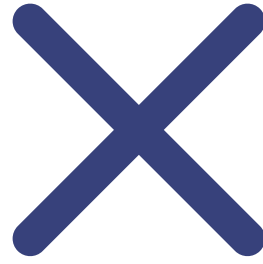
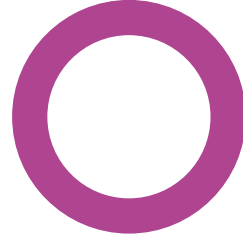
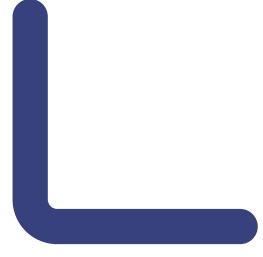
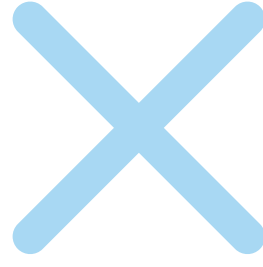


Transferability

Study

Youth empowerment through youth
participatory budgeting

COM'ON CITY



Transferability Study

Youth empowerment through
youth participatory budgeting

Written by
Nils Scheffler
scheffler@urbanexpert.net

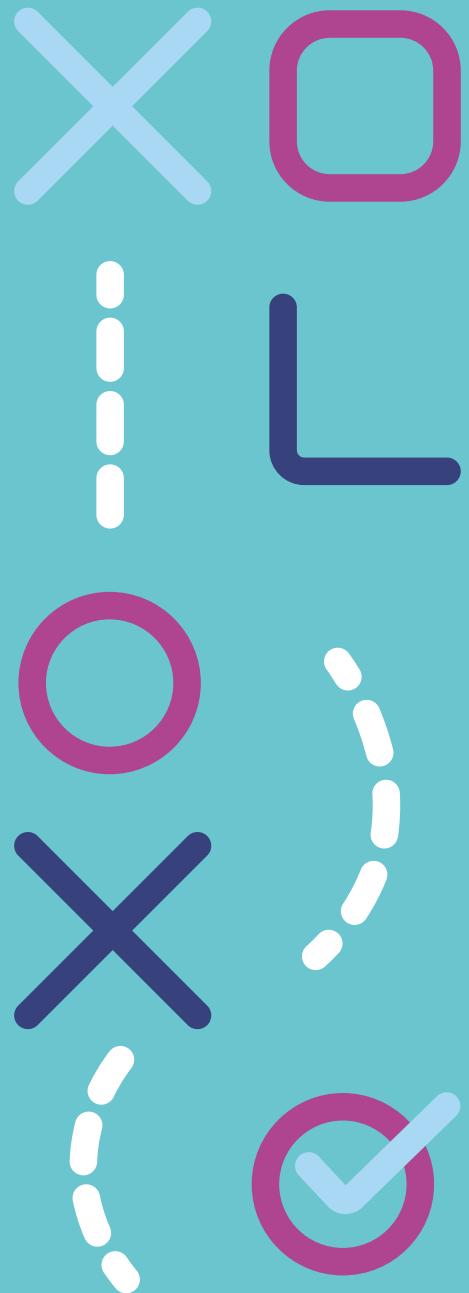
Lead Partner
Municipality of Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Alexandra Poliec
poliecalexandra@gmail.com

PONT Group
András Farkas - andras.farkas@pontgroup.org

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COM'ON CITY



1. The good-practice Com'ON Cluj-Napoca

Com'ON Cluj-Napoca is Romania's longest-standing, pioneering youth participatory budgeting model (YPB), certified as a URBACT Good Practice and recognised as one of Europe's most innovative youth engagement models. It empowers young people identifying community challenges and developing solutions to shape their communities through creative, inclusive, and grassroots-driven small-scale actions.

Launched in 2015 as part of the legacy of the European Youth Capital year, Com'ON was designed to open public participation and funding opportunities to a much wider group of young people—especially those outside formal organisations. It introduced an accessible, youth-friendly model of participatory budgeting, enabling informal groups of at least three young people to propose ideas for the community, have them validated directly by residents through public voting, and implement the selected initiatives themselves.

Beyond allocating small-scale funding to youth-led initiatives, Com'ON has become a city-wide ecosystem platform that strengthens youth agency, fosters community engagement and promotes collaborative governance between young people, civil society and local institutions. Young people not only develop and implement projects, but also acquire social and life skills, build networks and gain confidence to take an active role in shaping their city.

Since its start in 2015, Com'ON has evolved from a mere funding instrument into a broader system, combining different participatory budgeting “editions” with capacity building, inclusion strategies, outreach, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. The result is a scalable and transferable model that supports youth empowerment and multi-stakeholder governance for the youth.

Com'ON: Explanatory video for the youth (2015 version)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4H-ySQXwNI>

Cluj-Napoca

Location: Transylvania, Romania (Cluj County)

Population: ~287,000 city (2026); ~411,000 metro area

Youth (12–27 yrs): ~20–25% of population (~60,000)

Key features: Romania's second-largest city, major university hub (20,000+ students annually), cultural capita, European Youth Capital 2015, dynamic tech/innovation ecosystem, and URBACT lead partner for the Com'ON city transfer network (2025–2028).

1.1 Background and Challenges Leading to Com'ON

Com'ON Cluj-Napoca emerged during Cluj-Napoca's preparation for its European Youth Capital 2015 title. In the lead-up (2013–2014), stakeholders identified a key gap: motivated young people outside formal organisations were rarely reached by traditional youth programmes. The response was to adapt participatory budgeting into a low-threshold, youth-oriented format to fund and support informal youth groups. Com'ON also addresses a broader policy challenge: youth disengagement, declining trust in institutions, and the underrepresentation of marginalised youth in civic life—issues exacerbated in recent years by social fragmentation and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interconnected challenges: Com'ON was specifically designed to tackle

Untapped youth potential

Unequal access across neighbourhoods

Difficulty engaging youth through traditional formats

Lack of simple, unbureaucratic accessible funding & support for youth community

Limited collaboration within the youth ecosystem

a tool to better understand youth needs and realities

Lack of youth-specific data and evidence

Com'ON Cluj-Napoca emerged to provide a comprehensive response to these challenges, specifically:

a low-threshold, inclusive way to engage large numbers of young-people

A solution for informal group excluded from founding

a platform enabling youth-led initiatives to shape the city

a mechanism to build trust between youth, institutions, and the community

a participatory governance model rooted in co-creation

a tool to better understand youth needs and realities

The combination of structural challenges, youth mobilisation, and institutional support—especially the transformative effect of European Youth Capital 2015—created the conditions for Com'ON to emerge as one of the most impactful youth participation processes in Cluj.

1.2 EU Urban Policy Context

Positioning Com'ON in EU youth policy

Com'ON translates the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027's pillars of Engage, Connect, Empower into a concrete municipal mechanism by giving informal youth groups resources and a voice in local decisionmaking. The programme directly supports the Strategy's call to foster youth participation in democratic life, support youth organisations, and use innovative forms of democratic participation, including digital tools and participatory processes. As a recognised URBACT Good Practice, Com'ON is explicitly aligned with the European Youth Goals and with national youth strategies, demonstrating vertical coherence between local practice and EU level objectives.

Alignment with democratic participation and charters

The European urban policy framework emphasises that cities should use EU funds to strengthen local ownership and citizen involvement in shaping urban futures. The revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (Council of Europe) affirms young people's right to be involved in democratic structures and decisions affecting their lives, and calls on authorities to create inclusive, accessible formats close to home. Com'ON responds to this with a practical approach by micro-funding informal youth initiatives, combining open calls for ideas, transparent public voting and co-implementation through youth groups with back-up support for project implementation to make participation tangible for diverse groups of young people, including those beyond established organisations. Recent Council of Europe recommendations urge investment in safe, inclusive local participation formats; Com'ON can be presented as a mature example of such a format, embedded in municipal policy and co-managed with youth structures.

Contribution to EU priorities on democratic resilience

At EU level, there is a growing emphasis on structured engagement with young people, including through the EU Youth Dialogue, upcoming “youth checks” and youth policy dialogues with the European Commission. Com'ON complements these supranational mechanisms by anchoring participation in everyday local life, building civic agency, trust and a sense of ownership among young people and their communities. By reaching beyond already active youth—through smallscale, accessible projects and targeted outreach—it contributes to the EU objective of inclusive participation and to broader democratic resilience, especially in contexts where some young people are disengaged or vulnerable to polarising narratives.

Link to Cohesion Policy 2021–2027 and “Europe closer to citizens”

In 2021–2027, Cohesion Policy introduces a specific policy objective to bring

Europe closer to citizens through support for locally driven integrated territorial and urban development strategies. Com'ON fits this logic as a governance and implementation tool that can be embedded in a city's integrated urban strategy, using a structured call, selection, and implementation cycle for youthinitiated projects, and drawing on multistakeholder partnerships. It presents a replicable local mechanism that operationalises the "Europe closer to citizens" objective in the youth field, complements Urban Agenda partnerships, and helps cities use Cohesion Policy's urban window to foster inclusive, youthdriven urban transformation.

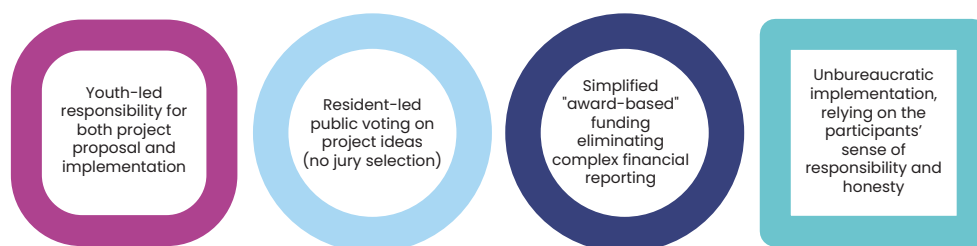
Integrated urban development and social, inclusive cities

The 2021–2027 framework stresses integrated urban development, encouraging cities to combine physical, social, cultural and environmental interventions in coherent strategies. Com'ON directly supports the "social" and "inclusive" dimensions of such strategies by strengthening youth agency, supporting informal groups, and improving access to participation for marginalised young people. By using cultural institutions, youth centres and NGOs as implementation partners and venues, Com'ON links social inclusion, culture and civic participation—exactly the kind of crosssectoral integration the EU expects from sustainable urban development strategies.

