

AGENTS OF CO-EXISTENCE

Integrated Action Plan
The city of Banská Bystrica



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Section 1

Context, needs and vision

Overall theme

The main challenge of the "Agents of co-existence and open government" network is to embrace social innovation and inclusion in all fields of local governance by improving skills and capabilities of municipal staff and creating new organisational structures in order to further boost civic participation and create a more solid basis of democracy. As a result, empowered civil servants with proper skills and attitudes, and better organisational structures will encourage public service innovation.

By the end of the Activation stage, AoCE partnership agreed on focussing on the following themes:

Theme1 - Working together with citizens

Theme2 - Innovators coming into government

Theme 3 - Focus on staff, internal capabilities, and officials as innovators

Theme 4 - New working methods and rethinking the rules.

Inside each theme, partners have identified sub-themes, expressed their knowledge needs, and highlighted their good practices.

All partners are already applying different methods, tools, techniques, and approaches to citizen participation. At the same time, they are struggling **to find solutions to increase trust in government institutions**, tackle polarisation issues and mobilise the silent majority of their population improving the participatory culture of citizens. Fortunately, some partners have well-elaborated systems for cooperating with young people or other specific groups of citizens represented by NGOs. Also, many partners have extensive experience with and tested **tools for participatory budgeting**.

We can safely say that the partners already have a deep knowledge about 'working with citizens' but they have a lack of knowledge on **how to embed the results of citizen participation into the daily work of the administration**. Another important element is the innovations and new ways of thinking that citizens can bring to the table. Generally speaking, civil servants (very often experts in their field) find it difficult to embrace citizens' ideas as possible solutions for the policies being discussed.

Moreover, they struggle to follow up on citizens' ideas, whether the idea has been taken into consideration or explain why it could not be implemented. They are also looking for new ways to communicate these decisions to citizens in such a way that they can easily absorb them. To sum up, partners want to know **how to create transparency in decision-making**.

As mentioned before, AoCE particularly focuses on **improving the skills and capacities of civil servants** (theme 3) to implement citizen participation processes more successfully. Partners found the **communication and facilitation skills** the most important skills of civil servants to be improved. Some partner cities need to improve their civil servants' knowledge of citizen engagement methods. Further, partners wish to focus not only on civil servants in general but focus especially on the leaders of the municipality, to **achieve participatory leadership** in tackling power relation issues. Almost all partners expressed their willingness to **make changes in the attitude, and mindset of their civil servants** to overcome fear and increase motivation for innovation and citizen participation.

On top of upskilling civil servants, partners would like to **explore and establish new working methods** for and rethink the rules of citizen participation (theme 4). As with theme 3, the main questions for partners in this theme are: how to increase cross-department collaborations involving all departments in citizen participation; how to set up and run an internal platform for civil servants being a safe place for innovating and mutual learning; and how to create a clear legal framework for working with citizens. Half of the partners have already set up a participation department or at least established a position for a participation officer. They will exchange knowledge about their working methods and support those partners who haven't created such a unit in their organisation yet but would like to do so in the future.

Current situation

Banská Bystrica is the economic, administrative, and cultural centre of central Slovakia and the seat of the Banská Bystrica self-governing region. Historically it is a mining city, however, currently, the economy is built on banking, education, and tourism. With the establishment of Matej Bel University in 1992, Banská Bystrica became one of the centres of higher education in Slovakia. On top of developing a new economic profile of the city, **the need for a new and more open way of governance emerged in the city administration resulting in the decision to enter the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in October 2020.** OGP fostered a supportive environment for the acceleration of the systematic and strategic development of the open and collaborative governing to enable citizen and stakeholder participation in urban development through enhancing participation processes in this field.

Currently, there is a small unit – **Department for Participation and Innovation in Open Governance (PIOG)** existing in the city office with **2 staff members** dedicated to coordinate open and participatory governance development. It means that only two people cover the open government and participation agenda, however, another student will be hired.

Banská Bystrica has experience in participatory budgeting and launched several participatory initiatives with citizens (e.g., Revitalisation of housing estates, City Park revitalisation, Open Government strategy development, Integrated Urban strategy development). In addition, thematic committees operate in the City consisting of experts and MP's functioning as advisory bodies to the City Council. Furthermore, there is a partnership of the City with the Dialogue Centre n.o., an NGO that is helping the city to develop an open governance culture.

