



BRIDGING URBAN AND RURAL PERSPECTIVES:

Enhanced Community Engagement in Environmental Policy from Zaragoza and Jerica



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief explores the distinctive approaches to environmental engagement in Zaragoza and Jérica, Spain, emphasizing the successful involvement of urban and rural communities. Zaragoza’s urban strategy leverages the city environment to enhance urban sustainability initiatives, focusing on integrating green practices into daily city life. In contrast, Jérica focuses on improving rural public transportation, with an emphasis on the active participation of rural women, demonstrating a unique approach to addressing rural mobility and accessibility challenges. This document provides a comparative analysis of these strategies and offers recommendations for other regions aiming to implement similar initiatives.

IMPORTANCE FOR DECISION-MAKERS

The contrasting contexts of Zaragoza and Jérica—urban and rural—provide a valuable lens through which policymakers can evaluate and refine engagement strategies. These cases exemplify how tailored approaches can enhance participation and ensure that environmental policies resonate well with different community settings. For policymakers, understanding these dynamics is crucial for crafting policies that are not only comprehensive but also culturally and contextually appropriate.

SUMMARY OF THE TEST CASES

The table below compares the approaches of the two test cases

CATEGORY	ZARAGOZA (URBAN FOCUS)	JERICA (RURAL FOCUS)
Location	Zaragoza, Aragon, Northeast Spain	Jérica, East of Spain, Valencia
Date	Roundtable session held on November 23, 2023, with ongoing research and follow-ups scheduled through January 2024.	November 25, 2024

Objective	To engage citizens in co-creating sustainable metropolitan mobility solutions, with a focus on optimizing urban transport and reducing the use of private vehicles.	Improve rural mobility and ensure public transportation meets the needs of all community members, focusing on women.
Typology of Audience	Urban residents, environmental organizations, city planners, and local policymakers.	Rural residents, particularly women, local farmers, migrant population, elderly populations, and community organizers.
Methodology	Structured roundtable format with group work, SWOT and CAME analyses, and final plenary presentations. Dynamics included World Café sessions with rotations among four thematic groups (private vehicle use, public transport, logistics, and urban planning). Participants actively contributed to defining ideal future scenarios and practical actions.	World Café methodologies, roundtable discussions, and community surveys.
Key Issues Discussed	Metropolitan mobility optimization, public transport improvements, logistics and freight management, and urban planning.	Accessibility of public transport, connectivity between rural areas, and specific challenges faced by rural women.
Local Stakeholders Involved	ECODES, Real Deal project representatives, session facilitators, local authorities, and citizens from Zaragoza.	Local government, rural advocacy groups, transportation agencies, and community leaders.
Engagement Techniques	Group discussions, SWOT and CAME analyses, questionnaires distributed before and after the session, and plenary feedback sessions.	Local gatherings like the World Café, face-to-face meetings, community forums, and direct consultations.
Outcome	Actionable insights for enhancing metropolitan mobility. Recommendations generated through collaborative SWOT and CAME analyses to optimize transport strategies. Ongoing research and follow-up planned for January 2024.	Developed actionable recommendations for improving rural public transportation, increased awareness of rural mobility needs, and stronger community cohesion.

CONSIDERATIONS

FROM OUR HANDBOOK

The «Real-Deal Country Profile: Spain», one of the main deliverables of the REAL DEAL project, emphasizes the necessity for community-specific engagement strategies, acknowledging Spain's diverse socio-economic landscape. For effective environmental governance:

- **Localized Engagement:** Policies must be attuned to the unique environmental, economic, and cultural characteristics of each region.
- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Engage local NGOs, community leaders, and citizens to foster a collaborative approach to problem-solving.
- **Educational Initiatives:** Enhance understanding and awareness through targeted educational programs that address local environmental issues.

POLICY

RECOMMENDATIONS

To simplify this section, the recommendations are organized around common themes identified in the case studies of both Zaragoza and Jérica. For clarity, the case studies will be referred to by the city names.

1 “EMBRACE DIVERSITY IN VOICES”

Embracing diversity in voices ensures that environmental policies are comprehensive and sensitive to the needs of various populations, resulting in more sustainable and widely accepted solutions.

In both Zaragoza and Jérica, diversity in voices was prioritized to ensure comprehensive and inclusive policy outcomes. Zaragoza's use of flexible group work sessions and World Café dynamics allowed participants to choose discussion topics, rotating between groups to ensure a wide range of perspectives. Pre- and post-event questionnaires and direct observations further captured diverse viewpoints, actively integrating them into policy recommendations on urban mobility. Similarly, Jérica engaged participants from diverse backgrounds, including marginalized groups, ensuring their voices shaped rural mobility solutions. This inclusive approach enriched the policy discussions and ensured that both urban and rural needs were adequately addressed.

2 “ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION, EMPOWERED CITIZENS”

Accessible information empowers citizens to actively participate and make informed decisions, a cornerstone of democratic engagement.

Zaragoza provided clear communication of session objectives, supplemented with pre- and post-session questionnaires and real-time interactions. This transparency ensured that participants could engage meaningfully in the discussions. Jérica, on the other hand, employed traditional communication channels like posters and WhatsApp groups, reaching even those with limited internet access. By focusing on effective information dissemination, both cities enabled their residents to make informed contributions to policy-making.

3 “EQUALITY IN DIALOGUE, EQUITY IN OUTCOMES”

Equality in dialogue leads to more equitable policy outcomes that represent the needs of the entire community.