1.3 The Youth Participatory Budgeting «Com'ON»

Today, Com'ON operates as a low-threshold micro-granting mechanism providing informal youth groups (aged 14–27) with up to € 1,000 per small-scale community project, which young people can handle to implement. Since 2015, Com'ON has supported, funded and implemented more than 600 ideas.

Com'ON defining features include:



How it started and functions

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igrSgub1llc>

Key Objectives

Com'ON pursues four interconnected objectives across key stakeholder groups:

Young People Empower as Active Community Shapers Com'ON enables youth informal groups to: 1. Identify and address community challenges by proposing and implementing self-designed small-scale projects 2. Develop personal/social skills, self-confidence, and practical experience in organising people, projects and democratic processes 3. Foster trust between youth and public institutions	Community and Institutions Build Mutual Agency and Trust Com'ON strengthens: 1. Community and institutional awareness of youth needs and capacities 2. Recognition of young people as equal partners in community development 3. Intergenerational trust and collaboration 4. Inclusive policies that reduce marginalisation of underrepresented youth
Residents Enhance Public Participation Com'ON mobilises residents through public voting on youth proposals, reinforcing democratic decision-making, civic ownership, and mutual accountability.	Youth Ecosystem Strengthen Multi-Stakeholder Governance for the youth Com'ON promotes: 1. Cross-sector collaboration (public institutions, civil society, education, youth organisations, private actors) 2. Co-management model with shared learning and resource pooling 3. Institutional capacity for evidence-based youth policy development

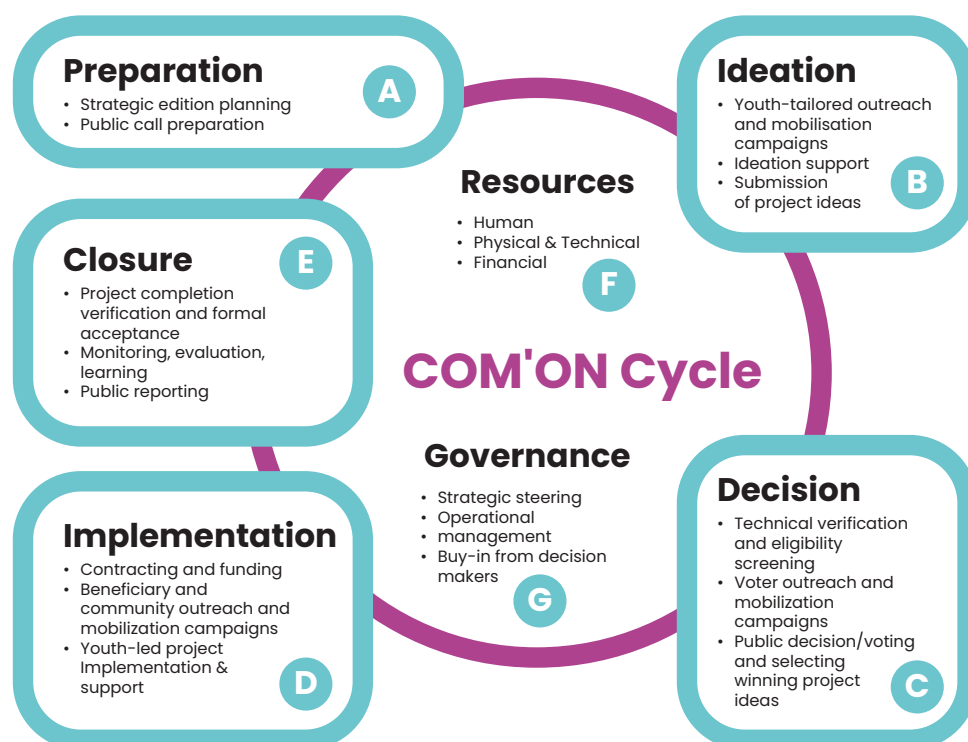
Maxi and Mini editions

Com'ON currently operates two complementary youth participatory budgeting (YPB) formats:

1. **Maxi edition:** City wide YPB following the full Com'ON cycle (see below); occasionally supplemented by earmarked budgets targeting at projects for vulnerable/underrepresented groups or specific themes (e.g., green edition).
2. **Mini edition:** School-based YPB: Schools receive €5,000; pupils propose and refine ideas through workshops; all pupils vote on projects; school administration implements winning projects (up to budget limit).

Com'ON Cycle

Com'ON is implemented in an annual cycle, consisting of a five-stage process, which has evolved and expanded over the time.



A. Preparation

1. Strategic edition planning and public call preparation	
Objective: Establish a clear framework and public relation material for the YPB edition(s) and activate the supporting governance structure. Activities - Defining the editions' (target-group/area) focus and themes for earmarked budgets (if wanted) - Developing the regulation as legal basis (timeline, rules, deadlines, process map for editions) - Preparing communication materials (posters, social media, video teasers) - Incorporating the governance bodies (Tripartite Core Partnership, General Board and Inclusion Board) - Mobilising community partners, youth groups, schools, NGOs	What is particular: Flexible focus and theming of YPB editions to adapt to local priorities and governance activation Duration: 2–3 months before call opens Needed resources: Core team, communication budget, partnership coordinator, legal/comms expertise

B. Ideation

1. Youth-tailored outreach and mobilization campaigns	
Objective: Mobilise diverse young people to submit project ideas and future voters. Activities • Public call launch: Online/offline publication of rules, simple application form, deadlines, FAQs, helpdesk contacts • Light-touch applicant guidance: Email/phone support, no heavy bureaucracy • Social media and community campaigns (posters, street actions, local media) • In-person activation (school and youth center visits, neighbourhood events, info sessions & Q&A) • Mobilising communication channels of youth organisations	What is particular: Flexible age thresholds per edition: Maxi: 14–27 years (city-wide informal groups); Mini/School: 12+ (school-specific, matches target audience); multi-channel support Duration: 2–3 month call period Needed resources: Call coordinator, comms specialist, online platform with Q&A, application form
2. Ideation support	
Objective: Equip youth with skills to identify local problems (school, neighbourhood, community) and co-design feasible project proposals through structured learning and problem-solving. Activities • Learning & skill-building: Talks, practical exercises on communication, teamwork, problem-solving • Co-creation labs: Structured workshops where youth + stakeholders map community challenges, prototype solutions, refine ideas • Targeted mentoring/guidance: One-on-one or small-group support to make ideas realistic and submission-ready	What is particular: Duration: 3–5 weeks parallel to open call Needed resources: Coordinator, facilitators, workshop kits, space
3. Submission of project ideas	
Objective: Easy submission of project documents with an initial validation check. Activities Providing the online submission platform with simple online, cacheable forms Helpdesk during peak submission	What is particular: Team formation: Minimum 3 youth (14–27) submit together to promote teamwork and peer deliberation Proposal limits: Each person in max. 2 teams; teams must differ by ≥50% in composition to avoid individuals/

	groups dominate and broader participation No formal organisation required Duration: Deadline Day Needed resources: Tech support, online platform for submissions
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C. Decision

1. Technical verification and eligibility screening	
Objective: Quickly filter submissions to ensure only feasible, compliant ideas reach public voting while maintaining youth momentum. Activities - Review checks: Eligibility criteria, community benefit, rule compliance (safety, non-discrimination, no profit, free access), belonging to earmarked topic/target-group - Feasibility scan: Realistic within timeline, regulations, budget - Reorganize option: If project is unfeasible as submitted but fixable, teams get the chance to revise before final approval	What is particular: Light and fast review to not lose youth between submission and voting 80 % auto-checks (budget, team rules) + 20 % human review Duration: 2 weeks post-submission deadline Needed resources: Validators, validation logic integrated in online submission platform
2. Voter outreach and mobilization campaigns	
Objective: Broad, inclusive and representative participation of citizens (with a focus on young people) in the voting phase to strengthen democratic engagement and legitimacy of selected initiatives. Activities - Multi-channel communication campaign (social media, local media, schools/universities, NGOs) targeting youth and underrepresented groups - Organisation of promotional events (launch event, info sessions, pop-up voting points in public spaces) - Engagement of local influencers, youth organisations, and community ambassadors to mobilise participation - Targeted outreach campaigns in neighbourhoods with historically low participation	What is particular: Strong emphasis on youth-led mobilisation and peer-to-peer outreach Combination of digital tools and on-the-ground activation to reduce participation barriers Use of gamification and community competition elements (e.g., neighbourhood-based engagement) Focus on inclusivity, ensuring access for marginalised or less digitally connected groups Duration: 2–4 weeks, during the voting period, preceded by awareness phase Needed resources: Communication specialist / campaign manager, budget for media promotion (online ads, print materials), IT infrastructure for secure voting platform, partnerships with schools, universities, NGOs, volunteers /

• Clear and accessible presentation of projects (online catalogue, visual summaries, short videos) • Development and promotion of a user-friendly digital voting platform, complemented by offline voting opportunities	ambassadors for local outreach
3. Public decision/voting and selecting winning project ideas	
Objective: Low-threshold voting, creating visibility and legitimacy through direct resident vote on youth ideas Activities • Publishing all eligible project ideas • Ranking project ideas based on vote count; identifying projects for earmarked budgets and the additional winners based on predetermined number of projects to be selected • Online publishing of the winning projects	What is particular: All residents 14+, which declare they live/study/work in Cluj are allowed to vote via online platform with SMS/email validation (trust-based, no ID/proof or registration); no jury vote Voters have to vote for 3–10 ideas to prevent friend-only voting, encouraging broad review Earmarked budgets for particular topics and target-groups Duration: 2 weeks Needed resources: Digital voting platform, tech support