Regarding the actions taken so far to **upskill civil servants**, PIOG is trying to integrate “educational parts” where coordinators from PIOG invite employees /staff of the City office to take part in designing participatory planning and participatory meetings. They also try to invite civil servants to take part in various participatory meetings to have a direct experience with the participatory approach. However, employees often say that they don't have time to contribute, and they are not hired to work on participation. This is also related to the issue that City hasn't established the policy yet, whether the city office expects the participation department (which is small) to cover all the participation agenda or some employees should be upskilled from all relevant departments to do participation activities at least to some extent.

Also, the internal initiative called “**City Office Breakfast**” was established as an informal safe space to discuss things around open government with the view to foster internal municipality community of practice in the area of participation. However, PIOG struggles to develop concept properly and maintain the meetings regularly due to the lack of capacities of employees.

PIOG, supported by OGP action planning approach brought to life some other good practices in Banská Bystrica. The city implemented a small project with OECD and the European Commission called **„Innovative implementation of the principle of partnership in the EU cohesion policy”**, through which 9 EU municipalities received technical assistance from OECD experts, among them also Banská Bystrica municipality. Within the scope of this project, together with OECD experts, the city developed a new participatory method called “Ideathon”. They have organised face-to-face as well as online participation in the process of creating the Integrated Urban Strategy. Ideathon is an innovative participatory format for brainstorming of individuals from different backgrounds, with different skills and intentions, who come together to jointly identify different ideas, solutions, or actions within a particular topic. Ideations are time-limited, can take several hours or even days, and are realised through online or offline workshops and consultations.

A recently developed initiative is the “**CoLaboratory**”: a permanent city platform which suppose to function as a platform for the ongoing cooperation of different stakeholders, including citizens, in developing various complex public policies. One of the key features of this platform is that it is facilitated by professional facilitators who use dialogue and participatory methods such as “the art of hosting” and “harvesting methods”. However the CoLaboratory has not yet been integrated in city’s agenda and policy making processes due to reasons such as insufficient capacities to foster quality participative processes, lack of awareness and understanding of the opportunities provided by the CoLaboratory, no evaluation processes in place to provide data about the use of CoLaboratory, absence of directive specifying how and when CoLaboratory can be used, and also people’s resistance or distrust towards new approaches and tools which foster participatory culture. This platform also has a **CoLaboratory board**, which the city uses as a “cross sector consulting, and advisory body for the Open Government development”. There are currently up to 15 active board members.

All in all, Banská Bystrica has taken important steps towards open government introducing different forms of citizen involvement but faced multiple challenges which they hope to tackle with the help of the AoCE partners’ contribution.

Relevant existing strategies and policies

Relevant local strategies and plans

The City declares that dialogic approaches, such as open government, are key approaches when resolving complex challenges and poly-crisis of today’s world. Therefore, the city entered the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Initiative and committed to improving the application of principles participation, transparency and collaboration in the city governing.

The city has developed and implemented its first **Open Government Action Plan 2021/2023**. This included also the development of the Open Government Roadmap 2030 for Banská Bystrica city, as a basis for further OGP actions. With this the city has also created a dedicated job position, “coordinator for open government and participation”, and it has developed a systematic collaboration with civic partner organisation “Dialogue Centre”. Currently, the city is working on the development of the **2nd Action Plan for Open Government 2024/2026** and would like to integrate this with the work on the Integrated Action Plan of Agents of Coexistence.

Integrated territorial strategy of the Functional Urban area of Banská Bystrica 2021/2027

The development document Integrated Territorial Strategy - Functional Urban Area Banská Bystrica (ITS FUA BB) tries to define the current development needs of the urban functional area, which will be possible to finance through the resources of the European Structural and Investment Funds intended for our territory and which are framed in the Operational Programme Slovakia for the new programming period 2021-2027. One of three strategic developmental priorities of the strategy is also the development of the area of good and open governance.

The Banská Bystrica Development Programme 2024/2030

The Banská Bystrica Development Programme for 2024-2030 is a strategic plan that allows to see the city projects in the context of long-term direction. It helps the city to set priorities and direction of investments, identifies project linkages and the potential to move the city towards achieving its strategic goals.

