, given that pre- and post-panel respondents are not necessarily the same

people, these aggregate findings should be interpreted as overall patterns rather than showing changes in attitudes.

Participants own political participation

Participants were asked to answer about their own forms of political participation. In the pre-panel survey, participants' most common answer was electoral participation. Seven out of eight respondents reported participation in local elections and six in the national elections. Five of the panelists have signed petitions and four had experience in citizen panels or citizen assemblies. Three had made individual donations and two had participated in strikes, while both demonstrations and marches, and non-violent civil disobedience had one vote each.

The post-panel respondents had similar results. All of the five respondents have participated in local elections, four in petitions and three in national elections. Three had made donations, two had participated in demonstrations or marches, two more in citizen panels or citizen assemblies, and one in strikes.

These survey answers suggest that the participants were already relatively active politically before taking part in the CO-SUSTAIN process. Panels therefore did not perhaps reach individuals who weren't active already.

Perceived barriers to participants own political participation

Participants were asked about what the possible barriers to their own participation were. In the pre-panel survey, lack of time was the most frequently identified barrier to participation, selected by four respondents. Two considered the feeling of not having an impact to be a factor, and the same number considered that they were already actively involved in political processes. One also selected the limited opportunities for meaningful engagement. Additional open responses mentioned work related time pressure, and a working role that would make the person uncomfortable taking part in politics in public.

Among the five post-panel participants, three felt they already participated actively in political processes. Lack of time and limited opportunities for meaningful engagement were picked by two respondents each. Lack of trust in civil society, political disconnection, fear of conflict or negative social consequences, and health related issues or disabilities were each selected once.

Answers suggest that participants generally see themselves as relatively capable of political participation in general, while time constraints and perception of having a limited impact remain as barriers.

Perceived barriers to political participation in the general public

Relative to their own obstacles, respondents viewed the wider public to have a more diverse set of obstacles. In the pre-panel survey seven of eight respondents selected that the feeling of "participation has no impact" as a possible barrier affecting the general public. Six chose lack of time, while five picked limited opportunities for meaningful engagement and four thought limited digital skills might limit participation. Three chose lack of trust in civil society as playing a role in lack of participation. Political disconnection, financial constraints, fear of conflict or negative social consequences, and health issues or disabilities were selected by two participants. There was also one who wrote under "other, please elaborate" that indifference could be an obstacle.

Fairly similar patterns can be found in the post-panel answers. Four out of five identified lack of time and the feeling that participation has no impact. Two chose limited opportunities for meaningful engagement,

political disconnection, financial constraints, health issues or disabilities and limited digital skills. It is notable that all post-panel respondents selected fear of conflict or negative consequences as barriers for participation compared to only two from the pre-panel respondents. It cannot be seen as a result of the panel process, yet it is potentially something to examine and contrast with other results.

Open-ended responses suggested that participants were worried that in the general public there might be individuals who perceive themselves as lacking required knowledge of political issues while at the same time assuming that the decision makers already possess the required expertise. This might reduce motivation to participate, as they might not see need or value in their participation. Another respondent was concerned that fear of online harassment might put people off participating.

5.4.2 Qualitative change based on surveys and interviews

The qualitative analysis draws from pre- and post-panel surveys as well as interviews held after the panels with experts and panel participants. The qualitative analysis of the surveys can primarily draw from the open question replies of the participants who completed both pre- and post-panel surveys. Particular caution is required when interpreting the change in the Espoo case study, as only three participants took part in both questionnaires, and only one answered the same version of the questionnaire. This is due to case study using two different ways of answering the survey. One was a web-based provider Webropol and the other was a printed copy. Unfortunately, the wording on the leading question was different between the two.

In the printed version, the primary question was phrased “What do you think the proposed small nuclear power plant project in Espoo would help advance or produce?” as opposed to the Webropol where the question was phrased: “What do you think public participation advances or produces (for example when considering a hypothetical small nuclear power plant)?”. All participants answered the post-panel survey in Webropol, and they all answered the later question. As these printed pre-panel survey questions address different subject matter they are not used here as they would not be comparable.

Defining the challenge

The pre-panel responses had several different ways of framing the challenge. Some participants described the challenge they were here to solve as relating to opportunities of participation and their effects. Such as the need to strengthen the dialogue between civil society and sustainable transition projects. Other proposed challenges related to nuclear power projects themselves, and their public acceptance, related political decision-making, or broader development of clean energy in general. Democratic influence was proposed as a challenge as well, particularly in how citizens can have an influence on decision making.

The post-panel responses were more centred around the relationship between energy projects and participation. Participants referred to the need for citizens and residents to have an understanding of how major energy projects are prepared, and how and when to influence them. Common themes were communication, ability to influence and social acceptance.

Understanding the causes/problems

Again, pre-panel answers identified many different barriers to participation, including scattered information, insufficient knowledge, misinformation, polarisation, inequality, limited opportunities to influence decisions and concerns related to nuclear power and public acceptance of it.

Post-panel results emphasised more the timing and organisation of communications and participation. Communications are often too late in general and residents should be consulted earlier. Also mentioned are complexity of the large scale energy projects and lack of standardized practices in both getting information and how to have an influence on decisions.

5.4.3 Focus group discussions

The case study held two retrospective interviews with panelists, to gather additional qualitative data and reflections on participation and the deliberative process. As both interviewees had participated in one event each, no longitudinal analysis can really be done. They still do provide complimentary perspectives on the perceived strengths and limitations of the process and participation in general.

The interviews suggested that deliberative process did not have a major impact on participants' views on participation, but in some cases reinforced existing beliefs that early and continuous engagement is important. They also displayed a recurring worry of residents lacking sufficient knowledge of political and administrative processes, such as land-use planning and hearing procedures, and they might therefore lack motivation or ability to participate. Participants might also be discouraged if impacts of participation are unclear especially as participation requires substantial time investment.

The interviews also highlighted possible barriers to participation such as political apathy, aggressive and polarized political debate in general, and how it might bias people's thinking towards seeing that there is no sense in even trying, even if the aggressive and polarized discourse might only be representative of the loud few.

The interview also further suggested the importance of early stage communication and influence, as political parties might be more amenable to substantive dialogue before they establish a public political position on the matter at hand and be reticent to do so afterwards.

A further theme was the responsibility of initiating and facilitating participation. The interviews suggested that project planners and other responsible actors should take more responsibility for facilitation and communication, rather than lone residents

Overall interviews reinforce the importance of early dialogue, continuous engagement and the need for residents to believe that participation has real live impacts.

5.4.4 Expert validation

The Espoo case study and the preliminary results of panels were presented to a group of external experts, of whom two were academics and one person employed by the municipality and had case relevant expertise. Overall the experts regarded the process valuable and considered many methodological elements useful. They also identified limitations such as finding system maps hard to understand, and that system mapping did not account for power relationships, and that lack of underrepresented group participation is an issue, a common issue, but an issue nonetheless.

The experts saw continuity of having multiple panels as a strength of the deliberative process undergone. Role play that was used in the last panel was also considered a useful method, and the general implementation of the panels as a whole were also viewed positively. Experts also felt bringing together experts and non-experts to have dialogue was important. They also thought that having this expert valuation was a particularly significant addition. Getting comments and outside validation about the process and preliminary results from people with practical experience is invaluable.

The system mapping done in the panels received mixed assessments. On the one hand, the method was seen as useful and interesting, especially when trying to understand complex decision-making processes. At the same time the maps were felt to be a bit abstract and challenging to intuit. One expert commented that it would be hard to see how to translate system maps and their findings into concrete actions or recommendations. As previously mentioned another expert commented that they would like to have seen power relationships presented in the maps, as now it's not clear where the authority to make the decisions lies. System maps in their view can be useful tools to help understand complex context and decision making processes and help participants how to navigate it, yet some complementary methods might be useful to turn the maps into more digestible information.

Other points that rose were that in large scale energy projects the importance of zoning as an avenue of participation should not be over emphasised, as it accounts only for a fairly short period of time. Instead, participation should be considered more during every stage of preparation for a potential large scale energy project as well as during the process. Also points concerning delegation of power were raised. Firstly, what are the actual methods that people with decision making power have, to get the opinions from the residents in the first place during the preparation process of large scale energy projects? Secondly, in the delegation of power, where are the possible locations, where power could be delegated to participation? In other words, where are the possible locations that participatory activities could be integrated into? Lastly, an expert comments that new forms of participation have been trialled in Finland before, and that they need political will behind them to succeed and have staying power.

Participation of underrepresented groups or vulnerable groups was another important theme for the experts. The experts felt that efforts to involve NGOs was a good way of trying to reach these groups, but noted that this is a familiar challenge, as often projects such as these reach only the active members of society, not the underrepresented ones. They suggested that more personalised and targeted recruitment could help and that if resources permit offering childcare services, translators and/or compensating them for their time might be considered. They also raised the question if "vulnerable groups" is the most appropriate term to use. Particularly in the Finnish language the translation is something that should be carefully considered.

To sum up: the experts support several elements of the deliberative process. Such are sustained engagement through multiple panels, dialogue between experts and non-experts, role playing, system mapping and combining this process with external expert evaluation. They also point out that some methods could be more easily digestible, how system mapping will translate into actions and recommendations, recruitment should be more tailored to underrepresented groups and participation and its impacts need to be explained in a way that potential participants can see how it can have an impact.

5.5 Alpujarra case study (UGR)

In this chapter, data gathered from surveys and interviews are used, as well as the validation meeting with the experts. This includes the nine surveys conducted prior to the start of the deliberative process and the four completed at its conclusion. The analysis also includes four interviews conducted with two participants who were involved throughout the entire deliberative process: each participant was interviewed once before and once after the process. Likewise, we take into account the results of the validation meeting with the two experts; although they were not present in the deliberative process itself, they helped us evaluate it by providing an expert, external perspective.

5.5.1 Quantitative change based on surveys

This section interprets the responses to the closed survey questions administered to participants in the deliberative process in Órgiva, Granada. It should be noted that the number of survey respondents was limited: nine for the pre-panel survey and four for the post-panel survey. Consequently, rather than aiming for statistical representativeness, the results serve to illustrate the participants' profiles. The methodology originally intended administering the same survey before and after the deliberative process to assess potential changes in participants' responses. However, the small number of responses, together with substantial attrition between the pre- and post-panel surveys, limits the extent to which changes can be interpreted as reflecting the influence of the deliberative process. In particular, half of the respondents who completed the initial survey did not complete the follow-up survey.

Perceptions of climate change and the feasibility of a sustainable transition

There is a broad consensus among the participants regarding the concern for and importance attributed to climate change. This suggests that this issue might be a driving force behind their interest in participating in the deliberative process. Only one participant was unsure, while the rest affirmed that it is the most significant challenge we face—or, at the very least, a highly significant one.

At the same time, participants remained highly optimistic about the possibility of tackling climate change. Five were confident that a just ecological transition is entirely possible, while the other four considered it probable. One participant, however, became less optimistic over the course of the process, shifting from considering a just ecological transition to being unsure whether it could be achieved.

Overall, the survey results show no clear change in participants' views on either of these two issues between the beginning and the end of the deliberative process.

Political participation

Participants entered the deliberative process with a high level of confidence in this type of activity. The results reflect this: seven individuals viewed such processes as considerably useful, while two others deemed them vital for the transition. Individual responses, however, show some changes over the course of the process. Two participants who initially held more positive views concluded at the end that these activities were of limited usefulness. In contrast, one participant shifted from considering them "considerably useful" to viewing them as "vital" for the transition, a view also expressed by another participant in the final survey. The reasons behind these changes cannot be established from the survey responses alone. The less positive assessments may reflect unmet expectations or doubts about the effectiveness of such processes in contributing to a just and democratic ecological transition. Conversely, the more positive response suggests that participation may have strengthened confidence in the value of these activities for at least one participant.

The participants generally believe that the most effective forms of political engagement for achieving a more environmentally friendly society are those that are direct and local. Consequently, citizen assemblies top the list of effective methods, followed by democratic elections—particularly at the local level, though national elections are also cited. That said, one individual identified decisions made by authoritarian leaders or political parties as the most effective approach. Meanwhile, other forms of political action—such as civil disobedience, demonstrations, or strikes—were considered effective by only three people.

Consistent with these views, the group's political activity centers primarily on participating in assemblies and associations, as well as voting in local and national elections. Three individuals are also members of a

political party in the municipality of Órgiva, indicating that their political engagement extends beyond voting in elections.

Experience and perceptions of deliberative participation

As we have seen, the participants are individuals involved in various political activities; however, the survey indicates that they have relatively limited experience with participatory processes similar to the CO-SUSTAIN deliberative process. Four participants reported having moderate experience, three reported limited experience, and one reported no experience at all. Conversations during the deliberative process also revealed that several participants were interested in taking part partly because of the methodology itself, which they saw as potentially useful within their own organizations.

Despite being politically active, they reported several obstacles to engaging in such activities. The most frequently cited obstacle, selected by five participants, was lack of time due to work, family, or caregiving responsibilities. The second most frequently cited, selected by four participants, was the lack of opportunities for meaningful participation. These two barriers appear to be interconnected, with two participants selecting both. Four participants also reported barriers related to frustration or disillusionment, including the perception that their actions have little impact, lack of confidence in civil society, and a sense of disconnection from political reality. By contrast, two participants reported being satisfied with their level of political activity, expressing confidence in what they do and identifying no particular barriers to participation.

When asked about the barriers faced by society more generally, the picture changed slightly. The perception that political participation has little impact and the lack of opportunities for participation emerged as the most frequently identified barriers, each selected by five participants. Time constraints and lack of confidence in civil society followed, each identified by four participants.

Participants generally considered these barriers to affect primarily people with fewer socioeconomic resources. They used different expressions to describe these groups, including “the poor,” “the working population,” “people with fewer opportunities,” “the working class,” “the vast majority of the population,” and “society at large.” One participant specifically identified young women as particularly affected by these barriers.

Perceptions of the CAI Alpujarra Energy Community

Finally, when asked about the contribution of the AEC, seven participants considered that it helps combat energy poverty, strengthen social ties, and build community. Six believed that it contributes to a sustainable transition by fostering independence from fossil fuels and strengthening democracy and citizen empowerment, while five highlighted its importance in combating climate change.

Overall, participants held positive views of the AEC as an initiative that can contribute to a just transition. Six considered that it has considerable potential to contribute to change, two believed that it probably has such potential, and one considered its potential to be limited. Individual responses show some changes over the course of the deliberative process. One participant shifted from considering the AEC’s potential limited to viewing it as probable, while another moved from probable to considerable potential, emphasizing their confidence in the possibility of achieving change at the local level. Conversely, one participant became somewhat less positive, shifting from considerable to probable potential.

5.5.2 Qualitative change based on surveys and interviews

This qualitative analysis is based on open-ended responses from pre- and post-panel surveys, interviews, and a report by an external observer. The survey material consists of the same nine surveys administered before the deliberative process began (pre-panel surveys) and the four conducted at its conclusion (post-panel surveys); the quantitative data from these were analyzed in the preceding section. Four interviews were also conducted with two participants, one before and one after the deliberative process for each participant. These interviews provided an opportunity to explore the survey topics in greater depth and to examine participants' experiences of the process and any changes in their views. Finally, the analysis incorporates a report by an external observer who attended all three panels, providing an expert, outside perspective on how the process unfolded.

Given the small number of surveys and interviews, and the fact that several participants did not answer the open-ended questions, the findings should be interpreted with caution. They provide useful insights into the perspectives of the participants and, to some extent, into changes that occurred over the course of the process, but cannot be considered representative of the wider group of stakeholders.

Defining the challenge

Before the first panel, when asked what problem they believed they had come together to solve through the deliberative process, the participants' responses varied. One participant suggested that the process should focus on improving social dynamics within energy communities, while another highlighted the need to strengthen associations and cooperatives through greater unity and collaboration. These first two responses can be grouped together, reflecting a shared concern for nurturing social and personal relationships—both within the AEC itself and externally through alliances with other organizations. A final response pointed to a lack of support from local politicians, which was hindering the project's progress. Both issues featured prominently throughout the deliberative process, and many of the final outcomes aimed to address these very problems.

Both responses point to the importance of strengthening social relationships, internally within the AEC and externally through alliances with other organizations. A third response identified the lack of support from local political actors as an obstacle to the initiative's development. These concerns remained relevant throughout the whole deliberative process and are reflected in several of its final outcomes.

Responses to the same question at the end of the process were somewhat different, although only one participant answered it both before and after. This participant expanded on their initial response, explaining that, although several issues had been addressed, particular importance should be placed on creating local value and strengthening the community. The other two responses emphasized identifying the AEC's strengths and weaknesses, developing a more strategic approach, and generating ideas capable of supporting the initiative's development.

One difference between the pre- and post-panel responses is that the lack of political support was no longer mentioned in the final surveys. Given the small number of responses, this should not be interpreted as evidence that the issue had become less important. Rather, the deliberative work itself concentrated increasingly on issues that participants could address more directly: the AEC's internal organization and relationships, strengthening the local social fabric, building alliances, and developing a more strategic approach to the initiative's sustainability.

The interviews with two participants—one AEC member and one non-member—provided further insight into these issues. Before the panels, concerns were already raised about the internal functioning of the AEC, particularly the difficulty of ensuring meaningful participation by new members, its perceived top-down organizational structure, and limited diversity. The interviews also raised broader issues, including climate change as a potential unifying concern for the panel and energy poverty as a challenge that the AEC seeks to address.

After the panels, the two interviewees described the challenge in more similar terms. Their responses centred on understanding the local social fabric and the AEC's internal structure and organization as a basis for developing strategies for improvement. They also emphasized the importance of understanding the wider network of associations in the Alpujarra, fostering dialogue and coordination among local actors, and creating connections and alliances.

Understanding the causes

As in the previous point, the participants identified several causes for the problems outlined above, with some common themes emerging across their responses. Prior to the deliberative process, participants stated that the causes of problems linked to the lack of a strong social fabric lie, on the one hand, on individualism, limited experience of democratic and civic engagement, low levels of empowerment, and economic pressures. On the other hand, the lack of support from local politicians is attributed to political motives—specifically, the fact that members of the AEC have opposed a large-scale renewable energy project championed by the local government.

Following the deliberative process — marked by the absence of the municipal government—no answers emerge regarding the lack of political support. The factors associated with the weak social fabric were , firstly, limited experience with civic associations and entrepreneurship, and secondly, individualism, a desire for immediate results, and a lack of effort. One interview also linked difficulties in attracting and involving new members to internal organizational dynamics, particularly the concentration of work within the core group, limited delegation, and insufficient openness to exchanging ideas.

Envisaging the desired future

Before the deliberative process, participants' descriptions of the desired future placed considerable emphasis on community-building and the creation of local spaces and networks. At the same time, the AEC is viewed as a key initiative that must achieve greater self-sufficiency and independence to reach that goal and help combat climate change. Post-process responses continued to emphasize the need for energy communities to be more self-sufficient and participatory, as well as the importance of the role they play in combating climate change.

Achieving the desired future

When asked how to achieve the futures outlined earlier, participants—at the start of the process—consistently emphasized the role energy communities play in fostering a sense of community. To this end, they noted the need to work collaboratively to address local needs, build networks, follow a clear roadmap, and raise social and community awareness. In the post-panel responses, greater emphasis was placed on a step-by-step approach, maintaining clear objectives, and broadening the impact of actions and decisions.

The interviews raised similar issues. Before the panels, participants emphasized the need to build a broad social network and improve collaboration and coordination with other energy communities. After the

panels, they placed greater emphasis on dialogue among stakeholders in the Alpujarra and on the possibility of taking ideas and approaches developed through these exchanges back to their own organizations. Achieving this requires constant exchange and an openness to change and new ideas—areas where the AEC has faced challenges. Finally, the need to professionalize energy community members was raised; much of the work is currently voluntary and largely carried out by retirees with a higher education background. Participants also raised the need for greater professionalization within energy communities, arguing that voluntary work alone may not be sufficient to sustain all their activities. In this context, interviewees considered that local governments should play a more active role in supporting energy communities.

