



Let's Build a Sustainable and Good Future through a Participatory Transition Arena!

How to empower co-creation and cooperation between local authorities, civil society, business and other local actors to foster ecological and social sustainability at the local level?

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Interreg
Baltic Sea Region



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RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

We make transition!

Societal transitions & transition arena

Societal transitions are complex, long-term processes of change that happen at different levels of society. Transition requires changes in societal structures and in the way of thinking and attitudes.

Sustainability transition means changes that lead towards a society that is ecologically and socially more sustainable.

The ‘**transition arena**’ is a **participatory method** used to engage people in a collective process of understanding, learning, visioning, and experimenting around specific societal transition challenges. Arena is a workshop process that helps to reflect critically on a current societal system and to problematise unsustainable structures, cultures, and practices.

The Arena outcomes guide the search for strategies to transform existing structures, cultures, and practices and realise first steps: new projects, collaborations and experiments.

Transition may happen at any level: the new way of thinking, engagement of new actors, new cooperation models, new political discussions or boost bigger changes in the socio-technical system.



Transition arenas in the We make transition! –project

The **We Make Transition!** (2023–2025) -project implemented transition arenas in 12 locations in six Baltic Sea Region countries. The topics of transition arenas were related to circular economy, social sustainability, nature & biodiversity and sustainable local food system. Some arenas had wider topics, some were more focused.

The project focused especially on enhancing the interaction and cooperation between local and regional authorities and various local actors.

This guide presents the principles of the transition arena method and learnings from the We make transition! -project that are related to engaging local actors, co-creation and launching new cooperation to enhance sustainable and good future at the local level.

Key issues at the We make transition! arenas were:

- Engaging and empowering local and regional authorities and various local actors
- Avoiding difficult and abstract language
- Listening to different views
- Supporting the launch of actions, pilots and initiatives



WMT! transition arena topics

We make transition! arenas were related to the following sustainability topics that were identified relevant for local actors. Each arena topic was formulated based on the local cooperation needs.



WMT! transition arenas in 12 locations

FINLAND

 **TAMPERE** 01
Sustainable life
(people & nature)

 **HÄMEENKYRÖ** 02
Agriculture

 **HELSINKI-UUSIMAA** 03
Circular economy

 **UUSIKAUPUNKI** 04
Biodiversity

 **KEMIÖNSAARI** 05
Youth involvement

NORWAY

 **NAMSOS** 06
Circular economy

 **TRONDHEIM** 07
Sustainable food
system

ESTONIA

 **TARTU** 09
Circular economy

 **LÄÄNE-HARJU** 10
Sustainability in
education

GERMANY

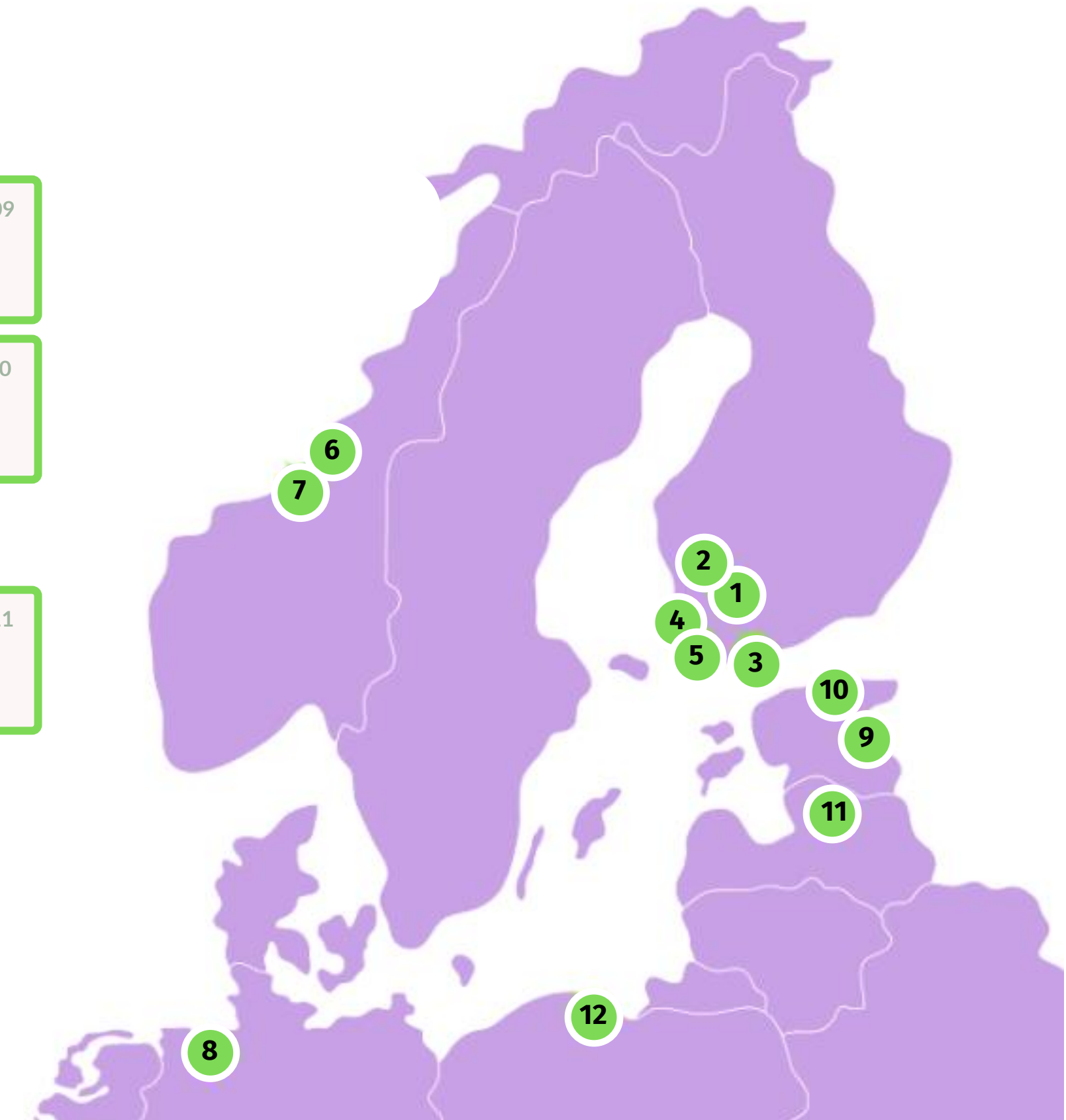
 **BREMEN** 08
Organic food
transition in schools

