



# Shaping communication and participation for local climate action

*Municipalities have a direct impact on nearly 10% of greenhouse emissions. Although municipalities may set ambitious climate change mitigation goals for themselves, no significant reduction in emissions will be possible without collaboration with external actors beyond local administration structures. These guidelines will tell you how municipalities can establish contacts with stakeholders, communicate in ways that match the particular target group, and shape participation processes in order to reduce emissions and, consequently, make progress in climate change mitigation at the municipal level.*

*This set of guidelines has been developed as part of the project entitled “Polish-German Co-operation on Low-Emission Economy in Cities”<sup>1</sup> and is based on the outcomes of the project’s workshop event organised in June 2018 in Warsaw.*

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## 1. Contacting and involving local stakeholders

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Co-operation with entities from beyond local administration is significant not only because it increases the local capacity to lower greenhouse emissions. Engaging key stakeholders also gives municipalities access to important **know-how in planning and implementation of own activities**. It also facilitates support from the local residents in the implementation phase. Apart from that, by engaging stakeholders municipalities can create **firm and efficient networks** which can help local authorities access the necessary support when required. This can position climate change mitigation as a comprehensive municipal task whose implementation is a burden resting on the shoulders of multiple entities.

The **key stakeholders**, apart from the relevant decision-makers from the local administration, can include representatives of local businesses, craft chambers, associations and municipal institutions as well as societies, churches and interested citizens. Regardless of the area the stakeholders represent, they can be classified according to the following typology:

**T0:** informants / climate experts

**T1:** central initiator driving the process

**T2:** influential “accelerators” of the process

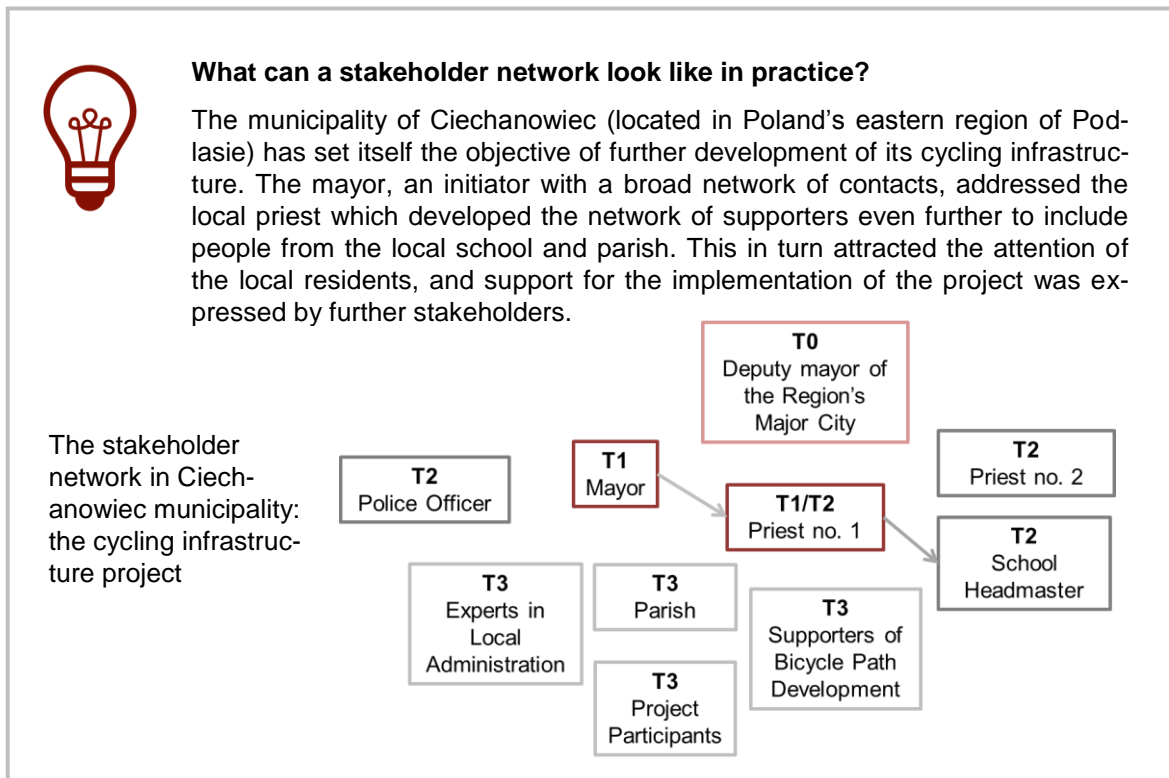
**T3:** engaged supporters and persons performing auxiliary works<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> You can find more information about the project on this website: <https://low-emission-project.de/de>