Collaboration within the CAI

In the surveys, members of the AEC were specifically asked about the initiative's decision-making process. The responses indicate the existence of a coordinating group that meets weekly, alongside a biannual assembly with the members. Respondents described the decision-making process as participatory and primarily focused on energy-related issues.

When asked if they would change anything, one respondent highlighted the importance of focusing on raising public awareness.

Working with policymakers

The survey also asked members of the AEC about their relationship with policymakers. Respondents reported limited involvement of representatives of the municipal governing team in the initiative, as discussed above. Some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the role of local political representatives, arguing that they were not providing sufficient support for meaningful change. They also pointed to a lack of understanding regarding the value the initiative can bring to the local area on various levels: alleviating energy poverty, retaining the local population, lowering municipal costs, attracting grants, generating technical jobs, stimulating the local economy, modernizing industrial estates and irrigation systems, and becoming a defining element of the region's identity.

Working with stakeholders

Finally, members of the AEC were asked about their relationships with other stakeholders and what changes would be desirable. Respondents described the AEC as an initiative rooted in activism but considered that, to remain sustainable, it requires a stronger technical and organizational structure. On the one hand, technical challenges—such as securing funding, navigating legal frameworks, and addressing energy-related issues—must be resolved; on the other, organizational issues need to be managed to prevent internal friction and member burnout. Respondents also saw greater institutional support as important for addressing these challenges.

5.5.3 Focus group discussions

The deliberative process was demanding for the participants in terms of both time and effort. We maintained contact with the people of La Alpujarra for approximately eight months. Beyond their participation in the four sessions that made up the panels (the kickoff meeting and deliberative panels I, II, and III), there was constant communication—via email, WhatsApp, and phone calls—as well as interviews and requests to complete access forms, consent forms, and pre- and post-panel surveys. By the end of the deliberative process, signs of participant fatigue became apparent , along with a diminishing

willingness to dedicate more of their time. This is entirely understandable, especially given that a lack of time and burnout were among the key topics discussed throughout the process.

Given the amount of material already collected and the signs of participant fatigue, the team decided not to conduct the planned retrospective focus group.

5.5.4 Expert validation

At the end of the deliberative process, we held a validation meeting with three experts who had not participated in the process. The objective was to obtain feedback on the methodology used, the development of the process, and the results.

In the validation process, three people were contacted to participate. These individuals were not all affiliated with academia, they had not participated in the deliberative panels, they work on related topics, and they have a basic understanding of the case study to be able to provide informed opinions during the validation process.

In previous sections, we have used surveys and interviews to explain the obstacles people have encountered in participating in the deliberative process, the segments of the population that have been underrepresented or absent and some challenges of the AEC towards the future. The validation meeting deepens and confirms some of the impressions.

Political engagement

Regarding the lack of gender parity, the validation meeting with experts indicated that this reflects broader patterns commonly observed in the energy sector, where participation often remains male-dominated and centered on homeowners. As for youth participation, experts suggested that barriers may stem less from a lack of environmental awareness than from structural factors—such as limited access to stable housing, which reduces opportunities to engage directly in energy community initiatives. The absence of racialized participants was not specifically addressed in either the surveys or the validation meeting and therefore could not be explored further.

Identification of challenges and the path toward the futures

During the validation meeting, experts deemed the process participatory and noted that it centered the debate on issues raised by the participants themselves. The results of the deliberative process addressed the problems participants had come to solve, and the experts considered the proposed actions to be both relevant and actionable. They appreciated that the deliberative process yielded concrete, prioritized activities rather than remaining at the level of general recommendations. In their view, this practical orientation distinguishes the process from many participatory initiatives that generate extensive discussion but few implementable outcomes. One expert also noted that many of the identified organizational challenges are shared by other emerging energy communities.

As for the second point, the validation meeting identified the limited participation of "regime actors" – particularly municipal government representatives – as a major limitation of the process. However, the experts viewed this as a common challenge in participatory initiatives rather than a flaw in the methodology itself. They acknowledged the research team's significant efforts to encourage institutional participation, including repeated invitations and the decision to hold all meetings at the Town Hall.

5.6 Westbahn case study (BOKU)

The Austrian case study used observational protocols, assessment protocols of the deliberative quality, feedback surveys and access surveys for every meeting, pre-panel interviews, and a reflection focus group setting in the third panel, as well as an online survey for expert validation of the panel results to feed the impact assessment. Post-panel interviews, and focus groups outside of the panel were not conducted, as the CAI participants showed participation fatigue and reluctance to invest more time (mostly due to the lack of presence of the stakeholders), and stakeholders were not present continuously enough to observe changes over time in interview settings.

The pre- and post-panel surveys in the Austrian case study covered three closely related substantive topics: political participation and its barriers; the role and potential of WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE; and the problem definition, causal explanations and possible solutions concerning the development of the Westbahn area. They also included questions on the usefulness of transdisciplinary research and on participants' experience with participatory methods, as well as the participants' perceptions of climate change and the feasibility of a sustainable transition. The same survey was implemented pre- and post-panel, however, the survey was customized for the stakeholder and CAI groups to ensure the relevance of questions.

As the post-panel survey was only completed by five participants, compared to 15 responses for the pre-panel survey, a quantitative comparison of pre- and post-panel survey responses was not feasible in the Westbahn case study. The quantitative observations in section 5.6.1 were thus limited to the pre-panel survey dataset in order to characterize the participant group and provide context for interpreting the qualitative changes observed over the course of the deliberative process, which are described in section 5.6.2.

5.6.1 Quantitative characteristics of the participant group based on pre-panel surveys

In total, 15 – eight by the CAI, and seven by stakeholders – individual pre-panel surveys were filled out completely. The discrepancy between the total number of participants (18) in the deliberative process and the number of completed surveys stems from 1) spontaneous switches of organisations' representation in the process, and 2) unwillingness of participants to complete the survey at the panel or online afterwards.

Regarding perceptions of climate change, the majority of participants expressed strong concern, with the most frequent response characterizing it as 'the most important challenge of our time'. At the same time, a transition to sustainability was considered either totally or somewhat possible by most survey respondents, with only few participants rating it as doubtful.

For the most effective forms of political participation, participants most frequently named democratic national and regional elections, both with equal frequency. This was followed by signing petitions, participating in strikes and non-violent protests. None of the respondents considered actions against property, violent protest or decision-making by an authoritarian regime as effective.

Participants showed a high level of active participation in political decision making: Although national and regional elections were the most frequently named forms, almost all respondents had also participated in other ways. Most frequent among those were petitions and non-violent protests, followed by strikes and monetary donations. A few participants also reported having participated in protests and actions against private property.

Among the barriers to participation identified by the respondents, the most frequently mentioned were lack of time or disinterest. Other frequently mentioned barriers concern the lack of a participatory culture both from the perspective of citizens as well as authorities, with participatory processes often missing and decision-making procedures being perceived as intransparent and inaccessible to citizens. A few participants also named language barriers and overwhelm or lack of communicative skills as significant challenges. Among the groups most affected by these barriers, frequent mentions included people with low socio-economic or educational background, migrants, and women.

The majority of respondents also had prior experience with transdisciplinary research processes, although none stated being very experienced in the area and a few were participating in a transdisciplinary project for the first time. At the same time, most participants estimated the relevance of such processes for democratic sustainability transitions as high, with most answering 'necessary' and a few 'somewhat useful'. In keeping with these positive attitudes towards participation in research processes, all participants indicated that they implemented participatory methods in the context of their own work at least sometimes, with the majority naming them as a fixed component of their work. These results indicate that the group entered the process with a broadly favourable attitude towards the potential of transdisciplinary research and citizen participation to contribute to democratic transitions.

Perceptions of the CAI WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE were somewhat more varied: When asked what challenge was addressed by the CAI, the most frequent answer was 'community building', although 'sustainable urban development' as well as 'active democracy' and 'representation of interests' (referring to the CAI's demands for an unbuilt park area) received almost as many replies, while some stakeholders chose 'I do not know'. Estimations of the initiative's potential to contribute to sustainable urban development in Vienna also varied, although none of the respondents chose 'no potential'. Both large and limited potential were equally frequently mentioned, and some participants stated that the CAI had already contributed to changes in the past. Among the members of the CAI, the majority stated that they contributed to the initiative by participating in at least some of their activities and actions, while a few also reported participating in most activities or taking initiative and leadership responsibilities. All CAI member respondents named the collaboration with different (interest) groups as 'very important' in the context of the initiative's work, which suggests that the participants from WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE were generally open to exchange with different groups.

5.6.2 Qualitative change based on surveys, observational protocols and interviews

The observations on qualitative changes over the course of the deliberative process are based on the qualitative data obtained from the pre-and post-panel surveys, from observational and assessment protocols, the feedback surveys, pre-panel interviews and the post-panel reflection with participants of panel three. Four pre-panel interviews were conducted between the Kick-Off Meeting and prior to the respective first panel the interviewees were to partake in. The post-panel observations were collected in a group session at the end of panel three. The collected data do not indicate significant changes due to the deliberative process. Especially for the CAI's representatives, prior perceptions, such as the experience of receiving little recognition from administrative and political stakeholders, distrust towards these stakeholders and frustration with the city's communication strategies and decision making procedures seemed to be reinforced: the unwillingness of administrative and political stakeholders to participate in the research process was interpreted as proof these perceptions were correct.

The qualitative elements of the pre-panel survey reveal both strong common ground and notable differences between respondents closely associated with the WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE initiative (CAI) and other stakeholders (planning, administration, research and civil society). Both groups identify similar barriers to political participation, including limited time, financial and linguistic resources, insufficient knowledge, and care responsibilities. They agree that migrants, people with low incomes, young and older people, and people with disabilities are particularly affected by these barriers. Both groups define the core problem as insufficient democratic participation in sustainable urban development, characterised by top-down planning, limited transparency and a lack of genuine influence. They also share a positive view of the action platform's potential contribution to sustainable urban development, community-building, advocacy and democratic experimentation, and they generally endorse a broad repertoire of participatory forms, from elections and petitions to protests and civil disobedience.

Respondents associated with the initiative articulate a more structurally critical perspective. They emphasise power asymmetries, unequal influence, nontransparent procedures and institutional exclusion as central obstacles. Their answers frequently refer to "structural problems", "capitalist patterns", "pretend processes" and a perceived lack of solution-orientation in existing participation formats. Their assessment of decision-makers and current collaboration is more ambivalent, ranging from "very little" influence to "not solution-oriented" and "pretend interest". Proposed solutions stress open and transparent processes, stronger accountability, questioning established power relations and, in some cases, building political counter-power. Other stakeholders emphasise more individual and group-specific constraints (time, interest, resources, language) and focus on how participation formats can be improved. Their responses highlight the need for activating, outreach-based and multilingual participation, redistribution of resources, and the integration of participation as a basic principle in planning and political decisions. While they also identify structural barriers (e.g. missing participation cultures, language-cultural barriers, lack of direct affectedness), their tone is more reform-oriented and optimistic about the potential of better-designed formats to enable inclusion.

These patterns in the pre-panel survey's qualitative elements suggest that the process brought together actors with a shared diagnosis of the problem but different levels of trust in existing institutions and different emphases in terms of solutions. The CAI respondents contribute a power-sensitive, experience-based critique of current participation and planning practices. The other stakeholders contribute a design-oriented, inclusion-focused perspective on how participatory formats can be made more accessible and effective.

The qualitative elements in the post-panel survey reveals both continuities and shifts in participants' assessments of political participation, the action platform and the conditions for sustainable urban development. A key limitation is the highly asymmetric response rate: only one respondent from the original "other stakeholder" group (planning, administration, research and civil society) completed the post-panel survey, whereas four respondents of the CAI provided post-panel answers. As a result, observed patterns and changes primarily reflect the perspectives of initiative's participants. The single non-initiative response can be used as a tentative point of comparison, but its exploratory status must be acknowledged.

Both the CAI respondents and the single other stakeholder continue to identify resource-related and institutional barriers to participation, including limited time, knowledge, insufficient opportunities for participation and unclear communication. They agree that migrants, people without Austrian citizenship and people with lower levels of formal education are particularly affected. Both also maintain a positive

view of the CAI's contribution to democratic participation, sustainable urban development and community-building, and they continue to rate collaboration across groups as important.

Compared with the pre-panel, the post-panel responses from the initiative-aligned group are more concise and, in some cases, more polarised. Several open-ended fields are left blank or marked with "?", which may indicate survey fatigue, a sense that the questions no longer capture their concerns, or a strategic withdrawal from providing detailed feedback. Where substantive answers are given, they emphasise institutional and political barriers. Post-panel responses highlight nontransparency of political and administrative decision-making processes, refusal of dialogue on equal terms, hierarchical administrative structures, fear within the system and the experience that citizens are misled. One respondent explicitly calls for building stronger political counter-power to "break open" the political process. Some answers stress "political powerlessness", describe the city's decision makers' circle as a "secret community", or note that decision-makers' participatory approaches range from "very little" to "non-existent". At the same time, there are references to "openness" and "future viability" within the initiative, suggesting that the platform is still seen as a relevant space for experimentation and alliance-building. Proposed solutions focus on open, hierarchy-free communication, dialogue formats on equal terms, improved networking, multilingual communication, cultural change within administration and, in some cases, a political reorientation or change in power relations.

The single other stakeholder's post-panel answers are more reform-oriented. Barriers mirror their response from the pre-panel survey and are described in terms of restricted voting rights, too few opportunities for participation, unclear communication and the exclusion of non-Austrian citizens and people with lower levels of education. The problem is framed as a gap between initiatives/citizens and the city administration, coupled with a missing participation and discourse culture. Solutions emphasise open, hierarchy-free communication among all actors and dialogue and exchange formats on equal terms. This aligns with the pre-panel emphasis on activating, inclusive participation, but now more explicitly links it to the relationship between civil society and public administration.

The low response rate among non-initiative stakeholders has important implications for the analysis. Observed similarities and differences between the groups in the post-panel cannot be generalised, as the "other stakeholder" perspective is represented by a single voice that may not reflect the diversity of views within that group. Changes in the initiative-aligned responses could reflect genuine shifts in perception, but they could also reflect survey fatigue, frustration with the process, or a sense that earlier, more detailed inputs were not sufficiently acted upon. The respondents who remained engaged until the post-panel may be those with the strongest commitment to the initiative or the strongest opinions, positive or negative. This self-selection may amplify critical or polarised positions and underrepresent more moderate or ambivalent views. The post-panel analysis should therefore be read as an indicative account of how a small group of highly engaged, CAI respondents reassessed participation, power and the action platform over the course of the process, complemented by a single, reform-oriented stakeholder perspective. It cannot support robust claims about how "stakeholders" as a broader category changed their views.

5.6.3 Expert validation

The expert validation survey response dataset contains three entries, of which three respondents completed the full questionnaire. The findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative rather than representative. The completed responses came primarily from persons with expertise in science/research and participation/process facilitation. Familiarity with the Westbahnareal varied from no familiarity to

being rather familiar. The expert validation survey addressed five key themes and their accompanying policy recommendations derived from the deliberative panel process.

The responses suggest that transparency is necessary but insufficient on its own. Making planning information available or documenting decisions can improve traceability, but this does not automatically create trust or democratic influence. The more substantial change potential lies in linking transparency to accountability. The proposal for open planning data and binding decision records therefore has the greatest transformative potential when understood as part of a broader accountability chain. Transparency should not merely provide more information; it should enable affected actors to follow the movement from participation input to planning decision and, ultimately, to implementation.

The strongest change potential concerns the definition of participation frameworks and the binding nature of outcomes. The concept of a “Beteiligungsvertrag” was broadly intelligible and the proposal to distinguish negotiable from non-negotiable issues in advance was considered meaningful. This points towards a need to clarify the institutional expectations of participation at the beginning of a process. The survey feedback also reveals a risk: several individual recommendations appear to overlap, making it difficult to identify the precise change each measure is expected to produce. The recommendations should therefore be reorganised into a smaller number of clearly differentiated instruments. This would make it easier to assess which measures concern procedural commitment, which concern political accountability and which concern the translation of participation results into formal planning instruments.

The policy proposals concerning physical and digital spaces, small grants, neighbourhood centres and support for civil society initiatives indicate that participation depends on material conditions. The responses support a broader understanding of participation as an activity requiring time, organisational capacity, accessible spaces and resources. This shifts the focus from asking whether citizens participate to asking whether the institutional environment enables participation to occur on relatively equal terms. Small grants and logistical support could reduce barriers faced by less-resourced groups. Permanent neighbourhood spaces could provide continuity beyond individual planning projects, particularly if they support independent organisation rather than functioning only as channels for official communication.

The responses strongly support the role of mediators, while also recognising that mediators should not replace binding citizen participation. Mediators can contribute local knowledge, continuity and relational capacity, but they cannot compensate for a lack of formal accountability or decision-making rights. In this configuration, mediators could help connect formal planning institutions with local knowledge and social networks. Their contribution would extend beyond conflict resolution to include translation, relationship-building and the identification of emerging problems. However, their independence and accountability would need to be specified carefully to avoid creating ambiguity about whom they represent.

The clearest substantive addition suggested by the expert survey concerns the period after formal participation has ended. One respondent noted that the post-participation process was insufficiently addressed and proposed mandatory use assessments as well as procedures for revising decisions that do not work for the population. This points to an important gap in the current policy recommendations derived from the deliberative process.

6. IMPACT STORIES

This section presents impact stories from the six CO-SUSTAIN case studies. Impact stories bring together evidence collected before, during and after the deliberative panels to trace how each initiative developed and what changes emerged. The following subsections examine the context of each case, the effects of participation and inclusiveness on the deliberative process, and the changes identified in participants' understandings, relationships and capacity for collective action in this setting, binding the process together as an extended case study. By connecting these findings, the stories explore how and under what conditions the panels may have contributed to change, while distinguishing emerging outcomes from longer-term impacts that cannot yet be established.

6.1 Annelinn case study (UT)

6.1.1 Context: From a climate-adaptation problem to a more concrete sense of collective possibility

The Annelinn deliberative process took place in a context which had a clear gap between people's potential interest in their neighbourhood and their participation in formal decision-making. Tartu has established participatory mechanisms, yet, participation in these mechanisms remains relatively limited, and needs to be understood also against the background of contradictory public exposure to deliberation and participation, and hence, trust in it. The case addressed two connected challenges: how to improve a climate-vulnerable urban environment - a topic brought into the setting by the organising bodies - and how to involve residents more meaningfully in shaping its future - a topic that emerged in response to participants' concern as well as the experience of lack of diverse participation.

The physical problem was relatively concrete. Annelinn contains extensive areas of underused or highly managed green space and faces risks associated with urban heat, heavy rainfall and biodiversity loss. At the same time, the quality and accessibility of public space affect particularly the residents who have limited access to private gardens or cars. The intervention therefore sought to connect climate adaptation, greener public space and community development. This intervention was not, however, arising from amidst the local residents, but in accordance with the task of the Estonian case, was rather a top down process, involving both municipal and academic contributors. The deliberative process added a more focussed element to the existing municipal and academic participation around Greener Annelinn. Across the kick-off meeting and three panels, approximately 50 people participated, including municipal specialists, residents and representatives of community and other organisations. The process moved from identifying problems and desired changes, through system mapping and analysis of causes, to identifying intervention points and exploring implementation through role play.

6.1.2 Participation and inclusiveness

Access was mixed. Considerable effort was made to reach actors occupying different positions in the local system, including municipal departments, community organisations, residents and organisations connected to social and welfare services. The resident-oriented panel in particular attempted to broaden participation towards young people, older residents and community initiatives. Expert validation also recognised the organisers' deliberate attempts to reach groups that are normally difficult to engage.

Nevertheless, the resulting deliberative space remained selective. Young people and older residents were less represented than intended, while some housing associations, youth organisations, a kindergarten and

other potentially relevant organisations were absent. Russian-speaking residents were also insufficiently represented. The final panel relied on people who had already participated, which strengthened continuity but made it difficult to correct the representational gaps that had emerged earlier. Furthermore, the final panel's timing fitted the administrators and the organisers better than the locals.

