



Democratising
jUst
Sustainability
Transitions

Deliverable D2.1 – Stakeholder Engagement and Participation (STEP) Index: A tool for measuring involvement in just sustainability transition policies

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1. Introduction

In a nutshell, WP2 “Measuring the democratic quality of citizen participation in place-based policies for just sustainability transitions” of the DUST Project focuses on evaluating the quality of citizen participation in place-based policies for just sustainability transitions. This phase addresses the fundamental question: What is the extent and intensity of involvement in developing and executing sustainability transition policies within a multi-level governance framework? To tackle this, the project is developing several instruments, one of which is the STEP-Index (STakeholder Engagement and Participation in Policy-Making Processes), a tool for comparative assessment. The index aims to gauge the effectiveness of stakeholder and citizen engagement across various government tiers.

This document serves as a supportive companion to the initial release of the Excel-based STEP Index tool. It provides an introduction to the tool's objectives and the dimensions it covers. Additionally, it outlines the tool's developmental journey, refinement process, and testing procedures. However, it's important to note that this document does not replace the user manual, which is a separate deliverable (D.2.5) within the project. The user manual is designed to assist tool users in comprehending its functionalities and accurately interpreting evaluation outcomes. Drawing from the practical application of the STEP Index within WP2, the manual extends its utility beyond the DUST Project, aiding practitioners and researchers who seek to assess citizen participation performance in multi-level policies, even those not exclusively tied to sustainability transitions. The methodological handbook furnishes clear, step-by-step instructions for applying the STEP Index, offering guidance for practitioners, researchers and policy-makers embarking on the measurement of citizen participation in place-based policies.

2. The STEP Index in essence

This tool aims to provide practical support for systematically evaluating the performance of citizen participation in just transition policies within a specific region, as well as for conducting comparative analyses of similar processes in other regions.

Objective of the STEP Index

This deliverable serves as a pivotal resource facilitating the evaluation of citizen participation effectiveness within the realm of just transitions policies across eight case study regions, a core component of the DUST project. Operating within the DUST framework, it enables a comprehensive appraisal of participation levels, thereby laying the groundwork for participatory experimentation employing design-centric tools and digital deliberation mechanisms. This iterative process is envisaged to yield insights and recommendations conducive to redefining the integration of marginalized communities within the complex multi-tier just transitions policies.

Expanding beyond its DUST-project role, the tool's public accessibility enhances its utility. It stands poised to provide valuable support to the members of the Working Groups affiliated with the Just Transition Platform and any other place-based policies planners. Their pursuit of progress tracking and comparative analysis of democratic participation vis-à-vis the formulation and execution of equitable transition policies and ventures can be greatly bolstered. In this regard, the STEP index emerges as a bespoke instrument tailored to gauge engagement and participation within just sustainability transition policies, employing a comparative lens. The selection of criteria and evaluation methodologies is intrinsically aligned with the requisites of territorial just transition policies.

It's important to note that the tool's adaptability extends its potential impact. Customization and fine-tuning are viable options, rendering it compatible with analogous scenarios. This adaptability facilitates structured evaluations of citizen participation processes steered by public administrations, effectively contributing to planned and organized assessment endeavors.

Citizen participation involves active engagement and contribution of individuals within a community to influence decision-making processes, policy development, and other activities related to public affairs.

Assessment Framework

The tool is based on an assessment framework providing predefined criteria structured in 4 dimensions. For each criterion evaluation questions and metrics in the form of checklists are formulated.