D. Implementation

1. Contracting and funding	
Objective: Deliver unbureaucratically micro-grants to winning informal youth groups through simplified, trust-based administration that bypasses bureaucratic hurdles and legal restrictions. Activities • Concluding a simplified, basic participation and funding agreement in plain language with clear financial instructions with main contact person of informal group, no complex bureaucracy • Payment of the micro-grant as award	What is particular: Municipality transfers Com'ON budget to PONT (intermediary), which disburses funds to winning project teams Payment as award, thus, micro-grant can be paid to minors, too; and no official financial reporting is needed, eliminating complex accountability for small community projects and signalling trust in youth responsibility Duration: 1-2 weeks post-voting results Needed resources: Contract coordinator, micro-grants
2. Beneficiary and community outreach and mobilization campaigns – from kick-off to closing	
Objective: Sustained communication and milestone events to make funded youth projects visible, transparent, celebrated and embedded in the	What is particular: Focus shifts from “call and voting” to visibility of real-life results Beneficiaries act as co-communicators,

community, strengthening community ownership and participation and momentum for future cycles. Activities • Kick-off event: Winning teams come together to network, share their plans publicly, receive support toolkit to guide them through implementation • Ongoing communication about funded projects through social media storytelling, local media coverage and newsletters, including promotion of events and activities organised by beneficiary groups (e.g. workshops, community actions, public interventions) • Support to beneficiaries in communication: guidelines, templates, visibility rules, storytelling support to help youth groups communicate effectively with their own networks and communities • Targeted outreach to local stakeholders – schools, neighbourhood groups, institutions – to attend or engage with project activities • Use of visual and digital formats (photos, short videos, testimonials) to document and highlight impact throughout the implementation period • Closing or youth showcase events: teams present their completed projects to the community, allowing residents to see tangible results from their votes with storytelling focus: speak-out days, impact videos, youth narratives and lessons learned	not just recipients of funding Strong emphasis on storytelling, peer visibility and community-level engagement that reinforces public trust in the process by making outcomes tangible and visible Duration: 2–6 months with peaks around major activities/events Needed resources: Communication support (central team and guidance for beneficiaries), communication budgets for visibility materials, events, access to media channels (social media, local press), tools/templates for beneficiaries (branding, reporting, storytelling), coordination capacity to collect and disseminate content
3. Youth-led project implementation & support	
Objective: Successful implementation of youth projects. Activities • Youth-driven execution: Informal teams implement their voted projects, adapting to real conditions	What is particular: Flexibility rule: Project evolve with reality — core goals stay, methods adapt Mentoring on demand by the youth, not obligatory

• Supportive facilitation: Each team is assigned a mentor, who offers continuous, collaborative support, learning activities, skill-building workshops, and troubleshooting on demand — not top-down control • Practical guidance: Planning workshops, event promotion tips, community space access • Progress monitoring: Light-touch observation via regular contact by mentor; intervention only if teams go silent or stall	Mentors help solve problems together, not fix them Youth centre as free, central meeting point for informal groups and mentors Duration: 4-6 month Needed resources: Facilitators, free space to meet, shared digital workspace for team coordinatio
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E. Closure

1. Project completion verification and formal acceptance	
Objective: Confirm project delivery through minimal, youth-friendly documentation that prioritizes learning and trust over bureaucratic compliance, while teaching basic financial responsibility. Activities • Simple reporting: Teams submit photos, short content reports ("Did you do what you proposed?"), basic budget summaries • Light verification: Focus on outcomes achieved vs perfect accounting (€1,000 scale justifies trust-based approach) • Formal acceptance: Quick coordinator sign-off once essentials confirmed	What is particular: Teams are not required to prove that 100 % of the award was spent, aligning with the "award logic" Simple process encourages future participation vs paperwork aversion No need of invoices on their names Duration: 1-2 weeks post-implementation deadline Needed resources: Reviewer, reporting form
2. Monitoring, evaluation, learning	
Objective: Continuous data collection and reflection to drive iterative improvements across Com'ON cycles. Activities • Data collection: ideas submitted, youth involved, voter numbers, funded projects, media coverage • Impact assessment: youth typologies, spatial distribution, themes covered, represented/ underrepresented youth groups, success patterns, skills/ confidence development	What is particular: The continuous improvement loop is a defining feature of the Com'ON model Monitoring is needed both for learning and to maintain legitimacy with stakeholders Duration: 2-4 weeks Needed resources: Data collection tools (participation metrics, feedback forms), data coordinator

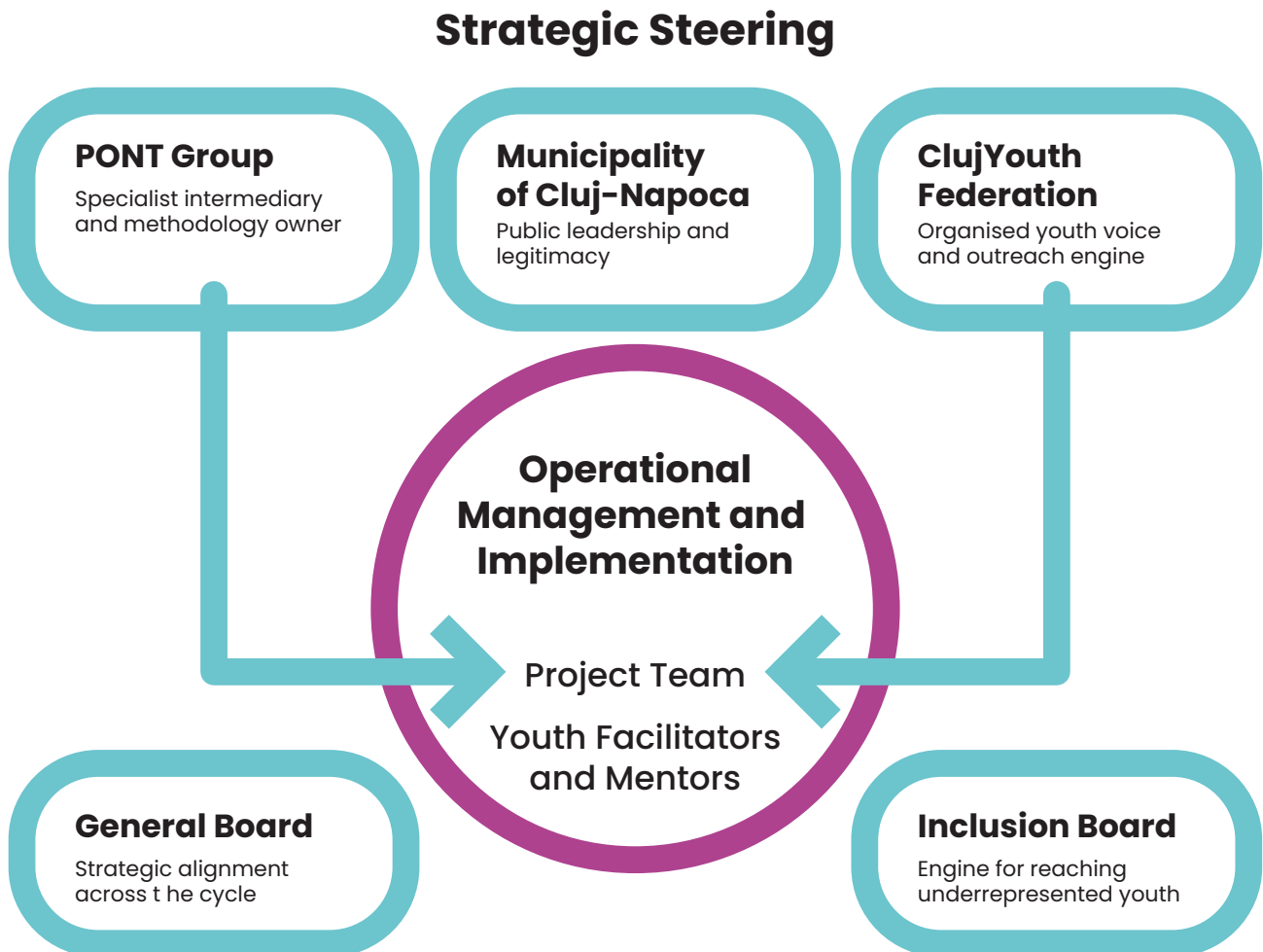
• Feedback collection: reflection form, surveys, interviews with beneficiaries, facilitators, involved stakeholders to improve future cycles • Post-cycle analysis: Board discussions of lessons learned to discuss adjustments of the Com'ON model and cycle	
3. Reporting to funders, stakeholders, public	
Objective: Transparent, accessible and meaningful communication of results and impacts of the Com'ON cycle to funders, local stakeholders and the wider community Activities • Preparation of a comprehensive cycle report including data on applications, voting, funded projects and implementation results • Development of impact summaries: quantitative indicators and qualitative insights, stories, testimonials • Presentation of results to funders and institutional stakeholders: reports, meetings, briefings • Public dissemination of outcomes through online reports and infographics • Documentation of good practices and transferable elements	What is particular: Combining accountability to funders with public transparency and storytelling Making results understandable and visible to a non-technical audience Use of narratives and real examples to illustrate impact Reporting feeds also learning and future cycle design Duration: 1-3 months, with preparatory data collection throughout implementation Needed resources: Coordination and reporting capacity, Communication/design support for visual outputs Engagement of beneficiaries for input (stories, results, testimonials)

Governance Model

Purpose of the governance model

Com'ON's multi-layered governance system provides the infrastructure that underpins every phase of the Com'ON cycle. It aims to ensure quality, transparency, inclusion and sustained impact while distributing responsibility across public institutions, youth structures, NGOs and experts. The governance model operationalises Com'ON's core objectives: building youth agency through ownership, securing democratic legitimacy via broad stakeholder buy-in, and enabling iterative learning for continuous improvement. It links governance, operational delivery, support mechanisms, monitoring and community engagement.

Overview about the Com'ON governance structure



Strategic Steering for Quality, Inclusion and Development

PONT Group – specialist intermediary and methodology owner	Municipality of Cluj-Napoca – public leadership and legitimacy	Cluj Youth Federation (FTC) – organised youth voice and outreach engine
- Leads strategic and operational management of Com'ON - Designs and safeguards participatory budgeting methodology - Handles communication, outreach, digital platform, youth support, troubleshooting and monitoring/evaluation	- Provides political and financial commitment - Co-development of regulation for each call - Coordinates involved departments - Ensures alignment with municipal youth strategy - Supplies youth space center	- Co-manages Com'ON and youth support - Mobilises youth communities and organisations - Bridges youth organisations and municipality - Advises on further development of Com'ON
General Board – strategic alignment across the cycle	Inclusion Board – engine for reaching underrepresented youth	
- Multi-stakeholder body with municipal departments, youth/ culture/ education/ social institutions and NGOs, universities, companies - Meets ~3x/year (pre-call, mid-cycle, post-festival) - Provides strategic guidance - Connects Com'ON to wider city policies and processes - Ensures cross sector cooperation and thematic expertise feeding into future editions	- Specialised body with academia and NGOs representatives working on strengthen participation of vulnerable and underrepresented groups - Meets ~3x/year and feeds lessons into the next edition - Advise on inclusive call design and outreach - Supports targeted mobilisation and barrier removal across ideation and implementation	

Operational Management and Implementation

Project Team

PONT Group and Cluj Youth Federation

- Responsible for day to day management of the full cycle: Process administration/ contracting, communication and PR, platform management, event coordination, direct youth support (technical/ administrative/ organisational), operational and impact monitoring

Youth Facilitators and Mentors

- Responsible for learning and capacity-building: facilitation of ideation workshops, voting mobilisation, youth group coaching and guidance and troubleshooting

Resources for Implementation

Delivering the full Com'ON cycle requires a balanced combination of human, technical and financial resources. These resources are not an add-on; they are an integral part of the model and should be planned from the start in any transfer city.