LATVIA

 **VIDZEME** 11
Organic food and
Bioregion

POLAND

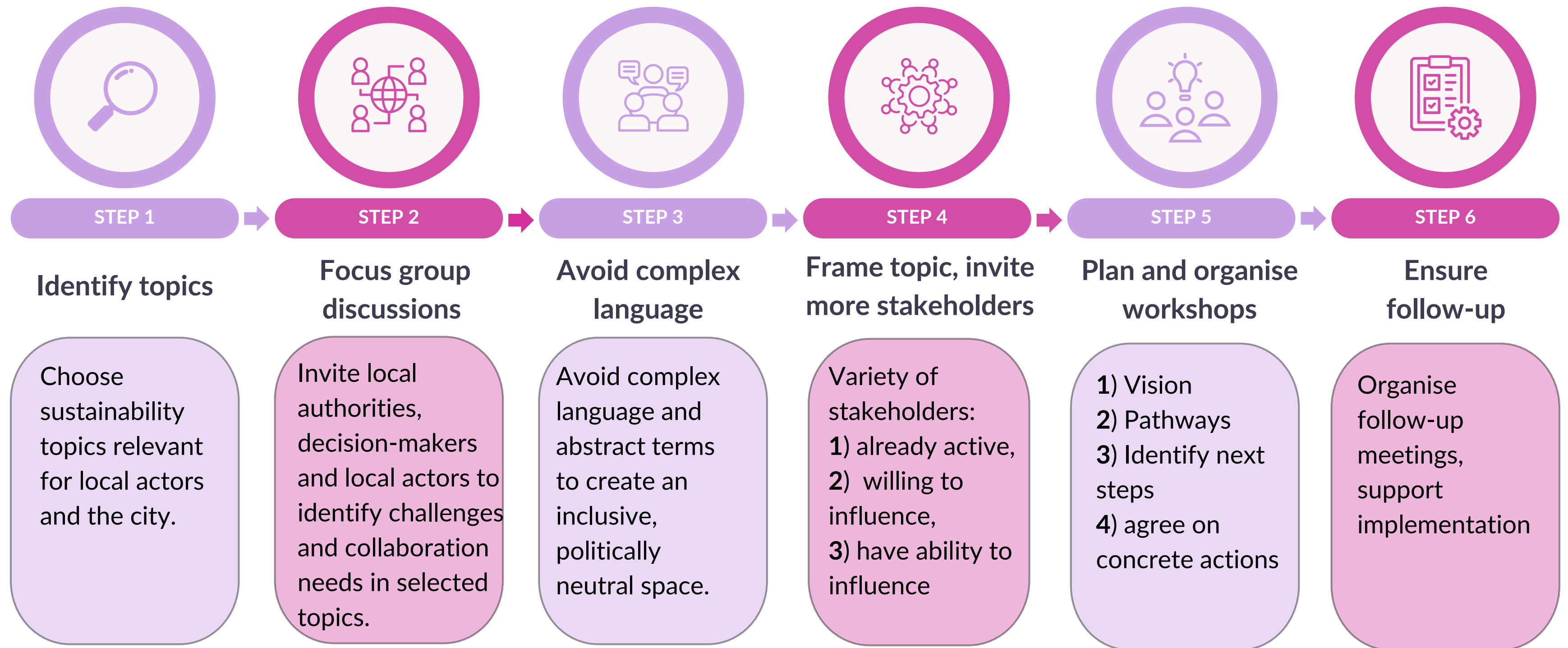
 **GDYNIA** 12
Cross-sectoral
sustainability