The proposed priorities and objectives respond to the most significant challenges and identified needs of the area concerned:

- Adverse demographic developments and related changes in the provision of public services,
- the emergence of new technologies and their use in the urban environment and spatial development,
- the use, renewal and completion of technical and environmental infrastructure,
- sustainability of the urban and peri-urban environment,
- strengthening resilience and response to unexpected situations and environmental changes,
- social responsibility, engaged communities and participation.

Problem identification

The biggest challenge is the **polarised atmosphere** in Banská Bystrica that hinders collaboration between citizens and the municipality. Another issue relates to **capacities of civil servants as civil servants and their capacities play an important role** in participatory culture development. An important question is how to change the conservative mindset of the staff of the city office and how to overcome fears and be open to change, open towards experimentation with new ways of communication, relationship building and collaboration with citizens and in general how to handle and implement management of organisational/cultural change. In addition, an important question is also how to increase the understanding of city staff when to use participation and what level of participation to use on different processes /agendas, understanding what benefits participation can bring to different departments.

Finally, what the city can do **to improve the facilitation skills of civil servants to be able to organise and process quality participatory/group conversations and to ensure that the results from participatory processes are indeed being taken into account**. This might also **require a change in the traditional way of leading as current decisions are being made at the top, thus there are power relation and trust issues**. Also, there is a strong political influence due to a dominant representative democracy style as opposed to a participatory democracy style. Therefore the city needs to also work on building capacities of politicians so they can operate in a more dialogic and collaborative manner.

Results of **SWOT Analysis** which was done by ULG stakeholders specifically points on following **challenges /weaknesses**:

- Dominance of hierarchical and silo based culture and behavioural patterns as well as resistance to change inside of the municipality
- Lack of capacities, skills and attitudes among local civil servants to develop participatory and collaborative way of governing
- Polarisation and low interest of citizens and civil society stakeholders to participate and participatory processes
- Lack of collaborative relations and tradition to develop collaborative relations

Analysis also points out on **local strengths/opportunities**:

- Open governance innovation initiative found its institutional home at the Banska Bystrica Municipality
- Small, but dedicated and committed team that has brought and developed already a number of innovative participatory tools and approaches
- International collaboration

SWOT ANALYSIS BY ULG



Vision

The self government of Banská Bystrica will be using **dialogue** and **collaboration** as a main strategy to tap into the **collective intelligence** of its citizens, associations, entrepreneurs and other stakeholders and with that it will be able to achieve the **social cohesion** and quality **development of the city** for its citizens in current **complex times**.

Main integration challenge(s)

Stakeholder involvement in planning

Current situation:

Stakeholders in Banská Bystrica are engaged on a regular basis. They are organized around so called CoLaboratory board which consists of stakeholders from different sectors. At this point of project (half way through) its hard to keep stakeholders interested in action planning. For some of them it is also hard to grasp the topic of participatory governance development in such strategic manner. There is general lack of interest from the civil servants community.

Possible progress:

For the upcoming and next project period we are going to focus on Multi-layering of CoLaboratory board where core of the board will focus on actual action planning and relevant strategic work while the wider circle of CoLaboratory board representatives will be involved in consultation processes. Furthermore we will also focus on enhancing the motivation of CoLaboratory board members to be involved through tangible benefits and results such as networking, teambuilding and opportunity for presenting and promoting their projects.

Coherence with existing strategies

Agents of Coexistence action plan is in alignment with the following strategic documents of the city:

- 2nd Action Plan for Open Government in Banská Bystrica 2024/2026
- Integrated territorial strategy of the Functional Urban area of Banská Bystrica 2021/2027
- The Banská Bystrica Development Programm 2024/2030

Possible progress is seen in strengthening the cross-departmental communication and awareness as well as awareness of politicians about the existence of strategies and strategic objectives related to the open and participatory governance development.

Sustainable urban development

Agents of Coexistence Action plan propose actions that will strengthen the application of participation and partnership principle that will enable to tap into the collective intelligence while co-creating innovative, sustainable solutions in integrated manner for complex issues in all crucial sectors of sustainable urban development in terms of economic, social and environmental objectives.

