

## O.T4.3.

# Action Plan for Rural Development - Regional Distributed Bioeconomy Excellence Environments



Biz-up  
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## 1. Summary

After a short general introduction, this report shows the initial situation about participative governance in the project regions and the reached target groups through the co-creation workshops. The chapter 2.2. informs about the results of the co-creation workshops within three priorities: i) related to institutional capacity and skills development at the local/regional level; ii) new forms of rural-urban interaction developed within the co-creation workshops and iii) deploying local bioeconomies across the Danube Region through co-creation workshops. The output states additionally, who the main enablers of participative governance are, how the output can be transferred to other regions and which main target groups can make use of the output. The chapter 5 summarizes the lessons learnt from the co-creation workshops.

Therefore, the output resumes assets for an action plan on how the partner and related regions can develop participative governance models on their own in order to catalyse interdisciplinary cooperation between multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, the action plan serves as a basis for more multi-level governance in the Danube region, ranging from peri-urban to rural areas, and from national to local administration.

## 2. Description

### 2.1. Introduction

One of the main targets of the project GoDanuBio was strengthening institutional capacities to improve decision-making and administrative performance, increasing the involvement of civil society and local actors for effective policymaking and implementation, and enhancing cooperation and knowledge for better use of funding and developing needs-based funding instruments which are anchored within the EUSDR<sup>1</sup>. In order to increase the identity of civil society and local authorities and to involve them more in the development of the regions, a participative approach is necessary and useful. In the framework of WPT4 of GoDanuBio, capacity building and the implementation of participative governance have been developed to target the different actors and improve the socio-economic status of the Danube region.

Participative governance involves different stakeholders (citizens, local communities, NGOs, SMEs and other actors) in decision-making. It brings together people with different interests, opinions and experiences, thus increasing knowledge about the issue. Later decisions can build on this and are thus better prepared and secured. If all interested parties are given the opportunity to participate in a project that they can relate to, it increases the identification and satisfaction with the results of the project and with the region they belong to <sup>2</sup>.

#### 2.1.1. Participative governance in the project regions – initial situation in the regions

The process of participative governance is one of the essential processes when it comes to the transition from linear to circular bioeconomy. The involvement of the general public is crucial for that transition as well. The concept of bioeconomy is still not very well known among the population in all participating countries of the project. Furthermore, bioeconomy is still not considered as a topic that the general public can contribute something to.

A participative government can help to clarify the concept of bioeconomy in a direct way. Participative governance instruments only work if all participating parties meet on an equal footing and a trusting, and when a cooperative atmosphere has been established. Positions of power in the population must be eliminated in this process. This can be ensured above all at the local or regional level. Therefore, these instruments were applied in regional areas of the project countries as part of co-creation workshops.

Figure 1 shows the initial situation of participating governance in each of the project regions.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/EUSDR-ACTION-PLAN-SWD202059-final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> For more information read: GoDanuBio\_DT1.2.2 Macroregional framework conditions report and GoDanuBio DT4.1.1 Participative Governance Training Scheme ([4123734d12456ebbe29af07d8c0512baf2564912.pdf](https://danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/4123734d12456ebbe29af07d8c0512baf2564912.pdf) ([interreg-danube.eu](https://danube-region.eu/)); [a42ace7f85b7aeb809ea16e57687d1a2849d9e44.pdf](https://danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/a42ace7f85b7aeb809ea16e57687d1a2849d9e44.pdf) ([interreg-danube.eu](https://danube-region.eu/)))



Figure 1: Map of participative governance in the project regions

In Austria, Germany, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary, participative governance has already been implemented at a good level. This means that participative governance is already implemented and applied in many areas/systems. Nevertheless, there is still potential to expand participative governance in these countries as well. Particularly in the bioeconomy, it is not yet used to its full potential. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania, participative governance has been implemented at a medium level. In these countries, participative governance is already being used to some extent, but there are still many areas and stakeholders that have not yet been exposed to it. Thus, there is a relatively large potential for rolling out participative governance here. In Bulgaria and Serbia, as Figure 1 shows, participative government is not used on a regular basis. However, in Serbia the representatives from the local administration were very enthusiastic about learning and applying the participative approach. Specifically, identifying the opportunities for developing ideas and projects that may contribute to creating added value and further job opportunities in the region. They are also looking for partnerships with other stakeholders, specially from the private business sector. So, this process has been started and will fruitfully continue in the future.