Human resources

The Project team is at the core which ensure the smooth and successful implementation of the Com'ON cycle. In practice, this translates into several activities and work profiles:

- Programme manager: overall management, planning, partner liaison
- Branding/Communication specialist: branding, campaigns, social media, press
- Financial specialist: fundraising, contracts, micro-grant payments, budget monitoring
- Technical/digital specialist: managing the online platform, voting interface, registration, data
- Monitoring and evaluation specialist: data collection, analysis, learning
- Mentors and facilitators / youth work: navigation, guidance, facilitation, mobilisation, coaching, troubleshooting, providing tools and methods
- Volunteers: event support, outreach, logistics

Physical and technical resources

The Com'ON cycle needs physical and digital infrastructure that makes participation accessible and manageable.

Physical infrastructure: On the physical side, key is the youth space where youth groups and mentors come together for meetings, mentoring sessions and exchanges between project teams, working on their ideas and projects and feel part of a larger community.

Digital infrastructure: On the digital side, a dedicated platform is central:

- Website for online call for proposals, application documents, news, FAQ, online learning materials (templates, guidelines, facilitation tools) to support teams, etc.
- Digital submission for youth ideas and public voting interface that is transparent and user-friendly
- Online communication channels (social media, newsletters) to reach and inform young people and the wider community
- Digital monitoring tools, centralised data management and dashboard to follow participation, inclusion and impact across the cycle.

Financial resources

Sufficient budget for the operational implementation of Com'ON cycle, for human and technical infrastructure and micro-grants for the youth projects is key. Cluj-Napoca has managed to build up a mix of sources for the budget:

- Municipal funds as core for operational management and awards for youth projects
- Private sponsorships, notably the Romanian Commercial Bank and from Foundation Botnar to enable scaling, learning and methodological development based on evaluation and research
- EU Funds from EU projects and programmes

1.4 Lessons Learnt – What Contributes to Success

Political support and equal-footing partnership

Com'ONs governance approach demonstrates the opportunities for sustained buy-in and adaptability of youth participatory budgeting throughout the youth stakeholder eco-system.

- **Early political backing:** The model, introduced by PONT Group, was supported by the City Hall from the start, minimising uncertainty and ensuring continuity across cycles.
- **Equal-footing partnership (not “client-provider”):** PONT Group and municipality collaborate as trusted equals, fostering dialogue, shared ownership and joint problem-solving.
- **Flexibility via non-public intermediary:** PONT's operational lead enables simpler processes and less bureaucracy than municipal procedures typically allow.
- **Wider stakeholder eco-system:** General Board and Inclusion Board anchor Com'ON in a broader stakeholder environment, building legitimacy, stability and strategic advice for further development.

Pre-authorized trust as a rewarding investment

Com'ON shows that pre-authorized trust, providing resources upfront with minimal oversight, is a rewarding investment, resulting in reciprocal trust build: youth gain faith in institutions, institutions gain confidence in youth-led delivery of actions.

- **Awards model:** Giving funds as award (not contracts) in the beginning to eliminate complex financial reporting while signalling confidence in youth responsibly.
- **Simple, control-light processes** that minimise bureaucracy and control, so youth teams can focus on their project and not paperwork.
- **Demand driven support:** Support and guidance offered on request, not top-down, avoiding a feeling of constant control in the youth teams.

Low-threshold, unbureaucratic funding

Com'ON maximises youth participation by prioritising speed, simplicity and accessibility in its funding mechanisms.

- **Simple, unbureaucratic processes** that allow easy application and spending of funding
- **Youth-tailored timetables** e.g. short intervals between project submission and decision sustain motivation and momentum.

Skills building and physical support space

Com'ON supports transformative skill growth and sustained youth leadership for

future civic engagement by developing social, communication and coordination skills, confidence, critical thinking, empathy, teamwork, problem-solving through hands-on actions and non-hierarchical support.

- **Ideation AND implementation:** Youth commit stronger as they both create and execute their projects.
- **Facilitator-led learning without taking over:** Mentors offer capacity-building on demand, focusing on agency and confidence, listen than dictate what has to be done, help anticipate what needs to be done and build team capability.
- **Physical hub as anchor:** Dedicated safe, friendly, open-minded space for youth teams to meet with team members, mentors and other project teams, enabling team collaboration, facilitator access and peer exchange between projects.

1.5 Scope for Improvement

Inclusion

Low participation of vulnerable, marginalised youth groups (Roma, LGBTQIA+, disabled, low-income household and neighbourhoods) due to limited programme awareness, lack of accessible entry points, insufficient project development skills and low confidence to participate. It needs more tailored outreach to these youth groups, localised formats and support mechanisms for them.

The model is relatively centralised.

There is a need to develop more modular, decentralised, neighbourhood, thematic or target-group-specific formats/editions (e.g. in schools, local hubs), allowing participation to happen closer to young people's everyday environments, in particular for vulnerable, marginalised youth groups. It would increase the flexibility and adaptation of Com'ON to different contexts and needs.

Voting fairness

Popularity bias in voting – well-networked youth groups win more likely, not necessarily high-impact ideas. This highlights the need to explore and test alternative or complementary decision-making methods (e.g. mixed evaluation models, deliberative elements, weighted criteria) that can ensure a more balanced, inclusive, and impact-oriented selection of ideas.

Mainly young people vote (in 2024 around 85 % of the roughly 4,300 individual voters were under 30). This is because older age groups are less likely to be attracted to Youth Participatory Budgeting and youth ideas.

Financial sustainability and flexibility

Dependence on public annual budget cycle creates uncertainty for long-term continuity of Com'ON and limits strategic development. A multi-annual financial framework would enable more stable planning and scaling.

The Com'ON cycle must be carried out within a rigid annual budget cycle.

Delays in public funding allocation reduce the effective implementation period for the youth projects. It needs more financial spending flexibility in terms of time.

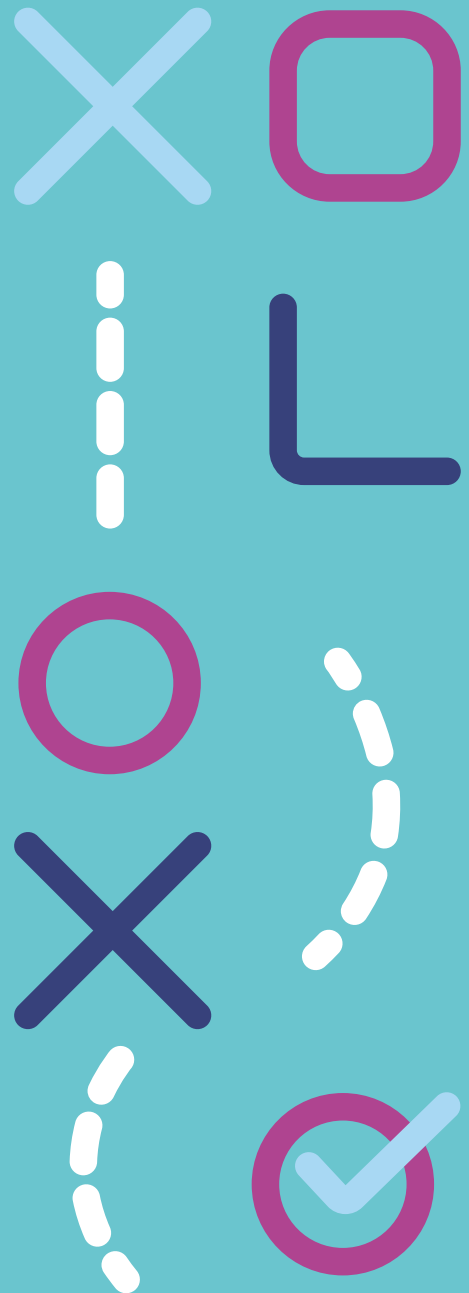
Impact Communication

Strengthen impact measurement and communication (why it matters, what changes, what happens). More robust tools and methodologies are needed to capture the short- and long-term impact of Com'ON (on participants, communities and local governance), including qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Results need to be communicated towards decision-makers, funders, and the wider public, including clearer narratives on impact and contribution to local development, in order to build sustained support.

Alumni Engagement

Youth participation within Com'ON is often one-off. There is untapped potential in activating former participants as peer mentors and ambassadors or initiators of follow-up actions, who receive mentoring in supporting the continuation and scaling of successful projects.

COM'ON CITY



2. Partner profiles

The Com'ON City Network brings together five medium-sized European cities from five different EU member states, united by a shared commitment to developing innovative participatory approaches that actively engage young people in urban development and local governance. With populations ranging from approximately 55,000 to 287,000 inhabitants, the partner cities represent a deliberate diversity in scale, geographic location, and institutional context — a diversity that significantly strengthens the transferability potential of the methods and practices developed within the network.

Across all five municipalities, young residents aged 10 to 29 account for between 19.8 % and 28.4 % of the total population, reflecting a broadly comparable demographic baseline. While each city brings its own urban culture, governance tradition, and socioeconomic context, this shared demographic profile ensures that youth-oriented instruments developed in one context can be meaningfully adapted and tested across the network.

The following section presents a concise profile of each partner city, including key statistical indicators and a brief characterisation of the local context relevant to youth participation and urban co-creation.

2.1 Overview of Partner Cities

City	Country	Inhabitants	Age 10–29	% Age 10–29	Area
Cluj-Napoca (LP)	Romania	287,000	61,000	21 %	180 km ²
Leeuwarden	Netherlands	130,000	36,000	28 %	237 km ²
Piacenza	Italy	103,000	20,000	20 %	119 km ²
Valongo	Portugal	101,000	20,000	20 %	75 km ²
Veszprém	Hungary	55,000	11,000	21 %	127 km ²

Figures are rounded/estimated.