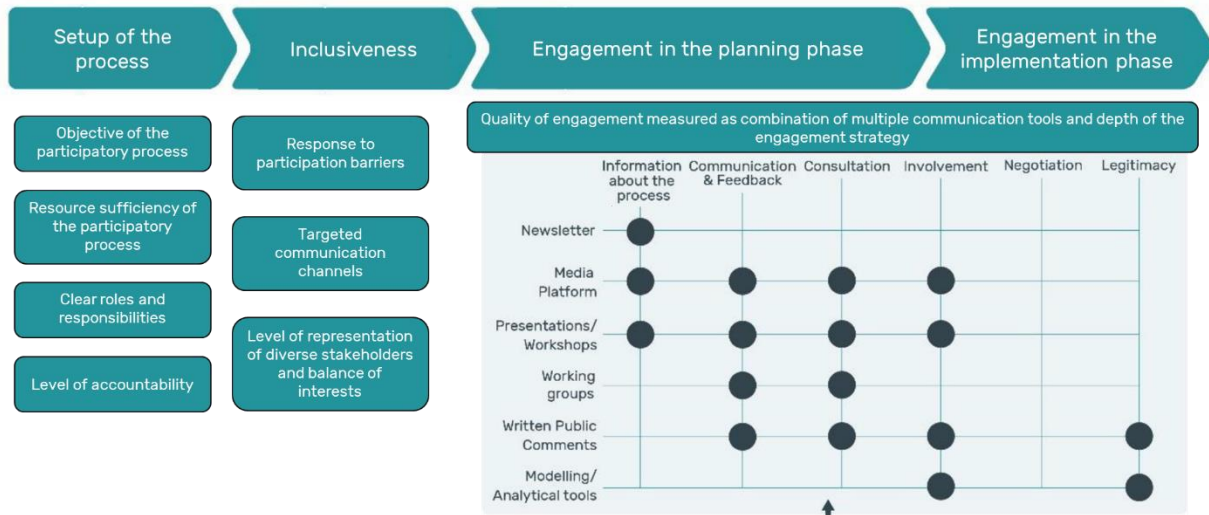


Figure 1: Evaluation framework of the STEP Index

Evaluation draws upon the predetermined framework detailed in Figure 1 and involves analyzing the extent to which observed participatory practices in a given territory and timeframe align with these predefined criteria.

Objective of the evaluation: *Why is the evaluation important?*

- *Ensuring compliance with place-based policy-making requirements that require partnership arrangements with social actors and concerned citizens.* The evaluation measures whether all involved stakeholders had the chance to learn and co-responsibly contribute to planned action implementation.
- *Enhancing processes and outcomes over time.* Periodic evaluation facilitates managing planning and implementation processes for continuous improvement.
- *Identifying and replicating good practices.* The evaluation enables comparison among different territories/places/regions

Possible evaluators: *Who will conduct the evaluation?*

- *Process-Internal:* Public administration, policy-makers, consultants overseeing stakeholder engagement, technical leaders of the process.

- *Process-External*: Observers, experts, academics, European Commission, and others.

Evaluation Criteria: *What are we evaluating precisely?*

The criteria embody aspects desired for a participatory process to qualify as a quality one, based on the consortium team's perspective, literature, and regulatory reviews. The criteria cover dimensions like context, participation process, participation instruments, and impact of the participatory process.

Weighting of Evaluation Criteria: *Are some indicators more important than others?*

The structure of the tool ensures that each individual indicator holds an identical level of significance in determining the ultimate score. This parity is upheld irrespective of whether the assessment involves binary variables, which are appraised as a binary outcome (1 or 0), or when dealing with multiple-choice responses. In the latter scenario, each provided response contributes an equal proportion to the overall score assigned to the indicator. When confronted with an evaluation using the Likert scale, characterized by a range of response options, a nuanced approach is adopted to ascertain the indicator's weight.

Data sources/Informational requirements: *How to obtain the needed data?*

The data for use of the STEP index will be provided mainly by expert evaluation, review of region-specific policy documents and the application of the APES software to explore the process of engagement of different groups in the policy process. STEP Index will be tested and refined as part of a workshop with regional stakeholders. Upon completion and testing, the STEP index will be made available for application beyond the DUST research, including detailed guidelines on how to use it in further research.

