



CITIZEN FOCUS ACTION CLUSTER

MAPPING THE TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING OFFER ON CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND CO-CREATION

Background

The Citizen Focus Action Cluster of the Smart Cities Market Place works to support continuous learning and capacity building of cities and ecosystems, stakeholders on citizen engagement and co-creation methodologies and practices. The overarching idea is to shape the Action Cluster with all its Initiatives, as a European Academy on Citizen Engagement and Co-creation. As a first step, a mapping exercise has been conducted on existing training and learning opportunities on the topics at stake.

Objectives

The objective of mapping citizen engagement and co-creation courses is two-fold:

- getting an overview of the capacity building offer available to EU cities to enhance their internal knowledge and capacities on the topics
- identifying good practices in the field

Methodology

Systematic and web-based desk research has been performed between October and December 2020. Firstly, the main categories of providers (type of institution that offered the course: universities, networks, multilateral organisations, companies/non-governmental organisations (NGOs)), and training formats (face to face trainings/courses, webinars, workshops, summer schools, massive open online courses (MOOCs)) were identified.

A database was designed to collect the information in a structured way. Each training initiative as an entry was presented with a series of columns-descriptors. Besides the above-mentioned categories, other dimensions encompassed: name of the course, topics, duration, the trainers, target population, title of the course, fees, EU project, covered vertical topics, specific coverage of inclusivity or diversity issues. Given the impact of the pandemic, a dedicated dimension was added to account for the training to take place in presence or online.

A keyword search was conducted using Google as a search engine: “citizens engagement”, “citizens participation”, “co-creation”, “capacity building”, “smart cities”, “participatory budgeting” combined with all the format-related categories (“course”, “training”, “seminar”, “workshop”, “summer school” and “MOOC”).

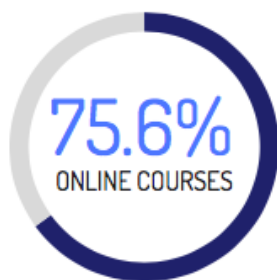
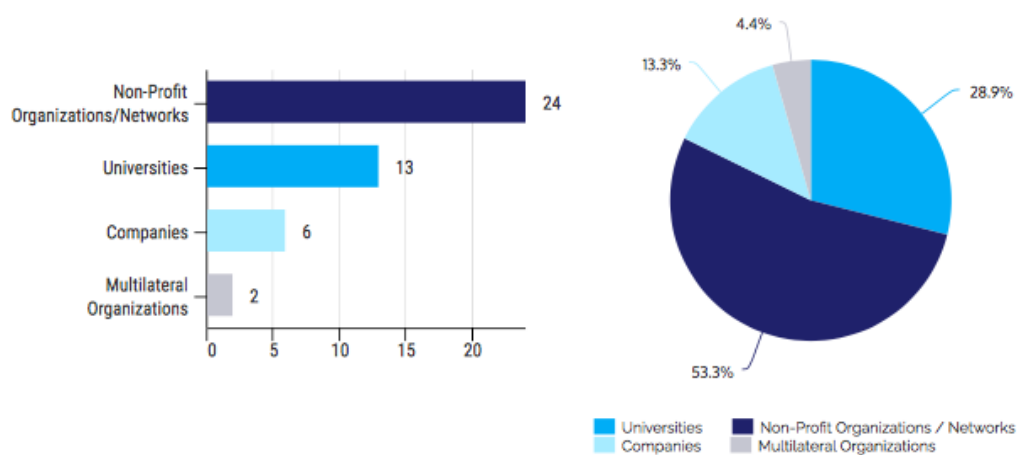


Report mapping citizen engagement and co-creation



Data base

Summary of the providers of the courses



Modality of the courses

Total of the number of online courses, possibly impacted by the covid-19 restrictions to travel and face to face events.



Not specified Diversity or Inclusiveness specified



Diversity and Inclusiveness

Specific coverage of inclusivity or diversity issues during the training of the courses.

Findings

The database was completed with 45 different entries. We can observe that the category “Non-Profit Organisations/Networks” is the most represented amongst providers.



As far as the formats are concerned, the mapping shows that the number of online courses (34 = 75,56 %) is much higher than the courses in 'in presence attendance' mode (11 = 24,44 %), most likely an outcome of the Covid-19 restrictions to travel and face to face events. Moreover, it is important to comment on how the target beneficiaries are not usually specified or limited, although in many cases participants are recommended to have experience or studies in the relevant subjects.

In the case of attendance-based courses, there are usually more explicit requirements such as having a particular background in one or the other discipline or being a university student. Due to the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these courses or workshops were conducted in the form of online webinars, allowing for more people (who do not have to be specifically students) to be trained.

Online courses and MOOCs, tend to be less specific so that although the general/wide public is reached, the concepts are not as deep as they could be with experts already specialised in citizen engagement or co-creation issues.

It should also be noted that in the case of the events organised by NGOs and networks, many of the webinars appear to have a dissemination more than a training objective, with the main goal being communicating both providers' work and their project results.

In fact, speakers' roles are usually undertaken by the experts from the Networks, Labs, NGOs, project leaders themselves or by representatives from the participating/piloting cities. However, in the webinars or MOOCs provided by universities, it is usually the professors themselves who conduct the courses.

It should also be noted that many summer schools appear to be "overdue" or "postponed" to next year to try and hold them in a face-to-face format.

Finally, it should be highlighted that aspects such as diversity or inclusiveness are only specified and considered in 9 cases (20 %).

Concluding remarks on developing further learning opportunities for cities

In this mapping exercise, we found that most of the existing learning opportunities focus on Citizen engagement and co-creation in generic terms, not necessarily with a focus on smart cities as such or vertical topics and specific policy areas. Also, the landscape is mostly featured by one-time courses, with no continuous, consistent offer. The most widespread typology being a webinar that is uploaded to the company/network/university/NGO' website or other forms of massive dissemination, such as YouTube. The only courses that appear to be repeated or belong to a series are the MOOCs.



Trainers and facilitators are mostly university professors or project managers/experts within EU funded projects. Moreover, these courses also tend to address more than one vertical area and tend to have a broader focus on sustainability.

Overall, target beneficiaries tend to group together many types of profiles, therefore a specific offer tailored for city staff members seems to be missing.

Another point to keep in mind is that most courses try to combine a practical part with a theoretical part. Nevertheless, because of COVID-19, many formats were transferred online lacking the enrichment of personal interaction with trainers and facilitators, peer to peer learning, and group work. This was most likely detrimental to a good theory-practice balance.

From this sketch of the existing training and capacity building offered on citizen engagement and co-creation in smart cities. It appears that there would be space for developing further learning opportunities along the following dimensions:

- a more specific focus on Citizen Engagement or co-creation in Smart Cities
- be part of a consistent and constantly improved programme
- address one or more vertical topics with more specific insights
- target the need of city staff members more specifically
- ensure a balance between theoretical and practical knowledge
- rely on participatory training methods
- take diversity and inclusivity aspects into account.