

Innovative approach to the students' education on their involvement in civil society development at the local level

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*Social, Political, Environmental and Public Administration Challenges
for the Visegrad Region*

26th of September 2025, Brno, Czech Republic

- MENDELU
- Faculty of Regional
- Development and
- International Studies

1. Theoretical background
2. Case study
3. Main findings
4. Preliminary conclusions and project outcomes



HEIsCITI - HEIs as Innovative Triggers of Sustainable Development in European Cities in Post Covid-19 era



HEIsCITI

HEIs as Innovative Triggers
of Sustainable Development
in European Cities in Post Covid-19 era

Akademia WSB
WSB University



In the face of complex **multidimensional transformations in European regions**, active citizen involvement is essential for building inclusive and sustainable communities.

Young citizens, in particular, are increasingly recognised as immediate **agents of change**, whose active involvement in decision-making represents a strategic investment in social capital and innovation.

However, effective participation is often hindered by **significant barriers**, such as a perceived lack of real influence and low trust in public institutions.

For engagement to be authentic, it must move beyond tokenistic gestures towards meaningful collaboration. Frameworks like the 'Ladder of Participation' provide a model for progressing from merely informing youth to establishing genuine partnerships where decision-making power is shared.

By systematically incorporating the perspectives of young people into regional and local planning and development, as well as the co-governance of their communities, authorities can harness fresh ideas and digital fluency to co-create solutions, while fostering a lasting culture of civic responsibility and strengthening local democracy.

participatory learning

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-glossary/glossary/participative-learning-participatory-learning>

instructional model promoting the active engagement of participants in the learning process, using various didactic strategies and techniques, such as group discussions, peer learning, role-playing games, observation of the learning object, use of learning outcomes in daily and professional life, evaluation of the learning action.

Principles

- Collaboration
- Engagement
- Shared Responsibility

Benefits

- Enhancing Engagement and Motivation
- Improving Knowledge Retention
- Fostering Collaborative Skills

Challenges

- Navigating Resistance to Change
- Ensuring Inclusivity and Equity
- Varying learning paces



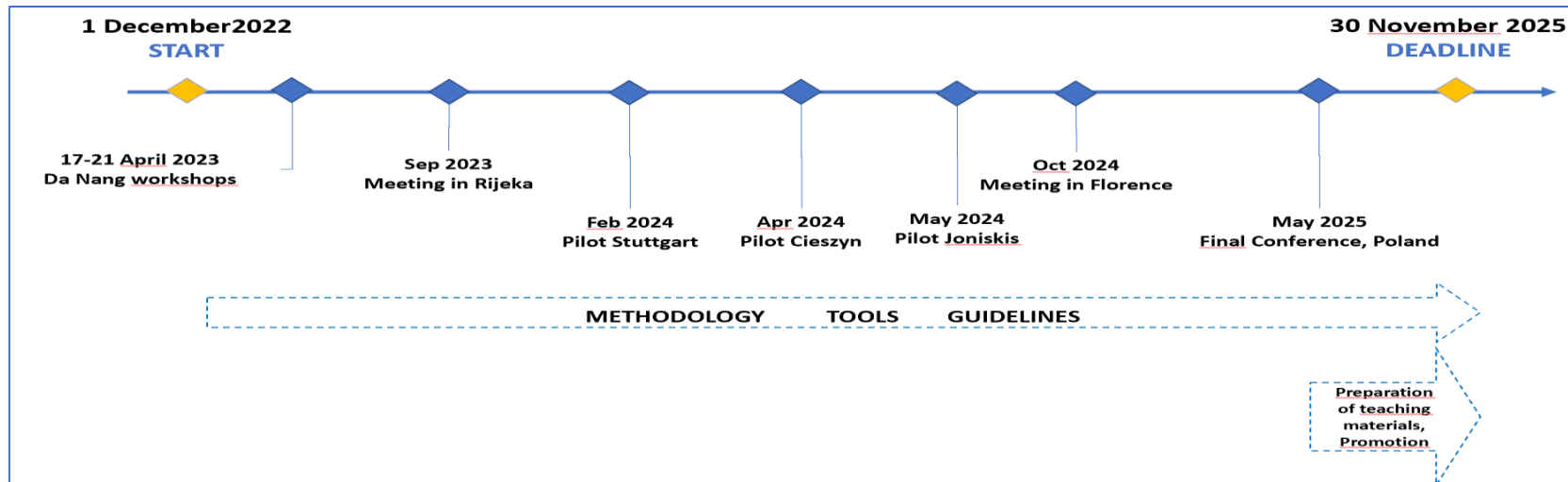
<https://advancetitan.com/spotlight/2023/10/04/uw-system-calls-for-civic-engagement-among-students>

Key Message:

Both participatory learning and civic engagement are crucial for transition of young people into active citizens equipped to contribute positively to their communities.

