LOCAL LABS 21 | REPORT

Local Labs are participatory processes designed to unlock potential and create tangible solutions. A diverse team of local stakeholders goes through a 5-step process to find a solution to a pressing challenge within the municipality in two days. Inspired by the methodology of Design Thinking and Hackathons, the Innovation in Politics Institute developed a work process that is tailored to the needs of local communities. Our playbook guides the teams through step-by-step project development. The tailored process allows local teams to develop, test, and implement solutions to pressing local issues in a creative but structured way. A mentor trained by the Institute guides the team through five steps (empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test), explains methods and tools of project development, and moderates discussions. Moreover, the Institute matches the teams with experts from its Best Practice Database to support them with knowledge transfer and consultancy.

Local Labs empower communities and show municipalities a new way of citizen engagement and problem-solving. They facilitate measurable change on the local level while connecting innovators across borders.
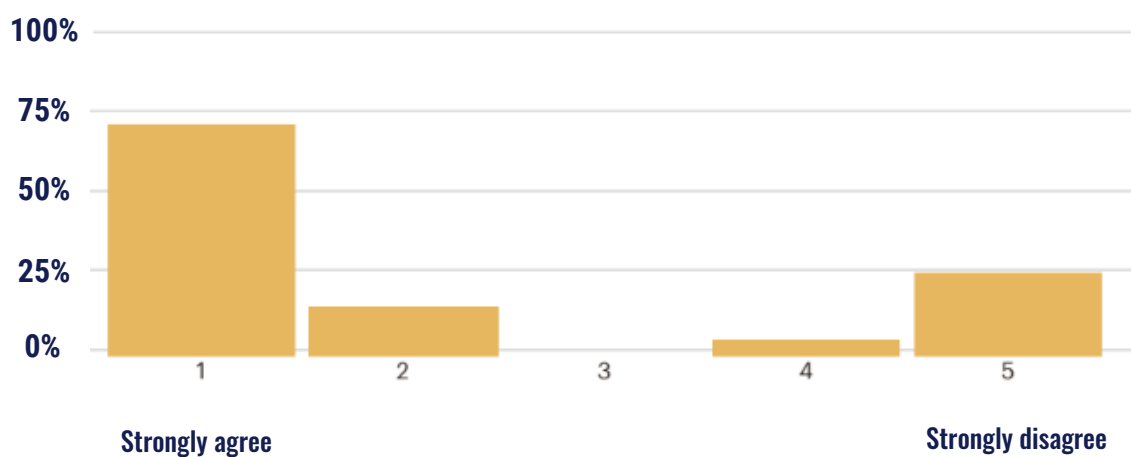
BENEFITS

- **INNOVATIVE** by using a 'Design Thinking' process leading to creative and bold solutions.

- **INCLUSIVE** by inviting people from different backgrounds and communities to take part in their own language and experience self-efficacy.

- **IMPACT-DRIVEN** as all projects connect to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals while also being sensitive to the local context.