WMT! transition arena bottom-up process

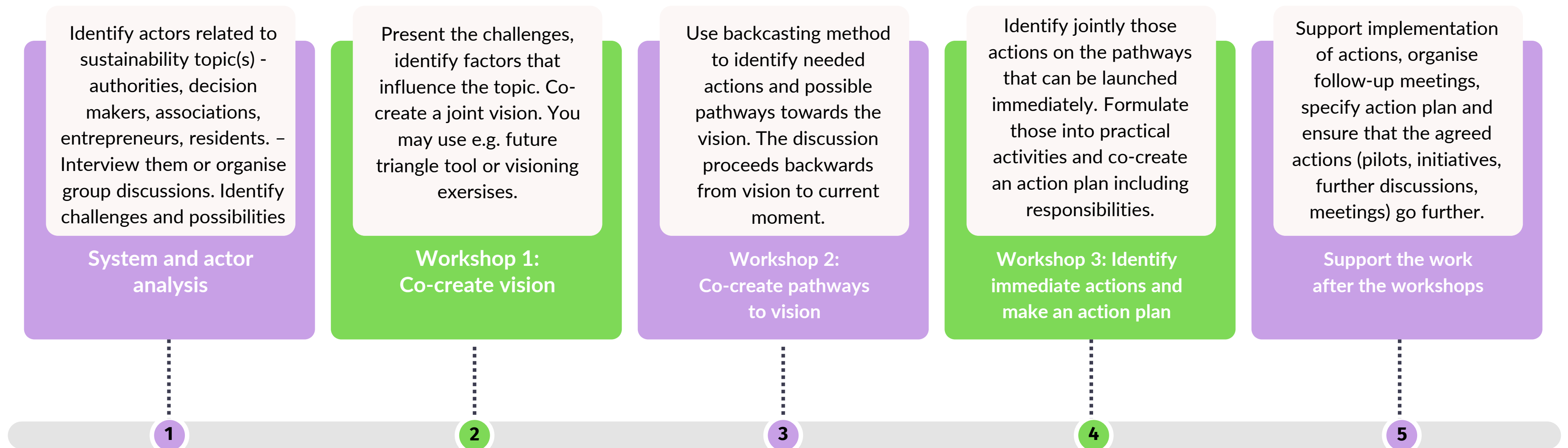


How did we apply the transition arena method?



Transition arena stages and workshops

At a pre-stage, an analysis is conducted to identify challenges and relevant stakeholders. This helps to frame the arena topic and identify who should be invited. A joint vision and pathways to vision and concrete actions are co-created in a series of workshops. It is important to create an atmosphere where different actors can discuss as equals and all views can be brought to the table. Disagreements may occur and they are important, but discussion should not get stuck in them.



Transition arena planning team

A planning team should be established to plan and implement the transition arena. The planning team will formulate the arena topic and design the workshop content: selecting speakers, planning structure of workshops, facilitation, practical arrangements for group work and documentation of results. The planning team also decides who should be invited to the transition arena workshops.

An external consultant/facilitator can support the planning team. However, it is important that staff from the coordinating organisations are actively involved in both planning and implementation, rather than outsourcing the entire process to a consultant. External support can be useful, for example, in shaping the vision based on workshop discussions or in reporting findings and insights throughout the process.

The whole team ensures the accuracy of documentation and plans the next steps based on the previous workshop. Planning should be active and continuous throughout the process.

Remember that the outcomes of the arena can never be predicted in advance: therefore, trust the process, be active, respond as needed, and carry the discussions through to the end.



WMT! Arena: Who should be invited?

The number of invitees can range from 20 at the smallest to as many as 100.
The number of participants in each workshop may vary.

The invitation list should include people who are related to the chosen topic and who have sufficient knowledge or experience of the topic. It is good to invite people from different fields and backgrounds, representatives from several city departments and involve also decision makers. New participants can join during process —especially if key actor(s) was noted missing in a previous workshop.