This approach offers several advantages. Firstly, it allows for the inclusion of data from a wide range of sources, including academic literature, government reports, and statistical data. Secondly, the index can be updated and adapted over time to reflect changes the policy landscape and progress on the transition pathways. Finally, it enables the index to be applied in different geographic areas with varying levels of local stakeholder engagement, as the indicators can be defined and measured using consistent criteria. Upon its validation and finalisation, the STEP index will serve as an evaluation tool that could assist local and regional authorities in gaining insights into their performance and facilitating comparisons with other territories when it comes to involving and empowering citizens to participate in the decision-making process. Using the index, they could apply evidence-based method to report partnership arrangements and practices applied during the process of territorial just transition plans (TJTPs) development

and implementation. Moreover, the STEP index might support non-governmental organisations and external observers to monitor different aspects of citizens participation in place-based policies.

Format and Functionalities

The Excel-based tool encompasses three distinct components, each residing within its designated worksheet:

- **Read-me File:** This section furnishes some basic guidelines and a coherent color agenda. It provides users with an initial orientation, elucidating essential steps and color-coded references that aid seamless navigation.
- **Evaluation Framework:** Structured across four comprehensive dimensions, this segment presents a series of questions formatted as a checklist. The questions are meticulously designed to encapsulate pertinent aspects, providing a holistic evaluation of the subject matter.
- **Results Compilation:** This facet of the tool operates autonomously to generate a calculated score, both in its aggregate form and segmented across each of the four dimensions. Furthermore, it employs visual representation techniques to translate the collected data into an insightful graphical depiction. This graphical representation enhances the interpretability of the results, enabling users to swiftly grasp the patterns and trends emanating from the assessment.

Results

Country: xxx
Region: xxx
Evaluation time period: Jan-20 Jul-23

	Index value	Max. value	% Performance
Dimension WHAT?: Participation-centered decision-making process setup	1.9	6	32%
Dimension WHO?: Inclusiveness	4.7	9	52%
Dimension HOW? / Planning phase/: Engagement methods	6.14	21	29%
Dimension HOW? / Planning phase/: Engagement methods	12.86	21	61%
Dimension: Consequences	2.8	3	93%



Figure 2: Illustration of Results Presentation within the STEP Index

3. Process of STEP Index Development

The following systematic approach to develop the STEP index as comprehensive and robust measurement tool has been divided into nine steps:

1. **Defining Purpose and Scope of the STEP Index:** This initial step has been successfully executed as a valuable contribution to deliverables D1.1 and D1.2.
2. **Identification of Key Variables and Indicators:** Previously, CSD conducted work aimed at developing an assessment framework for the analysis of stakeholder participation in the development of Just Transition Plans within Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. This prior work identified four key dimensions of stakeholder participation, which encompassed the following aspects: the objectives of the engagement process, the identification of stakeholder groups, and the engagement methods used during the planning and implementation stages of local just transition policy development.

Initially, six indicators were proposed, as outlined in the table below. Subsequently, CSD published two reports, one in 2021 and another in 2022, in which methodological guidelines were provided for defining these four dimensions and measuring the associated indicators. This assessment framework was then applied to analyze the process of territorial just transition planning in Bulgaria, aiming to gather practical insights into the applicability of these indicators and the availability of relevant data..

Within the scope of the DUST project, our understanding of this subject matter has been significantly enhanced. This was achieved through a thorough examination of relevant literature in the realm of citizen participation in public policy development, which encompassed a review of pertinent written materials such as research papers, studies, articles, and guidelines in this field. As a result of this comprehensive review, we have expanded our set of indicators to include 20 practical and applicable indicators, allowing us to measure 14 distinct variables effectively (particularly the work dedicated to WP 1 and 2). The variables underwent thorough internal discussions across two project meetings. Additionally, a more focused array of variables was presented at the *"Evaluating Stakeholder Involvement in the Implementation Process Using the STEP Index"* workshop. This collaborative workshop, conducted in online format on July 28, 2023, was organized in partnership with the Just Transition Platform Secretariat. In response to

the feedback we received, we incorporated additional characteristics and specific experiences from more countries in the field of just transition. These additions not only influenced the indicators but also impacted the variables and potential values used in the index. We also assigned weights to these elements. As a result, a new dimension was introduced, resulting in the current version of the STEP Index, which now comprises five dimensions and encompasses 17 indicators. These indicators are measured through the provision of answers to 20 questions.