Cluj-Napoca is the second-largest city in Romania and the main economic, cultural and academic hub of Transylvania. Known for its vibrant student population — the city hosts several major universities — Cluj-Napoca has positioned itself as a centre of innovation, creative industries and digital entrepreneurship. Its relatively young demographic profile, with more than one fifth of residents in the 10–29 age bracket, provides a strong foundation for participatory youth engagement in urban governance.

Leeuwarden is the capital of the province of Friesland in the northern Netherlands. Having served as a European Capital of Culture in 2018, the city has built a lasting legacy of citizen-led creative placemaking and cross-sector collaboration. With the highest proportion of young people (10–29) among all network partners — 28 % — Leeuwarden brings a distinctly youthful and participatory civic culture, shaped in part by its educational institutions and active local NGO landscape.

Piacenza is a medium-sized city in the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy, strategically located at the confluence of the River Po and the Via Emilia. The city has a strong tradition of civic associations and social solidarity, and its compact urban structure lends itself well to community-led interventions. Piacenza contributes to the Com'ON network a rich experience in grassroots neighbourhood governance and inter-generational dialogue.

Valongo is a densely populated municipality in the Greater Porto metropolitan area of northern Portugal. Its rapid urban growth in recent decades has brought both opportunities and challenges in terms of social cohesion and public services. The municipality has invested strongly in participatory planning tools and digital civic platforms, making it a pioneering example of youth co-creation in a suburban context with a young and growing population.

Veszprém is a historic city in western Hungary, nestled in the Bakony hills and awarded the title of European Capital of Culture 2023. Home to the University of Pannonia (Pannon Egyetem), the city benefits from a significant student population that shapes its cultural and civic life. As the smallest partner city in the network, Veszprém demonstrates that innovative youth engagement practices are feasible and transferable in smaller urban settings, offering valuable lessons for similarly sized municipalities across Europe.

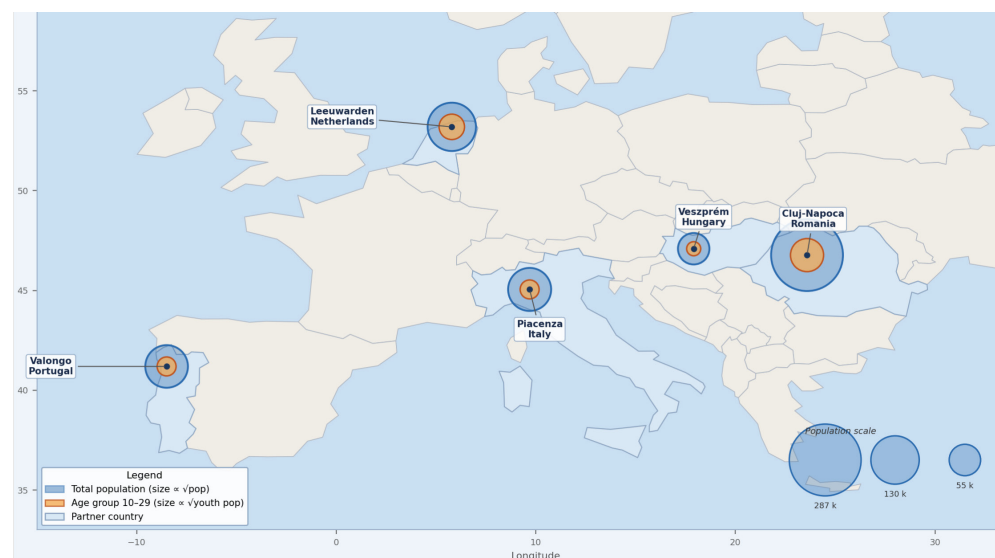


Figure 1 illustrates the geographic spread of the five partner cities across Europe. The outer circle at each location represents the total population of the city (proportional to the square root of the number of inhabitants), while the inner amber circle reflects the size of the 10–29 age group.

2.2 Shared Challenges and Objectives

Each partner city enters the Com'ON transfer network from its own specific urban context, carrying a distinct set of challenges related to youth participation and civic engagement. At the same time, all five municipalities are committed to more inclusive, meaningful and institutionally embedded forms of youth involvement in local governance and community life.

The table below identifies the main recurring challenges and their distribution across the network.

Common Challenge	Relevant Cities	Key Description
Youth disconnection & civic disengagement	Cluj-Napoca, Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Veszprém	Young people increasingly disengage from formal civic structures, democratic processes and local institutions.
Reaching underrepresented youth	Cluj-Napoca, Leeuwarden, Valongo, Veszprém	Participation tends to concentrate among already active or school-embedded youth; peripheral, vulnerable and marginalised groups remain hard to reach.
Diversity, inclusion & shared identity	Leeuwarden, Piacenza	High cultural diversity and social fragmentation make building inclusive, cross-community participation especially challenging.
Youth emigration & local retention	Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Veszprém	The outmigration of young people is a structural demographic and civic challenge, also because lack of spaces and activities for the youth.

This convergence of challenges — and the shared aspiration to move from tokenistic towards genuine co-creation and institutionalised youth agency — provides the strategic rationale for the Com'ON transfer network. The diversity of local responses to these shared challenges is, in turn, the network's principal asset: each city brings tested practices, adapted instruments and institutional learning that can inform and inspire its peers.

General objectives

All partners strive to strengthen youth participation and youth agency in their city to empower young people to actively shape their environment and make their voices and opinions heard. It is important to the partners that the empowerment ensures equal opportunities and inclusion for all young people regardless of social and cultural background or residential area they come from. The Youth Participatory Budgeting is also to contribute to build bridges between youth, youth organisations, city administration and society at large.

2.3 Participatory Budgeting and Youth Empowerment Experiences

Each partner city brings a distinct portfolio of prior experience in youth empowerment, participatory budgeting and civic co-design. This experience forms the practical knowledge base that each city contributes to the Com'ON transfer network — both as a source of tested instruments and approaches that can inform other partners, and as a foundation on which to build the local adaptation of the Com'ON model.

The following table provides an overview of the partners' experiences with participatory budgeting (PB):

City	PB	YPB	Experience
Cluj-Napoca		X	Com'ON is the main YPB instrument, embedded in the city's strategic framework on youth participation.
Leeuwarden	X	X	Mienskipsfúns allows residents to submit plans with budgets for neighbourhood improvement and social cohesion projects up to € 10.000. They are reviewed by an independent panel. Approved plans receive financial support and are implemented by the initiators. Project500 is a micro-budget YPB initiative, providing € 500 to youth project ideas. A youth commission of young people approves within 2 weeks submitted projects, which are implemented by the youth applicant (12-27).
Piacenza	X	X	Piacenza Partecipa is the first approach of participatory budgeting that allows residents to submit project ideas for public spaces. A technical commission checks feasibility (€ 20.000 – 30.000 per project), then citizens vote online or in-person (age 16+). Top-voted projects get funded and implemented by the city. Piacenza 2030 – Giovane Città Futura allows informal youth groups (14-35) and associations to submit project applications. A technical commission selects the successful applicants, providing funding between € 3.000-9.000 for the implementation of the project by the applicants.
Valongo	X	X	Orçamento Participativo Sénior allows residents aged 62+ to propose and decide on projects to improve quality of life and promote active aging. The municipality implements the winning projects. Orçamento Participativo Eu Conto! is an internal PB for municipal staff. Employees propose ideas and vote on them to enhance workplace quality of life, with €5,000 allocated per edition (splittable across winners).

			Orçamento Participativo Jovem de Valongo targets youth aged 6–35. It allocates public funds of up to € 10.000 for projects, which are proposed and voted by the youth. The implementation is done by the municipality.
Veszprém	X		Résztvételi költségvetés , launched in 2025, allows residents (16+) to propose and vote on projects for local infrastructure and green spaces, with the municipality implementing the winning project proposals.

In addition, the partners bring the following experience with youth empowerment to the partnership:

Experience Theme	Partner Cities
Youth policy frameworks & strategies	Youth Strategy: Cluj-Napoca, Leeuwarden, Valongo, Veszprém Youth participation guide: Leeuwarden
Co-design spaces and community hubs	Youth and neighbourhood centres: Cluj-Napoca, Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Valongo, Veszprém
Municipal structures for youth empowerment	Youth Advisory Council, bringing youth stakeholders together: Cluj-Napoca, Valongo Youth platform, connecting youth and municipality: Cluj-Napoca, Leeuwarden, Valongo Youth surveys and consultations: Leeuwarden, Veszprém

This mapping confirms that while Cluj-Napoca holds the most comprehensive and mature Youth Participatory Budgeting model, the transfer partners are not empty vessels: each brings concrete, tested experience that is directly relevant to the Com'ON model components they are adopting. The network's learning potential is therefore bidirectional — Cluj-Napoca can also draw on the partners' experience.

2.4 Partners' Network Objectives and Transfer Interests

The partners' network objectives describe what each partner city specifically aims to achieve by participating in the Com'ON City transfer network. While the general objectives outlined in section 2.2, p. 20 reflect longer-term, city-wide ambitions for youth empowerment, the network objectives are more concrete and operationally focused: they set out what each city intends to learn, test, adapt or implement within the timeframe of the network, and how participation in the exchange is expected to add value to existing or planned local programmes.

Cluj-Napoca enters the network as the lead city and the source of the Com'ON Good Practice, seeking to use the transfer process to critically reflect on and evolve its own model. The four transfer partners — Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Valongo and Veszprém — are each at a different stage of developing or reforming their youth

participation and participatory budgeting approaches, and bring distinct local contexts, assets and ambitions to the network.

Across the five partners, a number of recurring themes emerge in the network objectives. These themes of convergence define the core exchange agenda: the topics on which all cities have something to gain from structured peer learning and where the network's collective knowledge is most valuable.