In several respects, the panels were discussing issues related to groups who were underrepresented in the room and proposed solutions that would impact them. Retrospective interviews explicitly recognised this problem. One municipal participant observed that "the people whose lives are impacted are not present", while another participant suggested that direct recruitment through schools or day centres might have reached young and older residents more effectively.

Access to participants was generally experienced positively. Participants reported few practical barriers concerning travel, costs, information or communication, although timing, parking and the possibility of obtaining time off created some difficulties. Lack of time was also the dominant reason given for non-attendance. This suggests that the composition of the panels was shaped at least partly by who could make the particular format fit their lives.

The expert assessment reinforces this interpretation. The experts considered the participant composition somewhat unbalanced and noted that the presence of a relatively large number of organisers and officials could itself affect the atmosphere of participation. Given the top-down approach at the centre of this case study, such a composition of the panels and the resulting tone was to be expected. The experts recommended taking deliberation closer to target groups, for example through schools and elderly centres, rather than expecting these groups to come to a workshop.

Thus, the process created a meaningful deliberative space, but not a fully representative one. This is important when assessing its effects on the understanding of Annelinn's problems and possible futures.

6.1.3 Deliberation and change

The most plausible mechanism of change was exposure to people, perspectives and forms of interaction that participants would not normally encounter in their everyday lives. The panels brought municipal officials, residents, community actors, police, welfare organisations, planners and other actors into direct contact. For some participants, this appeared to change how they interpreted the intentions and capacities of other actors. One participant described the importance of meeting particular representatives, such as the local police as well as a municipal worker, directly. Seeing municipal employees participate and show interest was encouraging to participants as it provided evidence that the municipality - now seen as an actual person rather than a role or a name on the website - may actually listen. The direct contact had the potential of making actors who had previously appeared to be "behind the wall of bureaucracy" seem more accessible and potentially cooperative. This went both ways: a municipal participant described other actors as becoming "partners to cooperate with" rather than people to fear or regard as opponents. The process therefore appears to have worked partly through relational change and a sort of de-othering, a process within which those seen as distant and different become part of the same pursuit of a better living space. Participants learned who other actors were, what they knew, what constraints they faced and what they might be willing to do. This did not eliminate differences or produce a dramatic change in political attitudes, but it could make cooperation appear more feasible. The focus group similarly identified increased proximity and a safer atmosphere as important outcomes. One participant described the process as bringing people "closer" and creating a sense of safety.

The group also reported that the panels supported mutual understanding and cooperation across the wider participation process. This mechanism is particularly relevant in Annelinn because the problem was repeatedly described as partly relational. Several interviewees connected the problems with the quality of public space with a lack of community, weak connections between residents and the municipality, and limited confidence that residents could influence what happens around them.

Did the process increase understanding of the problem?

There is evidence of increased specificity and differentiation in how the problem was understood , although the evidence does not support a claim of a comprehensive change in problem definition. Before and after participation, interviewees described the "problem" in different ways. For the municipal participant, it became associated with a lack of ownership: solutions traditionally come from the municipality, while residents do not necessarily feel that the resulting places and projects belong to them. Two interviewees had picked up on the topics of climate change and nature-based solutions and connected this to insufficient local involvement and to residents' quality of life. A young participant connected the lack of community and lack of interesting things to do and saw this to potentially contribute to people leaving the area.

The panels appear to have helped in clarifying the scale and scope of what could realistically be done on the site, in understanding that being heard and having a say mattered to residents, and reinforced the understanding that the shared problem was lack of community and lack of knowledge of others in the area. The focus group provides a similar picture. Participants did not describe a radical change in their understanding, but they did identify "micro-understandings" and greater mutual understanding. The participants gained a stronger understanding of others' perspectives and a reduction in negative assumptions about the Annelinn residents - for some, their fellow residents.

A particularly important change indeed concerned the meaning of Annelinn itself. The process exposed participants to the impact of negative narratives about the neighbourhood: Annelinn’s low reputation was recognised to be at the centre of the issue of high turnover and thus difficulties in creating a community. The focus group suggested that negative descriptions can become self-reinforcing: people outside the area repeat them, residents internalise them, and this can reduce confidence in the community's capacity to act.

Across the panels, there was a shift from the top-down definition of what problem should be in the focus to the actually experienced problem of lack of relations. It was, hence, the community capacity and ownership, the everyday use of space, and the relationships between residents and institutions that the whole exercise eventually circled around. In the process of discussions, games, informal and more structured communication, system mapping and the search of causal loops, created primarily in-between panel events but eventually confirmed by the participants of the last panel, a greater awareness of the potential links between several apparently separate problems arose.

Did the process influence understanding of causes and systems?

System mapping was explicitly designed to move participants from identifying problems towards understanding the relationships and causes underlying them. The underlying idea was valued. Experts considered the system-mapping approach important because it helped participants see connections and the larger picture. That worked for at least some of the participants who recognised the importance of understanding that "everything is connected", while also noting that one exposure to systems thinking was unlikely to be sufficient to develop systematic thinking. However, both experts and participants found

the concrete visual system maps difficult to understand. Participants reported that some activities were too complex or insufficiently explained. The expert validation reached a similar conclusion: the concept was useful, but the visual representation needed to be simplified and translated into everyday examples.

This suggests that the mechanism worked only partially. The deliberation encouraged participants to recognise connections between issues, but the formal system-mapping tool itself may not have been the main vehicle through which this happened. The broader process of discussion, comparison of experiences and consideration of concrete examples may have been more accessible.

There was also limited evidence of major ideological divergence over the causes of Annelinn's problems. Focus-group participants reported that conflicts were generally small and that people often arrived at similar broad conclusions. Where disagreement arose, it tended to concern practical matters, such as benches, alcohol use or the use of public space, rather than fundamentally incompatible understandings of the neighbourhood. Humour and conversation generally prevented these differences from escalating.

At the same time, there were moments where different realities became visible. One participant contrasted the optimism of project actors with the more pragmatic assessment of an older Annelinn resident. This is significant because it introduced a counterweight to the project-oriented narrative and reminded participants that institutional optimism does not necessarily correspond to residents' expectations.

What future did people put forward before and after the panels?

The pre-panel picture suggests that participants already entered the process with relatively positive expectations about participatory activity. They associated participation with improved quality of life, better leisure opportunities, community creation and improved interaction between residents. Climate adaptation and sustainable transition were less prominent in these expectations.

This provides an important baseline: the desired future was already substantially present before deliberation. The retrospective interviews nevertheless suggest that the future became more concrete, more socially populated and somewhat more achievable for some participants.

The desired future included:

- a public space that residents actually want to use;
- Annelinn as a destination and a home rather than a place people simply pass through;
- more community activities and "third places";
- stronger cooperation between residents and the municipality;
- greater resident ownership and decision-making power;
- opportunities for residents to initiate and organise projects;
- participatory budgeting or similar mechanisms;
- continued co-creation as a normal part of urban planning;
- stronger networks connecting active residents and community organisations.

The visions of the future were broadly in line with overcoming the problems that people saw stopped or prevented solutions, such as creating a place where people gather and where residents can influence local

investment. Also, recognising the relevance of the local voices meant a change was expected in the future that would treat locals as experts as they will actually use the public space planned.

The most important change appears to concern doability. Before the panels, people expressed hesitation, believing that there is little chance of getting anything done in Annelinn because "nobody does anything anyway". This shifted to "a bit of a chance". Doability also depends on being able to simply notice what can be changed, improved in the city. The panels increased the willingness to notice opportunities rather than remaining within the routine of work, school and home. The survey evidence points in the same direction, but with caution. Expectations about the capacity of deliberation to produce change declined somewhat after participation. Two respondents who had initially assessed its potential as significant downgraded their assessment to "likely". However, this probably indicates a more realistic appreciation of the difficulty of converting discussion into institutional change, rather than an experience of the impossibility of the task.

Did the process influence the solutions people recognised?

There is evidence that the process broadened the range of solutions and made some forms of collective action more imaginable. The clearest examples concern small-scale social and spatial interventions. Participants identified "third places", such as cafés or other places where people could meet, as responses to the lack of community and everyday interaction. Ideas such as community gardens, makerspaces, neighbourhood events and participatory budgeting became part of the imagined pathway towards a different Annelinn. The mere presence in a space where diverse solutions were put forward opened people's eyes to the opportunities that could be tapped into.

The role play exercise was intended to help participants examine implementation from different stakeholder perspectives. Expert validation regarded role play as one of the strongest methodological elements because it could help participants leave their habitual perspective and consider the needs and constraints of others. The focus group was more ambivalent as when actually attempting to leave such a perspective, even though people made an effort to consider the lives and needs of others, there was no direct mechanism to prevent resorting to stereotyping the represented group, or remaining too distant from the concrete situation.

The most productive aspects of the process were the concrete and interactive elements: brainstorming, practical exercises, discussion of ideas and how they might work together, voting and direct exchanges with actors who could potentially implement or support ideas. Experts considered voting for intervention points particularly effective because it provided a simple way for participants to express preferences.

The process also changed the perceived pathway between residents and institutions. A municipal participant came away with a clearer network of local "spark people" whose ideas could potentially be supported. This suggests an institutional change in how the municipality viewed the available resources within the community. Residents, meanwhile, acquired direct contacts and a greater sense that municipal actors might respond.

The resulting solution pathway can therefore be represented as:

local knowledge → meeting and understanding other actors → identifying concrete opportunities → connecting residents and institutions → supporting resident initiatives → gradually building community capacity.

Climate adaptation: an important but increasingly implicit part of the story

Survey participants already regarded climate change as an important challenge which did not change in any notable way. Since the panels devoted relatively limited attention to climate change itself, this stability is unsurprising. Although the physical conception of climate adaptation was the starting point of the process, in the course of the panels, this slipped to the background whilst social capacity and infrastructure, relationships, communication and residents' agency moved to the foreground. Participants and experts did observe this change. The focus group described a movement from climate-related discussion towards community issues, particularly in the later workshop. Experts identified this as a weakness and recommended keeping the climate perspective visible throughout the process and providing stronger expert input on climate and nature-based solutions.

At the same time, overcoming the social obstacles would also be inevitable for laying the ground for the potential climate adaptation pathway. Furthermore, climate adaptation is embedded in ordinary urban decisions and small everyday interventions. This suggests that the climate dimension may have become translated into questions about public space, greenery, water, shade, children's activities and everyday quality of life.m Still, this impact story is not that of a substantial increase in climate awareness, but rather, increase in the potential of keeping the climate-adaptation objectives to locally meaningful questions about how people live and interact in public space.

Quality of deliberation and the role of conflict

The deliberative quality was generally positive, particularly in terms of the interactional environment. Participants described the process as safe, accessible and conducive to meeting people from different backgrounds. The focus group concluded that the panels did not produce radical changes in attitudes but did strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation. The absence of major conflict was partly a strength and partly a limitation. Participants generally found common ground, and disagreements could be expressed without escalating into personal conflict. However, this also meant that the process did not strongly test competing visions of Annelinn.

Some differences were nevertheless productive. The more pragmatic perspectives challenged the optimism of project actors. Participants also discovered that actors they had previously regarded with suspicion could be approached directly. These encounters helped shift some relationships from presumed opposition towards possible cooperation.

The quality of deliberation depended on direct interaction, concrete exercises and accessible visual or participatory tools. By contrast, long explanations, lengthy questionnaires and complex system maps reduced the sense of engagement.

6.1.4 Overall impact: what changed and how

The evidence does not indicate a large measurable shift in attitudes. Indeed, some participants became more cautious about the likelihood that participation itself would generate institutional change. The qualitative evidence points to a different and more subtle impact.

First, participants developed a more differentiated understanding of the problem. The potential to connect climate, public space, community, ownership, information and institutional relationships became more clear.

Second, the process made other actors more visible and more understandable. Direct contact with municipal officials, police, planners and residents reduced some distance between groups and created a basis for cooperation.

Third, the process increased the perceived doability of some forms of local action. Participants moved from a sense that "nothing happens" towards examples of things that could be initiated, supported or developed. Community gardens, makerspaces, neighbourhood events, third places, participatory budgeting and resident-led initiatives became more tangible.

Fourth, the process changed the municipality's perception of residents, making them aware and more confident of the active local people and acquiring contacts through whom resident initiatives could be supported.

Fifth, the process generated a new responsibility. Once residents have experienced being heard and officials have encountered residents willing to contribute, expectations increase and whether or not the participants' input is taken into consideration will become a test to the relationship with the municipality as well as to the deliberative process. This creates a potential trust effect: if participation produces visible follow-up, the process can strengthen trust and future participation; if nothing happens, the same process could reinforce scepticism both towards the newly gained relations as well as the deliberative process. The interviews repeatedly returned to this point. Participants wanted continuity, clearer feedback and visible consequences. The experts likewise regarded follow-up as the decisive condition for longer-term impact.

This final mechanism is central to the impact story. The evidence suggests that people did care. What remains uncertain was whether this could be translated into sustained collective action and institutional change. As the assessment was merely able to consider the immediate aftermath of the panel process, this cannot be ascertained. The changes that helped some participants see Annelinn, other actors and their own agency differently and gave the municipal actors an insight into potential partners, remain provisional. They depend on whether the relationships, ideas and expectations generated through the panels are converted into subsequent action.

In this sense, the most important outcome may be the emergence of a potential for a local infrastructure for co-creation: contacts between actors, a shared repertoire of ideas, greater familiarity with participatory methods, and a small group of people who may be willing to continue. The development of an ongoing community network or communication channel is consistent with this interpretation. The focus group emphasised that continuity, community initiatives and an expanding network are necessary for residents to develop confidence that participation can actually make a difference.

The process therefore produced a plausible pathway of change:

Exposure to different actors and perspectives → safer and more direct interaction → greater mutual understanding → more concrete understanding of local problems and possibilities → increased sense that local action is possible → identification of people, relationships and interventions that could carry action forward.

Whether this becomes durable democratic, social, climate or spatial impact depends on the next step: visible follow-through on what residents contributed. Without that step, the panels risk becoming a successful but bounded participatory experiment. With it, the process could contribute to a longer-term shift in how Annelinn's public space is planned and how residents and institutions understand their respective roles in shaping it.

6.2 La Traginera case study (ECO)

The main change observed in the Catalan case was not a shift in participants' overall attitudes towards sustainability or participation, which were already broadly positive before the panels. Rather, the deliberative process helped connect different understandings of the challenges facing Energies Compartides al Raval and build a more shared view of how an inclusive energy transition could be achieved.

The case emerged from a concrete local ambition: to develop an inclusive shared-energy model in El Raval, Barcelona, where a network of social organisations was working to ensure that energy communities could also benefit households experiencing energy vulnerability. Turning this ambition into practice required more than technical solutions. It depended on access to suitable rooftops, financing and administrative procedures, but also on public-sector commitment, coordination between actors and the capacity to make inclusion a structural feature of the energy transition. These challenges provided the starting point for the panels, bringing together those directly involved in developing the initiative and external stakeholders with broader responsibilities and perspectives on energy, social inclusion and public policy.

Before deliberation, these actors did not start from the same position. CAI members were closely engaged with the practical development of the initiative and the challenge of making its model viable. External stakeholders brought wider perspectives on community energy, energy poverty, participation and institutional responsibilities, but not necessarily knowledge on local challenges and barriers, or on how to embed inclusion into energy communities. Pre-panel interviews show that some already recognised systemic barriers, including administrative complexity, unequal conditions for participation and insufficient coordination between public authorities. The challenge was therefore not to introduce systemic thinking from scratch, but to connect insights that were distributed across actors occupying different positions in the system.

6.2.1 Context: Connecting the practical challenge with the wider system

The deliberative process began to bridge this divide by bringing practical experience and institutional perspectives into the same discussion. The case emerged from the specific context of El Raval, a densely populated Barcelona neighbourhood where socioeconomic vulnerability, low incomes and poor housing conditions contribute to energy poverty. At the same time, the neighbourhood has a strong network of social organisations, foundations and cooperatives, providing an existing basis for collective action. This local capacity intersected with a wider policy push to promote energy communities as a tool for the energy transition, alongside growing recognition that their benefits do not automatically reach the most vulnerable groups. Energies Compartides al Raval sought to address this gap by developing an inclusive shared-energy model, making the deliberation a space to explore how local initiative and institutional support could work together to achieve this ambition.

Through the systemic analyses, participants connected issues such as financing, regulation, technical implementation and access to rooftops with wider conditions, including political support, administrative procedures, trust, information, participation, social inclusion and coordination between actors.

This connection is also visible in the matched pre- and post-panel questionnaires. Although only seven participants could be followed longitudinally (three inners and four outers), their responses suggest complementary changes in how the pathway towards change was understood.

Some CAI members moved beyond a predominantly operational framing, linking the development of the initiative more explicitly to co-creation, public-sector commitment and collaboration between actors. Some external stakeholders, in turn, connected their broader understanding of inclusion and the energy transition more closely with the practical realities of the Raval case.

Participants' explanations of what prevents change also became more relational. Technical knowledge and financing remained relevant, but post-panel responses more frequently referred to trust, differing interests and objectives, dialogue, participatory structures and relationships between actors.

The emerging change was therefore not only a move towards a more systemic understanding, since some external stakeholders already approached the issue in these terms. The panels helped connect practical, social and institutional perspectives that had previously been held by different actors, making their interdependencies more explicit and highlighting how the neighbourhood's existing capacity for collective action could be linked to the wider political and institutional changes needed to make energy communities more inclusive.

6.2.2 Participation and inclusiveness

The composition of the deliberative space reflected the nature of Energies Compartides al Raval itself: an initiative built on institutional participation and collaboration between organisations, not on the direct participation of individual citizens. The panels brought together CAI members (inners), directly involved in developing the initiative, and external stakeholders (outers), creating a space for actors with different roles, experiences and perspectives to engage with the challenge of developing inclusive energy communities.

This diversity was a key strength of the process. Participants represented both the social sector, bringing expertise on vulnerability and social inclusion, and the energy sector, contributing knowledge of energy communities and their practical development. These perspectives were present among both inners and outers, allowing participants to examine the challenge from within the initiative and from the wider sectoral context. The deliberative space also brought together civil society and institutional representatives from different territorial levels, including the municipality, the provincial level, the Government of Catalonia and an organisation with a presence across Spain. This broad sectoral and territorial representation helped connect neighbourhood-level experience with wider institutional responsibilities and policy perspectives.

The absence of individual citizens, including residents experiencing energy vulnerability, was also a deliberate choice aligned with the initiative's ethos. Since Energies Compartides al Raval is fundamentally based on institutional participation and collaboration between organisations, directly inviting residents into a deliberative process organised around this institutional initiative could have been intrusive and inconsistent with its established approach. Their interests were therefore considered primarily through organisations working on energy poverty and social inclusion, both public and private.

This approach enriched the discussion by bringing together complementary expertise and connecting local, sectoral and institutional perspectives. However, it also shaped the scope of the conclusions. While the composition was well suited to respect the CAI's structure, and to examine strategic approaches like coordination, political commitment and the conditions needed to develop inclusive energy communities, the perspectives of the participants only reflect the lived experiences of the people expected to benefit from an external viewpoint. It is important therefore to recognise how the initiative's participatory ethos shaped the overall outcomes and resulting ToC.

6.2.3 Deliberation and change

During the panels, participants explored how different actors could contribute to making energy communities more inclusive, while also confronting differences in their expectations and capacities. One example emerged in the discussion about establishing a permanent intersectoral coordination space. CAI members highlighted the need for a space that would enable ongoing, two-way exchange and help translate dialogue into influence and tangible results. From the public-administration perspective, participants emphasised that such spaces have limits in terms of their formal decision-making power.

This exchange made the different expectations around coordination explicit. Participants did not reach a common position on the role of such a space, but at least participants were able to discuss both its potential value and the institutional constraints affecting its effectiveness. The discussion helped clarify the challenges of translating collaboration into action and the need to consider how different actors' roles and capacities could complement one another.

More broadly, the panels provided a space where differences in perspectives, priorities and expectations between actors could be openly discussed. Bringing together community organisations, social-sector representatives and public institutions helped surface tensions that might otherwise remain implicit, particularly around responsibilities, decision-making power and the practical limits of institutional action.