Further refinements were made post-workshop, leading to the inclusion of supplementary indicators that delve into the contextual nuances and the design of the participatory process. For instance, the initial set of indicators encompassed the assessment of the sufficiency and transparency of stakeholder participation objectives. This encompassed determining whether the rationale behind the participatory process was elucidated and the alignment of this objective with the prerequisites of just and effective participation or partnership agreements. Subsequent to the workshop and the valuable insights garnered, additional indicators were incorporated. These included aspects such as the efficiency of resource utilization within the process, the establishment of clear roles and responsibilities for planners, and the accountability of governance stakeholders vis-à-vis the community as well as a new evaluation dimension, namely “Consequences of participation”

3. **Data Source Determination and Initial Evidence Scanning:** After several rounds of internal deliberations among project partners, particularly the data scientists part of DUST academic and research partners, the decision crystallized to underpin the evaluation process on the basis of expert assessment. Wherever viable, public evidence available in documents was deemed to be an invaluable supplementary source of data. While surveying actual participants engaged in the policy-making process was considered, the feasibility of this option was curtailed due to the significant costs associated with gathering representative data. Additionally, the intricacies of acquiring a booster sample for accessing participants with firsthand experience posed logistical challenges.

To ensure methodological consistency over time, the tool has been equipped to log information about the source of data. This feature reinforces the tool's capacity for uniform comparability across different instances.

4. **Stakeholder Workshop for Indicator Applicability Testing and Weight Discussion:** The stakeholder workshop mentioned above served a dual purpose, extending beyond mere indicator feedback. Not

only does it seek to validate the final set of indicators, but it also endeavors to ascertain the appropriate weights to be assigned to these indicators.

Key observations and insights emerged from the feedback obtained during the workshop:

- A clear need was identified for practical examples illustrating the assessment process and subsequent result interpretation. This need is slated to be addressed through the forthcoming implementation of the index within the case study regions, which will consequently be incorporated into the user manual as real-world illustrations.
- The principle of equal weighing resonated well with the workshop participants, signifying a well-accepted approach.
- Furthermore, the discussions highlighted the prospect of expanding the index's utility by testing it across a more diverse array of use cases. This is anticipated to furnish deeper insights into refining contextual considerations, alongside the endeavor to objectively capture and measure the integration of citizens' feedback from participatory processes into the decision-making fabric. Presently, this aspect remains a notable omission within the STEP Index.

5. Final Indicator Confirmation: As of August 2023, the STEP Index for evaluating the qualitative aspects of citizens' participation consists of these components:

- *30 Criteria for Evaluation:* These are overarching principles or standards that serve as benchmarks to assess the quality of the citizen participation process. These criteria provide a structured framework for understanding the effectiveness and depth of engagement.
- *17 Indicators for Responsiveness:* These indicators serve as measurable signposts that gauge how well the observed citizen participation process aligns with the established criteria. They offer a more granular perspective, allowing for nuanced assessment of how effectively the process addresses each criterion.
- *20 Guiding Questions:* These questions are designed to assist users in conducting a thorough evaluation of the citizen participation process. They provide a systematic approach for considering various aspects of the process and its alignment with the criteria.
- *Two Evaluation Matrices:* These matrices offer a structured format for tracking the combinations between engagements strategies and communication channels selected.