Possible progress is seen in mainstreaming the application of participation and partnership principle within all aspects of sustainable urban development.

Integration over time

Implementation of proposed actions is planned in logical order within the timeframe of the project. All of actions are designed as 1st phase of longer processes and it is expected that actions will need to be developed over time. In order to be successful in development of proposed actions, we will need to secure not only funding, but also actual capacities to continue in this mission. We will also need to set up evaluation mechanisms to monitor, refine and plan the action implementation over time.

Stakeholder involvement in the implementation

Currently stakeholders are engaged in the implementation of actions, however the main responsibility remains in hands of small team from the Department for participation and open governance innovation and Dialogue Centre who are acting as main coordinators, designers and implementers of actions. We foreseen the need to increase the capacities for further implementation of actions and the need to engage variety stakeholders as co-implementers from both sides – the municipality as well as civil society alongside with relevant experts.

Section 2

Overall logic and integrated approach

Strategic objectives

In line with the content of the section 1 of the Integrated Action plan, the **strategic objectives** and **expected outcomes** are formulated as follows:

Strategic objective 1: To Enhance social cohesion in the city by addressing and managing polarization as a foundation for participatory governance which will includes following operational objectives:

- To increase the knowledge and capacity of key stakeholders to understand polarization dynamics and apply effective depolarization strategies.
- To establish and strengthen a network of allies and ambassadors committed to promoting depolarization within the city's ecosystem.

Expected outcomes of strategic objective 1:

- Enhanced understanding of polarization dynamics
- Development of tailored depolarization strategies addressing key polarization situation in the public life.
- Creation of an active and engaged network of trained depolarization ambassadors who advocate and apply depolarization principles across the city.
- Delivery of a series of targeted workshops equipping diverse stakeholder groups, including municipal staff, with practical tools and skills for managing polarization

Strategic objective 2: Establish and formalize the so called CoLaboratory Council as a governance, strategic, and initiatory body to guide and advance the development of open and collaborative governance practices.

Expected outcomes of strategic objective 2:

- The CoLaboratory Council is formally established through the adoption of its statute, defining its governance, strategic mandate, and operational framework.
- City leadership actively engages in the CoLaboratory Council, ensuring political ownership and sustainability of participatory culture.
- The CoLaboratory tool is systematically integrated into the city's participatory processes, serving as a platform for collaborative policy-making and inclusive stakeholder dialogue

Actions

Based on strategic objective 1, we have defined the following area of intervention:
Strengthening Social Cohesion through Depolarization and Participatory Governance

This area of intervention focuses on building the foundations for a more cohesive, resilient, and inclusive urban society by addressing polarization as a critical barrier to participatory governance. The intervention aims to increase the knowledge, skills, and capacities of key stakeholders to recognize, analyze, and manage polarization dynamics within the city.

It will foster the creation of an active and diverse network of allies and ambassadors who will serve as catalysts for depolarization efforts across various sectors of the urban ecosystem. By equipping stakeholders with effective depolarization strategies and embedding these approaches within participatory processes, the city will be better positioned to engage diverse voices, prevent fragmentation, and strengthen trust between the local government and its citizens.

This area of intervention acknowledges that sustainable participatory governance depends on addressing underlying societal divisions and creating the conditions for constructive dialogue, collaboration, and shared problem-solving between local government and its citizens.

Area of actions will include:

- **Development of workshop methodological materials**
- **Organization and delivery of capacity-building workshops** (organizing a series of targeted workshops for key stakeholder groups, including city leadership, municipal staff, community leaders, civil society organizations, and citizen representatives)
- **Facilitation of public dialogues and citizen engagement sessions on polarization**
- **Identification, recruitment, and training of depolarization ambassadors** (selecting and engaging individuals across sectors willing to act as ambassadors for depolarization, providing specialized training and mentorship to support their role in promoting inclusive dialogue and spreading depolarization practices within their networks)

Based on strategic objective 2, we have defined the following area of intervention:

Institutionalization of Open and Collaborative Governance Structures

This area of intervention focuses on establishing a formalized governance body — the CoLaboratory Council — to serve as a driving force for the advancement of open, transparent, and participatory governance practices. By creating a structured platform that brings together political leadership, municipal administration, and key stakeholders, the intervention aims to embed participatory principles into the city's institutional framework.