The role playing exercise was particularly valuable in this respect, encouraging participants to consider the challenge from other actors' positions while retaining the knowledge and experience they had gained in their own roles. This created opportunities to develop more creative and actionable solutions. For example, a public-administration representative proposed actions based on their insider knowledge of how their institution operates, including which channels and internal decision-making processes could be most effective in influencing it. These proposals were very well received by the CAI, whose members had not previously considered such approaches, as they lacked the same detailed understanding of the institution's internal workings and routes for influence. By combining different forms of knowledge, the exercise helped participants move beyond their usual perspectives and identify practical opportunities for action that might otherwise have remained unexplored.

The deliberative process made the tensions visible and discussable, helping participants better understand the conditions and constraints shaping each other's positions. This was an important part of the exchange, allowing participants to consider not only what needed to change, but also how different actors' knowledge, roles and capacities could be combined to make change possible.

6.2.4 Overall impact: what changed and how

The main change observed in the Catalan case was a shift from understanding inclusion as an ambition for the energy community to recognising it as a challenge that requires changes in the wider institutional environment. The deliberative process helped participants connect their existing concerns differently and consider more clearly what would need to happen for an inclusive energy model to succeed.

For some CAI members, the process broadened the understanding of what developing Energies Compartides al Raval would entail. The initiative's viability was no longer framed primarily in terms of its own operational capacity, but also in terms of its ability to build alliances, engage public authorities and influence the conditions under which energy communities operate. For external stakeholders, the discussion helped bring broader concerns about energy poverty and inclusion closer to the practical realities of implementing a model in a specific neighbourhood. These complementary shifts helped bridge

the gap between those trying to make the initiative work and those with a broader view of the institutional and policy context.

The process also influenced how participants perceived possible solutions. Participants identified more specific ways in which different actors could contribute to the model's success, both in Raval but also the perspective of replicating the model in other contexts. The role playing exercise was particularly revealing, drawing on their knowledge of how public institutions work, some participants proposed routes for influencing decisions that CAI members had not previously considered. This demonstrated the value of combining different types of expertise and helped make potential solutions more concrete, realistic and strategically more effective.

At the collective level, the ToC provided a shared framework linking local experimentation with political competences at the different levels, institutional coordination and the consolidation of a viable model. It helped clarify that demonstrating the value of inclusive energy communities locally would be important, but insufficient on its own: wider adoption would also require public authorities to help create the conditions for these models to become mainstream.

These changes should not be confused with evidence of systemic transformation. The concerns discussed were often already recognised by participants, and the available evidence does not yet demonstrate that their understanding has translated into sustained collaboration, changes in organisational practice or new policy commitments. The capacity of the CAI to mobilise resources and maintain engagement with public authorities will be decisive in determining whether the shared pathway developed through deliberation leads to practical change.

The impact observed was therefore primarily a change in how participants connected the problem, its causes and the possible routes towards a solution. The process helped turn concerns held by different actors into a more coherent understanding of what needs to change, who can influence that change and how local action might contribute to the wider adoption of inclusive energy communities.

6.3 Turin case study (UniTo)

6.3.1 Context

The Turin case study is embedded within a dense and historically consolidated ecosystem of food solidarity initiatives involving charitable organisations, neighbourhood associations, public institutions and research actors. Participants described food solidarity as a long-term process rather than a recent development, emphasising that although COVID-19 accelerated coordination, many collaborative practices predated the pandemic. The crisis therefore accelerated and institutionalised collaborations that had already emerged across civil society at local level.

This context shaped both the deliberative process and its outcomes. As stated above (section 5.3), the deliberative panels provided a space for collective reflection on an existing but unevenly integrated system. Across the three panels, food solidarity was increasingly framed not simply as a matter of food provision but as a broader question of welfare governance, community building and social justice. Food poverty was linked to wider forms of vulnerability, including housing insecurity, labor precarity and social isolation.

A recurring issue concerned the relationship between civic initiatives and local government. CAIs' representatives described alternating phases of political support and disengagement from public authorities, affecting funding stability, coordination capacity and long-term planning. Despite these discontinuities, civic organisations continued to cooperate through informal and formal networks, often relying on their own resources and mutual support. Turin thus provides a context characterised by relatively strong civil-society collaboration but persistent challenges of institutional recognition, sustainability and the transition from emergency assistance towards structurally embedded food solidarity policies.

The case study also unfolded within a longstanding, although unevenly accessible, local tradition of participatory governance (section 3.3). Turin has historically hosted deliberative and participatory experiments, including processes associated with Luigi Bobbio and the 2007 deliberative polling experiment on the Turin-Lyon railway and voting rights for non-EU residents (Isernia et al., 2008). Participation has also been progressively embedded in the municipal Statute through petitions, consultations and other civic-engagement mechanisms (Città di Torino, 2024). However, participatory practices have developed alongside contentious forms of political mobilisation, and access to participatory arenas remains conditioned by organisational resources and connections to institutional decision-makers (Bassoli, Cinalli, 2016). The CO-SUSTAIN deliberation process therefore took place within an established participatory ecology that facilitated dialogue among organised actors while potentially reproducing inequalities in who can participate.

6.3.2 Participation and inclusiveness

The deliberative process was designed, organized and facilitated by the UniTo research team. Participants were selected through a preliminary context and stakeholder analysis, with the aim of including organizations working with hard-to-reach groups, including undocumented people, homeless people, and newly impoverished low- and middle-income households.

The three panels brought together representatives of grassroots organizations, charities, neighbourhood initiatives, municipal administrations, research institutions and intermediary organizations. Participants described the process as a relatively neutral space in which actors could engage across institutional boundaries and, in some cases, sit alongside more powerful partners as equals.

Nevertheless, important limitations to inclusiveness emerged. The panels targeted organisational representatives rather than direct beneficiaries. This reflected both the structure of the Turin food solidarity niche, composed of largely civic initiatives, and the researchers' concern that vulnerable individuals (including migrants, people experiencing food poverty, and individuals excluded from formal welfare systems) might experience discomfort or embarrassment in an institutional deliberative setting. Despite broader invitations, representatives of migrants and other marginalised groups were almost absent, participating only in the Kick-off Meeting, reflecting the structural lack of time and resources to devote to extra-work activities. Practical barriers also constrained participation. Meetings took place on weekday mornings, making attendance difficult for people with precarious employment, care responsibilities or other professional obligations. Several participants arrived late or had to respond to work-related calls, during sessions. The deliberation was conducted in Italian; although two French-speaking participants understood Italian, observation suggested that language may have affected participation dynamics, with one contributing less frequently during the initial discussions (but this of course, is an inference).

6.3.3 Deliberation and change

Towards a shared understanding of the system

One significant development was the gradual construction of a shared narrative of Turin's food solidarity system. The first panel, involving mainly CAIs, reconstructed its history through neighbourhood initiatives and voluntary organisations, emphasising informal cooperation and community practices. Participants identified a political discontinuity after 2017, when changing institutional priorities weakened support for more structural and participatory approaches, contributing to a return towards emergency and charitable models.

The second panel, composed mainly of institutional actors, produced a different narrative, emphasising policy development, European funding, formal coordination and the institutionalisation of practices such as Torino Solidale. Participants to the regime panel stressed gradual policy learning and institutional consolidation. These accounts were not reconciled during the historical reconstruction: the same developments were interpreted differently according to participants' organisational positions. For example, grassroots actors emphasised political disengagement, while institutional actors foregrounded governance, resources and organisational constraints.

The third panel brought these perspectives together. Through the merged causal loop diagram and subsequent visioning exercise, participants shifted attention from competing interpretations of the past towards shared concerns about the fragmented governance, unstable funding, weak data integration, limited coordination and insufficient knowledge circulation. They did not agree on the origins of the current system, but they identified common challenges and potential points of intervention (leverage points, see section 5.3.4).

Facilitators supported this process by redirecting discussions when particular participants became dominant or conversations moved away from the exercise, while ensuring that participants could complete their accounts before collective discussion.

The emergence of system thinking

Across the panels, participants progressively situated their existing expertise within a wider set of interdependent social, political and economic processes. This shift did not result simply from the introduction of a new analytical framework by the facilitators. Methodological difficulties became occasions for participants to test the framework against their own experiences and to reconsider relationships that had initially appeared less visible.

This was particularly evident during the construction of the causal loop diagram in the second panel. Participants openly expressed perplexity with the complexity of the exercise, observing that "every variable could be connected to every other variable". Yet this difficulty also prompted a recognition that the problems they were discussing could not easily be organised into a linear sequence of causes and effects. As participants tried to decide which relationships to include, they repeatedly encountered connections extending beyond the immediate provision of food: organisational constraints were linked to funding arrangements, funding to institutional priorities, and these in turn to broader questions of governance and political continuity. The difficulty of deciding where the system began and ended therefore became part of the learning process itself and the exercise made visible the coexistence of different understandings of the food-solidarity system.

This became particularly significant when comparing the perspectives emerging in the first two panels. Grassroots participants emphasised the erosion of political support for participatory and structural approaches to food solidarity, whereas institutional actors more strongly foregrounded governance, resource and organisational constraints. These were not simply competing interpretations to be reconciled. The CLD helped make explicit that different actors were locating the causes of current difficulties at different points in the system. In the joint third panel, bringing these perspectives together did not eliminate this disagreement, but shifted attention towards relationships and intervention points that could be recognised across positions.

As the deliberation progressed, the perceived boundaries of the system consequently expanded. Initial conversations focused primarily on food distribution and emergency assistance. By the third panel, participants consistently described food solidarity through broader dimensions including governance, data integration, education, community participation, institutional continuity, public-private cooperation and long-term policy planning. These dimensions were not introduced only as abstract categories by the facilitation process; participants increasingly connected them to concrete organisational and institutional experiences, using the discussion to identify how apparently separate problems reinforced one another. The move towards longer-term policy planning was therefore part of a broader recognition that food solidarity depended not only on the capacity to respond to immediate needs, but also on the continuity of institutions, knowledge and coordination over time.

This "widening" of perspectives became particularly visible during the vision brainstorming, when participants imagined a future food solidarity system characterised by stronger coordination, integrated knowledge production, stable governance arrangements, community participation and greater autonomy for people receiving support. The exercise also opened a more relational question: if food solidarity is understood as a system, which actors and forms of knowledge are currently missing from it, and whose participation would be necessary to make that system more inclusive? In this sense, the deliberation began to move beyond a shared diagnosis of institutional fragmentation towards a recognition of the consequences of particular absences and exclusions, including the limited involvement of groups such as migrants and other hard-to-reach populations.

6.3.4 Overall impact: what changed and how

From food provision to relational welfare

Perhaps the most relevant shift throughout the deliberative process concerned the meaning attributed to food solidarity itself. Across all three panels, participants challenged traditional distinctions between providers and beneficiaries. Discussions increasingly questioned the paternalistic implications of food aid, emphasising dignity, reciprocity and participation instead. Several examples illustrated this shift.

Participants argued that people experiencing food poverty should be able to choose their food rather than simply receive predefined food parcels. Others increasingly stressed that beneficiaries possess valuable skills, competences and knowledge that remain invisible within existing welfare systems. The proposed enhancement of digital platforms was discussed not merely as a mechanism for identifying needs, but also as a means to recognise people's capacities and facilitate reciprocal exchanges within communities.

Similarly, repeated discussions around accompaniment reflected a growing consensus that food assistance should function as an entry point into broader pathways of social inclusion rather than as an end in itself. Food increasingly became understood as a relational resource capable of revealing housing problems, health issues, social isolation and other forms of vulnerability. Throughout the deliberation, the language

employed by participants and facilitators also evolved. Expressions emphasizing assistance or beneficiaries were progressively replaced by concepts such as community, dignity, participation, choice and justice, emphasising the idea that language reproduces unequal power relations between organisations and those seeking support.

Did the process increase understanding of the problem?

No major transformations in participants' positions were observed (as emerged during both retrospective interviews and questionnaires responses), and the deliberative process did not fundamentally alter their understanding of the challenges facing food solidarity. However, it did appear to add layers to how the problem was defined (see also Section 5.3.2). Some of the participants entered the process with a strong focus on waste reduction, redistribution and the immediate provision of food to people experiencing hardship. As deliberation progressed, these concerns were increasingly situated within a broader understanding of food insecurity as a question of food justice, structural inequality, governance and long-term resilience. In this sense, the main change was not a shift from one position to another, but a shift in the object of concern itself: from addressing the immediate consequences of food insecurity to considering the social, institutional and political conditions that produce and reproduce it.

This distinction was particularly important because different definitions of the problem imply different understandings of what constitutes an appropriate response. If the problem is primarily understood as a shortage of food among people in need, the most immediate solution is to improve food provision and redistribution. If it is understood instead as food insecurity occurring within a context of abundance and unequal access to resources, redistribution alone becomes insufficient, and questions of rights, access and structural inequality become central. The deliberative process did not lead participants to abandon the former approach, but encouraged them to situate it within the latter perspective. Food solidarity could consequently be understood not only as a mechanism for responding to unmet needs, but also as part of a broader effort to address the conditions under which those needs arise.

A further layer concerned the temporal dimension of the problem. Discussions increasingly moved beyond the capacity to respond to existing needs towards questions of institutional continuity, coordination and preparedness. This broadened the problem from "how can we provide food to people experiencing hardship now?" to also include "how can food solidarity systems remain capable of responding to future disruptions and crises?". In this formulation, food solidarity became connected to longer-term resilience and collective capacity, rather than being understood exclusively as emergency assistance.

These shifts did not represent a wholesale change in participants' positions, nor can they be attributed solely to the deliberative process. Rather, deliberation provided a setting in which dimensions that were already present in participants' practices and knowledge could be articulated, connected and considered together. What changed, therefore, was less the substantive knowledge participants possessed than the level at which the problem was collectively framed. The process made it possible to move from a relatively bounded understanding centred on food provision and waste redistribution towards a more layered definition encompassing food justice, structural conditions, institutional capacity and future resilience. This broader framing also widened the range of solutions that could be considered, from improving immediate redistribution mechanisms to strengthening governance, participation, coordination and the capacity of food-solidarity systems to respond to future crises.

Did the process influence understanding of causes and the perceived solutions?

The third deliberation panel marked a clear transition from analysing existing systems toward imagining transformative interventions. Following discussion of the merged causal loop diagram, participants collectively identified three priority leverage points:

- stabilising time and financial resources;
- creating permanent spaces for coordination and dialogue;
- strengthening information flows and data integration.

Notably, these priorities did not emerge as isolated technical solutions but as interconnected strategies for increasing the long-term resilience of the food solidarity system. Moreover, food poverty was defined as a multi-causal governance and inequality problem.

During the role play exercise, participants further translated these priorities into concrete governance proposals. Suggestions included permanent co-design platforms between public authorities and civil society organisations, integrated data infrastructures capable of recognising both needs and capabilities, neighbourhood-level participatory committees, cross-sector training programs and mechanisms for improving collaborations between public institutions, voluntary organisations and food producers. These proposals were developed primarily by civil society and technical participants; no elected policymakers or other actors with direct decision-making authority were involved in the deliberation. The presence of technical professionals nevertheless provided some awareness of existing institutional procedures and constraints, while also highlighting the gap between the proposals formulated through the deliberative process and the actors formally responsible for implementing them. Discussions therefore focused not only on what new arrangements could look like, but also, where raised, on the institutional relationships and channels through which such proposals might reach public authorities and other decision-makers. The role play thus functioned as a space for collectively articulating governance alternatives and identifying the institutional actors whose involvements would be necessary to translate them into practice.

At the same time, tensions emerged between a service-efficiency logic, focused on optimising redistribution systems through the figure of the food manager, and a justice-oriented logic, focused on addressing the structural conditions underlying food insecurity. These positions reflected different understandings of both the purpose and the appropriate scale of food solidarity. The former prioritised the efficiency, coordination and reach of existing redistributions mechanisms, while the latter questioned whether improving service provision could address inequalities that contribute to food insecurity in the first place. The tension may also reflect an institutional distinction between actors working within existing service-delivery arrangements and those whose practices are more explicitly oriented towards participations, rights and structural change.

<u>The vision</u>

The shared vision that emerged in DP3 describes a future food solidarity system that is

- integrated and cross-sectoral (public, private, agri-food and civil society);
- participatory and community-based;
- data-informed;
- stable over time (beyond emergency logics and project cycles);
- centred on dignity, autonomy and social justice.

The vision also explicitly redefines food solidarity as a relational welfare system, where food becomes a vehicle for social inclusion, recognition and empowerment.

What do the surveys show in terms of change?

The pre-/post-panel survey analysis indicates a shift from broad aspirations and individual or generalised forms of action towards more concrete and systemic pathways for change. Before the deliberative process, responses combined civic engagement, collaboration, institutional support and political change with more open-ended or individual proposals. Post-panel responses more consistently identified shared processes and structures, including permanent research-action table, greater sharing and dialogue, the involvement of previously absent institutional and non-institutional actors, and clearer roles and responsibilities within a process of shared accountability (see also Sections 5.3.2 and 5.3.3). The need for higher-level political change remains present, but participants increasingly articulated the intermediate relational and governance conditions through which collective action could be pursued.

What change is described in retrospective interviews or pre/post interview comparisons?

Retrospective interviews describe a shift from fragmented and predominantly operational understandings of Turin's food solidarity system towards a more systemic and reflective perspective. Interviewees reported a clearer understanding of the range of actors involved, their interconnections, existing gaps in coordination and the potential to pool knowledge, resources and practices across sectors. The deliberative process also created a rare space to step back from everyday operational pressures and collectively reflect on longer-term futures, strengthening participants' capacity to imagine alternative forms of governance and coordination. Participants further described strengthened relationships and trust among existing actors, even where the process did not generate new collaborations, as well as greater awareness of different organisational perspectives and positions (see also Section 5.3.2). Finally, interviewees highlighted the value of the methodological tools used in the process, particularly temporal mapping and role playing, as new or potentially transferable ways of structuring reflection and supporting collective learning.

Is change described in focus groups or expert validation?

External experts endorsed the shift towards a more systemic understanding of food solidarity and strengthened the move from a charity- and waste-reduction paradigm towards food justice and the right to food. They also confirmed the relevance of the three leverage points identified by participants, while adding further structural dimensions, including political and policy inertia and the lack of a coherent food policy. The validation therefore provides independent evidence that the changes identified through the deliberation were recognised as relevant and meaningful beyond the panel participants themselves. At the same time, the validation made clear that identifying the changes needed is only a first step: substantial institutional and structural barriers remain to translating these insights into systemic change.

Emerging mechanisms of change

Although longer-term impacts cannot yet be assessed, several mechanisms appear to explain the observed changes throughout the deliberative process.

First, bringing together actors from different institutional positions enabled participants to compare contrasting historical narratives and recognise how different organisational experiences related to the same system.

Second, PSM then made these relationships more explicit, encouraging participants to connect immediate food solidarity practices with wider dynamics of governance, resources, knowledge and political continuity. Importantly, methodological difficulties (including the recognition that "every variable could be connected to every other variable") became occasions for participants to confront the non-linear and interdependent nature of the system rather than simply obstacles to the exercise.

Third, future-oriented visioning redirected discussion from competing interpretations of the past towards shared leverage points, collectively imagining desirable futures.

Fourth, role play activities required participants to temporarily adopt unfamiliar institutional perspectives, encouraging appreciation of governance constraints and opportunities.

Finally, repeated interactions across the three panels gradually produced a shared vocabulary centred on dignity, accompaniment, community participation and systemic transformation. Together, these mechanisms appear to have supported a shift not so much in participants' substantive knowledge or values as in how they connected existing knowledge, framed the problem and understood the conditions under which change could occur. The deliberative process also began to make visible actors and forms of knowledge missing from existing arrangements, including the limited participation of marginalised groups.