The HEIsCITI project focuses on designing, testing and validating universal curricula (methodology and teaching tools) for academic and secondary school courses to teach students how to animate, coordinate, and contribute to communication between citizens and local authorities for inclusive and sustainable urban development in the post-COVID-19 era.

- Program: Erasmus+Cooperation partnerships in higher education
- Project ID: KA220-HED-96EB51E1



Project Methodological Approach

1. Diagnosis

Social trends after the COVID-19 pandemic - youth

- social isolation (real world replaced by virtual world)
- little interest in local affairs
- lack of motivation for social involvement
- lack of knowledge and skills facilitating social participation



Challenges for local governments involving youth in action

- identifying the need for dialogue with young people;
- finding common language with young people;
- encouraging young people to get involved in participatory activities
- preparing local government employees for dialogue with young people



2. Designing solutions

- a set of activities and participation tools for students and pupils
- guidelines for local governments establishing dialogue with young people using selected participatory tools



3. Testing and validating solutions

- piloting participatory learning of students at universities in Poland, Lithuania and Germany
- further optimisation of solutions in cooperation with non-academic partners from Croatia, Italy and Vietnam



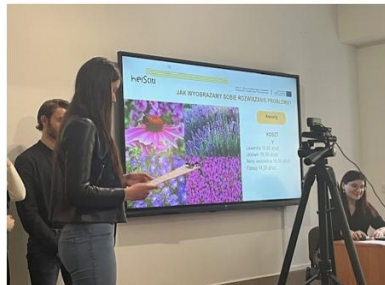
4. Project Results – November 2025

- secondary schools and universities – tools for effectively participatory learning of students to engage in local affairs effectively
- local governments – tools for building dialogue and participatory approach of young people in local affairs

Problem Based Learning Model



Pilot action / WSB University, Cieszyn, Poland (II-V 2024)



Case Study

Educational approach:

Problem based learning

**40-hour course: 15-h lecture and 25-hour workshop;
plus 10-hour of individual students work – 2 ECTS**

Educational method: **Problem Based Learning**

Participatory tools:

**walk&talk,
observations,
interviews,
brainstorming,
Charette workshop**

Problem:

***Boosting abandoned areas – co-creation of
revitalization projects***

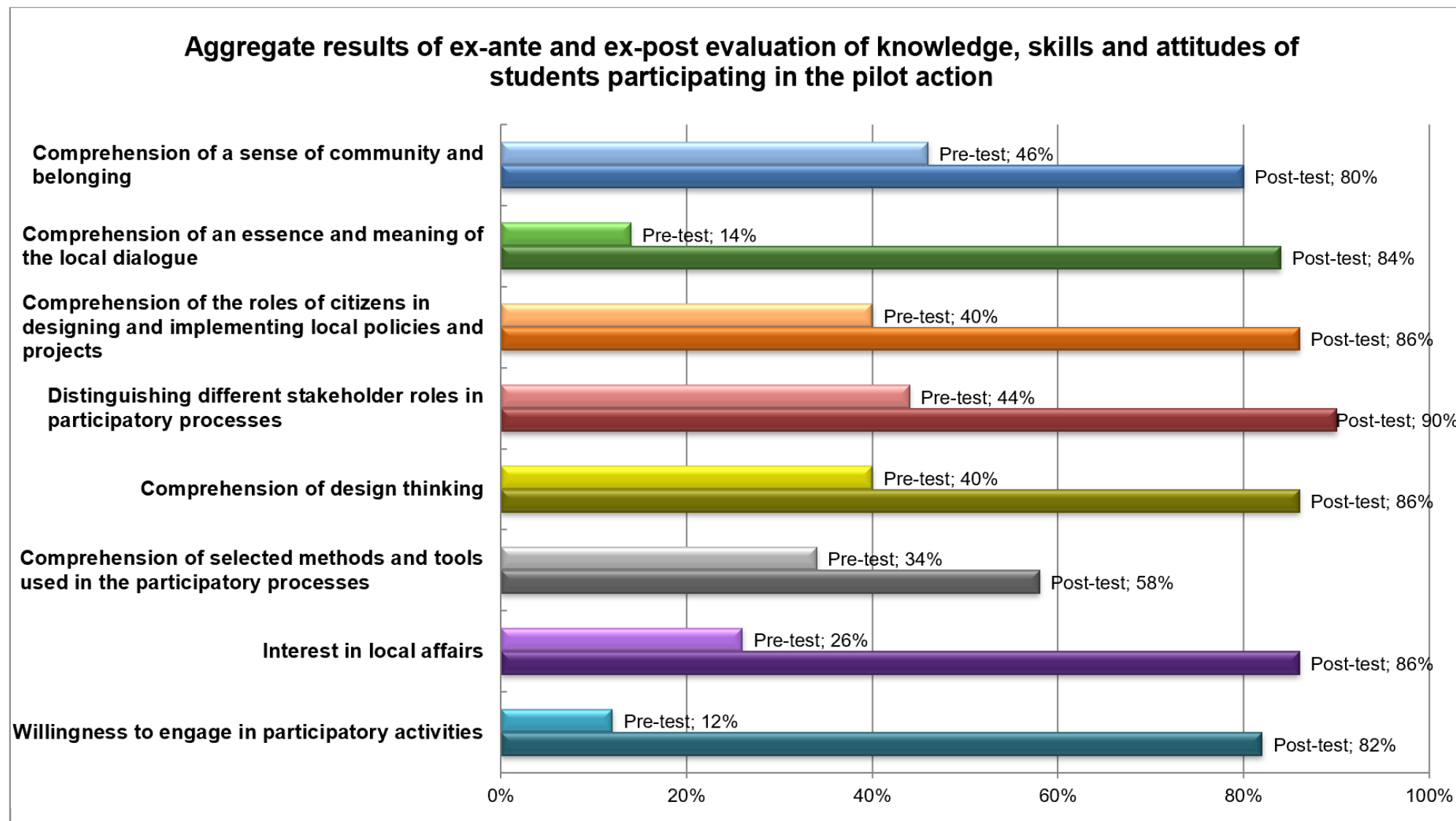
Process:

**50 students, 2 teachers,
10 external stakeholders** – representatives of self-
government, SMEs, NGOs, local community

– correlations among topics & educational/participatory tools implemented within 3 pilot actions: Poland, Germany, Lithuania

topic \ tool	Storytelling	Stakeholders map	Walk & talk	Persona	Interviews	Observations	SWOT analysis	Charette workshop	Brainstorming	Prototyping
Civic Engagement		+	+		+	+			+	
Co-designing		+	+	+			+	+	+	+
Information, Consultation and Co-decision-making process	+		+					+		
Ethics and Responsibility				+	+	+				
Inclusion		+	+	+		+		+		+
Communication & Media		+		+						
Intergenerational Dialogue	+	+						+		
Social Activation			+	+	+	+		+	+	
Revitalisation		+	+				+			+
Resistance to Crises				+			+			+

– progress in knowledge and skills of students participating in the pilot action in Poland



Providing students with good conditions for participatory learning is a very challenging and demanding process. It exceeds standard learning requirements, therefore, **students should be well-motivated to participate in this proces and see the benefits for themselves.**

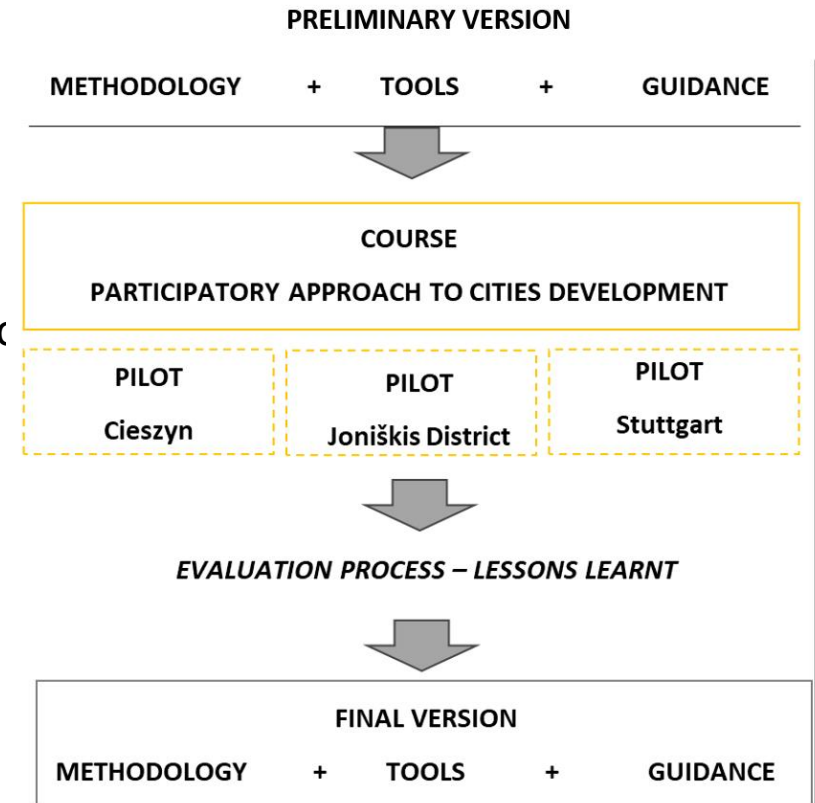
This is particularly crucial when designing curricula and introducing a new course. cc It requires outstanding competencies and **creativity from teachers who should also collaborate with external stakeholders e.g. self-governments.**