### 2.1.2. Target group and persons reached through the co-creation workshops

Through several co-creation workshops, numerous organisations and administrative units were reached and familiarised with the concept of participative governance. In total 490 different institutions (Table 1) in the 10 project regions were involved in the project and 32 co-creation workshops have been conducted throughout the regions (**Fehler! Verweisquelle**

konnte nicht gefunden werden.). The larger the spot, the larger the area covered by the workshops.



Figure 2: Map of co-creation workshops in the project regions<sup>3</sup>

The methods of participative involvement were used to exchange knowledge between relevant actors in the bioeconomy. The interdisciplinary cooperation between policymakers and various stakeholders led to more cooperation in the regions and urban-rural cooperation. This developed a multi-level system with actors from regional policy, industry, science, and civil organisations working together to further develop the bioeconomy. The aim was to use the institutional capacities of the participating regions, to use participative governance as an instrument for pushing bioeconomy and to establish the methods of participative governance. The broad participation of actors from different levels at eye level has shown clear advantages of the method, therefore interdisciplinary participation will continue to be demanded by all players in the future.

Through this interdisciplinary cooperation between politics and research, support organisations, and the general public, active work has been done on future concepts in the regions to counteract demographic change. The concept of bioeconomy acted as a catalyst. In this sense, GoDanuBio has supported processes, which lead to an increase in the attractiveness of rural areas through participative governance and the exchange of knowledge between the actors involved.

<sup>3</sup> Croatia, Czech Republic and Slovenia did not provide information for this map, so the spots are not represented

Table 1: Target groups reached through the co-creation workshops<sup>4</sup>

| Target group/-s                               | BW <sup>5</sup> | BG        | HR        | CZ        | HU        | RO        | RS        | SK        | Si        | UA <sup>6</sup> | No.        |
|---|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|------------|
| Local Public Authority                        | 27              | 5         | 4         | 6         | 1         | 3         | 2         | 40        | 7         | 3               | 98         |
| Regional Public Authority                     |                 | 3         | 7         | 3         |           | 2         | 2         | 5         | 6         |                 | 28         |
| National Public Authority                     |                 | 5         | 3         | 4         | 6         | 4         | 2         | 3         | 3         |                 | 30         |
| Sectoral Agency                               |                 | 2         |           | 5         |           |           |           |           | 3         |                 | 10         |
| Interest Groups including NGOs                | 13              | 15        | 2         | 14        | 3         | 5         | 4         | 24        |           |                 | 80         |
| Infrastructure and (public) Service Providers | 1               | 2         |           |           |           |           | 2         |           | 3         |                 | 8          |
| Higher Education and Research                 | 27              | 4         | 4         | 9         |           | 4         | 4         | 4         | 2         |                 | 58         |
| Education/Training Centre and Schools         |                 | 1         | 1         |           |           |           | 1         |           |           |                 | 3          |
| Enterprises, excluding SME                    |                 | 4         | 1         | 1         | 4         | 1         |           |           | 3         |                 | 14         |
| SME   | 21              | 6         | 5         | 7         |           | 6         | 9         | 2         | 12        |                 | 68         |
| Business Support Organisations                | 27              | 5         | 6         | 3         |           | 18        | 7         |           | 4         | 2               | 72         |
| General Public                                |                 | 5         |           |           | 1         | 3         |           |           | 1         | 11              | 21         |
| <b>Target Groups reached</b>                  | <b>116</b>      | <b>57</b> | <b>33</b> | <b>52</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>46</b> | <b>33</b> | <b>78</b> | <b>44</b> | <b>16</b>       | <b>490</b> |

In total, 803 persons (Table 2: Reached persons through the co-creation workshops per project region) were familiarised with the methods of participative governance and with the bioeconomy and its opportunities in the participating regions.