Preliminary evidence of impact

At this stage, available evidence suggests that the deliberative process primarily influenced collective understanding rather than organisational practices or institutional arrangements. Participants did not fully alter their core values and desired futures. Instead, the panels strengthened awareness of the systemic nature of food poverty, reinforced relational approaches to welfare and encouraged greater attention to knowledge sharing, governance coordination and long-term institutional continuity. A more layered understanding of the food solidarity problem was developed, moving from a focus on food provision, waste reduction and redistribution towards food justice, structural inequality, governance and longer-term resilience. They increasingly recognised coordination, shared knowledge, sustained resources, clearer responsibilities and stable spaces for dialogue as conditions for achieving the futures they already valued.

This broader understanding did not replace the recognition of structural and political constraints. Participants continued to emphasise the need for higher-level political change, while the external validation further identified political and policy inertia, resource limitations and the absence of a coherent food policy as structural barriers. The deliberative process therefore appears to have strengthened participants' capacity to distinguish between structural conditions and locally actionable levers, while increasing recognition of collective agency and interdependence.

Yet, resource instability, fragmented governance, uneven recognition of grassroots expertise and limited participation of marginalised groups remain unresolved. The validation workshop similarly confirmed that identifying the changes needed is only a first step, and that substantial institutional and structural barriers remain between recognising possible pathways for change and translating them into sustained systemic change.

Further analysis of post-panel interviews and survey data will determine whether these changes in collective understanding translated into measurable changes in organisational practices, inter-organisational collaboration and participants' perceptions of empowerment, inclusion and system thinking.

6.4 Alpujarra case study (UGR)

6.4.1 Context

Community building capacity

In the research team's first conversations with the AEC and the territory, it became clear that the initiative was relatively new and shaped by factors the team suspected would influence its development. Early conversations with participants revealed that a major challenge was generating interest and participation among the local population. Meanwhile, the ecosystem of associations in the Alpujarra is perhaps somewhat fragmented; while various initiatives exist that aim to contribute to a just ecological transition, they do not necessarily work in coordination. Conversations with the AEC showed that there had been no prior effort to cooperate with other local initiatives—an idea they view favorably—and they saw the deliberative process as an opportunity to do so. At the same time, the context analysis showed that the local landscape played a role. Órgiva, the municipality where the initiative is based, is home to a significant population of Northern European residents, many of whom were originally attracted to the area by alternative lifestyles. Although they coexist well with the locals, there has always been some resistance among the latter toward the newcomers' lifestyles. Several of the AEC's founders come from Switzerland and Germany, which may have contributed to some of the difficulties in connecting with parts of the local community and encouraging broader participation in the initiative.

Experiences with conflict

Another major challenge for the AEC has been securing support from the municipal government. The AEC has attempted to meet and engage in dialogue with the Órgiva town council to spark interest and encourage participation, specifically, to have public rooftops made available for the installation of photovoltaic panels. However, the town council has never been open to this idea and has opposed it. Participants offered two main explanations for this lack of support. First, they linked it to the municipal government's previous support for a utility-scale photovoltaic project that faced considerable local opposition. The AEC emerged partly in this context, proposing community-based energy generation as an alternative to large-scale corporate development. Some participants therefore interpreted the municipal government's reluctance to support the AEC in light of this earlier conflict. Second, participants also pointed to political differences, noting that some AEC members are affiliated with parties in opposition to the municipal governing team.

Towards sustainable transitions

Several of the AEC members involved in the process have backgrounds in environmental or civic activism, and some are linked to left-wing municipal groups. They are highly educated individuals who prioritize technical aspects while the social, participatory and organizational dimensions appear to receive less attention. The AEC enjoys the support of left-wing municipal groups; some of its members belong to these groups. The group's general ethos is characterized by confidence in Citizen Energy Communities (CECs) as a response to climate change, alongside opposition to large-scale projects and corporate proposals that do not originate within the community itself. At the same time, there is strong faith in technology and renewable energy sources. The initiative is primarily driven by environmental awareness and aims to contribute to global change.

Although addressing energy poverty and supporting vulnerable groups are among the AEC's stated objectives, interviews suggested that these concerns were less central to members' own motivations than other environmental and energy-related goals. European funding requirements also appear to have contributed to the inclusion of these objectives.

The AEC has taken steps to forge alliances beyond the municipality (at the regime level) to secure the support needed to develop and consolidate the initiative. For instance, they received training from the Escuela Social de Osuna and maintained relationships with the Granada Provincial Council, Cooperase, and Penta. They plan to consolidate the AEC at the municipal level and aspire to expand regionally by bringing other municipalities into the initiative. This is reflected in their name, which includes "Alpujarra", the region to which the municipality of Órgiva belongs. Nevertheless, they remain relatively isolated from other supportive initiatives, and it is true that there are no other CECs in the area.

6.4.2 Participation and inclusiveness

Presentation of the CAI members

Through the deliberative process, the research team hoped to meet the other members – or at least associates – of the AEC. However, with the exception of the kickoff meeting, only the four individuals with whom the team had prior contact were present; these were also among the most active members of the AEC. Two of them – the founders – have highly technical backgrounds; they dedicate the most time and effort to the initiative and define the project's roadmap. One of these participants tended to take a particularly prominent role in discussions, which appeared to influence group dynamics. Interviews suggested that this pattern was not limited to the deliberative panels. A third person has been involved from the start and, as a city councilor, attempts to facilitate relations with the local government. The final person became involved in the AEC during the deliberative process and shared their impressions regarding areas for organizational improvement right from the outset.

It is important to note that all of them are white men over the age of 38. This fact also illustrates the limited diversity among the AEC members most actively involved in the process. This became an important issue for reflection during the panels, particularly in relation to the initiative's capacity to attract and retain a broader range of participants.

Regarding those outside the AEC, a diverse range of actors appeared, though they primarily represented the social sector and the local level. A notable absence was that of politicians from the municipal government, although opposition councilors already linked to the AEC did participate. Consequently, the process was unable to create the intended space for dialogue between the AEC and the municipal governing team. Other segments of the population that were underrepresented in the deliberative process included women, gender-diverse individuals, young people, and racialized people.

6.4.3 Deliberation and change

Dealing with conflict

During the deliberative process, significant attention was paid to the AEC's organizational and structural aspects. Discussions highlighted how these factors negatively affect the participation and accessibility of new members, as well as the exchange of new ideas. However, this work could not go as far as necessary because the process lacked input from those who do not typically participate in the AEC or those who have disengaged, many of whom are women, as one of the interviews revealed. It would have been valuable to hear from them and understand the problems they encountered within the organization.

Conversely, the process engaged with those who have remained, yet the only critical voice capable of identifying these dysfunctions belonged to a current AEC member. As a result, opportunities for critical reflection on the reasons for low participation and disengagement were limited. The process and interviews revealed power dynamics within the organization stemming from the accumulation of knowledge and experience, a reluctance to delegate, and an inflexible vision of what the AEC should be. These factors may make it more difficult for new members to become actively involved. Furthermore, the validation meeting and interviews suggested that the lack of inclusivity toward women and gender-diverse individuals stems from the organization's highly vertical structure and limited spaces for dialogue, as well as its primary focus on energy-related issues. Historically, energy, like other fields with a strong technical component, has been male-dominated. The validation meeting also raised the possibility that the AEC's relatively vertical structure, limited spaces for dialogue and strong emphasis on technical energy issues may contribute to the low participation of women and gender-diverse people. Given the historically male-dominated character of technical and energy-related fields, the experts stressed the need for more deliberate measures to broaden participation and create more inclusive spaces.

Thinking about change

Environmental concerns were foundational to the AEC, while social and community dimensions were also recognized as important. In practice, however, the latter appeared to receive less attention. The result is a top-down organizational structure with low member participation, disconnected from other regional initiatives and stakeholders. These dimensions therefore became an important focus of the deliberative process. Yet, the central focus within the AEC appears to remain on project execution and the installation of photovoltaic panels, while organizational, human, and community aspects are treated as secondary matters—issues to be resolved merely to ensure public participation and initiative sustainability.

6.4.4 Overall impact: what changed and how

Changes in the community

The deliberative panels provided a dedicated space for discussing internal organizational challenges and giving greater attention to these issues. Furthermore, the process has fostered more strategic work aimed at networking and alliance-building. From the outset, AEC members had expressed the need to bring more people and organizations on board, recognizing that lacking municipal government support meant they needed to garner as much backing as possible. This was driven by the fact that very few people were actively involved and help was needed, as well as by an initial ambition to scale the initiative up to the regional level. These early stances were primarily motivated by a desire to ensure the initiative's viability. While the community aspect and local networking were valued to some extent from the start, they became more prominent in discussions over the course of the process. It proved to be an experience of exchange and collaboration with diverse stakeholders – something the AEC had not previously undertaken.

The deliberative process helped identify and examine several organizational challenges that participants considered important for achieving the AEC’s goals. Previously, this type of work had not been done, and these issues were either unknown, left to improvisation, or neglected. Consequently, the process has highlighted the challenges that need to be tackled and the necessity of doing so strategically. It also brought to light a certain lack of inclusivity within the organization, potentially linked to low participation, difficulties in recruiting members, and a rigid, top-down structure. Thus, the results point to the need to address this issue as well, and the process results provide a starting point for taking action.

However, there is no guarantee that the workshops' findings will actually be acted upon. This uncertainty stems, firstly, from the fact that implementation depends on the organization itself – specifically, on whether they trust the process and prioritize it. Secondly, the University of Granada (UGR) will not be responsible for monitoring or continuing the deliberative process, as its funding runs out at the end of 2026.

Changes addressing conflict

The main difference regarding the generation of change within the AEC lies in the content of the topics addressed during the deliberative process. Specifically, the process involved taking a "bird's-eye view" to try to understand the entire ecosystem of the AEC and other organizations in the region. This type of exercise had not previously been undertaken at the AEC; consequently, these issues had not been discussed or addressed. Furthermore, the organization does not typically operate in this manner, as the process was facilitated by an external entity (the UGR) which influenced the roles and dynamics among the participants. In this sense, the process itself introduced a different way of discussing the AEC and its wider ecosystem. Whether this approach will become integrated into the organization's regular practices remains uncertain. In any event, there are no guarantees of this. Indeed, an interview with an AEC member revealed the difficulty of getting these topics considered and placed on the agenda alongside technical, energy-related, operational, and financial matters.

Consideration of Theory of Change

The use of systems thinking and ToC generated considerable interest among AEC members and other participants. At the same time, participants did not express strong confidence that implementing the proposed actions would necessarily lead to the expected changes. Some responses suggested concern that the complexity of the situation could not be fully captured by the methodology and that the resulting pathways should therefore be treated as proposals rather than predetermined solutions. Consequently, while the AEC and other participants are interested in the process's results, they do not place blind faith in them; rather, they view the prospect of these results solving their problems with a degree of skepticism.

One of the clearest outcomes of the process was the network of stakeholders created by bringing together actors from within and outside the territory to work on shared issues. Participants exchanged contact details, ideas and potential opportunities for future collaboration, an aspect they themselves highlighted positively.

A further lesson emerging from the process was the importance of looking beyond the technical dimension of energy communities. Participants increasingly recognized the relevance of human, relational and organisational dimensions and the need to address them alongside technical issues if the initiative is to consolidate and remain sustainable over time.

6.5 Espoo case study (LUT)

6.5.1 Context

The case study on participation in large-scale energy projects, such as SMRs, takes place in a setting, where the city of Espoo was exploring alternatives to reach its goal to be carbon neutral by the year 2030 and general interest towards SMRs was picking up steam across the country (Kojo et al 2026). There seems to be a window of opportunity to pursue SMRs in Finland, as the Nuclear Energy Act has been renewed and

steps into force in 2027. In addition to large-scale nuclear power plants, the new legislation takes SMRs into account as well. The case study takes place in a city, which has used participatory activities, such as surveys, to develop its long-term strategies (Espoo 2025b). Therefore, the setting for this story is a municipality which has shown aspirations towards investigating SMRs and interest towards stakeholder engagement. A significant difference is that the City of Espoo does not own an energy company – unlike, for example, Helsinki and Kuopio, where it is precisely a city-owned company that is promoting an SMR project (Kojo et al 2026).

The case study topic was criticised during the KoM as one participant expressed concerns whether the research project was promoting and lobbying nuclear power, although the city of Espoo is currently not moving forward with the SMR initiative. Therefore, the focus of the deliberation panel was moved towards participation in a hypothetical scenario and the word SMR was removed from the guiding questions. This change of topic was reflected in the guiding questions of the panels. The overall guiding question for the panels was "how can participation be strengthened in the preparation and decision-making of individual significant projects in the city?". The guiding questions sought to underline that the focus of the panels and the case study were on participation and not promoting the building of SMRs.

6.5.2 Participation and inclusiveness

The main groups represented in the deliberative process were working for the city administration or energy sector. Also, regulatory authorities and professionals from nuclear energy were taking part in panels. Civic organisations and residents in the city were also represented especially in the second panel. Across all the panels, ten participants took part in the deliberative process. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, although women constituted a slight majority: six participants were women and four men. The participants' average age was 50.5 years, and six out of ten held a master's degree or equivalent qualification. The younger audience was most likely not reached due to the time and place of the events, as the events mainly took part in the middle of the day. Perhaps arranging the event during weekdays and working hours distorted the participant sample towards more regime actors.

Panels lacked representation from various vulnerable groups or otherwise those marginalized groups who remain absent from the decision-making. For example, younger generations, such as youth organizations, did not participate besides efforts to reach intermediate bodies that represent them. Additionally, continuity from the KoM to the panels was not reached.

6.5.3 Deliberation and change

The deliberative exercises planned for the panels were generally well received by the participants. During the first two panels the participants considered system mapping exercise as a beneficial exercise mainly because of its interactive nature. The participants found it to be useful especially as a tool to keep the conversation going and to organise thoughts. However, the beginning of the exercise, which included drafting a timeline to recognize key factors for the system map, was considered challenging in the context of the Espoo case. Most of the drawn timelines described the initial SMR investigation process that was introduced earlier in the opening presentation of the event. However, the guiding questions and the drawing of the timeline were clearly challenging for the participants. This was voiced by the participants of panel 2, and the exercise was adjusted in order for it to be more approachable for the participants.

Instead of a strict focus on recognizing causal relations between the selected factors, the participants focused more on discussing the factors themselves. As a result, the diagrams resembled more of a mind-map instead of a causal loop diagram. After the panels, LUT research team members edited the diagrams

and adjusted causal loops to describe the discussions during the panel. In hindsight, the hypothetical nature of the Espoo case might have made it too difficult to combine causal loop diagrams with clear cause and effect. Nevertheless, the participants were actively involved in the drafting of the system map and taking part in conversation. The panellists successfully recognized and voted on key factors and the resulting diagrams from both panels were surprisingly similar, although the first panel's conversations focused on the regime level and the second panel discussed how participation could be made to feel more meaningful.

The deliberative exercises of panel 3 had a similar effect. First, the resulting diagram from the first two panels were discussed and the participants were given a chance to comment. After an approval was reached, the discussion began on identifying the most impactful factors, which would form the basis for the role play exercise and the vision. The research team members had drafted a vision for the role play and the participants had the opportunity to modify and comment on it. After an agreement for the vision was reached, the role play began. The participants had a positive mindset about the roleplay and participated actively. Some confusion about the instructions of the game was expressed by the participants, but the participants were quickly carried away by the role play. The main challenges for the participants seemed to be fatigue at the end of the exercise and complex instructions at the end of the role play. During the concluding discussion, the panellists expressed contentment with the role play exercise and considered the entire deliberative process to be a beneficial tool for interactive events.

Key themes raised during all of the panels centred around the need for new pathways for participation. The conversations during the panels focused on topics of participation, security, economy and costs of the potential energy projects and how they would reflect on the participant community. Interestingly, climate change received less attention. Participants representing civil society expressed that the current participation strategies are not experienced to be meaningful. The panellists discussed how the existing methods of participation, such as issuing statements, are not considered relevant. During the second panel, the panellists shared their negative experiences from trying to influence decision-making processes regarding the city's energy projects and how the feeling of being unheard can create distrust towards the residents' opportunities to participate in decision-making. It was described as a loss of control regarding decision-making, and it was questioned whether companies and municipalities really considered the opinions of residents and civic organizations.

The representatives of companies and municipalities discussed how the existing decision-making protocols of companies and cities influence the type of participation offered. However, the representatives of the city were open towards introducing new methods for engagement and participation. Nevertheless, it was emphasised that there is a need for ready-made, clear strategies that would be easy to include in the municipality officials' work. A ready-made guideline for engagement and participation, also regarding vulnerable groups, to be applied in their own work was considered a helpful step to improve the engagement of residents.

6.5.4 Overall impact: what changed and how

The participants successfully identified important factors, leverage points and steps to reach the agreed upon vision. However, the deliberative process showed that the panellists seemed to be open for a change in the system that would make it easier for residents to take part in their city's decision-making regarding large-scale energy projects. However, what that change would look like and how it would be implemented remained an open question. There seemed to be differing opinions whether the responsibility lies with the

city or the energy companies. In the second panel, representatives of the residents and civil society underlined for both to be included in informing. Still, especially for the city and civil servants, key issues for offering novel ways of participation and engagement are challenges related to resources. The city's budget might not make it possible for them to arrange events and hearings in the capacity that the residents would want in order to feel truly heard. The city would want to have higher numbers of participation in order to receive a stronger social license to operate. Nevertheless, a clear model or strategy on how to conduct a successful participation campaign is needed.

A consensus was shared that participation should feel meaningful and be accessible. However, as this research project also showed, reaching and engaging residents, and especially vulnerable groups, remains a challenging task and more thorough engagement strategies should be implemented in order to reach various stakeholder groups.

Additionally, the challenges are connected to the availability and accessibility of information. There seems to be a contradiction between what the regime level considers to be sufficient participation and what the residents actually want and require. Regarding SMRs, there are no precedents or test cases that could give an example on how to conduct a strategy for participation.

In summary, change in this case study is challenging to measure or identify, due to the small size of the research sample and the hypothetical nature of the guiding questions. The main impact and change thus might be the openness towards novel forums of participation.

What do the surveys show in terms of change?

The survey evidence suggests limited change in participants' general attitudes to climate change, sustainability transition and participation. Participants who began the process showed high levels of concern about climate change, they had a fairly positive attitude that there is something to be done about it and tended to be relatively active politically already. Qualitatively the clearest change was on how concerns about participation in large scale energy projects were framed. Pre-panel framing revolved mostly around opportunities to influence, public acceptance of nuclear energy, green transition and available information. Post-panel answers were more concerned about having earlier communication about the projects, clearer and more predictable avenues of participation and clarity of roles on who is responsible for facilitating participatory activities. However, only three participants completed both surveys and only one gave directly comparable answers, so these results should be viewed as indicative not indicators of changes in individuals attitudes.

What change is described in retrospective interviews?

The retrospective interviews held should be viewed similarly as views of people who participated in panels, rather than comparative data. Similarly to the survey respondents, there is emphasis on the importance of early and continuous communication and dialogue between projects and residents, particularly before political actors have established positions on the matter at hand. When positions are established by political actors, they might be reluctant to change them. Limited understanding of day-to-day politics and administration by residents was also highlighted, as well as scepticism of having an influence or making an impact if one was to participate.

Taking part in panels did appear to strengthen views on importance of continuous engagement and gave ideas for future participatory work. Role play was commended as it took people out of their normal positions and may have helped them listen more to each other.

Is change described in focus groups or expert validation?

The expert valued several methods used during the panels, such as the dialogue between experts and non-experts, role play and system mapping; however, they also commented that it was perhaps hard to see how system maps can be easily translated into academic output or policy recommendations. Also, they noted that land-use planning might be overemphasised, as it is only a short period in a long process and to have substantive impact, a longer term commitment to participatory process is required. They also commended continuous participation that series of panels provides and that the process included review of external experts and that having external experts is the result in itself. Main critiques were that system maps are not taking into account power relations in the systems they are describing and are not very hard to intuitive, and that recruitment could have been more tailored.