Convergence Theme	Cities	Description
Scale and deepen own YPB	Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Valongo, Veszprém	All four transfer partners explicitly aim to learn from Cluj-Napoca's experience to further develop, adapt, reform or introduce youth participatory budgeting in their own context.
Inclusive outreach and involvement of underrepresented youth and areas	Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Valongo, Cluj-Napoca	Partners aim to move from reaching "already active" youth to mobilising young people from peripheral and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, with disadvantaged backgrounds and marginalised communities.
Reducing bureaucracy and lowering barriers for YPB	Leeuwarden, Valongo, Veszprém	Cities seek to simplify participation rules and procedures, making YPB more youth-friendly, low-threshold, flexible and accessible.
Youth co-creation and involvement in implementation in YPB	Leeuwarden; Piacenza, Valongo, Veszprém	Cities aim to move young people beyond the role of idea-submitters and voters into active implementers and co-managers, requiring mentorship structures and dedicated resources, evolving from consultation towards genuine youth co-creation and implementation.
Monitoring, evaluation and impact of YPB	Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Valongo, Cluj-Napoca	Partners want to improve result and impact measurement frameworks, capturing qualitative and long-term outcomes of youth participation beyond quantitative participation figures for a continues improvement process.
Youth visibility	Piacenza, Valongo, Veszprém	Partners aim to strengthen transparency and public visibility of youth led-initiatives to strengthen public awareness about potential of empowered young people and their needs.
Youth ecosystem	Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Veszprém, Cluj-Napoca	Partners want to promote a wider governance structure to strengthen a youth ecosystem between youth organisations, mentors, city administration, youth initiatives and local economic actors.

Institutional embedding and political sustainability of youth empowerment	Leeuwarden, Valongo, Cluj-Napoca	Network participation will be used to strengthen local capacities to support youth-led initiatives and the institutional anchoring of youth participation tools, ensuring their continuity across political cycles and leadership changes.
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This convergence themes makes the Com'ON City network particularly well-suited for structured peer learning: each partner is working on recognisably similar objectives — how to make youth participatory budgeting genuinely inclusive, institutionally resilient and impactful — but from a different starting point, in a different institutional culture and at a different stage of development. The diversity of local approaches and the shared ambition for meaningful youth co-creation create the conditions for substantive, actionable exchange throughout the transfer network.

Partners are interested to transfer and exchange on the following topics with regards to the Com'ON cycle (section 1.3, p. 6).

T = transfer, E = Exchange	Cluj		Leeuwarden		Piacenza		Valongo		Veszprém	
Transfer components / topics	I	E	T	E	T	E	T	E	T	E
A. Preparation										
Strategic edition planning and public call preparation			X	X	X	X	X		X	X
B. Ideation										
Youth-tailored outreach and mobilization campaigns			X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Ideation support			X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Idea submission							X	X		
C. Decision										
Technical verification and eligibility screening				X		X	X	X	X	X
Voter outreach and mobilization campaigns							X	X		
Public decision/voting and selecting winning project ideas			X	X	X	X	X		X	X
D. Implementation										
Contracting and funding			X	X			X	X		X

Beneficiary and community outreach and mobilization campaigns				X	X	X	X			
Youth-led project implementation & support				X	X	X	X	X	X	X
E. Closure										
Project completion verification and formal acceptance			X	X			X			
Monitoring, evaluation, learning				X	X	X	X		X	X
Public reporting							X			
F. Resources										
Human				X		X		X		
Branding and communication				X	X	X	X			X
Physical and technical			X					X		
Financial				X				X	X	X
G. Governance										
Strategic steering				X	X	X		X	X	X
Operational implementation				X		X	X		X	X
Buy-in from decision-makers								X		X

2.5 ULG Stakeholders and Involvement

The URBACT Local Group (ULG) is the key mechanism through which each partner city plans, adapts and embeds the Com'ON model locally. Its composition directly shapes whose voices inform the transfer process and who takes ownership of the resulting instruments. Each city is developing a tailored approach to ULG membership and involvement — reflecting its specific institutional context, existing partnerships and strategic priorities.

Despite their different local contexts, the partner cities converge on a consistent set of stakeholder groups for their ULGs. The table below identifies the main groups that partners intend to involve, their role in the transfer process, and the cities in which they appear. The table demonstrates a shared understanding of what a productive Com'ON ecosystem looks like — multi-sectoral, inter-generational and rooted in both institutional structures and informal youth networks.

A particularly significant pattern is the explicit inclusion of young people themselves in all ULGs — not as passive beneficiaries but as active co-designers. This signals a common commitment to moving beyond tokenistic consultation towards genuine youth agency in the governance of the Com'ON transfer process. The variety of mechanisms proposed — from dedicated Youth ULGs (Veszprém) to youth representatives within the core ULG (Leeuwarden, Valongo) to youth

beneficiaries with a focus on marginalised groups (Cluj-Napoca) — reflects the diverse institutional starting points of the partners while pointing in the same direction.

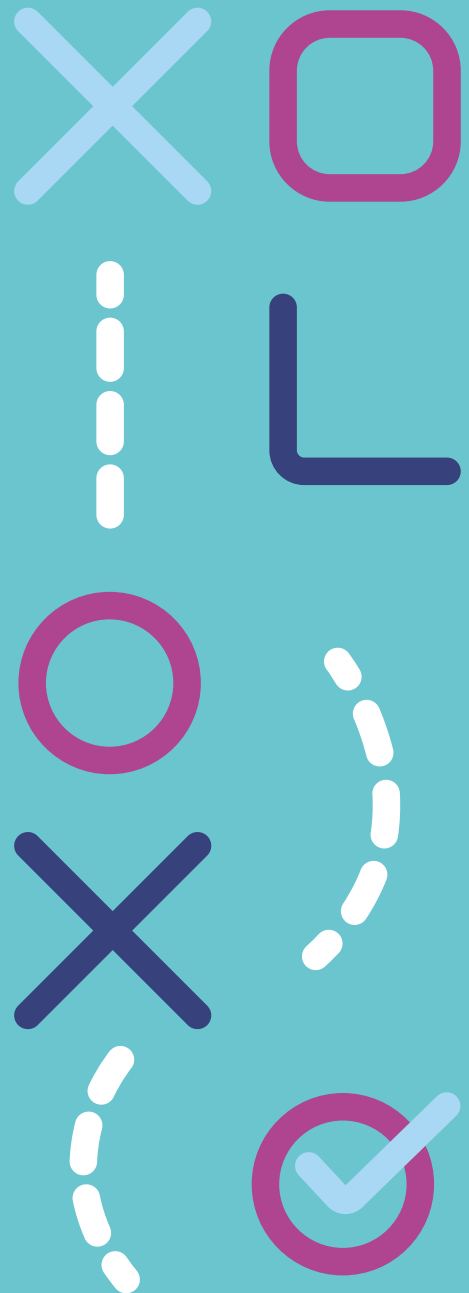
Stakeholder Group	Role and relevance across the network	Partner cities
Young people	All partners plan to involve young people directly in the ULG to reach less institutionalised youth and broaden participation beyond the "usual suspects". One city foresees a separate, additional youth ULG.	Cluj-Napoca, Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Valongo, Veszprém
Municipal administration	To ensure an integrated approach and overcome sector silo thinking, all cities involve municipal departments e.g. youth, education, social, inclusion, sport and culture, innovation or finance.	Cluj-Napoca, Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Valongo, Veszprém
Education institutions	Schools, universities and vocational training institutes are central stakeholders for all partners. They provide access to large numbers of young people, support dissemination and contribute to civic education. High school student councils and university representative bodies feature prominently.	Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Valongo, Veszprém
Youth NGOs & associations	Formal youth or youth umbrella organisations provide network reach, project implementation capacity and establish relationships with young people. Cluj involves its Youth Federation and other youth organisations, Valongo includes the Municipal Youth Council and specific NGOs, Piacenza and Leeuwarden involve associations active in youth work. Veszprém intends to involve the Student Council.	Cluj-Napoca, Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Valongo, Veszprém
Cultural, social & community organisations, youth centres	Social, culture and community organisations, in particular managing youth centres or participatory processes, are key stakeholders for all partners. They help widen access and attract less civic-minded youth.	Cluj-Napoca, Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Valongo, Veszprém
Elected representatives	Valongo explicitly includes the Councillor for Youth to ensure political alignment and resource continuity. Veszprém's ULG includes the two vice mayors.	Valongo, Veszprém
Private sector & financiers	Most partners intend to involve local economic actors, foundations and private financiers as potential co-financers and mentors and to create career connections for youth.	Cluj-Napoca, Leeuwarden, Piacenza, Veszprém

Beyond membership composition, the partners have following ideas what role the ULG will play in the transfer and adaptation of the Com'ON model, both at local and transnational level. At local level focus is on the practical design and piloting of the model; and at network level on transnational learning and contribution to the wider URBACT exchange. The table below synthesises the main involvement approaches across both levels.

Partner city	Approach to ULG involvement	
	Local	Transnational
Cluj-Napoca	ULG members will actively contribute to redesign key components of Com'ON and the testing action, bringing perspectives from their respective sectors. In addition, they will support direct engagement with underrepresented youth groups, acting as intermediaries and trust-builders. Private sector and institutional stakeholders will contribute to identifying complementary funding sources, sponsorships or in-kind support to strengthen sustainability of Com'ON.	ULG members will engage in transnational exchanges, sharing concrete tools, formats, lessons learned with partner cities and collaborate co-creating toolkits e.g. on inclusion, decision-making fairness, decentralised formats. Also they will support the articulation of key messages on youth participation towards national and European level, using local experience as evidence.
Leeuwarden	Integrated into the emerging mentor network of the youth programme, ULG members will in particular facilitate local "Spots" across the city and actively involve young people in shaping the YPB model.	The ULG coordinator will promote the participation at and knowledge-sharing of results from transnational activities between ULG members, who will contribute to the design of the YPB approach drawing on network insights.
Piacenza	The youth centres will act as "antennas": identifying civic issues and youth expectations, disseminating Com'ON to existing and new user groups. Active youth associations, university and high school representatives serve as spokespersons; the core ULG will periodically open up on specific topics more relevant to the young community, where the youth will be engaged through youth-friendly activities.	ULG members will participate in transnational activities, contributing local perspectives to the network-level and share transferable experience and lessons learnt with the other local ULG partners.
Valongo	Regular ULG meetings to discuss model adaptation, design participatory processes and define criteria for youth-led projects. Co-creation workshops to adjust tools, guidelines and micro-grant procedures. Active support for pilot micro-projects through mentoring, monitoring and feedback.	ULG members will participate in transnational activities to share progress, lessons learned and good practices. They serve as a reference group for the wider stakeholder community.