Table 2: Reached persons through the co-creation workshops per project region

| Reached person through co-creation WS | Persons    |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Baden Württemberg (BW)                | 147        |
| Bulgaria (BG)                         | 57         |
| Croatia (HR)                          | 118        |
| Czech Republic (CZ)                   | 74         |
| Hungary (HU)                          | 15         |
| Romania (RO)                          | 107        |
| Serbia (RS)                           | 37         |
| Slovakia (SK)                         | 158        |
| Slovenia (SI)                         | 56         |
| Upper Austria (UA)                    | 34         |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>803</b> |

<sup>4</sup> The names of countries were abbreviated according the EU Nomenclature, due to the format of the table

<sup>5</sup> Baden-Württemberg

<sup>6</sup> Upper Austria



## **2.2. Priorities of the co-creation workshops**

### **2.2.1. Priority 1: Institutional capacity and skills development at the local/regional level**

Before the co-creation workshops, expectations on both sides (politics and society) were high. An active dialogue at eye level was expected. The experiences from the co-creation workshops show that the economic sector expects more openness from local administrations and policy makers: more openness to proposals and concrete actions, as well as inclusion in the decision-making process for concrete implementations. The most important step at this point is that citizens, businesses, and stakeholders are introduced to a common mechanism to know to whom and how they can address their wishes, needs, concerns, and suggestions and reach the responsible authority.

Public involvement is crucial for the establishment of a circular bioeconomy. The method of participative governance can make a great contribution to the dissemination of the bioeconomy and the anchoring of its possibilities in the population and is thus crucial on a regional level. In many project partner countries, the field of bioeconomy, especially new and alternative production using renewable biological resources, is still unknown amongst the general population. Therefore, all efforts of the government and policy makers are directed towards the economic society. Participative governance can inform the general public, inspire new projects, and accelerate their implementation through networking, through which the bioeconomy can be anchored in the broader community.

In particular, the heterogeneity of the stakeholders presents great opportunities to remarkable new perspectives after the exchange of views. This creates partnerships with policy and stakeholder communities that lead to the identification of development ideas and new projects that can contribute to value creation in the region as well as job creation.

However, bureaucratic structures recognise the benefits of involving citizens in decision-making processes, but they are reluctant to engage in such activities. The extra work involved, especially in introducing new processes, prevents change – which means that decisions continue to be made from above. However, if there are individuals within the system who manage to break out of the bureaucratic constraints, they can act as contact persons, interpreters and missionaries and motivate others to open up.

### **2.2.2. Priority 2: New forms of rural-urban interaction developed within the co-creation workshops**

The relationship between rural and urban areas as a result of a combination of complementarity and functional divisions of labour, is often viewed as a source of conflict of interests in the use of resources.

The elements of conflict have been identified in four specific areas:

- the level and efficiency of the prices of relevant products;
- the different market valuation of their land resources;
- the erosion of agricultural land, during its exploitation for the expansion of the city;

- the imposition of external factors.

This leads to a lack of public intervention, excessive use of resources which is far from an optimum from the point of view of “well-being” as a social complex. The problem then becomes how to move from a state of "conflict" of the city over the rural territory, to a state of cooperation and "symbiosis", as it spreads with the new role of the village, to preserve as a reserve its increasingly scarce land resources and production with ecological value, a role involving certain positive externalities in the direction of the city.

Most of the co-creation workshops dealt with this problem and tried to interconnect the local public authorities, local enterprises and the general public with regional and national institutions or public authorities. Table 3 gives an overview of all co-creation workshops which aimed to strengthen the cooperation between cities and their rural surroundings through bioeconomy. The workshop introduced good practices, possible ways for development (through programmes and projects) and finding cooperation among the audience.

