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Training Manual

ECO CHAMPIONS



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Coordinator: CONNECT BRUSSELS

Partners: COGETHER, THE BALKAN FORUM, BOND BETER LEEF OP MILIEU, la bien paga, CRHACK LAB F4D

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Introduction

BECOMING ECO CHAMPIONS

Engaging Every Voice in Climate Participation

The Training Manual **"Becoming Eco Champions: Engaging Every Voice in Climate Participation"** is developed within the ECO-CHAMPIONS FOR HOUSEHOLD AND PUBLIC SPACES SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT CERV project to train facilitators tasked with organizing and supporting **local citizen engagement** activities related to **climate action.** The manual aims to build facilitators' capacities to engage citizens—especially those who are least able to participate—in meaningful and inclusive deliberation.

The ECO-CHAMPIONS project aims at empowering communities to take action on sustainable waste management—from food to clothing and household goods. By actively engaging citizens of all ages, local authorities, and community actors, the project promotes practical solutions at both the household and regional levels. Through participatory workshops, awareness campaigns, and cross-border collaboration among **six partner organizations** from Belgium, Kosovo, Italy, Spain, and Greece, ECO-CHAMPIONS aims to foster a culture of responsible consumption and waste reduction.
The project will directly involve over 2,000 participants and reach more than 7,000 indirectly across Europe.

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Manual

Objectives

This manual supports **facilitators** in:

- Understanding the barriers to **citizen participation** when it comes to **Waste Management**
- Applying the principles of **experimentalist democracy theory**
- Using **socially inclusive** and gender-balanced approaches
- Designing and delivering **effective and equitable engagement processes** for all the members of society, regardless their age, sex, geographical residence, etc.



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Who we are

CONSORTIUM PARTNERS

Connect Brussels (Connect Your City – Brussels ASBL) is a youth nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering young people (13 – 30 years old) through creativity, civic engagement, and social inclusion. Based in Jette, Brussels, we provide a safe and dynamic space where young people can develop skills, strengthen their mental well-being, and actively participate in their communities.

Co2gether is a social organization based in Patras, covering the Region of Western Greece. It supports and networks local authorities, non-profit organizations, private companies, research and educational institutions. It provides care to vulnerable groups (e.g. older people, families with economical difficulties, patients who have and do not have health insurance, children coming from Roma communities and people who are incarcerated) living in rural or remote areas.

The Balkan Forum on Regional Cooperation is a cross-sectoral platform for advancing sustainable and participatory development. It promotes a resource efficient, greener, and more competitive Balkan region that is based on collaboration and diversity. The Balkan Forum aims to create a new vision for the Western Balkans based on economic integration, prosperity, and sustainable peace.

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Who we are

CONSORTIUM PARTNERS

Bond Beter Leefmilieu is the largest network of sustainable organisations in Flanders, uniting citizens, policymakers, and companies. Core goals include climate neutrality, circular resource use, ecosystem resilience, and less environmental nuisance. They empower member organisations, mobilize citizens, and guide government policy for a just transition.

La Bien Pagá Espacio Escénico (LBP) is an association aimed at supporting the socio-educational integration and cultural inclusion of people with fewer opportunities and vulnerable groups through culture and arts. The association support disadvantaged groups including: children and school students with learning disabilities, low-skilled and low qualified young and adults, migrant families and refugees, ethnic minorities and offenders.

CRHACK LAB FOLIGNO 4D opens portals of possibility through digital and cultural innovation. Founded in 2019, it's a volunteer-led organization promoting positive use of technology. It fosters digital culture, cultural welfare, and energy awareness, especially for younger generations. Their projects empower people with the skills needed for the future. They inspire "addiction to positive thinking" and the dream of connected consciousness.

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Experimentalist Democracy Theory

Experimentalist democracy is a **governance approach & methodology** based on:

- Continuous feedback and learning,
- Inclusive participation
- Peer-to-peer accountability
- Iterative problem-solving

Instead of top-down policymaking, experimentalist democracy creates deliberative spaces where citizens, especially marginalized groups, are empowered to co-define problems and co-develop solutions.

It is a methodology participation and a **Bottom-up approach**, where citizens and public officials meet and speak together about public problems.

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Experimentalist Democracy Theory

This methodology leads the ECO-CHAMPIONS project in all its activities, because it aims **to engage all the citizens in the waste management practices**, especially the ones who are usually left behind: older people, people with economic difficulties, people with disability, young people, people that live in remote and rural areas.