The Council will act as a strategic and initiatory entity, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration, ensuring continuity of participatory processes, and providing political ownership and guidance for the long-term development of collaborative governance. Its formalization through an adopted statute will secure its legitimacy, mandate, and operational stability within the city's governance system.

Area of actions will include

- **Development of the CoLaboratory council statute and its governance framework and ensuring its formalization, including:**
- **Stakeholder mapping and identification of** key institutional, political, and community actors to be involved in the CoLaboratory Council
- **Conducting consultations and participatory meetings** to build shared understanding of the Council's purpose, roles, and benefits
- **Development of the CoLaboratory Council statute and governance framework – drafting** the statute defining the Council's legal status, mandate, composition, decision-making procedures, and operational modalities.
- **Political and institutional approval process** - Presenting and negotiating the draft statute with political leadership, legal advisors, and relevant municipal bodies.
- **Securing formal adoption of the statute through official decision-making channels** (e.g. City Council resolution, Mayor's decree).
- **Appointment and formalization of council membership** - Nominating and formally appointing members representing political leadership, municipal administration, expert community, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders, defining clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations for each member.

SECTION 3

Action Planning details

Action title: 1. Organization and delivery of capacity building “polarization workshops”, including development of workshop materials and organisation of public dialogues on polarization		Action Owner: - Department for participation and innovation in open governance, Banska Bystrica City - Dialogue Centre (NGO)	
Action summary: There is an increasing polarization in the city due to political divide in the country. The polarized situation affects the development of participatory government in the city therefore our aim is to build capacities and skills to be able to strategically work with polarization to enhance the social cohesion in the city as a foundation for participatory governance development.	Stakeholders: - political and municipal leadership - municipal officers - civil society actors, including informal leaders - MPs	Source of inspiration: City of Genk, City of Breda, Lead expert Polarisation framework by Bart Brandsma	Finance and resources: Agents of Coexistence budget 15 000 eur
		Links to strategy	Challenges-Mitigation: - willingness to attend workshops - implementation of acquired knowledge in every day life
Action steps -Knowledge sharing with the City of Genk and Breda -Development of the workshop concept -Invitation process -Workshops implementation -Reflection and evaluation -Organising and attending Training of trainers workshop delivered by Bart Brandsma - the founder of the polarisation framework - organisation of public dialogues on polarization	Related activities -Delivering workshops in other cities -Communication about the theme of workshops (blogs, articles, videos) -Dialogue session series -Exploring AI depolarisation approach	Timeframe May – October 2024 /Workshop concept development and preparation October 2024 – June 2025 Delivery of workshops June 2025 – September 2025 Development of the methodological workshop material	Outputs -Delivery of 5 x workshops (50 pax) - Enhanced understanding of polarization dynamics - Development of tailored depolarization strategies addressing polarization situation in the city - Creation of an active and engaged network of trained depolarization ambassadors who advocate and apply depolarization principles across the city -Delivery of a series of targeted workshops (5) equipping diverse stakeholder groups, incl. municipal staff with practical tools and skills for managing polarization - development of workshop methodological material

Future actions that we plan to organize in the context of above actions include:

- **Establishment of continuous support mechanisms for trained stakeholders** (such as peer learning opportunities, mentoring schemes, networking platforms to ensure ongoing knowledge exchange and reinforcement of skills)
- **Monitoring and evaluation of learning and impact** (such as designing and implementing monitoring tools to assess the effectiveness of workshops, dialogues and ambassadors activities, collecting feedback from participants to continuously adapt and improve methods and materials)