<sup>2</sup> The typology is quoted after: Beer et al (2017): Schlüsselakteure bewegen kommunalen Klimaschutz, [http://schluesselakteure.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/20170927\\_Grundlagenpapier\\_final.pdf](http://schluesselakteure.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/20170927_Grundlagenpapier_final.pdf) [accessed on: 26 July 2018].

Stakeholders can enrich municipal climate change mitigation efforts in multiple ways and vary depending on the thematic area. This can be illustrated on the example of Ciechanowiec.



The example of Ciechanowiec shows that the local contribution to climate change mitigation projects can be offered also by entities which at first glance do not seem to be natural partners in such efforts.

## 2. Adapting communication about climate action to target audiences

Communicating about local climate action can turn out to be challenging, particularly for small and medium-sized municipalities – for two reasons. Firstly, there is a risk that climate change mitigation activities developed by the municipality will be practically unknown to the citizens. Secondly, when it comes to some activities municipalities must rely on the support and assistance of the local community.

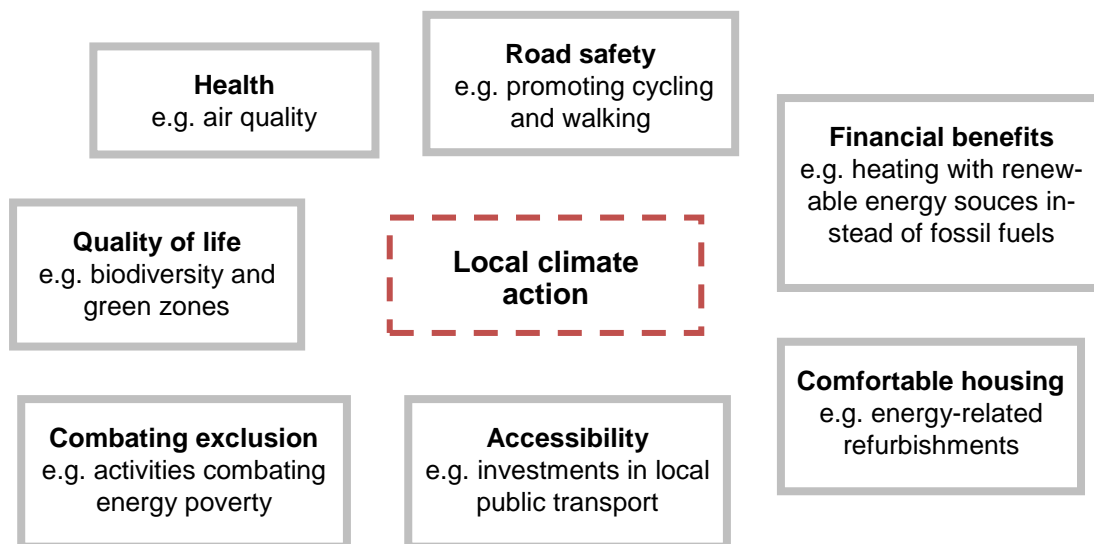
To many, climate change mitigation is still an **abstract topic which is hard to grasp and identify with**, although we can already observe some direct consequences of climate change such as extreme weather phenomena. The challenge that municipalities must face is to explain to the citizens the importance of climate change mitigation activities and raise the their awareness of the necessity to taking action in the field.