Both Zaragoza and Jérica emphasized equality in their participatory processes to achieve equitable policy outcomes. Zaragoza allowed participants to self-select table hosts, facilitating democratic and balanced discussions, and ensured all voices were heard in plenary sessions. Jérica’s approach included establishing a multiactor rural mobility table to co-create solutions, ensuring that diverse groups could contribute on an equal footing. This commitment to inclusive dialogue ensured that the policies developed were representative of the entire community’s needs.

4 “POLICY WITH PERSPECTIVE: INTEGRATING DIVERSITY FOR RICHER POLICIES”

Integrating diverse perspectives brings fresh solutions and innovations, enriching the policy-making process.

Zaragoza integrated diverse perspectives through structured discussions and collaborative analyses (SWOT and CAME), capturing insights from various stakeholders on urban mobility issues. In contrast, Jérica focused on the needs of marginalized rural residents, such as women, migrant population, and the elderly, ensuring policies were informed by those directly impacted. By integrating these diverse viewpoints, both cities enriched their policy-making processes, leading to more inclusive and effective outcomes.

5 “DYNAMIC DISCUSSIONS FOR DYNAMIC POLICIES”

Dynamic and interactive discussions foster creativity, ensuring that policies are adaptive to evolving needs.

The use of dynamic and interactive discussions helped both Zaragoza and Jérica develop adaptable policies. Zaragoza employed World Café sessions and collaborative analyses to stimulate creativity and adjust discussions based on emerging insights. Jérica similarly used participatory formats like World Café and roundtables to encourage fluid exchanges, fostering creative and adaptable solutions. This flexibility allowed both cities to develop policies that were responsive to evolving community needs.

6 “BUILD A CONTINUUM OF ENGAGEMENT”

Building a continuum of engagement keeps community interest and input active over time, enabling sustained policy improvement.

Maintaining continuous engagement was a priority in both cases. Zaragoza implemented ongoing feedback mechanisms through questionnaires and planned follow-ups, keeping participants engaged beyond the initial sessions. Jérica established a multiactor mobility table for ongoing dialogue, allowing for continuous refinement of mobility strategies. These approaches ensured sustained community involvement and adaptability of policies based on ongoing feedback.

7 “EXPAND THE AGENDA: PROMOTE CURIOSITY AND ENGAGEMENT”

Expanding the agenda encourages ongoing curiosity and community engagement in environmental issues.

Zaragoza encouraged curiosity by focusing on future-oriented urban mobility solutions, while Jérica broadened discussions to include cultural changes for rural decarbonization. By encouraging participants to think beyond immediate issues, both cities fostered deeper engagement and a proactive approach to long-term challenges.

8 “TRANSPARENCY TRANSFORMS: OPEN OUTCOMES TO ALL”

Transparency in how community feedback influences policy builds trust and credibility, essential for strong governance and community support.

Zaragoza demonstrated transparency by sharing group findings openly in plenary sessions and documenting contributions thoroughly. Follow-up questionnaires further ensured participants could see how their input influenced policy development. Jérica emphasized transparency by making rural mobility a visible priority in public forums, ensuring that feedback was acknowledged by local authorities. This approach helped build trust in both communities.

9 “COMMIT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT”

Continuous improvement in policies ensures relevance by incorporating new data and community feedback.

Both Zaragoza and Jérica committed to continuous policy refinement. Zaragoza extended its research and feedback collection beyond initial workshops, scheduling follow-up surveys to adjust policies based on new data. Similarly, Jérica’s multiactor mobility table allowed for iterative assessment and continuous updates to align policies with changing community needs. This iterative process ensured that policies remained relevant and effective.

10 “FOSTER INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION: ENHANCE SUPPORT SYSTEMS”

Providing support systems that remove participation barriers enables a wider community segment to engage in policy-making.

Removing barriers to participation was essential for inclusivity in both cities. Zaragoza provided clear guidance, flexible formats, and multiple feedback opportunities to ensure broad engagement. Jérica addressed logistical barriers by arranging transportation for remote participants and optimizing resources through dedicated platforms. These support systems enabled wider community involvement, ensuring that participation was accessible to all.

11 “KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE NETWORKS: PROMOTING INTER-COMMUNITY LEARNING”

Knowledge exchange networks facilitate inter-community learning, allowing urban and rural areas to share effective strategies and innovations for addressing common challenges.

Facilitating knowledge exchange was crucial for shared learning. Zaragoza collaborated with stakeholders to gather diverse insights and share findings in open sessions, promoting learning between urban areas. Jérica, on the other hand, used its World Café discussions to generate practical ideas that could be shared with other rural communities, enabling the transfer of successful models like car-sharing and cooperative transport.

12 “BARRIER BREAKDOWN: FACILITATING INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION”

Removing logistical and social barriers allows underrepresented groups to engage fully in environmental policy discussions.

Both cities focused on removing barriers to engagement. Zaragoza used clear guidelines and flexible group structures, while Jérica encouraged privileged participants to support marginalized voices, ensuring inclusive dialogue. These efforts leveled the playing field and enabled underrepresented groups to engage fully in policy discussions.

13 “GRASSROOTS EXPERTISE: INTEGRATING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE INTO POLICY”

Integrating grassroots expertise into policy leverages invaluable local knowledge, particularly in rural communities like Jérica, where traditional practices and sustainability approaches are well established.

Zaragoza utilized SWOT and CAME analyses, empowering participants to leverage their own knowledge in urban mobility planning. Jérica created platforms where rural residents could share their insights on mobility, ensuring policies were grounded in local realities. This integration of grassroots knowledge led to practical, community-driven solutions that reflected the unique needs of both urban and rural areas.