Veszprém	There will be a dual ULG structure: a core ULG (12–15 members) and a dedicated Youth ULG, with 1–2 youth representatives in the core ULG. The ULGs will be a platform for dialogue and provide input, opinions and ideas for the YPB model. The Com'ON ULG is linked to the existing PB model development working group. Some additional ULG members, outside the core ULG, will be periodically informed on the process.	Active and English speaking ULG members will be invited to transnational meetings and online masterclasses. They will share their experience at the local ULG meetings.
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COM'ON CITY



3. Synthesis, overall transferability and methodology

3.1 Objectives and transfer potentials of the Com'ON City transfer network

Objective

Development and application of low bureaucratic, low-threshold and inclusive Youth Participatory Budgeting (YPB) systems in the partner cities

The URBACT transfer network “Com'ON City” aims to strengthen youth empowerment and democratic participation through the development and application of low bureaucratic, low-threshold and inclusive Youth Participatory Budgeting (YPB) systems. The blueprint is the good-practice “Com'ON” of the city of Cluj-Napoca. The YPB is designed to enable young people to co-create and play an active role from ideation through to implementation of community projects – regardless of social or cultural background or the neighbourhood they come from – and to build bridges and mutual trust between young people, youth organisations, city administration and society at large.

A defining feature of the Com'ON model – and a central objective of the transfer network – is its continuous adaptation and improvement based on systematic monitoring and evaluation. Equally central is the institutional embedding of YPB within a multi-stakeholder youth governance ecosystem, ensuring that participatory budgeting becomes a sustainable element of local youth policy rather than a one-off initiative.

Within 24 months, the project partners will develop locally adapted YPB models in close collaboration with local stakeholders and set them out in transfer plans, thereby laying the groundwork for the long-term implementation and institutional anchoring of YPB in each partner city.

Ideally, in the long-run this will foster a generation of young people who actively engage in the development of their cities and neighbourhoods, whose needs are recognised and reflected in political decisions, and who are genuinely involved through co-creative, trust-based processes – contributing to empowered, skilled young people, who identify with their city, and more stronger, inclusive local democracies.

Transfer potential

The core challenge Com'ON addresses – how to meaningfully involve young people in local governance while overcoming institutional barriers, low trust and social exclusion – is not specific to Cluj-Napoca. It is shared across the partner cities as confirmed by the convergent challenges documented among the partner cities in section 2.2: youth civic disengagement, the difficulty of reaching underrepresented groups, the absence of low-threshold participation formats, and the fragility of youth empowerment instruments across political cycles. Com'ON was not designed as a bespoke solution for one city but as a response to a structural gap in how municipalities engage young people – which is precisely what makes it transferable.

As a decade-long programme that has supported over 1 000 youth-led initiatives and involved thousands of residents in deciding which ideas receive funding, Com'ON offers robust evidence on youth participation. The Com'ON model is based on a modular structure of stages (section 1.3: Com'ON Cycle: preparation, ideation, decision, implementation and closure in a continuous improvement process) which built around a set of principles: Low bureaucracy, trust-based micro-funding, demand-driven mentoring, inclusive outreach, among others. The stages and their design principles can be operationalised in different ways depending on local administrative frameworks, available resources and existing youth infrastructure. This allows to adapt the Com'ON model to different administrative, cultural and strategic contexts. Therefore, Com'ON can be presented as a scalable local practice for YPB.

The stages of the Com'ON cycle, the governance structure and need resources can be calibrated to the scope and complexity of each partners' own starting point and institutional capacity. Key to a successful transfer and adaptation of the Com'ON model is the political and administrative willpower, as well as the courage to adopt youth-friendly, less bureaucratic processes, rules and administrative procedures during all stages which may allow for less control, but are more appealing to young people and enable them to unleash their creativity and drive to shape their own futures.

Transferability is further supported by the strong alignment between Com'ON and current EU policy frameworks. As set out in section 1.2, the model directly operationalises the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, the principles of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People, and the “Europe closer to citizens” objective of Cohesion Policy 2021–2027. This means that partner cities can relate their YPB activities to EU policies – and hopefully to national policies, too. This will help to anchor their YPB and draw on existing national and EU funding streams – including ERDF urban allocations, ESF+ social inclusion measures and dedicated youth programme budgets.

Last but not least, all transfer partners bring concrete experience with participatory budgeting or youth empowerment instruments (see section 2.3), which means the transfer is not about copying a model wholesale without context but about critically adapting its principles and tools – a process for which the diversity of the network provides an ideal testing ground.

3.2 Transfer and adaptation requirements

Adaptation

Transferring the Com'ON model does not mean replicating Cluj-Napoca's programme in every detail. It means translating the model's core principles and structural logic into a locally owned, locally adapted YPB system that fits the partner city's administrative context, institutional culture and available resources. Three adaptation requirements are central to this process.

1. **Locally adapted, low bureaucratic and low-threshold, inclusive Youth Participatory Budgeting model:**

The adapted model must actively involve young people during all stages of the YPB cycle – preparation, ideation, decision, implementation and closure – and must be embedded in a continuous improvement process that allows the model to evolve based on the experiences of each cycle. The Com'ON cycle described in section 1.3, p.6ff provides the structural template; however, each partner city will define the scope, scale and specific format of each stage to match its own starting point, youth population and local priorities.

2. **Locally adapted multi-stakeholder governance structure and youth ecosystem that underpins every phase of the YBP model:**

The adapted model must allow a structured collaboration between the municipality, youth organisations, mentors, schools, community actors and the young participants themselves. This governance ecosystem must provide the operational backbone: managing the cycle, maintaining quality, ensuring inclusion and building the cross-sectoral trust that makes the model legitimate in the eyes of young people and institutions alike.

3. **Sufficient human, technical and financial resources:**

As set out in section 1.3, Resources for Implementation, a functioning Com'ON-type model requires dedicated staff across several profiles as well as a physical space for youth groups to meet and a digital platform for submissions, voting and communication. Financial resources must cover both the operational running costs and the micro-grant budget distributed to winning youth projects. These resources do not all have to be in place from day one, but a realistic resource plan must be developed as part of the transfer plan to ensure the model is viable.

These three requirements are interdependent: a well-designed YPB cycle without governance structures to support it will lack legitimacy and sustainability; a strong governance ecosystem without adequate resources will struggle to deliver; and resources deployed without a genuinely low-threshold, inclusive YPB model risk replicating the very exclusionary dynamics the model is designed to overcome.

Transfer

Successfully launching a Com'ON-type YPB requires more than a well-designed model. It depends on a set of decisions, structures and investments that must be in place or actively built. Drawing on the lessons set out in section 1.4, the following guidance identifies the key factors that partner cities should address when developing and launching their locally adapted YPB.

Built-up and establish a multi-stakeholder governance and youth ecosystem

The governance structure is not a bureaucratic add-on but the foundation on which the YPB rests. To ensure the administrative, social, political and financial embedding of the programme, the governance system should bring together the relevant municipal departments, youth organisations and centres, educational institutions, community organisations, private sector partners and youth representatives in a genuinely collaborative structure – building shared ownership and cross-sectoral legitimacy. Elected representatives and, where possible, funders should be part of

this ecosystem from an early stage, both to secure political backing and to open up additional resources. The governance system should not only provide strategic advice but also play an active role in the implementation of the YPB, depending on the capabilities and capacities of those involved.

A key lesson from Com'ON is that the governance model functions best when it operates as an equal-footing partnership – not as a client–provider relationship between the city and its delivery partners. Where possible, a non-public organisation supports the operational implementation, which can significantly reduce bureaucracy and increase flexibility, as its processes are not subject to the same administrative constraints as direct municipal delivery. This arrangement also builds the kind of institutional trust that allows the model to adapt and improve cycle by cycle.

Set up a dedicated operational team

Running a YPB demands sustained operational attention across all stages of the cycle. A dedicated team is essential to ensure that all the threads of the programme – outreach, applications, eligibility screening, voting, contracting, mentoring, reporting, etc. – are coordinated, that deadlines are met and that participants can count on responsive support at every step. This team is the central point where all strands come together: without it, the YPB risks becoming a fragmented sequence of one-off tasks rather than a coherent, learning-oriented programme with a recognisable face for the young people involved.

The team does not necessarily need to be large, but it must cover several distinct functions: programme management, communications, financial administration and mentoring and facilitation. In all cases, the team must have sufficient capacity to remain visible, available and responsive to youth participants throughout the cycle, as young people's trust in the programme is built through consistent, human contact and not automated processes.

Co-create an inclusive YPB model that genuinely empowers young people and develops their social and civic skills

The design of the YPB model is the most consequential set of decisions a partner city will make, and it must be made together with young people and other relevant stakeholders – not designed behind closed doors and presented to them afterwards. Information sessions, informal meetups, focus groups with specific youth communities, and engagement through universities, schools, NGOs and peer networks are all effective ways to build a model that young people will recognise as genuinely theirs. Be clear upfront about what you want to achieve with the YPB and honest about the human, financial and technical resources available: these realities should frame, not follow, the model design. From the outset, targeted outreach should ensure that marginalised groups are part of this co-design process.

In terms of model design, a number of choices are fundamental. A YPB regulation is needed as the legal basis for the programme. This regulation must allow participation by informal youth groups – not only registered organisations – and must establish a simple application process with reduced documentation requirements. A public voting system is important for the democratic legitimacy of the selected projects. The micro-granting approach has a double value: smaller

amounts keep projects feasible for informal youth teams and shift the focus from “getting money” to “doing something”. Micro-grants should therefore function primarily as enablers of action and learning – not as a financial incentive that attracts participation for the wrong reasons. A small number of clear spending rules is valuable for integrity; however, rules that become so restrictive as to deter participation undermine the very purpose of the YPB. The legal classification of funds (reward vs. reimbursement) is a decisive design choice, too: it can massively reduce reporting obligations and make the programme accessible to informal youth groups.

Create the technical and communication infrastructure

A functioning YPB requires digital and physical infrastructure: an online platform for idea submissions, a transparent public voting interface, accessible and clearly written rules and FAQs, and an active communication strategy through which young people and the broader community can be reached and engaged. Transfer cities can adapt the level of technical sophistication to their resources – from simple online forms to more advanced dedicated platforms – but a basic digital backbone and at least one physical anchor space where youth groups can meet and receive support are essential conditions for the programme to function.

Communication must be sustained, multi-layered and rooted in credible messengers. Young people typically need to encounter the campaign multiple times – through different channels and through peers they trust – before they decide to apply. A multi-touch communication plan with several waves and varied messengers is far more effective than relying on a one-off push. Visibility of youth-led projects and their outcomes matters beyond the youth audience too: communicating impact to decision-makers and the broader public strengthens political support and builds public trust in the programme over time.