Alarm Smogowy (“Smog Alarm”) is an NGO which has managed to raise the general awareness of the necessity to use environmentally friendly sources of heat in cities. The organisation has highlighted the link between massive air pollution caused by coal-fired heaters and their negative impact on people’s health. The problem has been communicated across all generations, not just on the organisation’s website and its social media pages but also on posters, strategically displayed along key transport and commuter routes, in pedestrian

zones in cities, and in hospitals. In the region of Małopolska alone, with its capital in Cracow, the organisation's 2-year-long campaign has increased the awareness of the problem among the inhabitants of the region's cities: over 50% of the surveyed respondents in 2018 claimed the air quality was bad and about two-thirds said the problem was caused by fossil fuels burnt in small furnaces.<sup>3</sup>

In order to get messages across effectively, organisations must first opt for **the easiest and clearest language possible**. It must be emphasised at this point (as in the example) that there is a clear **link between climate change mitigation and people's everyday lives**. Willingness to act will come about only when people personally identify with a challenge or a problem. The *framing* method can help present the messages in a way which focuses on some selected aspects of the issue and makes the message easier to understand. Framing consists in presenting information in such a way that **selected aspects are more vividly emphasised and appealing** than others.

In practice, linking climate change mitigation to some related issues may work well. The diagram below presents the topics and areas of activity which are particularly suitable for framing by highlighting the benefits of climate action.



It is much easier to encourage local people to become actively involved in climate change mitigation if they are aware of the quality of life and/or financial benefits resulting from climate change mitigation. Talking to a detached home owner about energy-related refurbishments, it is advisable that **not only emission reduction but also higher quality of living and financial savings due to lower energy use are mentioned**. Effective communication of messages can also be facilitated by presenting some **surprising contexts**. The German association of road users, Verkehrsclub Deutschland e.V. (VCD), presented in its campaign a comparison of urban space used by parking and playgrounds, green space and residential areas<sup>4</sup>. Thanks to this simple example the VCD managed to neutrally expose the link between car traffic and space management in cities; the organisation did it in a clear way, and provided a new impulse for the target audience.

<sup>3</sup> More information about the project "Małopolska w Zdrowej Atmosferze": <https://powietrze.malopolska.pl/en/>

<sup>4</sup> On this website you can download the recommendations from VCD members with examples of diversification of road space use in cities: [https://www.vcd.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Redaktion/Publikationsdatenbank/Fussverkehr/VCD-Leitfaden\\_Strassen\\_fuer\\_Menschen\\_2016.pdf](https://www.vcd.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Redaktion/Publikationsdatenbank/Fussverkehr/VCD-Leitfaden_Strassen_fuer_Menschen_2016.pdf)

Even the best arguments will be in vain if they don't reach the target group. That is why the key element of a good communication strategy must be the **identification of the target group and reaching the target group with the message**. Therefore, effective climate change mitigation communication with stakeholders from beyond local governments must take into account the needs of the target group. Consequently, care needs to be taken to ensure not only the right framing of the message but also the right and **strategic communication channel**.



#### **How to find the right communication channel for the target group?**

First prepare a list of target groups that you want to reach in your project. Based on the list, indicate one example of a person representing each group. The person will be analysed using social and economic criteria as the group's representative. The criteria include data such as age, income, but also the type of media the person uses. Does s/he read newspapers or local press regularly? Is s/he a member of any association? Does s/he use social media?

This definition of the target group may contribute to a more effective selection of optimal communication channels and reaching the desired target group based on its preferences.

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### **3. Shaping civic participation**

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Communication with local residents, i.e. informing them about planned actions is a very good first step to ensure civic participation which is about including the local people in the matters that they care about. There are three levels on the participation ladder: informing and consulting at the bottom followed by co-deciding and collaboration at the top of the ladder. Thanks to participation, local authorities can start a dialogue with their citizens. If done properly, this can let local authorities achieve a range of different benefits. A thoroughly implemented participation process should have the following attributes:

- the stakeholders are given enough time to speak out,
- the objective of the consultation is clearly defined,
- different citizen groups are invited to participate, rather than just a narrow representation
- the local residents must receive feedback throughout the entire process.