- **SUSTAINABLE** because our live-streamed conference removes the need to travel, and reduces participants' carbon footprints and COVID-19 risks.
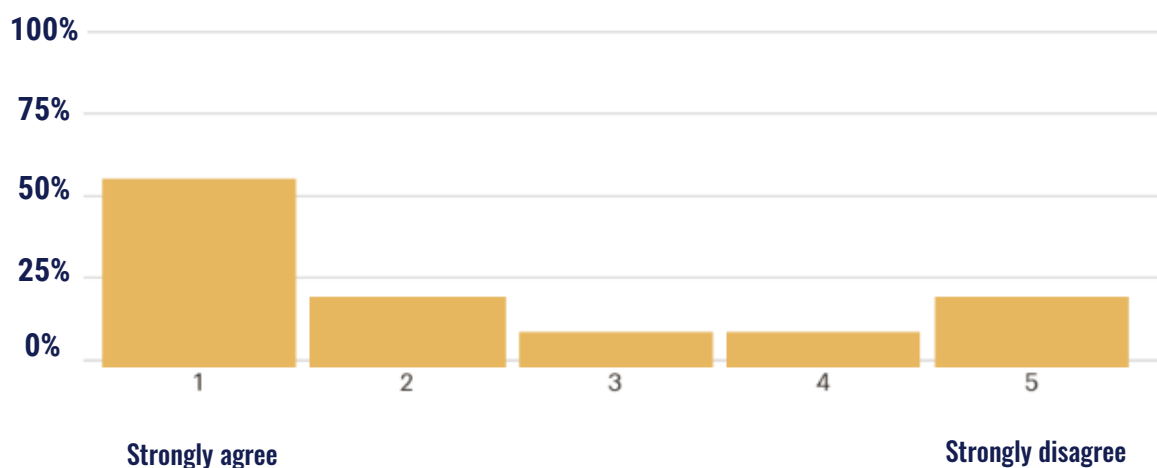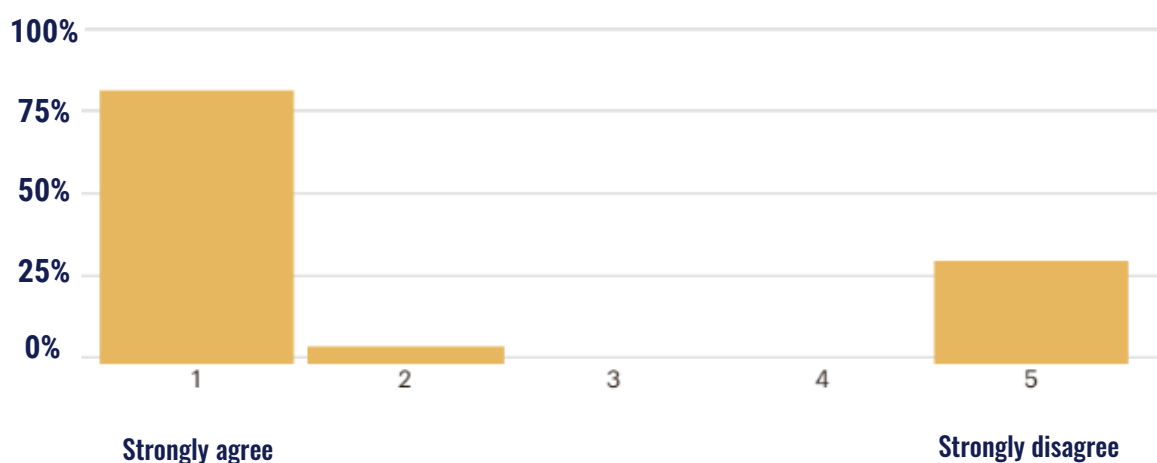
USER EXPERIENCES

The Local Labs was a good framework to develop solutions to a local change

100%		
75%		
50%		
25%		
0%		
1	2	3	4	5

Strongly agree   Strongly disagree

The LocalLabs were a good event to get my voice heard in local politics

100%		
75%		
50%		
25%		
0%		
1	2	3	4	5

Strongly agree   Strongly disagree

I would recommend other cities to participate in the Local Labs

100%		
75%		
50%		
25%		
0%		
1	2	3	4	5

Strongly agree   Strongly disagree

TESTIMONIALS

Luca Gaetano
Deputy Mayor of San Ferdinando, Italy

"The Local Labs gave young people the opportunity to communicate and create their own future.The city of San Ferdinando is quickly growing itself thanks to the passionate and highly professional commitment of the ACT NOW team. We are so proud and grateful to the entire network for helping and inspiring us."

Emma Sleiman
Student and Activist, Lebanon

"I was beyond elated to be part of a groundbreaking session, it gives me hope in a future that is being handled by amazing changemakers"

Joserra Gonzalez
Participation Councillor at Villasur de Herreros, Burgos (Spain) & Co-founder at EspacioUbuntu.eu

"Having space for connection helped us understand the problem better and allow great innovations to emerge."

Olga Tsiourva
Regional Director of OAED Thessaly, Greece

"The group worked hard to understand and deal with the local challenge while having fun!"