Participatory learning focused on involving students in local projects and strategies development requires **a clear message about the purpose of their engagement.**

Therefore, in this educational project, **manuals provided both for teachers and external stakeholders are being prepared, tested and validated together, providing a multi-dimensional view and assessment.**

The final version of the project outcomes (manuals) will be approachable at te project website in December 2025.

Preliminary conclusions



PARTICIPATION MANAGEMENT:
TOOLS FOR CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT
AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

METHODOLOGY

HEIs as Innovative Triggers of Sustainable Development
in European Cities in Post Covid-19 era

heisciti



Co-funded by
the European Union

The course aims to teach **students and secondary school students** how to facilitate **effective communication between citizens, particularly youth, and local authorities, promoting sustainable urban development.**

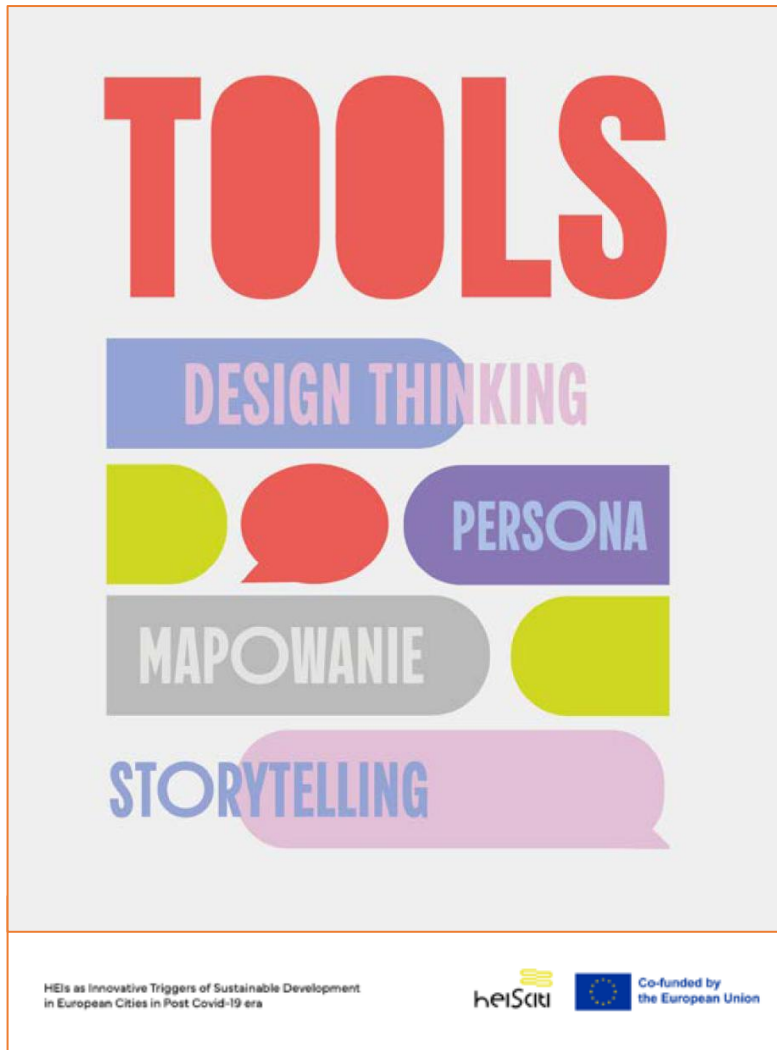
The primary objective of the course is to foster students' active involvement in community development by establishing partnerships among various stakeholders in community engagement. This, in turn, will influence urban policy and practice, moving towards a system that emphasises shared decision-making through improved information, communication, and dialogue.