Involving diverse citizens strengthens legitimacy, relevance, and creativity in local responses to climate challenges. It fosters:

- Local ownership of climate initiatives
- Resilience through trust and collective responsibility
- Innovation through inclusive dialogue
- Inclusion in designing or claiming waste management practices accessible for all

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Ecosystem community Based Management

Beyond the Experimentalist democracy, ECO-CHAMPIONS is also built on the **Ecosystem community Based Management (ECBM).**

The Ecosystem Community-Based Management (ECBM) is an approach that involves **local communities in decision-making processes.**

This methodology takes into consideration the needs and rights of local communities to make **sustainable practices** and improve ecological environment with green practice such as circular economy.



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Identifying Excluded Populations

Vulnerable groups are defined as populations who have **limited access** to resources due to various factors like age, disability, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

These may include:

- Low-income households
- Migrants and ethnic minorities
- Women and gender-diverse individuals
- Older people
- Youth without institutional representation
- People with disabilities
- Rural populations
- Those with limited digital or language skills
- People with low education



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Waste Management Barriers

Communities who are least able to participate in civic life often also face **unique challenges** when it comes to sustainable waste management. These barriers are not only logistical, but also social, informational, and psychological—and are closely tied to systemic exclusion. The barriers they face can be:

- **Structural** (lack of access to facilities, poor waste collection services)
- **Cultural** (norms and stigmas around waste-related activities)
- **Informational** (lack of awareness and understanding of waste management)
- **Psychological** (feelings of disempowerment, distrust, and fear of judgment)



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Structural Barriers

- Lack of access to proper waste facilities (e.g., no recycling bins in low-income areas or rural villages, bins that are too high or difficult to open it, etc.)
- Infrequent or unreliable waste collection services in marginalized neighbourhoods
- Poor housing conditions that limit space for sorting or storing recyclables
- Limited access to healthy food, making food planning and waste reduction difficult

Cultural Barriers

- Cultural norms that see it as a government-only responsibility
- Stigma around certain waste-related tasks, especially for women or youth
- Distrust in institutions promoting sustainability, rooted in previous negative experiences
- Low or no education on environmental issues



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Informational Barriers

- Lack of awareness about how to manage food waste, reuse materials, or sort recyclables correctly
- Language gaps or inaccessible communication formats (e.g., written-only guides for low-literacy groups)
- Inconsistent messaging from authorities or services across regions

Psychological Barriers

- Feelings of disempowerment—believing individual actions "won't make a difference"
- Shame or fear of judgment around "doing it wrong" or being seen as poor
- Frustration from past failed initiatives or poorly designed systems



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Overcoming Barriers as a facilitator

While some structural barriers, like lack of infrastructure or unreliable waste collection, are beyond the immediate control of facilitators, there are still many actionable strategies that facilitators can employ to empower individuals and communities to overcome challenges.

- **Giving simple Information:** Design easy-to-understand materials, using visuals, symbols, and simple language.
- **Advocacy & Cooperation:** Collaboration with Municipalities, Institutions and Social Services. Co-host events. Peaceful protests. Involving the Traditional Media.
- **Give simple solution to the Community:** In remote and isolated areas, facilitators can give practical solutions and educate people, for instance how to recycle, how to do compost, or the importance of donating & reusing.
- **Inclusive communication:** Speak in a simple and inclusive way, use both male & female pronouns or even better the * . Use the language of the community and visuals that they can relate to.

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Effective Communication Strategies

How to speak to vulnerable groups:

- Use **clear, simple language** — Avoid words like “biodegradable,” “infrastructure,” or “circular economy.” , or if you use them, explain them in a simple way: biodegradable means that it will not pollute, infrastructure like buildings and roads, circular economy means an economy where we share, reuse and pollute as least as possible.
- **Ask for confirmation** by saying: “Does this make sense?” or “Should I explain it another way?”
- **Be informed about their cultures**, In some cultures, public praise can embarrass people, so you can offer recognitions in private.
- **Use respectful language**: don't say elderly or disabled, say older person or person with disability.

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Co2gether

Case Study

Co2gether has implemented in all its actions the **experimentalist democracy theory,** as it strictly cooperates with different entities, such as municipalities, NGOs, academias, universities, associations, religious institutions such as Orthodox Metropolises and so on.

Through signed **Memoranda of Understanding** with seven municipalities and various social services, the organization reaches remote and vulnerable areas across Western Greece each month.

These include mountainous villages, isolated households, Roma community camps, prisons, and regions affected by floods and fires.

Partner entities refer individuals in need, enabling Co2gether to deliver targeted support and inclusive outreach.

This case study is a great example for **facilitators** to build a sustainable synergy and strategy to reach vulnerable groups.

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Recommended Resources

- Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making – Kaner
- Gender & Inclusion Toolbox – CGIAR
- OECD Report: Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions



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“True progress happens when everyone is included in building a cleaner, fairer future.”

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