*Table 3: Rural – urban interactions via co-creation workshops*

| <b>Project region</b> | <b>Topic of the co-creation WS</b>   | <b>Rural - urban interactions</b>   |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| Baden Wurttemberg     | Bioeconomy in the Alb-Donau district   | Approaches for a more sustainable economy through the intelligent use of biomass and residual materials, developing regional value chains with local administration |
| Baden Wurttemberg     | Circular bioeconomy with focus on carbon cycle and renewable energy generation and utilization in the Constance district | Approaches for a more sustainable economy, implementation of the bioeconomy on site of regional value chains to strengthen rural areas                              |
| Bulgaria              | Co-creation activities to diminish the effects of demographic change   | Local and regional public authority strengthen the local circular bioeconomy together with SMEs, NGOs, and the general public                                       |
| Bulgaria              | Fostering urban-rural interactions with stakeholders   | Activities aiming to improve the interactions between the rural and the urban regions in Bulgaria through the tools of circular bioeconomy                          |
| Bulgaria              | Bioeconomy transition  | Locate the position of all the parties on the way to bioeconomy – governance, business, and consumers   |
| Croatia               | Financing of bioeconomy projects   | Finding ways how to finance projects in rural areas   |
| Croatia               | Forest and wood biomass  | Engage local stakeholders and to connect them with business representatives in and outside the region   |
| Croatia               | Low-emission livestock production  | Engage local stakeholders and to connect them with business representatives in and outside the region   |
| Croatia               | Agricultural biomass   | Engage local stakeholders and to connect them with business representatives in and outside the region   |

|                |   |  |
|----------------|---|--|
| Czech Republic | Development of local economies through the use of renewable biological resources  | Transfer national knowledge about bioeconomy into local practice via participative governance and develop and run innovative bioeconomy-projects in the region                         |
| Czech Republic | Sustainable development of the national economy through the use of renewable biological resources   | Transfer national knowledge about bioeconomy into local practice via participative governance and find the use of the bioeconomy for innovative projects in the region                 |
| Hungary        | VidékLátó (VL, Translation: Rural Watch) programme definition   | Help activate the local communities, and dynamize local participative governance initiatives   |
| Romania        | Possible scenarios of development regional innovative ecosystems based on bioeconomy through clusters   | Rural-urban cooperation and smart specialization strategies  |
| Romania        | Circular bioeconomy-opportunities for the rural area  | Synergies of the policy fields related to rural and regional development, options for the use of bio-sources in a regional bioeconomy, business models for a regional bioeconomy       |
| Romania        | Bioeconomy and the sustainable development  | The interconnection of the bioeconomy with the 17 sustainable development goals is essential, mainly with the goals 8, 9, 11 and 17.   |
| Serbia         | Circular bioeconomy as a tool for development of the economy of Vojvodina - Bačka, South Bačka region, North Bačka                                  | Strengthen the local/regional circular bioeconomy and involve all relevant stakeholders as well as representatives of Quadruple Helix  |
| Slovakia       | How to support the functioning of Water Councils using the methodology of participative governance in the field of the Landscape Recovery Programme | Strengthen local connections across stakeholder from municipalities, communities, farmers, foresters, environmentalists and activists; support infrastructure in rural and urban areas |
| Slovenia       | Accelerating circular bioeconomy in Slovenia with the use of digital tools  | Fostering the bioeconomisation of regions and municipalities   |
| Slovenia       | Opportunities and sources of financing circular economy projects in the Podravje region   | Resources for financing projects on circular economy, particularly on bioeconomy   |
| Slovenia       | Supporting SMEs in their transition to circular (bio)economy  | Bring the stakeholders together to exchange good practices, present some of the business cases and make new business connections   |
| Upper Austria  | Mobility solutions for bicycles and pedestrians in Freistadt to strengthen the rural areas  | Interlink rural area of Freistadt via bicycle roads  |

### 2.2.3. Priority 3: Deploying local bioeconomies across the Danube Region through co-creation workshops

Table 4 provides a thematic overview of the topics addressed in the co-creation workshops in the Danube regions. In addition to the main topic of bioeconomy, cooperation between urban and rural areas, and the development of joint cooperation were a central concern in the workshops. The more diverse the participants were, the more comprehensive the results and the greater the desire for further cooperation. This suggests that more actors from different disciplines should be connected in the future through:

- Networking of public institutions, companies, and research institutions;
- More information on funding opportunities for bioeconomy projects;
- More cooperation in the field of research and development.

If this interdisciplinary approach is further developed via conscious and systemic policy-making, or through new Interreg or Horizon Europe projects, progress towards the bioeconomisation of some of the participating regions will be consolidated.