Action title: 2. Formalizing the so called CoLaboratory Council as a governance, strategic, and initiatory body to guide and advance the development of open and collaborative governance practices.		Action Owner: • Department for participation and innovation in open governance, Banska Bystrica City • Dialogue Centre (NGO) • Mayors office • Municipality CEOs office	
Action summary: Action focuses on establishment and formalizing the so called CoLaboratory Council by creation of its statute, as a strategic, governance, and initiatory body responsible for driving change and advancing the development of participatory and collaborative governance within the municipality. The Council will include key actors such as the Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Executive Director of the municipality, and will convene regular meetings to guide and oversee the implementation of open governance practices.	Stakeholders: • political and municipal leadership • municipal officers • civil society actors, • MPs	Source of inspiration: City of Gdańsk, Lead expert	Finance and resources: 5000 eur
		Links to strategy	Challenges-Mitigation: -Political Commitment and Ownership -Difficulty in securing sustained political support from elected officials (especially if political leadership changes after elections). -Potential competing political priorities that may delay or deprioritize the establishment of the Council. -Institutional Resistance and Administrative Complexity -Internal resistance from some of the reluctant municipal departments and staff who may be afraid of the Council as driver of participatory approach -Complex legal and administrative processes required for the formal approval and institutionalization of the Council.

Action steps: - Stakeholder mapping and identification of key institutional, political, and community actors to be involved in the CoLaboratory Council -Conducting participatory meetings to build shared understanding of the Council's purpose, roles and benefits - Development of the CoLaboratory Council statute – drafting its legal status, mandate, composition, decision making procedures, operational modalities, etc. -Political and institutional approval process - Presenting and negotiating the draft statute with political leadership, legal advisors, and relevant municipal bodies -Securing formal adoption of the statute through official decision-making channels such as City Council resolution -Appointment and formalization of council membership	Related activities	Timeframe Stakeholder mapping and identification September 2024 - August 2025 Conducting participatory meetings September 2024 - August 2025 Development of the CoLaboratory Council statute January 2025 - August 2025 Political and institutional approval process June 2025 - August 2025 Securing formal adoption of the statute September 2025 - December 2025 Appointment and formalization of council membership December 2025	Outputs -The CoLaboratory Council is formally established through the adoption of its statute, defining its governance, strategic mandate, and operational framework -City leadership actively engages in the CoLaboratory Council, ensuring political ownership and sustainability of participatory culture

SECTION 4

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Governance

Governance refers to how we work together and make decisions as we move the Integrated Action Plan forward and, more broadly, how we support innovation in the field of open governance in our city. One of the testing actions within the Integrated Action Plan— *“Formalizing the CoLaboratory Council as a governance, strategic, and initiatory body to guide and advance the development of open and collaborative governance practices”*—specifically focuses on institutionalizing the city’s open governance model through an official governing body. The CoLaboratory Council originates from the ULG group. Its Statute provides a detailed description of the governing committee, which will serve as the core group responsible for designing the next steps of the governance system related to open government innovation in our city. In summary, the CoLaboratory Statute concentrates on:

- Establishing a governance committee—the CoLaboratory Council— composed of municipal “sponsors” (middle and senior managers), political leadership, and civil society experts.
- Defining the operational model of the Council, including working norms, etiquette, and ethical principles.
- Outlining the Council’s working practices and decision-making processes.
- Developing the Council’s strategic roadmap and annual work plan.
- Planning and conducting regular Council meetings that ensure inclusive participation and transparent decision-making.
- Implementing communication and visibility activities, such as launching a public communication campaign to introduce the CoLaboratory Council, and continuously sharing its decisions, activities, and outcomes to promote transparency and build public trust.

At the same time, the CoLaboratory Council will continuously identify community leaders and seek strong leadership engagement in open governance innovation, involving them actively in its work.

Additionally, the overall process of advancing the Integrated Action Plan will be supported by a core group composed of staff from the Department of Participation and Innovation in Open Governance. This group will also help steer the work of the CoLaboratory Council.

We will also focus on designing the governance model for another testing action: capacity building in strategic work on polarization, which will be supported by a community-of-practice model known as the Platform of Middle Leadership. Here, we will invest in identifying community leaders, influencers, and sponsors who have practical authority in the field and who can actively advocate for the initiative, promote its outcomes, and dedicate time and resources to sustaining its impact.

Monitoring framework

Measuring the performance of our actions linked to our strategic and specific objectives in this IAP is an ongoing process, not (only) a one-off annual exercise.