TESTIMONIALS

David Leal

Country Representative, Innovation in Politics Institute, Spain

"Listening to young people and to the perspectives of those affected by policy in their own words has been instrumental. The Local Labs combined a well-designed process and high quality experts while working simultaneously with the local network of teams. The Local Labs hold tremendous potential for a future of sustainable innovation at all levels."

Michael Vogler

Programme manager | City of Togetherness in Tulln, Austria

"We participated at the Local Labs for the first time in 2021. It was a great experience. The process was brilliantly designed by the ACT NOW team and easy to follow. I am very thankful to the ACT NOW team for helping us progress in our inter-generational efforts."

Gisela Barbosa

Head of Citizenship and Youth Division, Municipality of Valongo (Portugal)

"Participating in the local labs was an extraordinary experience for me. It was extremely enriching to hear such different ideas and realities and, at the same time, similar, because everyone was looking for the same thing: to improve their communities with adaptable and capable solutions, strengthening the citizens and making them actors of this change."

PROJECTS

In November 2021 18 teams from Europe and the MENA region participated online, while being supported by local mentors and international best practice owners. Daily check-in calls with mentors trained by the Institute ensured the progress of every team. The teams were connected through several live streams from the Institute's office in Vienna, through social media, and video calls with local change experts.

The resulting projects address local challenges that are associated with one or several of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Water Harvesting for the Municipality of Um El-Jimal, Jordan

A Model for Saving North Jordan's Water

1

What is the main content of the project?

The main content is the creation of a surface run-off water harvesting system that traps the adi Zaatari and Loess rain waters into a storage and distribution system to deliver 80,000 cu. m. freshwater for public green spaces, domestic gardens, and farms and flocks in the greater Um El-Jimal Municipality. The vision of outcomes includes: Preventing the over-pumping of the aquifers, maintaining crop levels, seasonal flood control, combined hydro- and solar-electric energy generation, expanding tourism, and providing a model for nationwide application.

2

Purpose of the project

Two thousand years of Traditional Water Harvesting from Antiquity to AD 1990
Um El-Jimal's ancient water harvesting system utilized surface run-off collection technologies with which local Arab populations of the Nabataean, Roman, and Byzantine eras used to sustain their population's needs and extensive agriculture until the late 20th century.

Thirty years of Deep Well Pumping, 1990 to 2020.
Um El-Jimal's surface collection technology was abandoned in 1990. The community shifted to a 300 meters deep Hauran 'fossil'-water aquifer which was then tapped for 72 new irrigation-based farms, the domestic water supply for 40,000 residents, and municipal green spaces. Currently, 85 deep wells supply regional demand. Further, since 2012, over 100,000 Syrian refugees have used this aquifer with deep well infrastructure in Jordan's Zaatari Camp, which is contiguous to the Um El-Jimal Municipal land.

Aquifer Depletion, 2015-2025.
Over-pumping to meet unsustainable and excessive demands has rapidly lowered water table levels and the water quality. By 2019, the average drop in the aquifer's water table is 25 meters (measured in the 72 approved aforementioned farm-based wells). Now, individual farmers have had to re-drill wells with depths increasing from 250-300 to 500-700 meters. At current pumping rates, the aquifer could reach depletion as early as 2025.

3

Desired outcome

- Save north Jordan aquifers from depletion and restore the high quality of regenerated groundwater.
- Enable the maintenance of public and private green spaces.
- Maintain the crop levels of Um El-Jimal farms. Currently, 12 farms provide 10,500 tons of vegetables and 60 farms provide 26,000 tons of fruit to regional markets.
- Supplement the Municipal energy supply.
- Expand the flow of tourists from the antiquities into the Municipality's communities and surrounding landscape.
- Raise awareness of alternative and supplementary water supplies in the face of the looming water crisis.
- Provide a model for expanding surface runoff water harvesting technology in the arid landscapes of Jordan and the world.

LIS — Learning. Innovation. Sustainability in Kamenica, Kosovo

1

What is the main content of the project?