Table 4: Classification of the workshops

| Overall topic of the workshop | Amount |
|-------------------------------|--------|
| Bioeconomy                    | 15     |
| Cooperation and networking    | 11     |
| Sustainable mobility          | 3      |
| Projects funding              | 2      |
| Renewable energy              | 1      |

### 2.3. Main enablers

Key players are those who fulfil essential functions in society and are referred to as societal functional systems. Key functional systems are economy, education, culture, religion, security, legal system, and others. Politics is also a functional system, which is located separately at the municipal level because it has the task of setting the framework conditions for the other functional systems. At the municipal level federal and state policy can be relevant actors for finding good solutions and making decisions.

Major changes create new temporary functional systems, e.g. mobility, digitalisation, sustainability and bioeconomy, where technological progress opens doors to new opportunities and limits negative side effects.

Business organisations such as companies, business associations, business networks or clusters, but also chambers of commerce, educational institutions, business advocates and others, represent parts of the population and definitely need to be included in participative governance. Furthermore, a great heterogeneity of participating stakeholders leads to remarkable new perspectives in a participative process.

In concrete, an overview of the main enablers in each of the participating regions can be found in the “Implementation Plan for prospective actors for developing a sustainable and holistic circular bioeconomy” developed as output of WP2.

### 3. Geographical coverage and transferability

The roadmap for the introduction of participative governance processes developed in this project can be transferred to any other region and used as a template for the development of participative governance.

Figure 3 gives an overview of the different steps of participative governance and how the methodology can be implemented in other regions. The co-creation workshops can be used as best practice and show the benefits of participative governance.