Ensure the needed resources

Resources must be planned as an integral part of the model from the start. Cities should develop a realistic operational budget and staffing model that covers not only the micro-grant pool for youth projects but also the facilitation, mentoring, communications and coordination infrastructure that makes the programme function. Allocating a visible, youth-targeted budget signals commitment to young people and partner organisations alike; building alliances with private sponsors and foundations can extend reach and financial resources and support learning and methodological development beyond what public budgets alone allow.

Anchor the YPB institutional and politically

Institutional embedding is what transforms a successful pilot into a sustained programme. The YPB model should be formally anchored in local youth policies, municipal frameworks and, ideally, multi-year budget commitments – reducing dependency on individual champions and ensuring continuity across political cycles and leadership changes. Early and sustained investment in the buy-in of elected representatives is therefore important: not as passive supporters, but as active advocates who understand and are prepared to defend the programme’s value, resources and methods when challenged.

A monitoring and evaluation system must also be embedded from the start. Monitoring is not optional: it is the mechanism through which the model improves

cycle by cycle and maintains credibility with stakeholders. Data on participation, inclusion, project outcomes and youth skill development provide the evidence base for both internal learning and external advocacy – demonstrating to decision-makers and funders why the programme is worth sustaining and expanding.

Transfer ready lessons

The following lessons synthesise the key cross-cutting insights from the Com'ON experience that are most directly transferable to partner cities designing or reforming their own YPB models.

- **Start with clarity and stay realistic:** Be clear about what you want to achieve with your YPB and honest about the human, financial and technical resources available. Use this framework to develop your model.
- **Develop an inclusive youth outreach and co-design:** “Youth” is not a single category and the model must be designed for the specific youth groups you intend to reach. Thus, identify which youth groups you want to reach, what barriers might prevent them from taking part and how your outreach and model design can specifically address this. Involve identified youth groups e.g. through focus groups in the co-design of the model or at least as critical friends and feedback provider.
- **Start simple and evolve:** If a city is new to YPB, begin with a lighter model and increase complexity as experience grows.
- **One size will not fit all:** Parallel formats (such as a city-wide edition alongside a school-based and neighbourhood edition) may be necessary to reach different groups and serve different objectives.
- **Plan the YPB timeline carefully:** Design a realistic timeline for all stages of the cycle. Sequence it carefully so the programme remains credible through quick progression from idea submission to voting, while leaving enough time for implementation and meaningful support to youth teams.
- **Allow failure – and learn from it:** A failure-tolerant, learning-oriented culture, rather than a punitive control logic, supports experimentation and sustained engagement from young people who may be participating in a civic process for the first time. Monitor implementation to draw conclusions about what needs improvement, to track whether you are delivering on your objectives, and to build the evidence base to convince stakeholders of the model's value.

Network roadmap: methodology of the Com'ON City transfer

Transfer topics

The partners' interests documented in section 2.4 reflect a shared desire to explore the Com'ON model comprehensively – not only its formal structure but also the resources, governance arrangements and practical know-how that make it function. All partners are seeking to understand how each stage of the YPB cycle can be designed inclusively and in a youth-friendly way, how the necessary multi-stakeholder ecosystem can be built and maintained, and how the human, financial and technical resources required to run a sustainable YPB can be secured. The transnational learning activities of the transfer network are therefore structured around three interconnected topics that together cover the full scope of what a successful transfer of Com'ON requires.

Models of YPB – city-wide, thematic, target-group/community, neighbourhood focus – and inclusive, youth-friendly YPB cycle design covering all five stages of the Com'ON cycle – preparation, ideation, decision, implementation and closure – with a focus on how each stage can be made genuinely accessible and empowering for young people. This includes questions of outreach and activation, co-design of application processes, (public) voting and decision mechanisms, mentoring and support during implementation, and the feedback and continuous improvement loop at closure (impact measurement and evaluation frameworks). It addresses both the model architecture and the inclusion dimension: how to reach underrepresented groups, how to lower bureaucratic barriers at each stage, and how to sustain young people's motivation and ownership from first contact through to project completion.

Multi-stakeholder governance structures focus on the collaborative governance architecture that underpins a YPB – how to involve municipalities, youth organisations, civil society, schools, private actors and youth representatives in a structure that provides both strategic direction and operational backing. The topic explores how governance roles are distributed across cycle stages, how an equal-footing partnership between public and non-public actors can be established and maintained, and how the governance ecosystem can be built progressively even where the starting conditions are limited. Particular attention is given to the role of political buy-in, the function of non-public intermediaries and the mechanisms that sustain multi-stakeholder involvement and cross-sectoral collaboration over time to sustain long-term sustainability and resource mobilisation.

Funding, human and technical resources addresses the resource base that makes a YPB viable. This includes the design of a realistic operational and grant budget, the identification and development of appropriate staffing profiles, and the technical and digital infrastructure needed to run the cycle. It also covers institutional anchoring strategies – how to secure multi-year public budget commitments, how to build eventually complementary funding partnerships with private sponsors and foundations, and how to align the YPB with national and EU funding streams such as ERDF and ESF+. The three topics are closely interrelated and will be explored in an integrated way across the network's transnational activities.

Methodology

To support the transfer and adaptation of the Com'ON good-practice to the local context of the network partners following transnational activities are proposed.

Network meetings

Core activity to support the transfer and adaptation of Com'ON will be network meetings of all partners. In general, they will last two days. Project partners will participate with at least their project and ULG coordinator and one ULG member or further person that is relevant for the theme / transfer topic of the meeting.

Purpose

The purpose of the network meetings is to discuss and exchange about the transfer and adaptation of Com'ON, and to provide mutual support in sharing

ideas and feedback. Input is provided by the lead partner, project partners, lead expert and/or ad hoc expert.

The following sessions may be included in the network meetings:

- *Thematic input and exchange with regards to the transfer topics*
At each meeting, one or two components of the transfer topics are discussed (workshops). Input and ideas on adaptation approaches are provided and exchanged. This gives the partners an overview of the Com'ON model's adaptation options, enabling them to work on the one that best fits their local context. In preparation for the meeting, the partners are asked which specific aspects of the components/transfer topic they would like to work on and discuss.
- *Partner transfer and ULG involvement update*
'Awesome stuff' session: Partners present and exchange interesting and inspiring activities and solutions, transferring and adapting Com'ON to their local context, involving their ULG, the youth, elected representatives.
'Counselling time' session: Partners present challenges they encounter in the transfer of Com'ON and involving their ULG, the youth, elected representatives. Ad hoc workshops will then be held to look for solutions together.
- *Host spotlight*
The host presents interesting practices for empowering young people in their city, meeting and exchanging with local stakeholders.
- *Host peer coaching*
During the meeting, the host organises a session to present and discuss a relevant topic or issue of their choice on which they would like coaching from the other partners. The network partners will be informed of this coaching need prior to the meeting, so that they can come prepared.
- *Host ULG peer review*
During the meeting, the host's ULG organises a session to present and discuss a relevant topic/issue of their choice with the network partners.

For the host sessions, it would be greatly welcomed if youth representatives from the host city are present, presenting their experience, challenges and ideas directly to the network.

Frequency

It is proposed to organise each quarter a network meeting incl. mid-term peer review and final meeting. To provide contextual learning in each partner city and distribute hosting responsibilities, it is proposed that each partner hosts at least one network meeting.

Network meeting	Time	Place	Potential focus (tbc with project partners)
1st	1.-2. July 2026	Valongo	Agreement on transfer topics, working methodology and transfer plan structure; Models and editions of YPB: city-wide, thematic, target-group/community, neighbourhood focus, etc.

2nd	4th quarter 26	Tbc	Com'ON stage: A. Preparation, B. Ideation
3rd	1st quarter 27	Tbc	Com'ON stage: C. Decision
4th	2nd quarter 27	Tbc	Com'ON stage: D. Implementation
Mid-term peer review	3rd quarter 27	Tbc	Peer review of transfer plans, transfer and adaptation process; Budgeting and funding of YPB
5th	4th quarter 27	Tbc	Com'ON stage: E. Closure, impact measurement and evaluation frameworks; General multi-stakeholder governance of YPB: strategic and operational management in a continuous improvement cycle involving relevant stakeholders
Final	1st quarter 28	Cluj-Napoca	Sharing and presenting lessons learnt and final output of the transfer network with wider audience.

Each Com'On stage is considered from following cross-link aspects:

- empowering
- inclusive
- youth-friendly (low-threshold, low bureaucratic)
- needed resources (human, technical, financial)
- stakeholder involvement (governance)

On demand activities

During the network meetings or other occasions topics might occur that (all or some) partners want to discuss and exchange further. The following options are available:

- **On-demand webinars:** Webinars are organised to explore topics in greater depth and facilitate the exchange of ideas. Input is provided by the lead partner, project partners, the lead expert and/or ad hoc experts. Several people from the cities can participate in the webinars, which may incorporate features such as breakout rooms and Miro boards.
- **Online One-to-One coaching:** Partners have the opportunity to arrange on-demand one-to-one online coaching with lead expert, lead partner or another partner, in which they can discuss and exchange ideas on a particular topic in order to find a solution for their local context.

Bilateral partner visits:

In addition to the network meetings, bilateral visits between individual partner cities are encouraged to enable deeper, context-specific exchange of how a particular Com'ON stage or tool works in practice. These visits – typically lasting

one to two days – allow one partner to observe or participate in a specific moment of another city's YPB cycle (e.g. an ideation workshop, a mentoring session, or a voting event) and to meet local practitioners and ULG members in their working environment. Bilateral visits are arranged flexibly on demand between partners and do not require the full network to participate. The lead expert can support the preparation and debriefing of such visits.

Digital exchange space

The online exchange platform is intended to facilitate communication and information sharing between project partners and ULG coordinators, both during and between network meetings and on-demand webinars.

It is recommended that a dedicated communication channel is set up individually for all project partners and ULG coordinators. These channels can be used to ask questions, give advice, exchange information and make arrangements for webinars.

The lead partner and lead expert are available on the platform at all times to provide support.

Online network coordination

Project coordinators of the cities meet as needed online to discuss the working programme, organisational and financial topics of the Com'ON city network.

Transfer plans

All partners have to develop transfer and improvement plans.



COM'ON CITY