The main content of the project is the idea of revitalization and supporting the city's vision of building a healthy environment for youngsters and strengthening the border zones. Border zones are the most discriminated against due to administrative issues especially when it comes to countries that had a problematic past like Kosovo and Serbia. We aim to repurpose a vacant building that is located in the village of Lisocka and to begin the transformation process of border zones through this intervention. It is important to keep in mind that good governance is cohesive and reaches each citizen in an equal way. Lisocka is a project that highlights the importance of sustainability and green energy, which are important goals of the local government. A city is never to small to make a difference!

2

Purpose of the project

The project, called LIS — Learning. Innovation. Sustainability, takes a vacant school building and revitalizes it to make it a new meeting point for the community. Since the Municipality of Kamenica is located on the border between two neighboring countries (Kosovo and Serbia) and faces a lack of opportunities in the job market, a large number of citizens, especially youngsters, are leaving Kamenica for other European countries. During the last four years, Kamenica went through an education reform that included the merger of 6 small village schools. This resulted in 6 empty former school buildings which need to be repurposed. Taking into consideration the local circumstances, we addressed this issue with our village councils and agreed on the need to create a focus group that tackles two main problems: migration and cohabitation. The main goals of this project are increasing the capacity of youngsters and facilitating the cooperation between different minorities.

One of the vacant school buildings is in Lisocka, the most eastern part of the region. LIS intends to establish a common ground between youngsters and the citizens of the village. We aim to repurpose the school into a multifunctional community center that serves as a hub and meeting point for people from the surrounding villages. In doing so, the project tackles different issues, such as supporting local tourism, providing extracurricular education, and actively seeking the inclusion of minority groups. Moreover, by working with and for the local community, the project boosts local capacity building. With its bottom-up process, the project teaches the local community new forms of citizen involvement and an inclusive way of local policymaking.

3

Desired outcome

The project aims to offer a space/building that establishes an organic form of cohabitation in Kamenica. Since there are altogether six vacant school buildings, we use the LIS project in Lisocka as a pilot project for the remaining five vacant buildings. We have prepared questionnaires and distributed them in schools, the department of education, parents' councils, and among local citizens. The majority of people supported the idea to transform this building into a community center to connect groups with diverse backgrounds (age, language, culture, etc.). The background of this is the observation of the directory of education: there is a lack of cooperation between youngsters since they don't know each other's language and can't seem to find a way of communication. Therefore, creating this platform for both communities is an attempt to strengthen their relations and make the future generation believe in the importance of the local community. The building will generate 5+ workplaces, mostly in administration and extracurricular education. Moreover, the project is part of the local government's strategy of becoming a green city. The main challenges that this project has are cooperation between youngsters with different ethnic backgrounds, local employment, tourism, and strengthening partnerships across cultural and physical borders.

InnovaMundi in San Ferdinando, Italy

1

What is the main content of the project?

Have the young people of San Ferdinando become the contact point for tourists and the caretakers of the city's identity.

2

Purpose of the project

Through the creation of a package of tourist services, mainly touristic guides, the project team seeks to offer more employment to local young people to combat unemployment and the "brain drain" phenomenon, or when young people are forced to leave San Ferdinando to find better working opportunities in Northern Italy.

3

Desired outcome

The project could stimulate young people in being aware of the regional job opportunities and inspire them to create new types of businesses. The creation of companies for touristic services could also attract a higher number of visitors, create a network of tourist hubs in the region (connecting several points of interest in the area) and reactivate local business and culture.

TALENTIC in Ermua, Spain

1

What is the main content of the project?

To create a space called Talentic for young people, with the aim of attracting young, talented people and reviving the local community with new jobs and community life.

2

Purpose of the project

Our challenge is the lack of opportunities for young people in our town. We need to attract and retain/ hold young people, and give them good jobs and life opportunities.

3

Desired outcome

Giving young people good opportunities, high-quality jobs, and a place in a business incubator to carry out new enterprises, primarily in the technology/digital sector.

An inquiring and learning city in Larissa, Greece

1

What is the main content of the project?