We are planning to base our monitoring framework on the **reflexive monitoring strategy** as a method to get a grip on transitions. According to **DRIFT (The Dutch Research Institute For Transitions)**, the **reflexive monitoring (RM) is a way to critically reflect on established ways of thinking, acting, and organizing, and to translate these insights into programs and activities that foster systemic change**. RM process will be taking in a few steps:

- **Defining – and constantly redefining – goals** which provide insight into what needs to be done to make our innovation actions a success (outputs may include: updated goal statements, adjusted assumptions, revised theory of change for depolarization and collaborative governance)
- **Recording our learnings** - keeping a timeline in a logbook or diary which will be helping to track important moments, insights or events that influence our innovation activities. Examples to our project include (emergence of new polarization “flashpoints” in the city, A breakthrough in the ambassador network mobilization, Political backing for the CoLaboratory Council, Resistance inside municipal departments, New institutional partners joining)
- **Reflecting on our learning experiences, challenges and successes** to define key moments of change at the timeline meetings.
- **Recording and tracing the reflexive learning process** with the support of so called “**the dynamic learning agenda**”. The dynamic learning agenda captures the results of your timeline meeting. It presents the critical turning points and connects these to learning questions and follow-up actions. The goal of the dynamic learning agenda is to link the long-term goals of the process to learning objectives and concrete short-term actions. Tracking the changes over time will allow us to readjust. The agenda is dynamic because it changes in time: the critical turning points and learning questions can be reformulated, follow-up actions completed, and new learning questions or actions added.
- **Organising and eye opening workshop** that will help to make the impact of our learning lessons visible to project outsiders. It is important to share insights, along with tips and tricks, with other actors within and outside the city organisation. Our experiences can be useful for colleagues from other departments, external parties or others working on similar themes. Conversely, it is interesting for us to gain a different perspective on our process by gathering associations, ideas, eye-openers, questions, feelings, etc. from people who are not part of the project team. Academic, (research) partners, colleagues at the city organization, policy makers, the mayor, citizens, can all be invited to engage in sharing learning lessons.

Monitoring outputs and indicators within the reflexive monitoring framework

Although RM is not indicator-heavy, we can still track signals aligned with your expected outcomes. Signals of Progress (learning oriented indicators) may include:

For Strategic Objective 1:

- Increase in stakeholder awareness of polarization dynamics
- Evidence of new depolarization practices being applied
- Expansion and activation of the ambassador network
- New narratives or discourse shifts on polarization within city staff
- Workshops and activities leading to changed attitudes or new initiatives

For Strategic Objective 2:

- Visible political ownership in meetings
- Adoption of statute and formal establishment
- Faster or more inclusive decision-making processes
- City teams integrating CoLaboratory tool into everyday work
- New collaborations triggered by Council activities

Funding strategy

The purpose of our funding strategy is to secure long-term funding for:

1. The CoLaboratory Council – a governance, strategic, and initiatory body for open and collaborative governance.
2. The polarization capacity-building programme – workshops, public dialogues, including building of the community of practice model called the Platform of Middle Leadership.

Our strategy combines municipal, national, EU, partnership-based, philanthropic, and revenue-generating options to ensure sustainability and resilience.

A) Municipal and Core Public Funding: Our goal is to anchor both initiatives as permanent city functions. In this regards we plan to:

- Establish a dedicated annual budget line for the CoLaboratory Council and the polarization workshops /depolarization activities.
- Align with existing municipal priorities: social cohesion, inclusion, public participation, and democratic innovation.
- Integrate staff roles within the municipal structure (secretariat, coordination, facilitation).

B) National /Regional /International Funding: Our goal is to access country-level programmes supporting democratic engagement and social cohesion, which will include:

- Applying for funding through ministries responsible for public administration, civic participation, civil society and human rights.
- Positioning the CoLaboratory Council as a model of democratic innovation eligible for strategic national grants.
- Applying for funding through the embassies supporting democratic resilience initiatives in CEE regions

C) EU Funding Streams: Our goal is to secure multi-year support for development, innovation, and scaling. We may apply for grants via:

- URBACT program: Tackling urban challenges on a local government level.
- CERV (Citizens, Equality, Rights & Values): Strong fit for anti-polarization, civil engagement, transparency, and democratic participation.
- ESF+ (European Social Fund Plus): Capacity building, social cohesion, skills development, middle leadership networks.
- Erasmus+ (KA2 Partnerships): Training, competence development, co-creation of workshop materials.
- Horizon Europe (Cluster 2 – Democracy): Governance innovation, new participation models, action research.
- Interreg / Urban cross-border programmes: Shared governance and depolarization strategies with partner cities.