6.6 Westbahn case study (BOKU)

6.6.1 Context: From discussion a contested development and participation to a question of power and recognition

The deliberative process addressed the Westbahnareal, a site shaped by a long and conflict-laden history of urban development in Vienna. While this field has historically been dominated by top-down decision-making, since the 1970s growing demands by the public to have a say in large-scale infrastructure projects have led to the development of the 'Vienna Model' of top-down-governed citizen participation in urban planning. Despite these efforts to make planning procedures more inclusive, many processes (both historical and contemporary) are criticized for failing to incorporate citizens' perspectives in a truly participatory way by sharing decision-making power. Given that a third of the city's population are unable to participate in municipal elections due to holding non-Austrian citizenships, finding other forms of democratic participation in municipal policymaking is an urgent issue in Vienna.

The Westbahn case study centers around an area of land by the Westbahnhof train station in the 15th district, which is up for redevelopment. Several civil society actors and initiatives have been campaigning for the establishment of a new green space on the site, as urban green spaces are rare in the densely built area and could significantly support local climate change adaptation efforts. Municipal actors, on the other hand, view the unbuilt area as a rare opportunity for creating additional inner-city housing at affordable prices. Although a formal urban development process with a participatory component has already been implemented between 2022 and 2024, the process is criticized for a lack of transparency, inclusivity and influence of citizens' preferences on the subsequently presented preliminary development concept, which foresees some green spaces but also two building plots for housing and commercial venues, and significant areas of sealed soil. In this context, the initiative WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE has been focusing on creative and artistic forms of protest to continue to advocate for the preservation of the area without new buildings or significant ground sealing.

6.6.2 Who entered the deliberative space and who remained outside it?

The case involved members of the WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE initiative, stakeholders with professional expertise in urban development, representatives of vulnerable groups representing organisations, and an intermediary stakeholder. The city representatives and administrative stakeholders with decision-making power were not present in the process, despite being invited, due to either management directives prohibiting their participation, fear of losing favour with other decision-making stakeholders, or

reluctance to re-open conflicts around the development process. The process therefore took place in a context where the central question was not focused on what should happen on the site in the redevelopment process, but who is able to shape decisions about it and under what conditions participation can become influential.

Access to the process was uneven. The kick-off meeting brought together initiative members, stakeholders and other actors, while the first two panels separated stakeholder and initiative perspectives. By the third panel, only one stakeholder participated alongside initiative members. City politicians, plot owners, relevant city administration representatives and the agencies responsible for the formal participation process did not take part. Their absence was linked to the high-conflict character of the case, concerns about potential negative outcomes, and apprehension that participation could intensify tensions or affect future working relationships with the city.

This composition shaped what the process could achieve. It created a space in which the initiative's experience could be articulated and discussed with some external actors, but it did not create a setting in which the actors with direct decision-making authority could be directly addressed. The absence of city administration representatives and decision-makers sharpened participants' frustration and reinforced the perception that the city did not take grassroots engagement seriously. In this sense, the deliberative space was meaningful, but it was also bounded by the wider governance context from which it emerged.

The panels generated different kinds of impacts for participants, mainly resulting in more knowledge about the area, and some new relationships formed. They also exposed a central limitation: the deliberation helped participants to understand the system's dynamics, but could not resolve or even sufficiently address the conflict with actors who were absent from the room.

6.6.3 What happened during deliberation that links to change?

The most plausible mechanism of change was the gradual construction of a shared object of deliberation and the recognition of different positions within the same system. The storytelling exercise during the kick-off meeting provided a practical means of bringing different perspectives into dialogue. It enabled participants to exchange knowledge, and made different ways in which the Westbahnareal is experienced and interpreted visible. Beyond approximating the levels of knowledge on the site, the exercise initiated the construction of a shared object of deliberation, identified relevant stakeholders absent from the process, and fostered a sense of collective ownership of the story told in the deliberation process. The method's openness provided a visual background to helping the recognition of the value of multiple perspectives and experiences of the same object of deliberation, thereby laying the groundwork for the subsequent participatory systems mapping by initiating a shared understanding of the system.

The introduction of systems thinking became explicit in the first and second panels. Inviting participants to think in terms of individual factors, relationships between them and emergent dynamics was intended to establish a shared language for collective sense-making. The use of participatory systems mapping made knowledge and experience already present within the group more visible and explicit. It provided a structured process for identifying observable patterns, underlying structures, interconnections and feedback loops. The mapping process unfolded through intense discussion, which made differences in participants' perceptions apparent. These differences should not be understood simply as disagreements. Rather, they reflected participants' different positions within the system and their varying relationships to its constraints. More institutionally oriented stakeholders were accustomed to working through established organisations and administrative procedures, whereas initiative members approached the

process from a position of contestation and sought to challenge the assumptions underlying those procedures. Furthermore, it is important to make a distinction between participants' institutional functions, the roles through which they fulfil those functions, and their personal perspectives when addressing change. Participants could share concerns as individuals while remaining subject to different organisational requirements, interests and decision-making procedures. Greater mutual understanding therefore did not necessarily imply convergence in what actors could support or pursue within their professional roles. From this perspective, the difficulty was not simply that people understood the problem differently, but that shared understandings had limited space within institutional processes in which other interests were perceived to carry greater weight than local voices.

Did the process increase understanding of the problem?

There is evidence of increased understanding, but this learning was uneven across participant groups. For some younger initiative members, the panels helped them understand the initiative and its concerns from a somewhat different perspective, including through exchange with the participating stakeholder. The system's perspective appeared particularly helpful in relating planning decisions, power imbalances and the initiative's own capacity to mobilise. For members of the initiative's leading circle with scientific backgrounds, however, there was comparatively little new methodological or conceptual learning. Many were already familiar with systemic and academic perspectives. For them, the value of the process lay less in learning a new analytical approach than in making perspectives explicit and discussing them collectively.

The participating stakeholders, by contrast, appeared to experience a more substantial change. The exchange offered a closer understanding of the initiative's experience of the Westbahnareal and the barriers it encounters in planning processes. For the sole stakeholder participating in panel three it also contributed to a more positive attitude towards the initiative's strategies. This may have strengthened the ability of an intermediary actor to recognise these concerns and carry them into professional contexts. This was an important, if modest, form of empowerment. Its practical reach remained limited, however, because plot owners, relevant decision-makers and other actors with direct influence over the case did not participate.

The process therefore did not produce a single shared definition of the problem. Instead, it clarified how different actors were positioned within it. The differences in perspective that emerged point to more than divergent opinions; they reveal how participants are positioned differently within the system itself. Systems thinking shifted attention from individual actors or isolated problems to the connections and feedback loops that shape the wider urban development context. It also drew attention to the boundaries of the system: which actors and forms of knowledge were present, which remained absent, and how these inclusions and absences shaped both the problems identified and the solutions that could be imagined.

Did the process influence understanding of causes and systems?

The system maps developed separately with stakeholders and initiative members made different understandings of the Westbahnareal visible. In preparation for the third panel, the research team merged these perspectives and extracted the most significant dynamics for reintroduction at the beginning of the joint session. The merged map served as a starting point for a discussion that moved beyond system mapping through an adapted Theory of Change approach. This shift redirected attention from analysing the limits of participants' deliberative space towards identifying the conditions and pathways through which change might occur.

Participants developed a broader and more systemic understanding of the case while also identifying the limits of their own deliberative space. The emergence of systems thinking therefore consisted less in producing a single agreed model or solution than in making relationships, power asymmetries and institutional absences open to discussion, focusing the discussions on how decisions about the site are produced, which actors are able to shape them, and what changes would be required for participation to become genuinely influential.

At the same time, the emotional intensity of the third panel shaped the direction of this work. Frustration about limited recognition by decision-makers, perceived non-reciprocal participation and the absence of municipal decision-makers had to be given space. As a result, the emerging pathways for change were often demand-oriented towards absent institutions. CAI participants emphasised that the city administration should engage with grassroots initiatives as equally intelligent human beings with needs, ideas and perspectives, even where formal decision-making power remained unequal. They also called for greater transparency and for participation to be treated as more than an add-on to decisions made elsewhere. This does not mean that the process failed to generate systemic insight. Rather, it suggests that the possibility of developing constructive strategies was constrained by the emotional and political context in which the deliberation took place.

What possible futures and solutions did participants imagine?

The panels surfaced possible courses of action, including a suggestion to target international media in order to influence the image of the city and create leverage within the wider system. Other ideas concerned changing how the city engages with grassroots initiatives, improving transparency, and creating conditions under which local knowledge and initiative-based work could be taken more seriously. However, the initiative did not take up the media-related suggestion during the process. This should not be read simply as resistance to change. Frustration about the planning process, and concern that renewed engagement with the city could again lead to perceived co-optation, made experimentation difficult. Although motivation to protect the area remained evident, the initiative's capacity to adapt its strategy appeared constrained by both the wider governance context and its past experience of engagement.

The role play exercise contributed to perspective-taking in the third panel. Because the participating stakeholder was an intermediary, familiar with both the city administration side and the initiative's perspective, the exercise helped make these different positions more tangible. The small and intimate setting also supported trust-building between this stakeholder and initiative members. Nevertheless, the lack of interaction with actual decision-makers made the development of a theory of change more abstract: participants could identify what would need to change, but not directly negotiate how such change might be initiated. The pathways identified consequently focused strongly on demands towards the city administration and decision-makers rather than changes to the initiative's own strategies. CAI participants and the intermediary stakeholder present called for greater transparency, direct dialogue and more meaningful recognition of grassroots initiatives and their contributions. They wanted municipal representatives to be present and engage with them as equals—not in the sense of having equal decision-making authority, but as equally intelligent human beings with legitimate needs, ideas and perspectives. These demands reflected frustration with participation that, in their experience, invited citizens to express their views without sufficiently listening or allowing those contributions to influence decisions. The absence of decision-makers reinforced this frustration and directed discussion towards the institutional conditions required for meaningful engagement. The resulting theory of change therefore concerned not only what the initiative could do differently, but how the city would need to change its approach: treating

participation as more than an add-on, taking grassroots knowledge seriously and responding substantively to proposals. These conditions became more explicit through deliberation, but remained demands addressed to absent actors rather than commitments negotiated with them.

The ideas generated may still provide material for later action, but the panels did not demonstrate that they would be taken forward.

Changes in relationships and governance

The process did not produce a demonstrable change in governance arrangements or in the relationship between the researched initiative and the city. In this respect, its direct impact on niche-regime relations was limited. Nevertheless, the process contributed to new connections between actors. A new cooperation emerged between the participating intermediary stakeholder and another initiative working in and around the area, albeit with a more artistic and less site-specific focus. A connection also formed between this initiative and a representative of an organisation representing people with disabilities. These developments suggest that the panels could function as a space for bringing actors together and making new collaborations imaginable, even where they did not alter the formal governance of the redevelopment process of the site.

For the WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE initiative itself, however, no comparable change in governance or co-governance was observed. The absence of municipal and decision-making actors meant that the process could not test whether the concerns raised could be recognised or accommodated within existing planning and participation structures.

6.6.4 Overall impact: what changed and how

The evidence does not indicate a substantial shift in the governance of the Westbahnareal redevelopment process or a resolution of the underlying conflict. Nor does it support a claim that the panels changed the strategies of the WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE initiative in a demonstrable way.

The qualitative evidence points instead to a more limited but meaningful form of impact:

First, the process made different positions within the urban development system more visible. It helped some participants understand the initiative's experience, the constraints facing stakeholders, and the ways in which institutional roles shape what can be said and done.

Second, it supported relational learning. The stakeholder participating throughout the whole process developed a closer understanding of the initiative and a more positive attitude towards its strategies. Initiative members, particularly younger participants, gained a more differentiated view of the system in which they were acting. For more experienced members, the process primarily made existing knowledge and frustrations collectively explicit.

Third, the process generated ideas and identified possible pathways for change. These included strategies to influence the public image of the city, demands for more transparent and reciprocal participation, and proposals for stronger recognition of grassroots initiatives. Their uptake remained uncertain.

Fourth, the process created new, albeit limited, connections between actors. These connections may provide a basis for future cooperation, but they did not amount to a change in governance or co-governance.

The resulting impact can therefore be characterised as an early-stage change in mutual understanding, relational capacity and the visibility of systemic constraints, rather than a demonstrated change in policy,

planning decisions or institutional practice. The panels helped participants see the Westbahnareal as a system of interconnected actors, interests, procedures and power relations. They also made clear that understanding alone does not resolve conflict when those with the authority to respond remain outside the deliberative space.

In this sense, the most important outcome was not consensus, but clarification: participants became more aware of the conditions under which participation is currently practised, the positions from which different actors speak, and the institutional changes that would be required for deliberation to have greater influence. Whether this awareness contributes to longer-term change depends on whether the ideas, relationships and demands generated through the process are taken up in subsequent engagement with decision-makers. Without such follow-through, the panels risk remaining a bounded exercise in collective sense-making. With it, they could contribute to a more sustained shift in how the Westbahnareal redevelopment is governed and in how grassroots initiatives, intermediaries and public institutions understand their respective roles in shaping urban development.

7. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

This section draws together the preliminary conclusions from the CO-SUSTAIN case studies, highlighting the changes identified, the conditions that supported or constrained them, and the limitations of the available evidence. The case-specific conclusions are followed by a synthesis of shared findings and lessons for deliberative participation in sustainability transitions.

7.1 Annelinn case study (UT)

The Annelinn deliberative process provides evidence that deliberative approaches can strengthen local relationships, sow some seeds of collective agency and point out the paths towards future collaborative urban development. While the process did not produce demonstrable institutional or physical transformation within the assessment period, it contributed to changes in how participants' understanding of their neighbours, the challenges they faced and thus, offered new insight into the possibility of collective action.

One of the most significant outcomes was the increased mutual understanding and reduced distance between residents and municipal actors. Spending time together in neutral territory helped participants recognise that others are not so different after all, and showed them what were their perspectives, attitudes and constraints, as well as their willingness to contribute and possibly, to change the area. Municipal officials gained greater recognition of residents as potential partners in developing local initiatives, while residents gained a more concrete sense that institutions could be accessible and responsive. The emergence of new contacts and communication channels, including a WhatsApp group, might provide an initial basis for continued cooperation.

The deliberative process also contributed to a more differentiated and interconnected understanding of Annelinn's challenges. The initial reasons for deliberative panels evolved into a more focussed effort to work on participation and the ability to formulate the local futures together. The process - in particular the system mapping, causal loop diagrammes and simple interaction at the group discussions highlighted

that change depends on residents' sense of ownership, opportunities for interaction, accessible community spaces and meaningful involvement in decision-making. Although the panels did not end with a fully shared problem definition, and the explicit climate-adaptation dimension became less prominent, the discussions focused on everyday local concerns were nevertheless helpful in teasing out the sense of relationality and the potential to base on the future change.

The meetings also helped to generate and spread a variety of ideas and experiences, from community gardens, makerspaces, neighbourhood events, to third places and participatory budgeting. Municipal actors identified residents whose initiatives and willingness to be active could potentially be supported. The process therefore helped establish elements of a possible pathway towards change, connecting local knowledge and relationships with opportunities for resident-led initiatives and institutional support. Nevertheless, increased awareness and willingness to contribute did not consistently translate into commitments or sustained collective action and people appeared to shy away from actually committing to taking on responsibilities.

The findings also highlight important limitations. Participation remained selective, with young people, older residents and Russian-speaking residents insufficiently represented. Some methodological elements, particularly complex system maps and role play exercises were difficult for participants to engage with effectively.

The central preliminary conclusion is that the deliberative process primarily strengthened relational capacity and the perceived feasibility of local cooperation. Whether the emerging relationships and shared aspirations develop into durable institutional and community outcomes will depend on continuity, organisational support and visible follow-up. If participants see their contributions reflected in subsequent decisions and activities, the process may strengthen trust, ownership and future participation. Conversely, a lack of tangible results risks reinforcing existing scepticism about the effectiveness of participation.

Overall, the Annelinn case suggests that deliberation can provide an important starting point for collaborative urban transformation, but that its longer-term impact depends on connecting inclusive dialogue with concrete action, support to sustained community engagement, and lasting institutional responsiveness.

7.2 La Traginera case study (ECO)

The Catalan case provides relevant insights into the factors that can support or constrain the development of the CAI, as well as into the role that deliberation can play in strengthening their contribution to democratic sustainability transitions. It also illustrates the gap that can remain between building a shared understanding of the need for change and mobilising the institutional capacity required to deliver it.

The first lesson concerns the interdependence between the internal development of a CAI and its wider institutional environment. Energies Compartides al Raval depends not only on its own organisational capacity, resources and technical development, but also on relationships with public authorities, building owners, social organisations and other actors able to provide resources, legitimacy or institutional support. Public-sector engagement, administrative procedures, coordination between actors, access to funding, trust and shared objectives emerged as particularly relevant conditions. The case therefore illustrates that the development and potential replication of a local initiative cannot be understood solely through its internal dynamics. In particular, the initiative's ambition to demonstrate an inclusive shared-energy model

will not, by itself, ensure its wider adoption. This will also depend on the CAI's ability to mobilise resources and maintain engagement with public authorities, and on the willingness and capacity of those authorities to address the policy, regulatory and administrative barriers identified. These remain conditions for future progress rather than outcomes demonstrated by the process.

A second lesson concerns how niche collective action can interact with regime actors. The deliberative process created a space in which CAI members and external stakeholders could connect perspectives that were previously distributed across different actors. Some external stakeholders already recognised systemic barriers before the panels, while CAI members brought detailed knowledge of the practical challenges of implementing the initiative. Through the systemic analysis and To, these perspectives were progressively connected into a shared pathway identifying leverage points, responsibilities and possible actions. Deliberation therefore appears particularly valuable for making interdependencies explicit and translating different forms of knowledge into a more integrated understanding of how change could occur. The role playing exercise illustrated this potential particularly clearly: a public-administration representative drew on their insider knowledge of institutional decision-making to suggest routes for influence that CAI members had not previously considered. However, identifying these routes did not mean that they were subsequently used or that institutional decisions changed. Similarly, the panels made differences in expectations about institutional coordination more explicit, but did not resolve them. The case therefore shows both the value of deliberation in identifying possible routes for influence and its limitations when participants do not yet have the resources, authority or sustained cooperation needed to put them into practice.

The case also provides insights into the democratic dimension of sustainability transitions. Both inners and outers shared the starting point that energy communities need to become more inclusive. Although policymakers promote them as tools to democratise the energy transition, in practice their members often have relatively homogeneous profiles, frequently including people with technical knowledge of energy and the capacity to engage with complex administrative processes. For La Traginera, this challenge was particularly relevant: its organisations had a deep understanding of El Raval's complex social realities and recognised that, without an inclusive model, the benefits of the energy transition could remain out of reach for many residents in a neighbourhood already facing significant socioeconomic vulnerability. Developing an inclusive energy community was therefore not only an additional social objective, but a way to make the energy transition accessible and relevant to the neighbourhood. At the same time, vulnerable groups were mainly represented through organisations working with them rather than through their direct participation, while questionnaire respondents showed a relatively homogeneous and generally highly educated socioeconomic profile. The case thus highlights an important distinction: a shared commitment to inclusive outcomes does not automatically ensure inclusive participation. The absence of direct participation by vulnerable residents reflected the nature and ethos of La Traginera, an initiative built on institutional collaboration and participation among organisations. Inviting individual residents into a deliberative process centred on this institutional initiative could have been intrusive and inconsistent with its established approach. Their needs and interests were therefore considered mainly through organisations with knowledge of the neighbourhood and experience working with vulnerable households. While this approach brought valuable expertise and respected the initiative's participatory model, it also means that organisational perspectives cannot fully substitute for residents' own experiences and voices. Who participates directly, whose interests are represented and through whom they are represented therefore remain important dimensions when assessing the democratic quality of sustainability transitions. This distinction matters when interpreting the process's contribution to inclusion: the panels

helped institutional and social-sector actors consider how energy communities could better respond to vulnerability, but they did not establish whether the proposed model would be experienced as accessible, relevant or beneficial by vulnerable residents themselves. That question remains open as the initiative develops.