Designing and distributing a questionnaire to local citizens in order to collect data on their opinion on urban mobility and greening local traffic.

2

Purpose of the project

There are a lot of complaints in the city of Larissa about the sustainable urban mobility plan that has been implemented in the past years. Many citizens still use their cars instead of their bicycles or public transport. Our purpose is to involve the citizens in Larissa's sustainable urban mobility plan and, most importantly, to have their opinion heard by the city council and the mayor. The challenge we address is to motivate the citizens to change their mobility behavior to more sustainable transport forms and build their trust in the city council.

3

Desired outcome

In asking people about the sustainable urban mobility plan we will involve them, make them more engaged, and change their mobility behavior together. Moreover, the project promotes the inclusion of Larissa's citizens in local policymaking and will build their trust in local government.

Local Brand for Local Product in Koura, Lebanon

1

What is the main content of the project?

Create a local brand for local products from different villages. This way we will be able to sell these products locally and export them to other countries in the future.

2

Purpose of the project

Lebanon has been going through extensive hardships in the past years, especially on the economical level. With the Lebanese Liras' increasing inflation rates, people are unable to obtain a livable income. This project boosts the growth of local businesses, lowers the dependency on the importation of foreign goods, and in total, supports the provision of a basic income for local people. (The challenge that is being addressed is SDG#8.)

3

Desired outcome

Selling products and providing basic income will help in solving the economic issue and thus gradually allows economic growth locally.

NEET 5+
in Sultanbeyli, Turkey

1

What is the main content of the project?

Empowering young people that are currently Neither in Education nor in Employment or Training (NEET) in Sultanbeyli to be a part of the labor force by providing them with skills and education to promote economic growth and youth participation
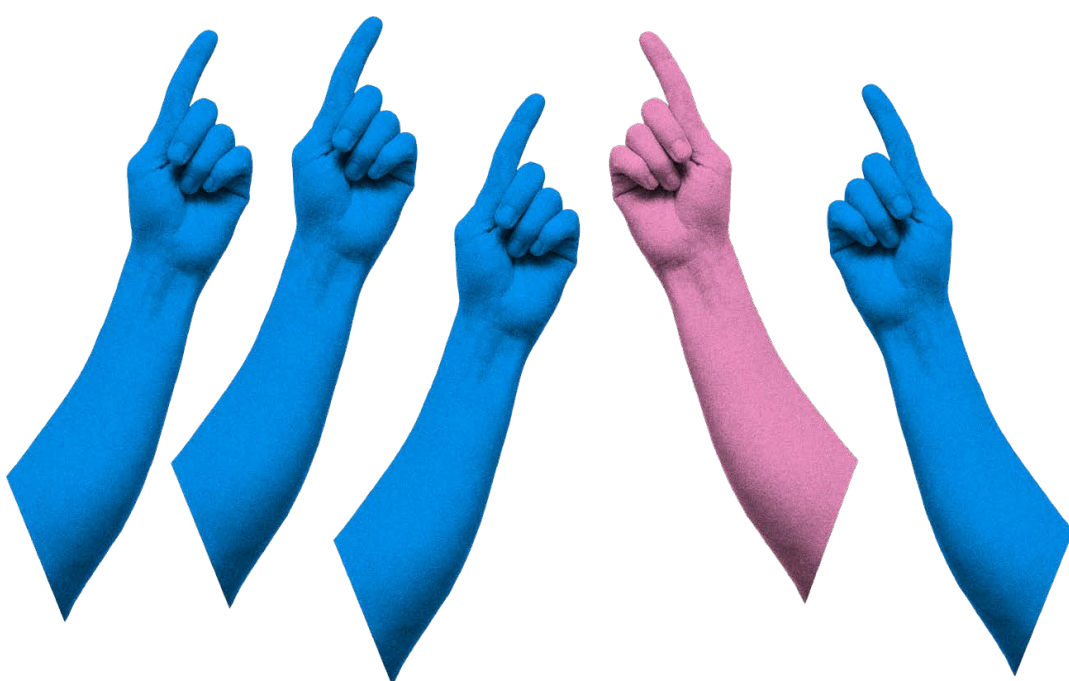
2

Purpose of the project

To reach the NEET youth, to determine the reasons and effects of being NEET, to prepare a development program suitable for their needs, to provide efficient guidance and counseling, to support their competence and skill acquisition, to offer them education and employment opportunities.