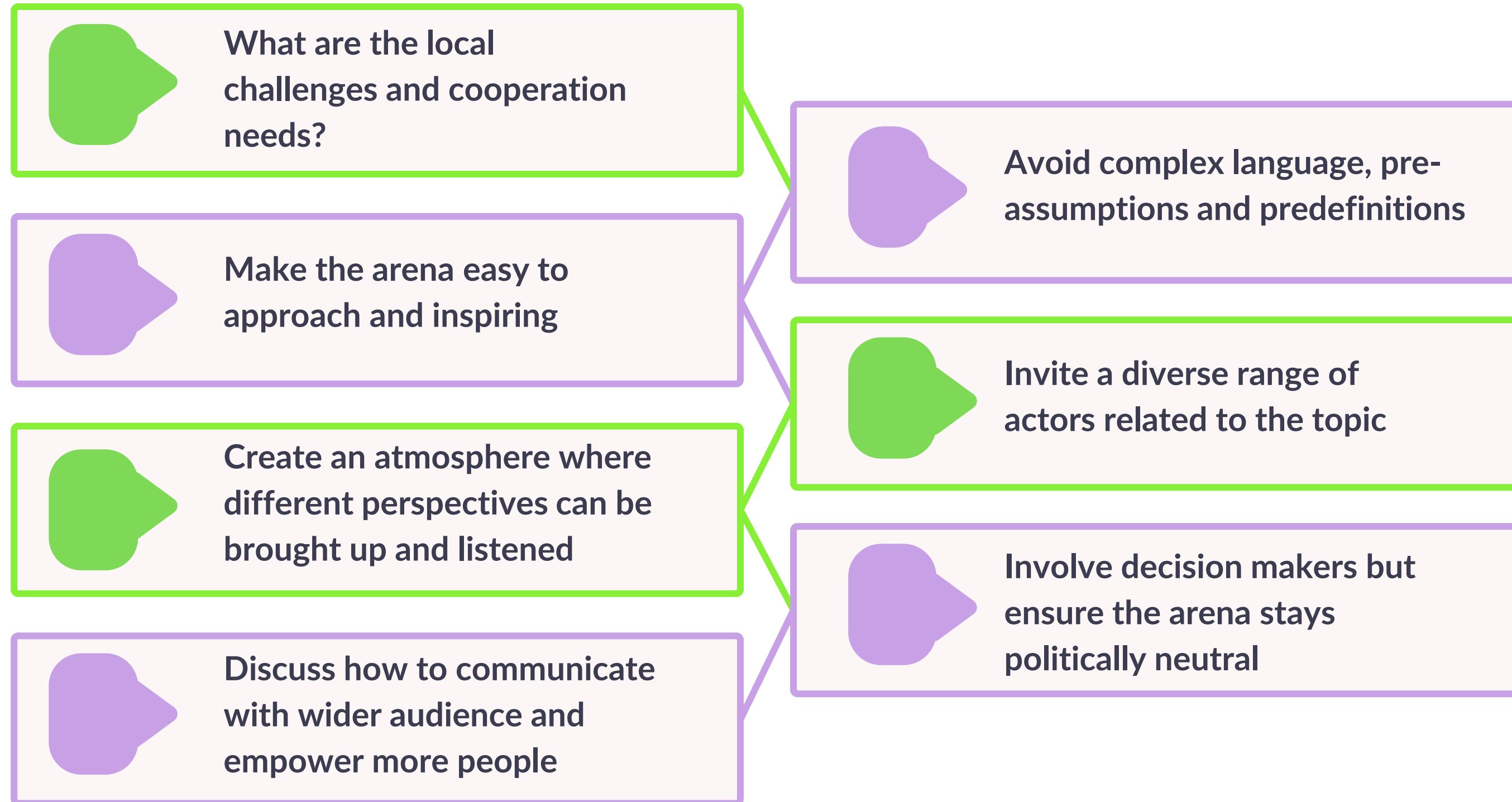
Representatives from the following three categories should be ensured:

- 1) Innovators** – visionary people who can bring new ideas
- 2) Experts** – e.g. experts of the topic and local actors with experience-based expertise
- 3) People with power** – people with networks, authority, and the ability to change practices, structures, and raise visibility; for example, decision makers, officials, artists

It is also good to invite ordinary individuals, e.g. residents who are motivated to influence and who can offer important perspectives on everyday practices.



What to keep in mind when engaging various stakeholders?



Added value of transition arena

The transition arena can be applied in different ways for various purposes.

The different elements can also be applied separately. The ways of applying depend on the need, the topic, the goal, and the resources available.

The transition arena enables genuine participation and co-creation, as well as hearing the voices of different actors (including those that are usually not heard). When analysing various factors impacting the situation, a better understanding is created of issues such as bureaucratic obstacles, communication challenges, or the perspectives of different stakeholders. This knowledge helps us learn and discover new insights, as well as find effective ways to collaborate towards the desired direction.

Every participant is considered as an expert. The arena participants collectively define the shared vision and the actions they want to take forward.

We all want a better future, and constructive dialogue is a way towards it!





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