D) Strategic Partnerships & Co-Financing: Our goal is to diversify resources and strengthen legitimacy. This may include collaboration with:

- Universities: Joint R&I projects, evaluation, and co-development of methods.
- Civil society organisations: Co-delivery of workshops and community dialogues; joint grant proposals.
- Private sector: Support communication campaigns, community dialogues, training tools, or innovation pilots.
- Media partners: In-kind contributions for awareness, events, and visibility.

E) Philanthropic & Foundation Funding: Our goal is to support innovation, experimentation, and outreach via foundations focusing on democracy, civic participation, social cohesion, and governance – such as:

- Open Society Foundations
- Robert Bosch Stiftung
- Bertelsmann Stiftung
- European Cultural Foundation

Funding can support piloting, facilitation expertise, materials development, and public visibility actions.

F) Revenue-Generating Components: Our goal is to increase self-sufficiency and reduce dependency on grants via activities such as:

- Offering paid training services to institutions, NGOs, schools, and other municipalities.
- Creating a membership-based community of practice for the Platform of Middle Leadership.
- Developing consultancy packages on governance innovation or depolarization methods for external clients.

Strategic Positioning for Sustainability - Sustainability is strongest when both actions are framed as:

- Essential infrastructure for democratic governance
- Tools for strengthening social cohesion and resilience
- Long-term commitments supported by stable municipal investment

Risk assessment

The implementation of this IAP involves innovative approaches to depolarization, social cohesion, and collaborative governance. These actions take place in a dynamic and complex environment; therefore, risk management is approached as a continuous and adaptive process, aligned with our Reflexive Monitoring (RM) methodology. This means that risks are not only assessed at the outset but are continuously reviewed, recorded, and mitigated through the logbook, timeline meetings, Dynamic Learning Agenda, and Eye-Opener workshops.

The risk assessment covers operational, financial, legal, staffing, technical, and behavioural risks, each categorised as low, medium, or high. The most significant risks relate to behavioural dynamics, staff capacity, and the institutionalisation of new governance structures.

Operational risks include delays in establishing the CoLaboratory Council, low participation in depolarization activities, and irregular maintenance of the timeline/logbook. These will be mitigated through clear role allocation, targeted outreach, structured coordination between departments, and integrating logbook updates and reflexive learning as fixed elements of project routines.

Financial risks mainly concern funding availability for facilitation, training, and participatory tools. Mitigation includes phased budgeting, identifying external funding sources, and regular financial review to reprioritise activities if needed.

Legal and administrative risks include delays in adopting the statute for the CoLaboratory Council and data protection considerations in stakeholder engagement. These will be mitigated by involving legal advisors early, preparing compliant data procedures, and maintaining political engagement to support formalisation.

Staffing risks—such as turnover, time constraints, or skill gaps—are considered high-impact. Mitigation measures include cross-training staff in RM and depolarization methodologies, facilitation methodologies, documenting processes to ensure continuity, and securing leadership support to safeguard staff time and increase the capacities of the staff.

Technical risks relate mainly to the digital tools used for the logbook, online engagement, and CoLaboratory activities. These will be mitigated by selecting simple, accessible platforms, assigning a technical steward, and preparing fallback options for key activities.

Behavioural risks—including stakeholder resistance, political shifts, tensions during workshops, or ambassador fatigue—are relevant for both - depolarization work as well as CoLaboratory council and Colaboratory platform.

These will be mitigated through trust-building, inclusive communication, careful facilitation, and capturing behavioural signals early in the logbook to prompt timely adjustments. Political ownership will be strengthened through regular leadership involvement and the Eye-Opener workshop.

Across all categories, mitigation relies on the ongoing reflexive monitoring cycle: recording emerging risks in the logbook, collectively reflecting on them in timeline meetings, integrating new learning questions into the Dynamic Learning Agenda, and adjusting activities accordingly. This ensures that risk management remains dynamic, learning-driven, and responsive, enabling the IAP to adapt to changing circumstances and remain on course toward its strategic objectives.