3

Desired outcome

The graduation from NEET, psycho-social empowerment, having a decent job, having a regular income; increasing the personnel competencies of the institutions and developing their institutional capacity; qualified human resources for businesses; increasing family communication and interaction.

Ensuring Public Transportation for Safe and Healthy Journeys to School in Qaraoun, Lebanon

1

What is the main content of the project?

Lebanon has been witnessing a degrading crisis in fuel shortage which makes the lack of private transportation a barrier to proper education. Qaraoun is therefore planning to ensure public transportation by providing bus services tracked by a comprehensive, innovative app, all of which to ensure an inclusive, safe, and healthy journey to the 4 neighboring schools.

2

Purpose of the project

Amidst the economic crisis, fuel prices have risen dramatically making it difficult for parents to handle the transportation costs that count for half of their salaries.

3

Desired outcome

We envision providing the needed amount of buses (+ 1 bus in reserve in case of rising student numbers) as a means of transportation to local schools. On that scale, we would also be able to fully refine our app so it can have the option of personalizing individual experiences with accounts and portfolios in addition to the tracking service.We aim to make the buses a dynamic asset by renting them for exhibitions, events, and other occasions.

Kids Theatre in Maan, Jordan

1

What is the main content of the project?

The creation of a children's show to educate them about their future and empower them to achieve their goals and be successful.

2

Purpose of the project

This project aims to help children and youngsters in Maan and its neighboring towns. The region of South Jordan suffers from severe drug use issues – especially among young, less educated, and unemployed people from abusive families. With our youth programme we aim to provide the young people from Maan with a place where they find entertainment with their peers and where they are actively included in the creative process. We want to provide youngsters with positive examples of what their lives can be looking like by fostering their creativity and removing them from unsafe environments.

3

Desired outcome

To provide the young generation of Maan with a place for creativity, community building, and inspiration and by doing so, lower their use of drugs as means of pseudo entertainment.

PV Solar Station in El Qrayeh, Lebanon

1

What is the main content of the project?

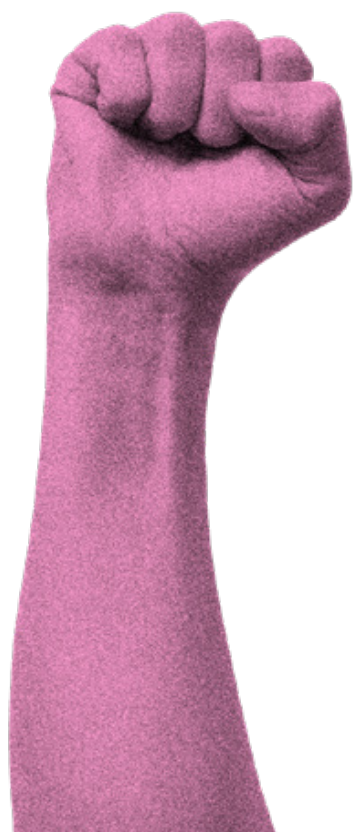The installation of a solar power farm

2

Purpose of the project

To provide a new source of power for residents in order to help them save on extremely high electricity bills due to the costliness of private generators.

3

Desired outcome

Once the project is realized, the solar power farm will ensure a steady source of power helping the citizens save 80% on their electricity bills.

Generationencafe
in Tulln a.d. Donau, Austria

1

What is the main content of the project?

To create a sustainable youth center format to facilitate positive, useful, and easy-to-handle communication between underprivileged young people (12-18 years) with older and experienced people.

2

Purpose of the project

To bridge the gap between the generations in the city.

3

Desired outcome

Experience the mutual strengths of generations and learn how to support each other in mutually beneficial ways.

15