Finally, the case highlights the difference between transformative potential and demonstrated transformation. The deliberative process produced a collectively articulated pathway for change whose relevance and feasibility were broadly supported by external experts. However, the available evidence does not yet demonstrate sustained changes in institutional commitment, organisational practices or relationships between actors. Stronger public-sector involvement, in particular, remained a recognised need rather than an achieved outcome. Nor is there evidence yet that the proposed leverage points have led to concrete policy or regulatory changes, that the CAI has secured the additional resources needed to advance its model, or that the initiative has influenced the wider development of energy communities. The short-term nature of the assessment limits what can be concluded about longer-term impacts, but the findings also point to substantive challenges beyond time alone: the CAI's capacity to sustain momentum and mobilise resources, the willingness of public authorities to act on the issues identified, and the difficulty of translating dialogue into institutional decisions. The impact assessment therefore identifies a plausible pathway towards change, not evidence that this pathway has already produced systemic effects.

Overall, the case suggests that CAIs can contribute to sustainability transitions by developing and testing bottom-up innovations that are rooted in local realities and respond to concrete community needs. Their transformative potential, however, depends partly on the capacity of regime actors, particularly public authorities and governments, to recognise the value of these locally grounded innovations and create the institutional conditions needed for them to develop, scale and influence existing systems. Deliberation can help connect these bottom-up experiences with institutional perspectives by clarifying interdependencies, responsibilities and pathways for action, but systemic transformation ultimately depends on whether public institutions translate these insights into sustained cooperation, enabling policies and concrete implementation. For Energies Compartides al Raval, the next test is therefore not simply whether the actors share a vision of inclusive energy communities, but whether that shared vision can be converted into sufficient resources, institutional commitment and changes to the conditions that currently constrain the model. This challenge is compounded by the complexity of the energy system itself, where responsibilities for energy policy, regulation, social inclusion and implementation are distributed across different levels of government and public administration. Influencing these interconnected areas requires coordination across institutions with different mandates, priorities and decision-making processes, meaning that progress cannot be driven by the CAI or any single public authority alone. Furthermore, even if policy or institutional changes occur, attributing them directly to the deliberative process would be difficult in such a complex system, where multiple actors, initiatives and external factors shape outcomes over time**.** Until there is evidence of progress on these fronts, the contribution of the deliberative process is best understood as strengthening the collective understanding and articulation of a pathway towards change, rather than demonstrating that the wider energy system has changed.

7.3 Turin case study (UniTo)

Using the Turin case study, we analysed how the process of engaging stakeholders within the panels not only helped to reshape understanding and awareness of food solidarity processes, the stakeholders and

practices involved, and the relationships between them, but also, to some extent, changed the stakeholders' own roles within the process.

At the individual level, change was primarily cognitive and relational. None of the three interviewed participants reported a substantial revision of their prior views of specific partner organisations. However, each described a broadening of understanding which reframed their personal definition of political participation (e.g., a significantly improved, more systemic understanding of the food solidarity landscape and the creation of first direct dialogue with other participants). Across all three panels, structured facilitation, visual/system-mapping tools, and the role play, were repeatedly identified as effective in making participation more accessible.

The clearest evidence of change emerged at the system level during DP3, the joint validation panel bringing niche and regime actors together for the first time. Participants co-produced a shared vision and jointly prioritised three leverage points for future action: stabilising resources and available time; creating stable spaces for co-design and collective learning; and strengthening information flows and data integration. Participants explicitly characterised this as a reframing of the problem itself, "from waste reduction to food justice," and described the deliberative process as constituting a form of democratic infrastructure rather than merely producing recommendations.

Overall, the Turin panels appear to have built trust and a shared understanding across niche and regime actors and produced a jointly owned, prioritised agenda for action, even though we still cannot foresee whether these shifts will translate into durable structural or institutional change.

7.4 Espoo case study (LUT)

The Espoo case study provides insights into both possibilities and limitations of deliberative participation in the context of large-scale energy projects. The central features of the case study were its hypothetical nature and nuclear power. The study originally focused on participation in a possible small-scale modular reactor project in Espoo as its context. As the city no longer actively pursued such a project when the deliberative process began the subject of the study was adjusted after concerns were raised in the KoM. The adjustment was to focus on a broader context and how participation could be strengthened in the preparation and decision making of large-scale energy projects. This adjustment made the case less politically sensitive and perhaps more relevant to participants but might have made it less concrete and harder to connect with.

The key lessons were about timing and continuity of participation. Across the panels, surveys, interviews and expert validation, participants emphasised that communication and opportunities to participate should begin before major decisions are made or political positions are established. Accessible and continuous information, predictable opportunities to participate and clarity whose responsibility it is to organise engagement were considered important factors to enable meaningful participation. As for motivating people to participate, it was deemed crucial that residents believe their contributions can have an actual impact.

The case study also clearly demonstrates the continuous challenge of inclusive participation. Despite extensive stakeholder mapping and a large number of invitations, participation remained low, and underrepresented groups were mostly absent. Those who did participate were usually already pretty active politically. Reasons identified for low participation were lack of time, uncertainty about the

influence decisions, lack of knowledge about political processes, fears of negative consequences and doubts about effectiveness of participation. Suggested improvements on how to tackle low participation were more targeted and personalised recruitment, practical help for participation and clearer communication why participation matters and where.

The deliberative methods themselves were deemed useful by those who participated. They provided an opportunity for reflection and interaction. System mapping helped participants communicate their visions about complex and abstract subjects and hear out others. It helped participants organize the complexity and identify relationships between factors. Role playing helped participants to consider perspectives that were not their own and relaxed them to have open dialogue. However, some limitations were also suggested such as system mapping might be hard to intuit, and that system mapping does not take into account power relationships.

On the whole, the impact of case study to the participants' attitudes remains inconclusive. Therefore case studies results should be more understood as strengthening discussion, identifying barriers and pathways for more meaningful participation and demonstrating openness towards new participatory practices.

7.5 Alpujarra case study (UGR)

The deliberative process has had a notable impact on the participating actors, and especially on the AEC, though it has also faced some limitations.

First, it highlighted the distance between the AEC and the municipal government, which did not participate in the process. As previously noted, disagreements and tensions between the local council and the AEC have existed since the initiative’s inception. The deliberative process aimed to foster common ground and ease tensions – a goal communicated to both parties – yet the municipal government's absence reflected its limited willingness to engage with the initiative through this process.

The deliberative process used a participatory approach to conducting an assessment, which provided a better understanding of both the network of associations of the Alpujarra region and the internal ecosystem of the AEC itself. Building on this work, participants engaged in collaborative strategic planning to address identified issues and move closer to their shared vision which had been agreed as "a cohesive Alpujarra region that promotes a just ecological transition through local collaboration." The process yielded a series of proposed actions outlining a potential path toward achieving these objectives. It remains uncertain whether these actions will be implemented or how effective their implementation might be; participants held varying degrees of optimism regarding the likelihood of implementation following the process.

Regardless of how the deliberative panel concrete results are ultimately used, the deliberative process has contributed to some changes within the AEC and among the other participants. One of the process's successes was bringing together diverse actors from the Alpujarra on several occasions to collaborate on issues of shared concern. In this way, the process served as a meeting point for networking and exchanging ideas, a foundation from which future collaborations and projects may emerge. Another positive aspect of the process was that it raised awareness among AEC members of the importance of social and organizational issues within an initiative like theirs. A key issue addressed during the process was the limited involvement of members and local people. To tackle this challenge, it became clear that the AEC

could not focus solely on energy and technical matters; it also needed to place greater emphasis on its organizational structure and interpersonal relationships.

Finally, there were certain limitations that prevented the full realisation of the potential of the deliberative process. As the participation of several key groups (representatives of the municipal governing team, women, gender-diverse, and young people) could not be secured, but this was a participatory process, the outcomes are strongly shaped by those who took part. Consequently, certain perspectives were missing – perspectives that would have provided a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the issues facing the AEC and possible ways of addressing them. Ultimately, to strengthen the longer-term impact of the deliberative process, it would be appropriate to provide follow-up and support to participants during the implementation phase. However, as CO-SUSTAIN project funding ends in late 2026, such a follow-up is not currently planned.

7.6 Westbahn case study (BOKU)

The findings suggest that the panels created a constructive space for exchanging knowledge about the Westbahnareal and examining barriers to participation in Vienna's urban development. Stakeholders and WESTBAHNPARK.LIVE members shared concerns about limited public influence, but differed in emphasis: stakeholders focused more on improving participation formats, while initiative members stressed unequal power, opaque decisions and their own capacity to mobilise. Systems mapping helped make these perspectives visible, particularly for some younger activists, and generated possible courses of action.

The process' wider impact remains uncertain. Participants generally reported feeling heard and valued, yet key political, planning and ownership actors did not attend. Their absence limited the opportunity to test proposed solutions against decision-making constraints and appeared to reinforce some initiative members' existing frustration and distrust. Ideas raised in the panels were not necessarily taken up; concerns about renewed co-optation may have constrained the initiative's willingness to experiment despite its continuing motivation. Given the small and uneven post-panel survey response, the evidence does not support a strong claim that the process changed attitudes or planning decisions. Its clearest contribution was to clarify problems and develop recommendations whose practical effect will depend on engagement with formal planning processes and decision-makers.

7.7. Key takeaways

This report has focussed on whether and how the implementation of the deliberative processes generated actual changes for the individuals, groups and institutions involved, as well as how it advances the capacity of niche level groups to capture the attention and support in the society. The report has examined the implementation of the project's deliberative interventions and explored how and what kind of change participation in these processes may have contributed to.

This section draws out the patterns that recur across the six cases and what they suggest about the impact of deliberation. The panels mainly reached people who were already politically active (Tartu, Barcelona, Espoo, Alpujarra), often with a high level of education (Barcelona, Espoo, Alpujarra).Younger people were hard to reach (Tartu, Espoo, Alpujarra), and where they did take part, they sometimes held back while longer-standing members spoke more (Turin, Vienna). Vulnerable groups did not take part themselves: they were either represented by organisations working with them (Barcelona, Turin, Vienna, Tartu,

Alpujarra) or not reached at all (Espoo). Lack of time remained the main barrier to participation (Tartu, Barcelona, Alpujarra). Finding suitable meeting times was a trade-off: daytime meetings suited professionals and officials, while residents (excluding pensioners) needed other times (Tartu, Espoo).

The presence of decision-makers also mattered. Where municipal and other institutional actors took part, mutual understanding between them and the initiatives grew (Tartu, Turin, Barcelona). Where key decision-makers stayed away, the panels had little chance to address conflicts with them or to test proposals against the constraints of decision-making (Alpujarra, Vienna). Their absence could also reinforce existing frustration and distrust (Vienna).

Within these limits, deliberation did three things. Firstly, it made differences in perspectives visible and open to discussion, without necessarily resolving them (Tartu, Barcelona, Turin, Vienna). Participants came to better understand the constraints behind each other's positions and how their knowledge, roles and capacities could be combined to make change possible (Tartu, Barcelona, Turin). This meant that some responses on the feasibility of the sustainable transition became somewhat less optimistic (Tartu, Turin), possibly reflecting a more realistic view of the structural conditions for change rather than weaker commitment. Secondly, it reframed problems. Participants developed a more systemic and shared understanding of the challenge, and the way they defined the problem shifted (Barcelona, Turin, Alpujarra). Thirdly, it built relationships. The panels brought together actors who rarely work together, created or deepened contacts and laid a basis for future cooperation (Tartu, Turin, Alpujarra). None of the cases showed a clear shift in general attitudes and none demonstrated institutional transformation within the assessment period; rather, the panels produced shared visions, prioritised actions and pointed out possible pathways to change. Whether this groundwork leads to action remains uncertain. In all six cases, participants gained new awareness and ideas but by the end of the deliberation, these had not yet turned into commitments or decisions. Implementation depends on continuity and follow-up, on resources and on the willingness of public authorities to act. Without visible results, deliberation risks reinforcing scepticism about participation.

Across the six case studies, expert validations broadly confirmed the relevance, coherence and potential of the deliberative processes, their findings and proposed pathways for change. Experts particularly valued sustained engagement through multiple panels, dialogue between experts and non-experts, role play, participatory system mapping and the development of concrete, prioritised recommendations. They generally considered the identified systemic dynamics and proposed actions relevant, while providing additional insights that strengthened the analysis, including the importance of power relationships, political and institutional conditions, social justice, data governance and the structural barriers affecting underrepresented groups. However, recurring methodological and participatory limitations were identified. These included the underrepresentation of young people, vulnerable groups and other less-heard residents, limited involvement of institutional decision-makers, and system maps that were sometimes too complex or abstract to translate into practical action. Experts recommended more targeted and adequately resourced recruitment, simpler communication and visualisation methods, clearer links between participation and decision-making, and greater attention to local context and power relations.

The cases also offer lessons on methods. Concrete and interactive elements, including direct exchange with actors who could act on ideas, appear to have been the most productive. System mapping was demanding and could be hard to understand (Tartu, Turin, Espoo), yet it helped participants connect issues and identify the structural conditions behind the problems (Barcelona, Turin, Vienna). It also showed that different actors located the causes of current difficulties at different points in the system. Linking it to a

ToC helped turn discussion into concrete pathways and actions (Barcelona, Alpujarra). Role play helped participants take others' viewpoints (Barcelona, Turin, Espoo). However, the tools depended on skilled facilitation and a neutral setting helped actors engage across institutional boundaries (Tartu, Turin). External facilitation also changed the usual roles and dynamics among participants (Alpujarra). Beyond the panels, interviewees and experts saw a need for mediators or responsible actors to organise and facilitate participation (Espoo, Vienna). Participant fatigue grew over the process, and research tasks such as surveys and interviews added to the burden. Methods therefore need to balance rigour with accessibility, and evaluation needs to stay proportionate.

Timing also shapes impact. On the one hand, the process has to fit the participants' timing: panels and research tasks have to suit the availability of the residents and initiatives involved. On the other hand, it has to fit the timing of decisions: participation has to start before major decisions are made or political positions are fixed, so that deliberative outcomes can still shape them. Timing is therefore a key condition for connecting deliberation with practical action.

For public authorities, the cases point to four lessons. Firstly, involve people early, before decisions are made or positions are fixed, and make clear who is responsible for organising participation (Espoo). Secondly, show participants how their contributions are used since a sense of impact motivates participation and its absence breeds scepticism (Tartu, Espoo). Thirdly, take part in deliberation because the absence of decision-makers limits what panels can achieve (Alpujarra, Vienna). Fourthly, reach under-represented groups through targeted recruitment and suitable meeting times (Tartu, Espoo), bearing in mind that organisations cannot fully substitute for residents' own voices (Barcelona).

However, these conclusions have limits. Survey samples were small, longer-term impacts cannot yet be assessed and changes are hard to attribute to the deliberative process alone. The conclusions therefore rest mainly on qualitative evidence and show tendencies and plausible pathways rather than demonstrated impact. The six cases suggest that deliberative panels can make differences visible, reframe problems and build relationships. Their longer-term impact depends on who takes part and on whether public authorities and initiatives carry the results forward.

8. APPENDICES

8.1 Access survey(s)

8.1.1 Survey for non-attendants

1. What is the main reason you cannot or prefer not to attend?
(choose all that apply)

☐ Time is not suitable

☐ Location is difficult to access (transport connections, distance)

☐ Access is not suitable for my needs (wheelchair, pushchair, bicycle places, parking - please circle or add……)

☐ I am a carer (child, elderly, ill, disabled etc) which prevents joining

☐ The meeting is not in a language I can speak sufficiently

☐ I am not comfortable participating in group discussions

☐ Not interested in the topic

☐ Topic would create conflict

☐ [ONLY IF SOME PARTICIPANTS ONLINE - Problems connecting online (weak internet, unfamiliar platform)

Other: _____

2. Would any of the following make it easier for you to participate in future panels?
Checkboxes (choose all that apply)

☐ Online/remote participation option

☐ Different time or day

☐ Different location

☐ Transport support

☐ Childcare support

☐ Clearer information before the event

☐ Accessibility accommodations (please specify……)

☐ Nothing would change my decision

☐ Other:……

3. Is there anything else that would help you feel more included or able to participate?
(short text)

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8.1.2 Survey version for attending participants, if carried out at the beginning of the event

Please assess if any of the following issues apply to you when planning your attendance of the panel.

1. Issues related to access or connection to the panel (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Travel distance is very long
   ☐ Venue is hard to reach by public transport
   ☐ Problems with parking/mobility
   ☐ ONLY IF THIS WAS AN AVAILABLE OPTION: Problems connecting online (weak internet, unfamiliar platform)
   ☐ I do not foresee any problems with this
   ☐ Other: _____
2. Issues related to time or duration (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Event time clashes with work or care duties
   ☐ Event is too long/too intense

☐ Too short notice to prepare
☐ I do not expect any problems with time or duration

☐ Other: _____

3. Issues related to costs (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Travel to the event or accommodation is expensive
   ☐ It is difficult to book unpaid time off
   ☐ Lack of childcare support
   ☐ Difficulties related to needed equipment or materials
   ☐ I do not foresee any problems with this

   ☐ Other: _____

4. Issues affecting access to information about the event and its clarity (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Info in the invitation was unclear, too technical or used specialist language
   ☐ Info in the invitation was in a language I do not master sufficiently
   ☐ No advance materials or context provided which made participation more difficult
   ☐ I could not access digital materials
   ☐ Information was clear and sufficient
   ☐ Other: _____

5. Issues related to language or communication (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Translation/interpretation unavailable
   ☐ Discussion seems potentially too fast or complex
   ☐ I would not feel confident speaking in the main language of the event
   ☐ Everything seems inclusive and clear
   ☐ Other: _____

6. Issues related to accessibility or special needs (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Venue lacks ramps / accessible toilets
   ☐ There are no captioning or assistive technology
   ☐ Dietary needs are not met
   ☐ All needs are met
   ☐ Other: _____

7. How would you describe your overall accessibility experience? (choose one)
   ☐ Easy and inclusive
   ☐ Somewhat difficult
   ☐ Very difficult
   ☐ If difficult, please tell us why_____

Country / region: _____ Gender: ___ Age: ___ Accessibility needs (if any): ___

8.1.3 Survey version for attending participants, end of the event

1. Were there any difficulties attending or connecting to the panel? (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Travel distance was too long
   ☐ Venue was hard to reach by public transport
   ☐ Problems with parking/mobility
   ☐ ONLY IF THIS WAS AN AVAILABLE OPTION: Problems connecting online (weak internet, unfamiliar platform)
   ☐ No problems/easy access
   ☐ Other: _____
2. Did the time or duration make participation difficult? (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Event time clashed with work or care duties
   ☐ Event too long/too intense
   ☐ Too short notice to prepare
   ☐ No issues
   ☐ Other: _____
3. Did costs affect your participation? (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Travel or accommodation was too expensive
   ☐ Difficult to book unpaid time off
   ☐ Lack of childcare support
   ☐ Equipment or materials were needed, and this caused difficulties
   ☐ No issues
   ☐ Other: _____
4. Was information about the event accessible and clear? (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Info in the invitation was unclear, too technical or used specialist language
   ☐ Info in the invitation was in a language I do not master sufficiently
   ☐ No advance materials or context provided which made participation more difficult
   ☐ I could not access digital materials
   ☐ Information was clear and sufficient
   ☐ Other: _____
5. Did language or communication affect participation? (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Translation/interpretation unavailable
   ☐ Discussion was too fast or complex
   ☐ I was not confident speaking in the main language of the event
   ☐ Communication was inclusive and clear
   ☐ Other: _____
6. Were your accessibility needs considered? (choose all that apply)
   ☐ Venue lacked ramps / accessible toilets
   ☐ There was no captioning or assistive technology

☐ Dietary needs not met

☐ All needs were met

☐ Other: _____

7. How would you describe your overall accessibility experience? (choose one)

☐ Easy and inclusive

☐ Somewhat difficult

☐ Very difficult

☐ If difficult, please tell us why (optional): _____

Country / region: _____ Gender: ___ Age: ___ Accessibility needs (if any): ___

8.2 Observation sheets

1	Date / Location	
2	Duration	
3	Number of participants and organizers	
4	What is the layout of the room like and in what ways it does or does not support the aims of the panels, participatory approaches in particular?	
5	Methods: Which methods of interaction are used? (e.g. lecture with Q&A session, World Café, etc. - document the process here)	
6	Linguistic patterns: Are there visible language barriers (e.g. academic jargon, slang etc)? Are participants using different languages? Is clear language used or are there problems with this (what kind?) Any other notable linguistic patterns	
7	Communication and discussion culture: Which communication and decision rules, if any, are established and how?	