With these attributes, the process will **yield many benefits**. It will improve the **image of the authorities** in the eyes of the local people and other municipalities (thanks to openness, candid communication and application of new forms of dialogue), and increase the level of **trust enjoyed by the local authorities**. Furthermore, the authorities will **establish contact with the local people** and they will **understand the people's needs much better**. Consequently, the local people will become more **active and involved citizens who recognize the intentions of the local authorities**.

Participation may also **deliver information necessary to make the optimal decision or to find an alternative solution**: if we invite the local people to talk about public transport in the city, bus routes, bus stop locations – thanks to considering citizen input we can increase the quality and attractiveness of municipal transport and make it more sustainable as well as attracting more residents to use it, thus reducing overall CO2 emissions.

Participatory methods are successfully applied in short distance mobility projects and urban walkability projects. By using the friendly research method of research walks (or walking interviews) we can invite the local residents to join us on a city walk and find out the level of accessibility and user-friendliness of the urban space for all pedestrians, including persons with mobility problems. Taking into account the remarks of the local residents will make the streets more pedestrian-friendly and attract more people to opt for walking rather than driving.

Thanks to encouraging participation, local authorities develop **better contacts with the local people and they better understand the people's needs**. This is of key significance in low emission projects such as energy-related refurbishments of detached houses, where the collaboration, involvement and willingness to act of home-owners are crucial.



**The participation process as an embedded component of urban strategy development.**

**The example of Rosbach vor der Höhe in Germany.**

In Rosbach, the process of city strategy development was implemented with active participation of the local community. First, the local residents were **surveyed**, either on-line or through face-to-face interviews. Apart from the local community, the participants of the strategy development process also included representatives of local associations, authorities, schools, kindergartens, parishes, businesses and other institutions. They took part in **expert workshops** where they were able to share their opinions and ideas. As a result of the process, **many ideas and initiatives were forged, all linked to short-distance mobility and green areas in cities**. Moreover, a working group named “**Bicycle-friendly Rosbach**” was established which intends to review the city's cycling infrastructure and establish a concept for its future development. The local community appreciated the idea of the authorities very much, and after the participatory process the participants inquired about when they would be able to take part in a similar activity again.

In Polish cities consultations have so far mostly referred to space planning and urban development projects. However, **participatory processes have also recently become a component of low-emission projects**. One of the flagship examples can be the ongoing (July 2018) consultations in [Lublin](#), and the third round of social consultations in [Gdańsk](#). How to improve air quality in Lublin? This was the question the local authorities in Lublin asked the city's inhabitants using one of the participation-enhancing methods: *the civic panel*. The method ensures that different social groups are represented, taking into account diversity in terms of age, gender, education, etc. Lublin's mayor promised that the solutions approved by the panel and aimed at the protection of air quality will be included in the city's anti-smog strategy.

The quoted examples show the **added value of participatory processes implemented at the stage of concept development, project planning or priority setting for climate change mitigation initiatives**. Municipalities must realise the objectives they want to achieve and the exact thematic scope of the project in order to avoid possible disappointment at a later stage. The key is for the stakeholders to receive feedback at each stage of the process, and the municipality must be involved in the dialogue with the local community at all times.

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## 4. Summary

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Local authorities can gain a lot in their transformation towards a low-emission economy by **involving their local communities, other entities and stakeholders from beyond the local government structures**. This is how the authorities can impact a large proportion of greenhouse gas emissions in the municipality. By knowing how to identify, select and then invite the key actors to join low emissions initiatives, and by using the right tools and forms of action, local governments will be able **to influence as much as 90% of greenhouse gas emissions** in their area.

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