Table 1: Comparative table between the initial assessment framework developed by CSD and the STEP Index

	Starting point: TJTP Comparative Evaluation Framework	DUST Project Contribution: STEP Index
Evaluation dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Objectives 2) Stakeholder Identification 3) Engagement methods in the planning phase 4) Engagement methods in the implementation phase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Setup of the process of stakeholder participation 2) Inclusiveness (Composition of the stakeholder groups) 3) Engagement methods in the planning phase 4) Engagement methods in the implementation phase 5) Consequences of participation
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I 1: Adequacy of the objective I 2: Identification of inclusiveness I 3: Balance of stakeholder influence I 4: Depth and proper timing of the engagement methods I 5: Comprehensiveness of the engagement strategy I 6: Potential depth of the engagement methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transparency of the participation process's objective 2. Multi-dimensionality of participation process's objective 3. Resource Sufficiency of the Participatory Process 4. Existence of a written document that clearly identifies the planners and their roles 5. Level of governance responsibility in front of the local community 6. Opportunity for Remote participation 7. Response to other participation barriers 8. Existence of the definition of vulnerable groups in the supporting documents 9. Inclusion of Vulnerable / Marginalized / Underrepresented Groups 10. Special communication channels to allow participation 11. Representation of incumbent and alternative economic sectors 12. Representation of different professional categories and stakeholder groups 13. Inclusion of citizens of different age groups in the decision-making process 14. Depth of Engagement (Planning Phase) 15. Depth of Engagement (Implementation Phase) 16. Influence 17. Monitoring
New elements		Weights of the indicators, Guiding questions and Criteria for the quality of the citizen participation process

4. Next Steps

The following three steps from the process of STEP Index development, testing and refinement are outstanding and planned to be implemented in the next months:

- *Validation and Calibration (Conditional):*

This step is contingent upon the availability of external benchmarks or existing measures that allow for meaningful comparisons. Up to this point, WWF has created a single assessment framework (in the form of a check-list) following similar objectives as the STEP index and designed for analyzing the comprehensiveness of TJTPs in coal regions. Once the evaluation process for the STEP Index is completed, the results of the existing framework could be employed to validate the ones obtained for the DUST case study regions. Additionally, the Horizontal Stakeholder Engagement working group, overseen by the Just Transition Secretariat, has included a dedicated task in its work plan. This task is specifically geared towards developing supplementary assessment tools, aligning with Action 2 of the JTP Implementation Plan. If such reference points are found and accessible, the validation and calibration phase will be initiated. This involves rigorously assessing the congruence between the STEP Index results and these external benchmarks. By aligning the index's outcomes with established standards, its reliability and accuracy can be verified. Adjustments and refinements, if needed, can be implemented to ensure the index's alignment with trusted external measures.

- *Ensuring Usability as an Excel-Based Tool:*

Recognizing the importance of seamless user experience, special attention is directed towards enhancing the usability of the STEP Index as an Excel-based instrument. This involves streamlining navigation, optimizing layout, and refining functionalities within the Excel environment. The tool's accessibility, ease of use, and intuitive interface are prioritized, ensuring that users can engage with the index efficiently and derive meaningful insights without unnecessary complications.

- *Integrating regional case-specific issues and results' interpretation*

As previously mentioned, there is a requirement for practical examples that effectively demonstrate the assessment process and provide guidance on result interpretation. This is crucial to showcase the index's applicability and ensure a standardized approach to interpreting STEP index results. To meet this requirement, the project's activities include the implementation of the index in

specific case study regions. The outcomes and experiences from these real-world implementations will subsequently be incorporated into the user manual, serving as valuable practical illustrations.

- *Developing Guidelines for Interpretation and Communication of Results:*

A critical phase of the process involves constructing comprehensive guidelines that encompass two vital aspects. Firstly, guidelines for interpreting and communicating the results generated by the STEP Index will be formulated. These guidelines will offer users clarity on how to interpret the scores and derive actionable insights from the data. Secondly, guidelines for facilitating continuous improvement will be developed. This will encompass strategies to refine and update the index as new insights and data emerge, ensuring that the tool remains relevant, accurate, and aligned with evolving needs and standards. Both will be included in the STEP Index User Manual (D 2.5.)

These subsequent steps further cement the reliability, usability, and effectiveness of the STEP Index, positioning it as a valuable instrument for assessing and enhancing citizen participation within the context of just sustainability transition policies.