	Does the moderation team try to contribute to a positive, appreciative culture of discussion and debate? In what ways? How are the organisers handling the changes and difficulties? How flexible is the moderation team (spontaneous changes)?	
8	Presentations and input: How is the scientific (or other central) input framed by the presenters? Is the scientific input presented without own opinion, and framed neutrally? Are the interest groups sharing their knowledge and experience without imposing their own take on this? How is the input received by the participants (as information, with concern, as an opinion of the presenter, etc.) and how is this observable?	
9	Creating motivation and commitment: What means and methods does the project team use to maintain/increase the motivation and commitment of the participants? Other remarks related to creating motivation and commitment	
10	How motivated are the participants? Use of smartphones / laptops for other purposes Active listening Are there clear signs of fatigue or resignation in some moments/ from a specific moment on? Other notes on motivation for participation	
11	Pragmatism and emotions:	

	Which topics are discussed pragmatically? Which topics are emotionalized/ing? How are emotions expressed? How are emotions received? How are emotions dealt with (by the team in particular)?	
12	Hierarchy / proportions of the conversation: Are there persons who speak longer and/or louder than others and what is their background/position? In what context does this occur? Are there people who assert their opinion, take on more dominant roles? Are there participants who hardly ever speak up? Are there views that are repeated later in the conversations?	
13	Verbal expression: Do people dare to express themselves even if their views are unpopular or unexpected? How do others respond in such cases? Are there cases of… Interruptions? Transgressions (what?)? Verbal assaults? Irony? Any other restrictions or digressions in relation to self expression or behaviour How are these received?	
14	Exclusions: Are some groups or individuals clearly left out of certain discussions, particularly those where their input is crucial (e.g youth left out of a discussion	

	where they are seen as the source of issues/problems etc)	
15	Highlights / breakthroughs in plenary or group discussion: Do participants succeed in understanding the scientific or other key input (and how is this understanding noticeable)? Do the participants manage to work out results, solutions, compromises, etc.? How are decisions made (consensus, majority, etc.)? Are efforts made to create an equal playing field to the opinions of all present, what methods for that are used?	
16	Are there signs of external influence and are these addressed?	
17	Dealing with conflicts and intense differences of opinion: What kind of conflicts are there? (differences of opinion, criticism, resistance) What are controversial issues? What are the different points of view? What are the consequences of conflict? (e.g. is there an agreement, adjustment of the process)	
18	Is the decision-making process transparent - whose opinions make it to the final discussions and documents and is this directly addressed?	
19	Access: Do participants address the selection process - if so, how? Is it discussed who is there and who is not?	

	Are there references to other deliberative processes, citizens' councils, participatory processes etc.?	
20	Are there delays, e.g. with the management of time, or issues with coverage of topics?	
21	Most important findings	
22	Further notes and/or any other issues	

8.3 Pre-/post-panel survey

	Question	Format
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC		
0	CODE TO LINK THE PRE- AND POST-PANEL SURVEY on the individual level	001etc - PLEASE CREATE A CODE SHEET TO ATTRIBUTE THE SAME CODE FOR EACH RESPONDENT IN THE POST-PANEL SURVEY
1	Age	
2	Gender	
3	Education	a. Early childhood education / no education b. Primary education c. Lower secondary education d. Upper secondary education e. Post-secondary non-tertiary education f. Short-cycle tertiary education g. Bachelor or equivalent h. Master or equivalent i. Doctoral or equivalent
4	Employment	a. Unemployed b. Self-employed c. Employed and working for an employer d. In full time education e. Retired

	Question	Format
		f. On maternity/paternity leave or military service g. Other……
5	Compared to the average household in your country, would you say your household's income is…	a. Considerably below average b. Below average c. About average d. Above average e. Considerably above average
6	Ethnicity	……
7	In politics, people sometimes talk of "left" and "right". Using the scale below, where would you place yourself on the political spectrum?	(Left)1→2→3→4→5→6→7→8→9→10(Right)
CO-SUSTAIN relevant questions		
9	How important an issue do you consider climate change to be among the challenges of our time?	a. A distraction from important issues b. Not particularly important c. Neither important or unimportant d. Quite important e. Most important challenge of our time f. Not sure
9a	To what extent do you consider a sustainable transition possible?	a. Completely impossible b. Somewhat doubtful c. Somewhat possible d. Entirely possible e. Not sure
10	Do you think the type of activities that are taking place/have taken place here (deliberative panels etc) are useful for democratic transition towards sustainability?	Choose one: a. Useless or even obstructive b. Some limited use c. Considerably useful d. Vital for such transition

	Question	Format
10a	Which form of political participation do you consider effective for achieving sustainable transition to a greener society?	Choose three that you consider most effective: ☐ Democratic national elections ☐ Democratic local elections ☐ Petitions ☐ Donations by individuals ☐ Demonstrations and marches ☐ People's/citizen's assemblies ☐ Strikes ☐ Non-violent civil disobedience and similar protests ☐ Protests and actions with violence against property ☐ Violent protests ☐ Authoritarian leader/party decides ☐ Other, please write…… ☐ Not sure
11	Which forms of political participation are you yourself involved personally?	Tick all that apply: ☐ Democratic national elections ☐ Democratic local elections ☐ Petitions ☐ Donations by individuals ☐ Demonstrations and marches ☐ People's/citizen's assemblies ☐ Strikes ☐ Non-violent civil disobedience and similar protests ☐ Protests and action with violence against property ☐ Violent protests ☐ Authoritarian leader/party decides

	Question	Format
		☐ Other, please write……..
12	How do you assess your experience with new forms of political participation/deliberative processes, such as these panels?	Choose one: a. No interest in such activities b. No experience c. Limited experience d. Average experience e. Very experienced
13	In how many similar participatory processes for decision making have you participated in in the past?	Choose one: a. None b. 1–2 c. 2–5 d. More than 5 e. I do not know whether I have participated in such processes
14	What obstacles, if any, prevent you from actively participating in political life?	a. Lack of time (work, family, caregiving duties) b. Limited opportunities for meaningful engagement c. Lack of trust in civil society d. The present political reality in my country makes me feel disconnected e. Financial constraints f. Feeling that one's participation has no impact g. Fear of conflict or negative social consequences h. Health issues or disabilities i. Limited digital skills (for online participation) j. Other (please specify)…… k. I already participate actively in political processes

	Question	Format
14a	What do you think prevents other people (the general public) from participating actively in political life?	a. Lack of time (work, family, caregiving duties) b. Limited opportunities for meaningful engagement c. Lack of trust in civil society d. The present political reality in my country makes me feel disconnected e. Financial constraints f. Feeling that one's participation has no impact g. Fear of conflict or negative social consequences h. Health issues or disabilities i. Limited digital skills (for online participation) j. Other (please specify)..... ..... k. People already participate sufficiently in political processes
14b	Who do you think are the worst affected by such obstacles?	…… …… ……
CASE STUDY QUESTIONS		
15	What do you think the [case study initiative] contributes to?	Tick all that apply ☐ I have no idea ☐ Sustainable transition ☐ Climate change mitigation/adaptation ☐ Improving standard of living ☐ Improving opportunities to spend free time

	Question	Format
		☐ Improving communication between people ☐ Creating a community ☐ Improving collaboration between decision-makers ☐ Strengthening democracy ☐ Other……
16	How important do you consider the [case study initiative] for sustainable transition?	Choose one: a. No potential to bring about or contribute to change b. Limited potential for bringing about or contributing to change c. Likely has potential to bring about or contribute to change d. Considerable potential to contribute to change e. Has already contributed to change
17	Do you use or plan to use any participatory methods in your work?	a. Definitely would not use b. No plans to use c. No but plan to use probably d. No, but plan to use definitely e. Yes, already use some f. Yes already do all the time
17a	Why have you given this answer?	…… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… ……

	Question	Format
18	Please describe what do you think is the problem that this panel has come together to solve?	…… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… ……
19	What do you consider to be the main issues that have caused this problem?	…… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… ……
20	Please describe the future you would desire in relation to this issue	…… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… ……
21	Please describe how you imagine right now that this future can be achieved	…… …… …… …… …… …… …… …… ……

	Question	Format
		…… ……
	ORGANISERS of CAI	
22	How important do you consider involving other groups in the activities of your initiative?	Choose one: a. Not important at all b. Slightly important c. Quite important d. Very important
22a	Why have you given this answer?	…… …… …… ……
23	Has the project facilitated new collaborations or strengthened existing relationships within the initiative?	Choose one: a. None b. Yes, a couple c. Yes, multiple
23a	If so, who (e.g., between residents, policymakers, businesses, and researchers or others)?	…… …… …… ……
24	Please describe the decision making process in your initiative.	…… …… …… …… …… …… …… ……
24a	What, if anything, would you do differently if you could?	…… …… …… …… …… ……

	Question	Format
		…… ……
25	What has been your role in the initiative?	Choose one: a. I do not think I have contributed b. Gotten involved in some activities c. Gotten involved in most activities d. Taken the lead e. Supported others from the sidelines in other ways, which…… f. Other……
25a	Is there anything more/else you would like to do and what has prevented you from doing this so far?	…… …… …… …… …… …… …… ……
26	What do you think of the current local or regional policy-makers approaches to this CAI and its goals?	…… …… …… …… …… …… ……
26a	What, if anything, would you change in these?	…… …… …… ……
27	What do you think about the current way of working with different stakeholders related to this [case study]?	…… …… …… …… …… ……

	Question	Format
27a	What changes, if any, would you make to improve how these stakeholders work together?	…… …… …… …… ……

8.4 Tables of results from the pre- and post-surveys for the Spanish case study

Table 1. Ranking of the forms of political participation

(Respondents rank the forms of participation in order of importance by assigning numbers from 1 to 11. The scores awarded have been totalled, so that the lowest scores indicate the greatest importance. If one of the items was not selected, it was automatically assigned 11th place.)

Choice	Priority of forms of political participation	Score
1st	Non-violent civil disobedience and protests	104
2nd	Demonstrations and marches	110
3rd	Citizens' assemblies	118
4th	Petitions	142
5th	State elections	173
6th	Strikes	178
7th	Individual donations	182
8th	Local elections	232
9th	Protests and property damage	232
10th	Violent protests	267
11th	Decision by an authoritarian leader/party	271

Table 2. Forms of political participation in which respondents state they take part

Forms of political participation in which they take part	Times selected
Local elections	28
State elections	27
Demonstrations and marches	25
Citizens' assemblies	21
Strikes	17
Petitions	15

Forms of political participation in which they take part	Times selected
Non-violent civil disobedience and protests	10
Individual donations	9
Protests and actions against property	3

Table 3. Reported barriers for political participation

Barriers to political participation	Times selected
Lack of time (work, family, caregiving duties)	18
The current political reality in my country makes me feel politically disconnected	10
None – Actively participates	7
Feeling that participation has no impact	7
Lack of trust in civil society	2
Fear of conflict or negative social consequences	2
Lack of spaces to participate politically	1
Economic constraints	1
Health problems or disabilities	1
Limited digital skills (for online participation)	1

Table 4. Answers selected to the question 'What do you think Energies Compartides al Raval contributes?'

Contributions perceived to be made by the CAI	Times selected
Community building	25
Sustainable transition	21
Easing the cost of living	10
Climate change mitigation/adaptation	10
Strengthening democracy	9
I don't know	3
Other	2

Table 5. Answers selected to the question 'What do you think Energies Compartides al Raval contributes?'

(More than 1 option selected by 2 people)

Perceived impact of the CAI on a just transition	Times selected
Probably has the potential to cause or contribute to change	14

Perceived impact of the CAI on a just transition	Times selected
Considerable potential to contribute to change	11
Limited potential to cause or contribute to change	5
Has already contributed to change	1
Not answered	1
No potential to cause or contribute to change	0

8.5 Pre-/post-panel interview

Dear Mrs/Mr.

Firstly we would like to express our appreciation and gratitude for taking time both for this interview as well as the subsequent deliberation panel today.

Thank you so much for joining us today and for taking the time to be a part of this deliberation panel. Your insights and opinions are truly appreciated, and we're excited to hear your thoughts.

Therefore, we have some more specific questions aiming to go in-depth with regard to your experiences and opinions with regard to novel forms of political participation (such as citizen assemblies and …) and citizen empowerment.

We would like to record this interview for later transcription. Is this okay for you? This data will be only used anonymously for later analysis within the CO-SUSTAIN project.

	Question	Probing Sub-questions
1.	There are different ways to be (socially and) politically active. How would you describe your role as a citizen?	Have you ever been active in any of these ways? If so, can you give some concrete examples across the years?

	Question		Probing Sub-questions
	2.	Do you have personal / professional experience with different forms of political participation?	If you have, what kind of pol.part.? Could prompt with "such as…" (Ekman's 4 categories or other examples to show the spectrum of political participation, but ONLY if the person does not come up with anything) IF ACTIVE: How did this journey start? How did you like this experience? What did you not like? Was it useful? Was it a waste of time…? IF NOT ACTIVE: what do you think are the reasons people do not often find it possible to engage with politics? What about you?
	3.	Which forms - if any - of activism do you believe to be the most effective, useful or democratic?	Why? Any recent examples you have come across which exemplify this conclusion?
	4. 5. 6.	What are the biggest barriers for you to engage politically? What would motivate you to engage more in things that matter to you? What would you need to be more active?	If the respondent does not come up with any, suggest: time, disappointment in politics (why?), … Please give some concrete examples that come to mind when thinking of this topic
	7.	What do you think stops other people from engaging politically?	Why do you think so?
	8.	Do you think politics needs to change - and if so, in what ways?	Describe some examples Have you come across any new, innovative/novel forms of political participation?
	9.	What are your expectations with regard to the deliberation process you will participate in?	If the respondent does not come up with any, suggest examples.

	Question	Probing Sub-questions
	10. Please define what is the problem in your opinion that this panel has come together to solve	
	11. What do you consider to be the main issues that have caused the problem you are discussing/trying to solve?	
	12. Please describe the future you would desire in relation to this issue	
	13. Please describe the pathways of achieving this future that you can imagine right now	

8.6 Retrospective interview

Dear Mrs/Mr.

Firstly we would like to express our appreciation and gratitude for taking time both for this interview as well as for joining us again and for taking the time to be a part of the deliberation panels. We valued your insights and opinions before the first panel very much, and we're very grateful that you are willing to give your time again for the final interview on your experiences during this process.

Once again, we would like to record this interview for later transcription if this suits you.

This data will only be used anonymously for later analysis within the CO-SUSTAIN project.

	Question	Probing/follow-up Sub-questions
	1. There are different ways to be (socially and) politically active. How would you describe your role as a citizen?	

	Question	Probing/follow-up Sub-questions
	2. Have your experiences during the panels influenced your thinking about how to be politically active?	If so, how?
	3. Which forms of activism do you believe to be the most effective, useful or democratic?	Why? Do you think participating at the panels has changed your view on this? How?
	4. What are the biggest barriers for you to engage politically?	
	5. What would motivate you to engage more in things that matter to you?	
	6. What would you need to be more active in these processes?	
	7. What do you think stops other people from engaging politically?	Why do you think so?
	8. Has participating at the panels changed your view on what these reasons are?	If so, give some examples why.
	9. Do you think politics needs to change - and if so, in what ways?	
	10. Has your participation at the panels influenced how you think about the need for political change?	If so, how?
	11. We talked about your expectations with regard to the deliberation process during our previous interview. Was the process what you expected?	What was different?

	Question	Probing/follow-up Sub-questions
	12. What do you think was the problem the panels came together to solve?	Did this become clearer to you in the course of the panels? When and how?
	13. What do you consider to be the main issues that have caused this problem?	Has this understanding changed in the course of the panels you have participated in? If so, in what way and how did this happen?
	14. What do you currently think is the future you would desire in relation to this issue?	Has this dream/vision… changed in the course of the panels and if so, how?
	15. Please describe the pathways of achieving this future that you can imagine right now	Has this understanding of how to achieve this future changed in the course of the panels, and if so, how?
	16. What was your experience more generally with the deliberative practices and systems thinking?	Did you find the approach(es) helpful or unhelpful and if so, which ones and in what way?
	17. What did you think of the system mapping and causal loops?	Were they helpful or unhelpful in understanding the problem and its solutions? In what way?
	18. What about the games used in the course of the panels?	Were they helpful or unhelpful in understanding the problem and its solutions? In what way?
	19. (For people in CAI or other institutions) What kind of approaches have you found most useful for the CAI for achieving sustainable change?	Which approaches have not been useful or have made things more difficult?
	20. Have the panels helped or hindered your ability to include more individuals or cooperate with other institutions?	In what way?

	Question	Probing/follow-up Sub-questions
	21. Do you think you might incorporate some of the activities and approaches from the panel in your work in the CAI in the future?	If yes, which ones and how? If not, what are the main reasons for that?

8.7 Focus group discussion themes

Community and power

1. Did the atmosphere in the panels change how people related to each other? How?
2. Were the participants at the panels a close-knit group, or were some people left out some (or most) of the time? Describe your experiences.
3. How did it seem, was the way people treated each other at the beginning and by the end of the panels different? If so, what might have been different?

Deliberation and conflict

4. Do you think the panels influenced how the participants handled disagreement or conflict? Can you describe some specific instances or experiences, or any discussions that have given you this impression?
5. Did the panels change how you think about decision making /how decisions are discussed or made at your initiative?
6. What was difficult about deliberation?

Methods (CLD, Games, etc.)

7. Did any activities changed your thinking in any way? If so, which? Which activity changed your thinking the most? Why?
8. Did systems mapping (CLD, creating loops) affect how you understand your initiative, problems, or the context analysed?
9. Did any method feel confusing or unhelpful, or make it harder to understand the problem or its possible solutions?

Systems thinking and sustainability

10. Did your understanding of what might cause the problem you were addressing change? How?
11. Do you see your initiative/problem/actions more clearly as part of a wider context or system than you did before the panels? What changed and how, if you think there has been a change?
12. Have the panels changed how important you think climate/sustainability are in understanding the problem? Explain please.

Outcomes and action

13. Has anything specific changed in relation to the problems discussed or some other related aspect (which)?
14. Are you planning any specific actions as a result of the panels? Are there new collaborations or networks emerging?
15. Have any of the skills acquired during the panels made you feel more capable than before to influence change?

Critical reflection

16. What did NOT change despite the panels?
17. What barriers do you feel there still are to achieving change or overcoming the discussed problems?
18. What would need to happen for deeper change?

8.8 Expert validation questionnaire

Step	Criteria	x / n.a.
1. Process Design Integrity	1a. Clear and suitable purpose	
	1b. Clear and unbiased framing	
	1c. Suitable design	
	1d. Procedural design involvement	
	1e. Transparency	
	1f. Representativeness and inclusiveness	
2. Deliberative experience	2a. Neutrality, inclusivity and balance of facilitation	
	2b. Accessible, neutral, and transparent use of online tools	
	2c. Breath, diversity, clarity, and relevance of the evidence and stakeholders	
	2d. Quality of judgement	

Step	Criteria	x / n.a.
	2e. Perceived knowledge gains by participants	
	2f. Accessibility and equality of opportunity to speak	
	2g. Respect and mutual comprehension	
	2h. Free decision-making and response	
	2i. Respect for members' privacy	
3. Pathways to impact	3a. Influential recommendations	
	3b. Response and follow up	

8.9 Impact story guiding questions

Context
Who accessed the panel? Who was absent?
What happened during deliberation that could be linked to change?
What did this appear to change?
What do the surveys show in terms of change?
What change is described in retrospective interviews or what emerges from pre/post interview comparisons? What has become more prevalent, do people mention change explicitly?
Is change described or notable in focus group discussions or during expert validation?
NB! -Do you have supporting evidence (extracts from interviews, numbers from survey data, observation/reflection sheets etc) - Can you identify the mechanism? (e.g. why did understanding of x increase?

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