The objectives of the course are as follows:

- defining the concept of community engagement
- providing variability of tools to enable responsible participation in local contexts
- guiding students in the process of designing and implementing projects or plans that address specific community needs

It employs Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Design Thinking, combining theoretical knowledge with practical, hands-on projects.

More information: <https://wsb.edu.pl/heisciti/about-the-project>



Toolkit on citizens' engagement at the local level

The adaptable toolkit is designed for **lecturers and facilitators (practitioners)** to foster effective community and academic engagement in local democracy.

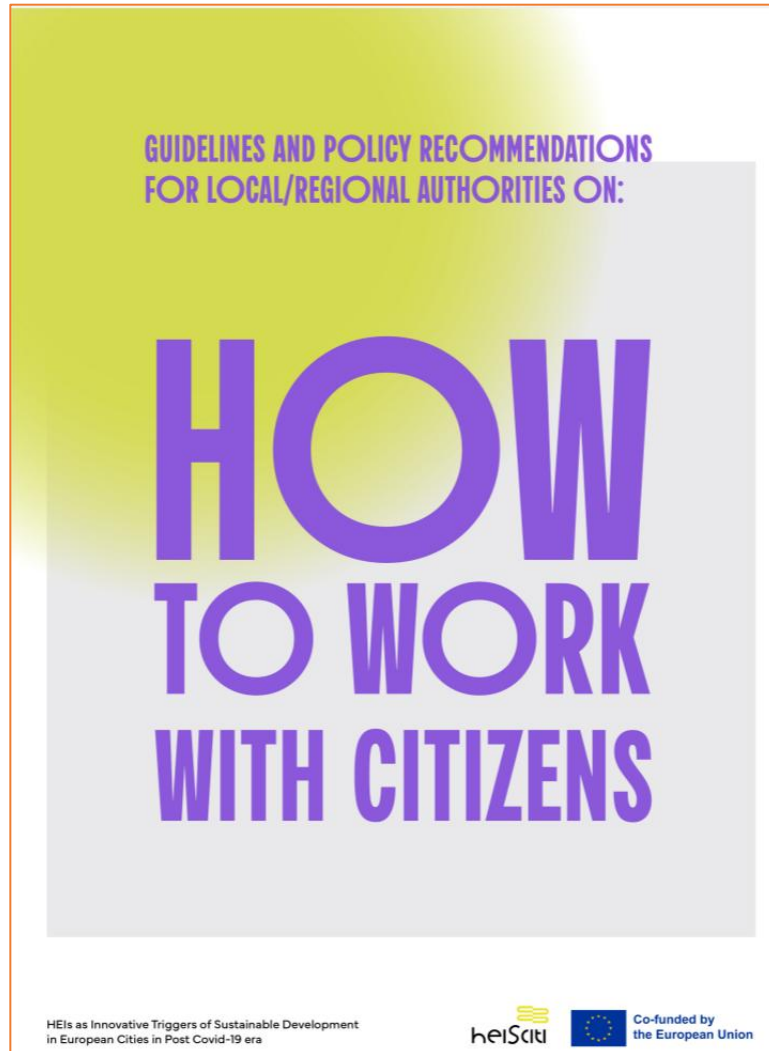
This guide provides **scenarios (lectures and workshops) and tools** for social dialogue. It uses design thinking and project-based learning methodologies. The course is founded on Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Design Thinking methodologies.

It can be useful for **self-governments** organising public consultations as well as for **scholars and NGOs** that conduct some social exercises with students.

These student-centred approaches engage students in active problem-solving and research on complex, real-world tasks.

This process develops critical soft skills, including teamwork, communication, creative thinking, and problem-solving.

More information: <https://wsb.edu.pl/heisciti/about-the-project>



Citizens' engagement guidelines for self-governments

It provides local and regional authorities with a comprehensive framework for engaging citizens, especially youth and HEIs, in sustainable urban development.

It highlights the strategic importance of transforming citizens from passive service recipients into active co-creators of public policy to enhance social cohesion, trust, and innovation.

A key theme is the crucial role of **HEIs as innovation hubs that bridge research and governance**.

It outlines strategies for building structured, long-term partnerships among self-governments and with universities to ensure urban planning is evidence-based and forward-thinking.

It offers a practical roadmap for strengthening youth engagement, covering diagnosis, strategic planning, implementation, and monitoring.

Finally, it presents a toolkit of participatory methods, including **storytelling, stakeholder mapping, and prototyping**. It also details the necessary competencies and resources for authorities, emphasizing the need for a supportive ecosystem to ensure engagement is effective and sustainable

More information: <https://wsb.edu.pl/heisciti/about-the-project>

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Thank you for your attention!

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