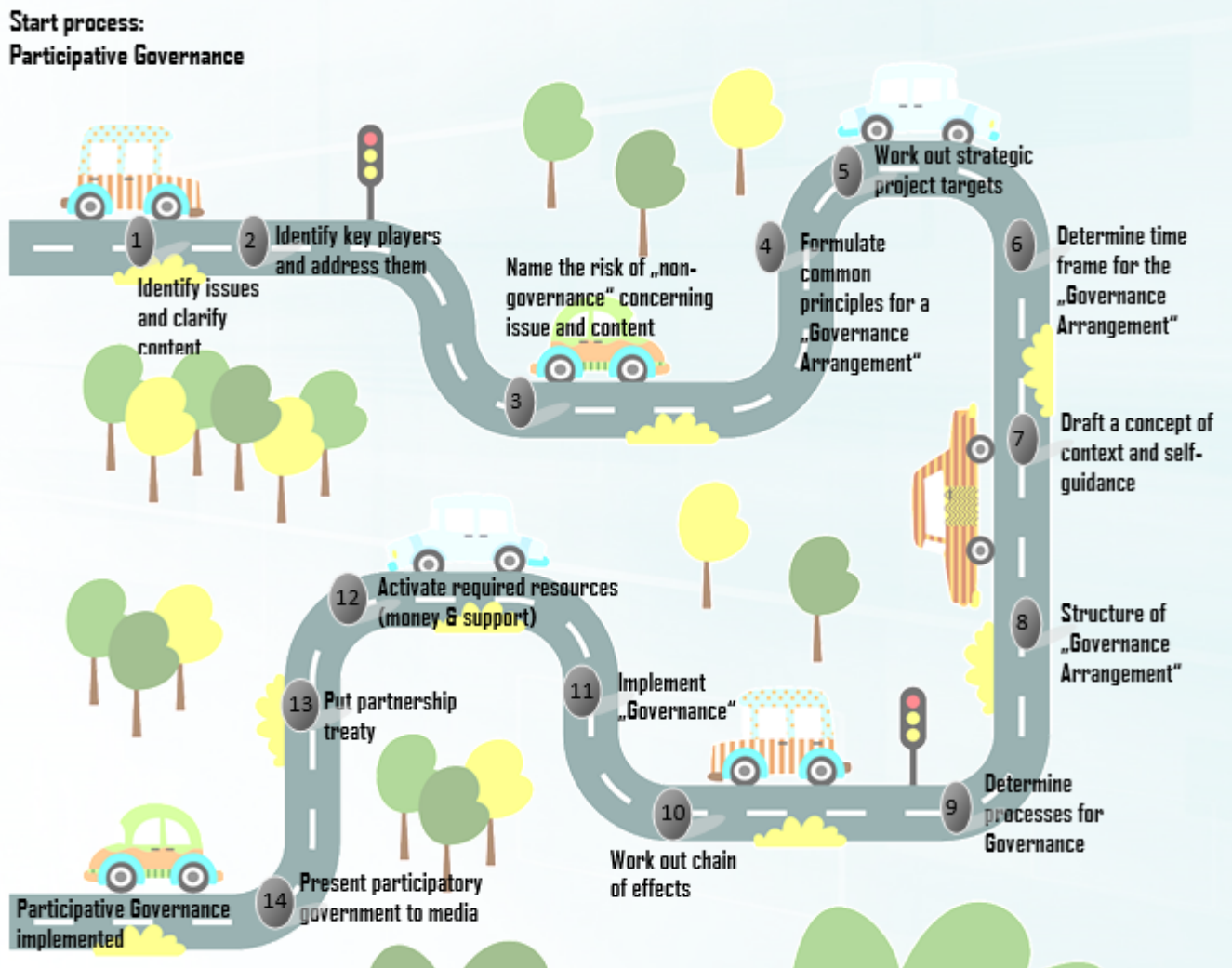


Figure 3: Roadmap for participative governance

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#### 4. Use of the output by target groups

For participative governance, the cooperation of public authorities with the rest of stakeholders (including the general public) is essential. Especially, if the bioeconomy is to be made known on a broad level and anchored with projects sustained in time.

GoDanuBio addressed well this mission, taking in consideration the reported numbers on the tables 1 and 5. Around 32% of the groups reached in the co-creation workshops<sup>7</sup> were public authorities, what indicates the qualitative and quantitative relevance of the outreach. Actually local, regional and national public authorities are often the main responsible bodies to initiate participative processes related to policy-making.

*Table 5: Public authorities reached through the co-creation workshops compared to overall target value*

| <b>Target group</b>       | <b>Target group description</b>  | <b>Target value<sup>8</sup></b> | <b>Target group No. reached as in Table 1</b> |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|
| Local public authority    | Cities, communities, municipalities and counties   | 50                              | 98  |
| Regional public authority | Regional and provincial authorities, regional department   | 30                              | 28  |
| National public authority | Ministries such as agriculture, forestry, environment, climate, energy, economy, innovation, digitalisation and research | 20                              | 30  |

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<sup>8</sup> Value set for the whole of GoDanuBio duration (no activity specific)

## 5. Lessons learnt

The following points can be summarised and taken in consideration in participative governance processes in the future:

- Many project partners used the “World Café” method, which seems to be extremely helpful in implementing a dynamic and engaging environment for sharing ideas;
- In some regions/workshops the participants were not used to this kind of workshop or to the methods used. One had the impression that there was a great need to talk. Bioeconomy brings with it many points of argumentation, which may also be justified. Therefore, an open debate round before is useful, in which everyone can get rid of everything;
- It is important to use existing networks to reach as many relevant stakeholders as possible;
- Special attention should be paid to promotion and the selection of participants to address. It is crucial to have participants, which are on the one hand interested in the respective topic and who are able to take decisions on the other hand;
- In general, it was pointed out that it brings added value to organize such a workshop in a less formal setting and more interactive, for example using a hidden agenda and to have a timeslot for moderated discussions and open sessions. The participants can express freely their ideas, if an atmosphere for open discussion without judgement is created;
- Engaging politicians on an equal footing with citizens often proved to be a challenge. Many politicians, even those who were willing and eager to engage in bilateral discussions on the topic and who were genuinely curious about the outcomes of the workshop series, were very reluctant when it came to concrete statements or active participation. At the moment, appointing a middleman to mediate ideas and demands between politics and citizens is advisable;
- Trust is generally a key component to the success of the programme, and cannot be compensated for by regulation and certification. It could be helpful, if some of the participants know each other already before the process;
- In the future, it is especially important to involve young entrepreneurs more in decision-making at the local level with the support of clusters and to strengthen participative approaches to local governance.